Partnership, Prevention and Family Support; Evidence from the Irish Experience

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CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE

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TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

The ATLANTIC Philanthropies

Partnership, Prevention and Family Support (PPFS)

- The Irish experience…
- Help seeking & help providing through the PPFS programme
  - The Meitheal model
  - Public Awareness
  - Overall learning on availability & accessibility of support

‘Doing better for our children and families: Innovate, lead, change’

- *Time of change…*
  - Newly established statutory Child and Family Agency (2014)
  - State Investment and (mostly) Philanthropic money
  - Dept of Children & Youth Affairs & Minister for Children (est. 2011)
    - Better Outcomes Brighter Future (BOBF, 2014 – 2020)
    - High Level Policy Statement on Parenting and Family Support, 2015
- *Following…*
  - Children & Family Services combined with Health
  - Child abuse inquiries
  - Child deaths
  - Referendum on Children's Rights
  - Economic Recession

Partnership, Prevention & Family Support (PPFS) programme (2015…

- ✓Seeks to transform child & family services in Ireland by embedding prevention and early intervention into the culture and operation of the Agency

TUSLA
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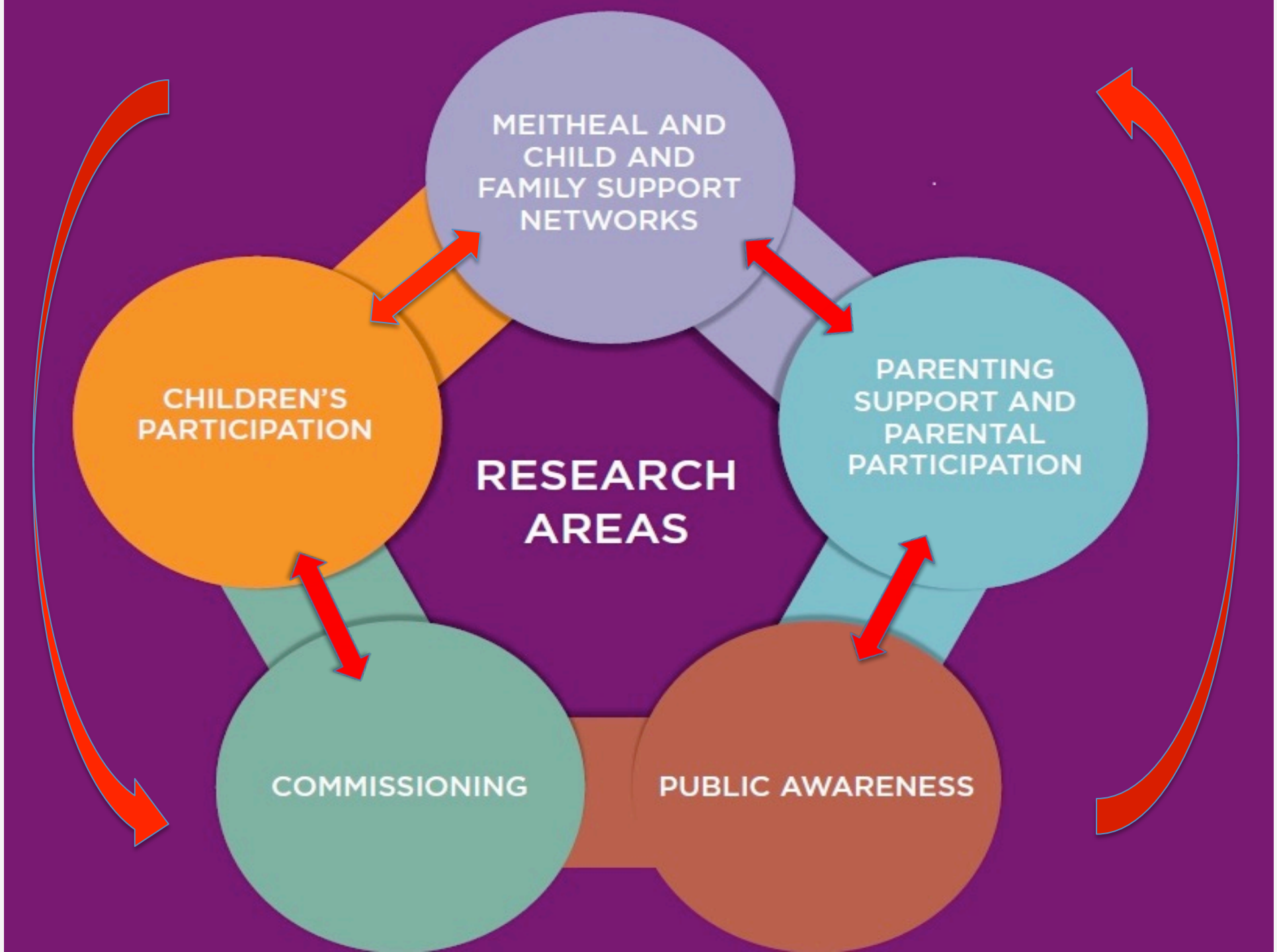
TUS
PPFS Programme

