

Introduction to the Dialogue on
Effective *Prevention* and *Early Intervention*
Approaches in Human Services
Working Towards a Shared Understanding

30 May 2018

Introduction

Firstly, thank you for agreeing to take part in this dialogue session.

The purpose of this document is to set out how the dialogue session will run and to provide you with some summary background information on the issues we would like to focus on.

We are calling this event a “dialogue” because we want people to engage with the issues by engaging with each other.

The dialogue is seeking to establish an opportunity for cross-sectoral sharing of the deep and broad experience of and expertise in prevention and early interventions in Ireland.

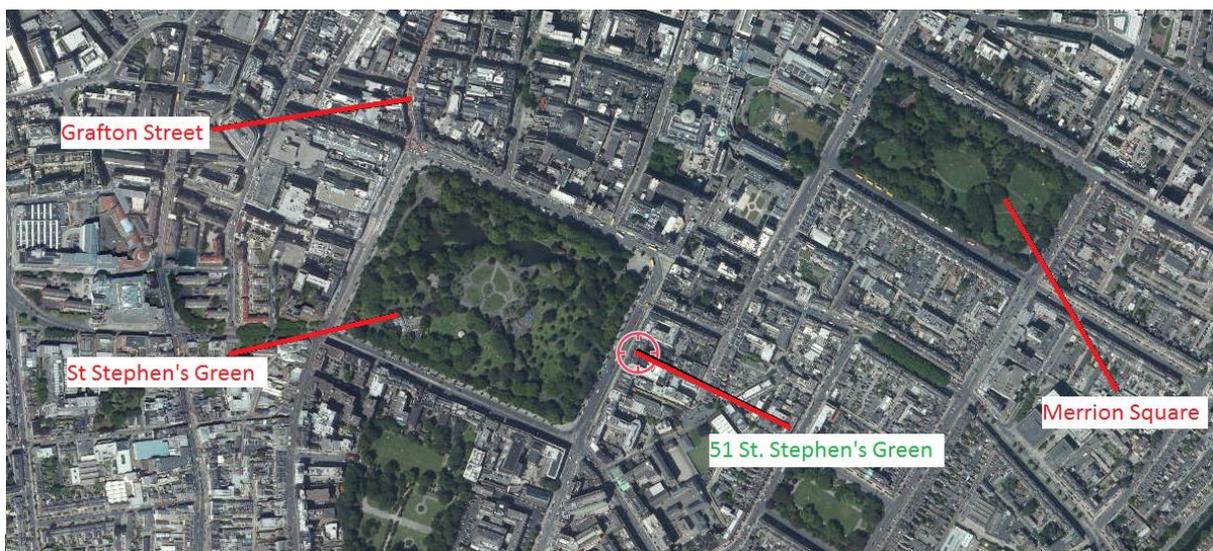
It is intended that the dialogue will build on our initial dialogue event (7 March 2018) and will work toward the development of a shared understanding of prevention and early interventions in Ireland and support the future development and implementation of effective policies.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Mary Clarke (Mary.Clarke@per.gov.ie).

Timetable:

- Registration opens	9:15
- Commence session – introductions	9:45
- Commence Part I	10:00
- Break	11:00
- Commence Part II	11:15
- End	12:30

Location: 51 St. Stephen’s Green



Structure of Dialogue Session

The dialogue session is divided into two parts.

Part I – Dialogue Boards (60 minutes)

The dialogue is organised around three core questions:

- What is meant by “prevention” and “early intervention”?
- How do we know if prevention and early interventions work?
- How can this information be used to inform decision-makers?

We have set out 6 *Dialogue Boards* outlining a number of high level points. These high level points seek to reflect the variation in views that we heard at our initial dialogue in March. The purpose of this session is to try and explore these in greater detail by bringing to the fore people’s day-to-day experiences.

In terms of how Part I will work, a small number of participants will be assigned to each *Dialogue Board* to discuss the issues raised.

After about 15 minutes, each small group will be asked to rotate to the next *Dialogue Board* where they can discuss the issues raised and add additional points to those noted by the previous group.

This process of rotation will continue until all groups have returned to their initial *Dialogue Board*.

The amount of time available for discussion will continue to decrease as the rotation progresses.

Part II – Open Dialogue (60 minutes)

The purpose of this part of the dialogue is to have an open discussion about each of the *Dialogue Boards*.

For each *Dialogue Board*, the group that had the initial discussion will have an opportunity to outline the points they considered. Each of the other groups will then have an opportunity to outline the additional points that they considered.

As we are anxious to learn about the relevance or otherwise of these issues for you in how you go about your day-to-day work, the facilitator will seek to ensure that the discussion is firmly grounded in people’s experiences.

While we will be taking notes during this phase of the Dialogue, they will a general account of the points raised and on a non-attributable basis.

Dialogue Boards

In order to provide an underlying narrative for the dialogue, we thought it might be useful to set out a hypothetical scenario.

Lucy joined the civil service in 2013.

Last month, she was promoted and has since moved to a new Department.

She has been assigned to a role that involves the design and implementation of a prevention / early intervention.

She has met a number of officials from other departments and agencies that are involved in relevant policy work and has also met representatives of a number of community groups who are providing services in the policy area.

As she has encountered a diverse range of views, she is asking you to think about your day-to-day experience and share your thoughts.

When I talk to people about what they mean by “prevention” and “early intervention”, some people say:

Prevention and early interventions are about anticipating problems and preventing or reducing harm.