Is the organisational culture and practice at Tusla and its partners changing such that services are more integrated, preventative, evidence informed and inclusive of children and parents? If so, is this contributing to improved outcomes for children and their families?

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre
PPFS Research and Evaluation Study
(2015 – 2018)


MEITHEAL AND CHILD AND FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS
CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION
PARENTING SUPPORT AND PARENTAL PARTICIPATION
RESEARCH AREAS
COMMISSIONING
PUBLIC AWARENESS

Public Awareness Work Programme

1. Do the public understand Tusla's role, purpose and processes (of how to access services, for example)?
2. How can the public be made more aware of Tusla with a view to ensuring the service is maximised as a means of enhancing child and family well-being?
3. How best can Tusla develop its public awareness activities into the future?

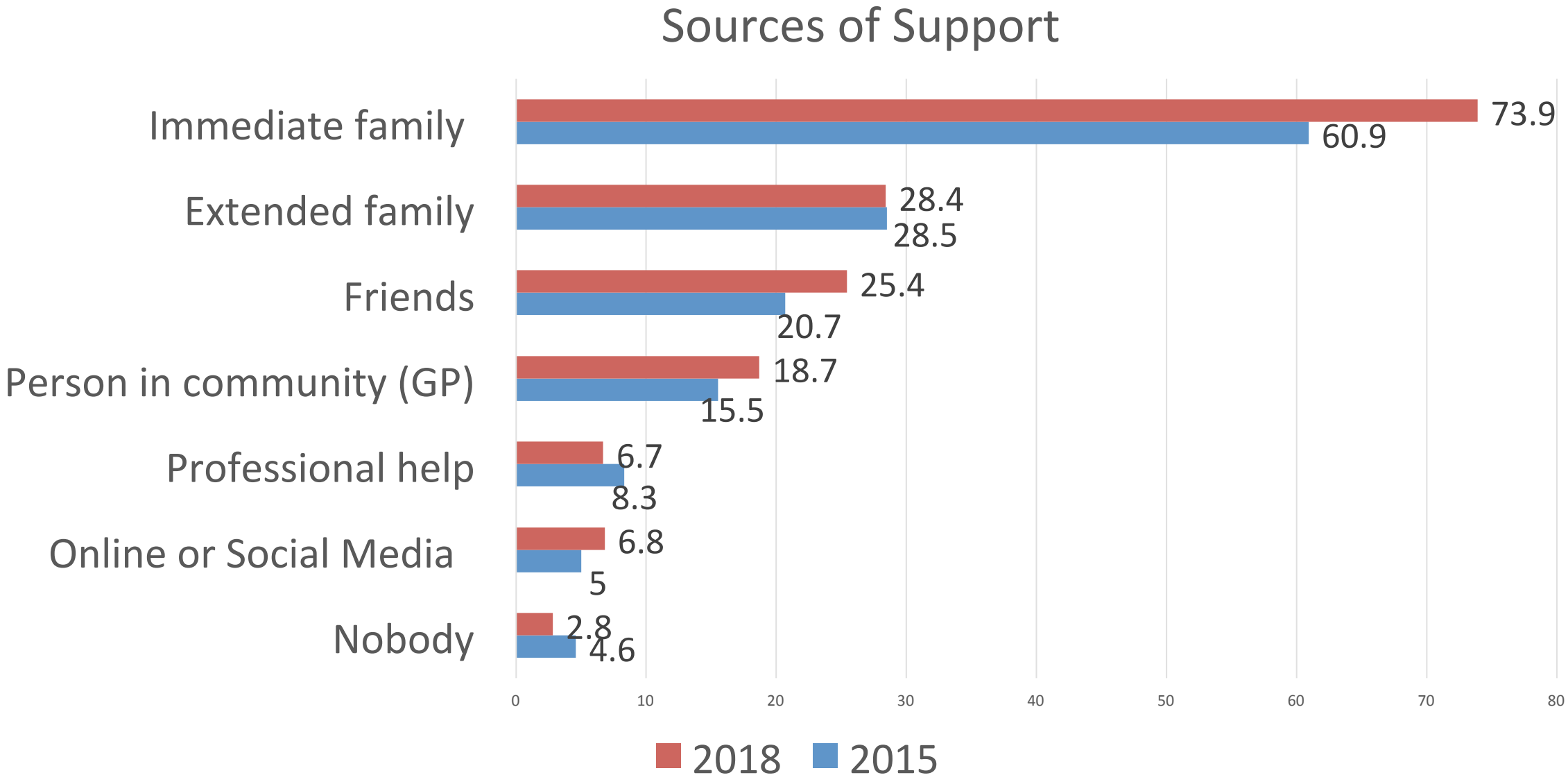
Population survey 2015 and 2018 (n=1,000)

1. What is the current level of awareness amongst the adult population in Ireland of PPFS services provided by Tusla?
2. What is the current level of knowledge about how to access services provided by Tusla or partner organisations regarding PPFS services?
3. What is the current level of public knowledge about reasons why family support/prevention services may be required?
4. What is the current public attitude to PPFS services?

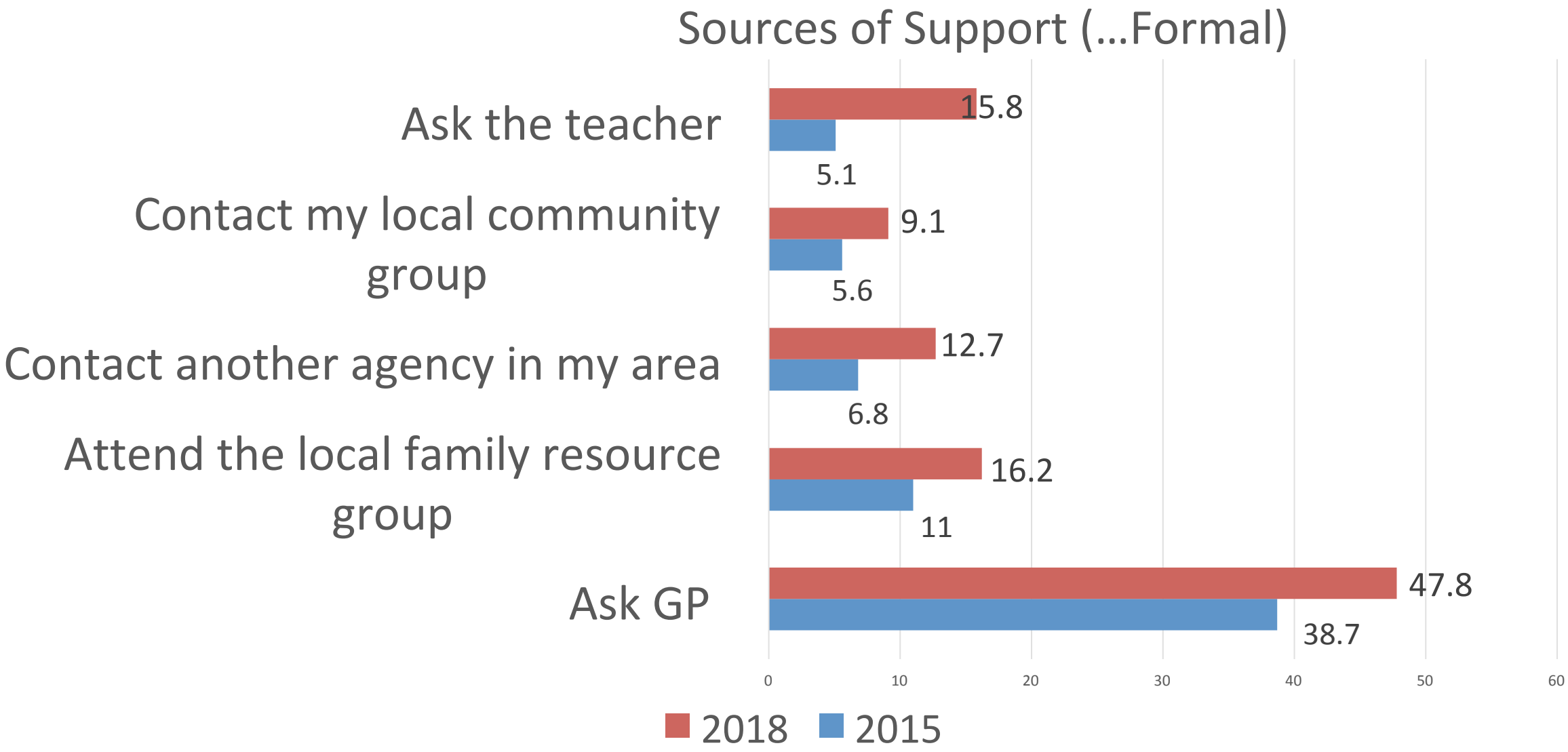
An additional question in 2018:

5. How can Tusla best inform the public about services?

Who would you ask for help with a parenting problem you could not manage?



What would you do if you could not manage a parenting or family problem with your own resources and family/friends



Has the PPFS programme made any difference to the availability / accessibility/ awareness of support?

Meitheal

A TUSLA led national practice model

Meitheal is an old Irish term that describes how neighbours would come together to assist in the saving of crops or other tasks

Meitheal

- ‘a **national** practice model to ensure that the **needs** and **strengths** of children and their families are **effectively identified, understood, and responded to in a timely way so that children and families get the help and support needed to improve** children’s **outcomes** and to **realise their rights**’

(Gillen et al., 2013: 1)

Meitheal

A TUSLA led national practice model

- A deliberate and focused attempt to intervene early in the life of a child and also early in the genesis of a difficulty in an accessible and responsive manner (Gillen at al. 2013; Devaney et al., 2013; Devaney & Dolan, 2015)

- Reflects international perspectives on need to re-orientate child welfare services from risk oriented to support within a children's rights and child development framework (Gilbert, 2012)

	Meitheal Process and Outcomes Study	CFSN Focus Groups	Meitheal & Child Protection Welfare System
Design	Mixed method Longitudinal	Nationwide Focus groups	Nationwide Tusla and partners
Participants	Children, Young people, Parents Lead Practitioners (LPs)	LPs (Tusla and partners)	Senior & Middle Managers Partner Agencies Stakeholders in C & V sector
Interviews	n = 263	-	118
Questionnaires	n = 874 SDQ, Outcomes Star, GHQ	-	-
Focus Groups	-	9	-
Secondary Data	-	-	Tusla Integrated Performance Activity Reports (2014 – Q1 2018)

1. What impact has the Meitheal model had on outcomes?	➢ Meitheal is improving outcomes over time (not all significant) ➢ Outcomes are sustained over time (albeit a short period) ➢ High fidelity scores
2. How has the model been implemented?	➢ Majority initiated through Direct Access ➢ Strengths • Voluntary nature, Relationship with Lead Practitoners • Review meetings, Promptness of initiation • Empowering/ listens to parents ➢ Limitations • Differences nationwide, Lack of structure and personnel- impact on fidelity? Issues with thresholds
3. What Impact has the Meitheal Model had on the Child Protection and Welfare System?	➢ Level of Meitheal activity is low compared to CPW activity ➢ 'Interface' not always seamless ➢ Discrepancy between staff trained and Meitheal overall activity • 1627 trained (Q4, 2017) only 346 Meitheals started ➢ However, Meitheal activity steadily increasing

Has the Meitheal model made any difference to the availability / accessibility/ awareness of support?

Look to the qualitative data from parents (in particular)

Listen to the parents…

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Feeling supported…*

I was kind of glad that I had reached out and agreed to do it [Meitheal] because it actually really did open the doors for us because I was kind of, I was at my wits end you know. I was at my breaking point and if something I think didn't change I'm kind of scared to think where it would have ended up (P49)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Feeling supported…*

I'm coping better because I know there's people there to support me whereas before you'd be afraid to phone up the social workers because they; I don't get on with some of them so it was just clash, clash, clash. With the Meitheal programme we're all sitting around and we talk (P50)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Feeling supported…*

I found it [Meitheal] very helpful because it kind of opened up lines of communication for myself and with other people, so I kind of, it has been shared, the load now, especially for me because I am a single parent. Do you know? I'm on my own. […] I suppose I didn't feel as alone as I had done (P49)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Being listened to…*

You feel better in yourself; you don't feel like when you go to a meeting and you know that they're after making a decision before you arrived […] It feels like someone is listening to me again. I felt like a bold child when the social workers weren't listening to me; like they seemed to think they knew everything yet they weren't in the situation and they didn't listen to all the sides of it. So it didn't feel right the way they were doing it (P57)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Being listened to…*