However, others have challenged this saying that such interventions can achieve very little because the problems that these interventions focus on are really a consequence of inequality in society.

Prevention and interventions are about changing how government works, in particular achieving greater co-operation between departments, agencies and other stakeholders as well as supporting the capacity of local communities to deliver national policies.

However, others have challenged this saying that services that were once set up to address the situation in a community are now being employed to implement government policy.

Prevention and early interventions are about reducing future costs for the taxpayer by preventing a problem developing into something more serious.

However, others have challenged this saying that such interventions are too intrusive and that we need to avoid the “nanny state”.

Drawing on your day-to-day experience, can you:

- Describe what you mean by “prevention” and “early intervention”;
- Examine the relevance or otherwise of ideas such as “preventing harm” and “reducing future costs”;
- Talk about to us about how and why greater engagement across government and between stakeholders would support and hinder your work; and
- Tell us why government should and shouldn’t intervene in people’s lives.

When I talk to people about what they mean by “prevention” and “early intervention”, some people say:

Prevention and early interventions are about using scientific knowledge in a way that can achieve a specific result for individual people.

However, others have challenged this saying that it is more important to focus on the quality of the experience of receiving a service.

Prevention and early interventions are about understanding why certain actions are likely to achieve particular results and having evidence that they do so.

However, others have challenged this idea saying that we need to get on with delivering services to people and that it is a waste of resources trying to alter programmes for an Irish context given that we already know they work in other countries.

Prevention and early interventions require on-going monitoring of how well or otherwise they are achieving the desired result.

However, others have challenged this idea saying that we need to rely on the experience of those who are delivering the services as they are best place to make reasonable judgements about what to do.

Drawing on your day-to-day experience, can you:

- Tell us about the challenges involved in achieving a balance between delivering services on a day-to-day basis and results over a longer period of time;
- Explore instances when theory and evidence have been important to you in shaping an action or decision and when it has been of little or no importance; and
- Discuss under what conditions you might find yourself turning to research evidence to inform an action or decision and when you might decide to rely more on your personal experience.

When I talk to people about how they know prevention and early interventions work, some people say:

Prevention and early interventions are about understanding what works and investing wisely.

However, others have challenged this saying that it is difficult and expensive to gather the necessary information and, moreover, there are ethical issues regarding the use of control groups.

Prevention and early interventions are about using scientific evidence to convince policy makers that such interventions work.

However, others have challenged this saying that too much emphasis has been placed on complex scientific methodologies that most people don't understand.

Drawing on your day-to-day experience, can you:

- Discuss what you mean by scientific evidence;
- Explore instances when scientific evidence has been important to you in shaping an action or decision and when it has been of little or no importance; and
- Talk about the various opportunities and challenges you encounter in trying to use scientific evidence?

When I talk to people about how they know prevention and early interventions work, some people say:

Prevention and early interventions are about “knowing” and “being able” to do something in the real world.

However, others have challenged this saying that sometimes there is resistance to change, especially when the evidence is critical of an intervention’s effectiveness.

Prevention and early interventions are about multiple stakeholders coming together to tackle an issue that people face in their daily lives.

However, others have challenged this saying that sometimes an intervention is dependent on a charismatic figure advocating on its behalf and such support is not sustainable in the longer term.

Prevention and early interventions are about using data to understand and contribute to improving people’s lives.

However, others have challenged this saying that the best way to understand how well a programme is working is to ask those who have experienced it.

Drawing on your day-to-day experience, can you:

- Tell us about the opportunities and challenges you have encountered in trying to utilise evidence within your own organisation;
- Explore instances when you sought to influence policy-makers, in particular what might have been their “evidence needs” and how the information you imparted supported these; and
- Discuss the opportunities and challenges you face when trying to progress an issue that falls within the policy remit of more than one department or agency.

When I talk to people about how evidence of effective prevention and early interventions can be used to inform decision makers, some people say:

Prevention and early interventions are about using evidence to inform decision-making.

However, others have challenged this saying that the evidence is often complex and difficult to understand, especially by people who are not specialists.

Prevention and early interventions are about using the evidence from pilot tests to determine how best to deliver interventions to a wider population.

However, others have challenged this saying that there seems to be an unending series of piloting interventions but a lot of uncertainty about how learnings have been translated into policy decisions.

Drawing on your day-to-day experience, can you:

- Tell us about the opportunities and challenges you have encountered in trying to communicate evidence into the policy making process; and
- Explore instances when you sought to communicate evidence to policy-makers, in particular those factors that supported and hindered you in your efforts.

When I talk to people about how evidence of effective prevention and early interventions can be used to inform decision makers, some people say:

Prevention and early interventions are about developing skills and mentoring colleagues within and across different organisations.

However, others have challenged this saying that there is a very limited culture of knowledge sharing of “best” practice between various stakeholders.

Prevention and early interventions are about investing in longer term outcomes.

However, others have challenged this saying that such interventions will always suffer in comparison with more urgent policy challenges and that there is a need to focus on more immediate outcomes.

Prevention and early interventions are about having a clear focus on what the intervention is trying to achieve and a clear understanding of how its actions can contribute to a successful result.

However, others have challenged this saying that such interventions are seeking solutions for “wicked” or intractable problems in a complex, policy heavy environment.

Drawing on your day-to-day experience, can you:

- Explore how knowledge of what works can be best shared between different organisations;
- Examine how feasible it might be for your organisation to focus on more immediate outcomes or results; and
- Discuss those factors that support and hinder you in trying to influence decision makers.