[Being listened to] definitely makes dealing with my child much easier… because we're frustrated and then when they kick off again you're like what more do we do now ? But whenever somebody is going "look there's definitely something going on" then at least you can say right this is not my child's fault and because you offloaded all your crap onto somebody else then it's not coming out on them as well (P53)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Co-ordinated approach…*

Often we'd find in the past is that they say ''oh we can't contact them [another service]; you'll have to contact them'' or ''I'm sorry we can't help you there; you'll have to go here''. It's like; you kind of run around in circles sometimes (P70)

*I just feel that they [*the Meitheal practitioners*] made it all possible without me running around like a headless chicken and then trying to bring it together, which is extremely difficult and it is very stressful you know? So I just felt they did it and they took that strain away from me you know?* (P8)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Trust in the support system*

"Because I knew what they want is what I want and the best for my child, you know what I mean? We are doing it together. So, if they didn't care, they wouldn't have came, you know what I mean? And as I said, I just trust them, I do, 100 per cent, like" (P10)

I told my friend like they're not there to take your kids off you, they're there to help you. If you hide away that's going to make it look worse but open the door and just take the help (P84)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Trust in the support system…*

Meitheal is brilliant because if they say they're going to do something they'll do it. Social workers say they'll do something and then they do it back to front. I mean if you're asked to do something or they tell you they're going to do something; some of them will say yeah we'll do it but then they don't get back to you. The Meitheal always gets back to you; they're always there, there's always a listening ear for you (P50)

Parent's perception of Meitheal: *Included…*

Because we weren't having meetings [before Meitheal]; it was people, it was other people that was having the meetings for us, on our behalf. Whereas with this we were there, our voices were heard; our voices was made clear what we needed for our family and to support our family (P4)

Success of Meitheal and Help Seeking

- The successful implementation of Meitheal appears to be influenced by the underpinning principles … *privileging voice… listening… non-judgmental… strengths based… own pace…*

These factors have been identified as important to a positive experience of the help provision system (Anderson et al., 2006; Darlington et al., 2012).

- Relationship with LPs is essential to parents involvement and the overall experience

Emphasises the importance of key workers in helping to change service-users perceptions of help-seeking and the nature of their engagement with it (Leese, 2013)

We now know…

- ✓ Meitheal process impacted on the help-seeking behaviours and awareness of support services for families… increased access to formal support networks
- ✓ Parents who had little understanding of how the service provision system worked now had a greater understanding of how to access help
- ✓ In future these networks could act as a protective factor, helping to ensure that support is sought earlier or to reduce reliance on one key service or individual.
- ✓ The focus on collaborative connections can re-frame the service-user/ provider dynamic thus helping to reduce resistance to seeking/ accepting formal support.
- ✓ Many parents recommending the process to their own informal social networks

We also know…

- ✓ Help-seeking behaviours are strongly influenced by family and community behaviours and attitudes (Amar et al., 2010) and in the Irish context most individuals rely on their own informal networks for support (McGregor and Nic Gabhainn, 2018).
- ✓ Given that current public awareness of formal services is low (McGregor and Nic Gabhainn, 2018) these parents could begin to act as advocates/ gatekeepers for support services
- ✓ However the process needs to increase access to / use of informal support networks.

Desired form of support for families which is most likely to be utilised in times of need (Devaney et al., 2013; McGregor and Nic Gabhainn, 2018).

Key learning

- We need to revisit the connection between Formal Family Support and generic universal support services and consider how a public health model can enhance the scope of PPFS and Meitheal as an early intervention and prevention approach (Lonne, 2018, Scott et al., 2016)
- This requires greater working in partnership with universal services such as GP, Health Visitors, Schools and development of strategies that enable this
- Necessitates co-training (pre-, post-, & in-service) and education of a range of professionals and social workers, social care workers to enhance collaborative working

In sum…

- Meitheal is making a positive difference to families – timely help provided
- Families are beginning to access help through this process earlier & are spreading the word to their networks
- The value based principles underlying the process is key
- Has the potential to affect change in the Irish service provision system improving the continuum of support for families who do not meet CPW thresholds
- Reminded of the significance of informal family support - most families rely on (and prefer) informal family support
- Indicates a need for even greater availability and accessibility of universal supports for families in their communities

Go raibh maith agat
Thank you…

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PPFS

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