



# Successes & Challenges in the Early Stages of a Home Visiting Programme: Staff Perspectives

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# Study overview

- ▶ *Preparing for Life*: Mentor & information officer roles
- ▶ Individual experience



# Comparing the roles

## Mentors

- Part of the high treatment group
- Trained professionals and paraprofessionals
- Assigned to families from pregnancy
- Visit family fortnightly or monthly
- Each visit 30–120 minutes
- Support and empower parents

## Information Officers

- Part of the low treatment group
- Trained paraprofessionals
- Meet parents once in advance of birth
- Provide information to families at regular intervals
- Can be contacted by families re child services
- Provide parents with information

# Comparing the roles...

## Mentors

- ▶ Build a relationship with parents
- ▶ Provide high quality information
- ▶ Use Tip Sheets and manual

## Information Officers

- ▶ Text/email parents about events
- ▶ Provide developmental packs
- ▶ Cannot give advice on parenting or child development

# Theoretical background

- ▶ Social–Psychological Perspective:
  - Bio–ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005)
- ▶ Home visiting programmes:
  - Effective alternative to centre–based programmes
  - Overcome logistical barriers with hard to reach groups (Astuto & Allen, 2009).
  - Provide parents with information & support (Howard & Brooks–Gunn, 2009)

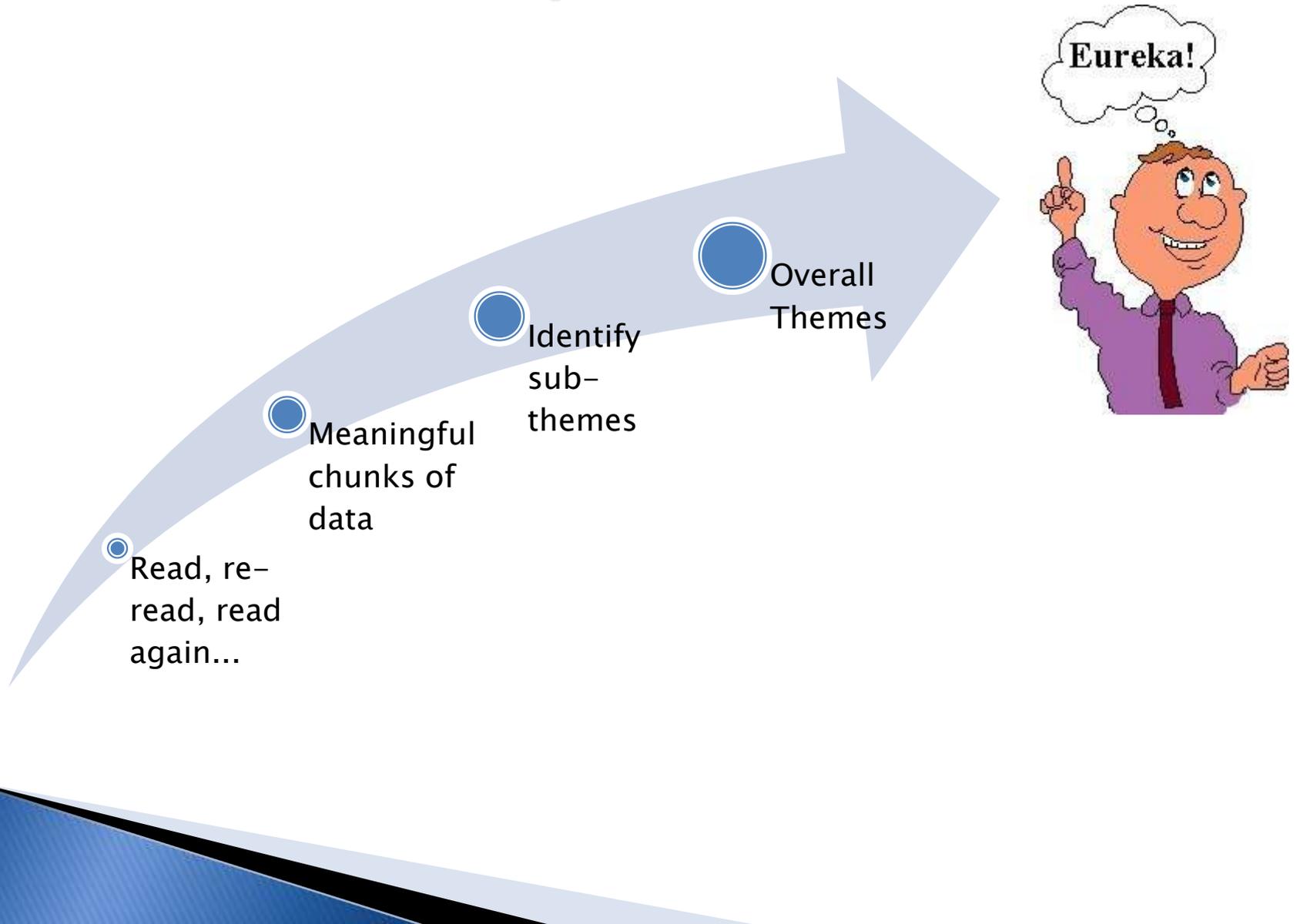
# The Home Visitor Role

- ▶ Bordin's Working Alliance concept (1979)
  - ▶ Home visitor–parent relationship is central to programme effectiveness (Wesley et al, 1997)
  - ▶ Parent and staff opinions on programme can differ (Brophy–Herb et al, 2009)
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# Method

- ▶ Qualitative research methods
  - Rich, in-depth research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006)
  - Useful for under-researched areas (Smith & Dunworth, 2003)
  - Researcher-as-lens approach
- ▶ Semi-structured individual interviews
- ▶ 7 participants:
  - 5 mentors, 2 information officers
  - December 2009 – January 2010
  - Average interview: 53 minutes

# Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



# Interview topics

- ▶ Expectations of the programme
  - ▶ Experience of working on the programme
  - ▶ Satisfaction with the programme
  - ▶ Barriers to implementation
  - ▶ Staff perceptions of programme benefits
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# Overview of Themes

- ▶ Both Mentor and Information Officer:
  - Strong, clear awareness of programme effects
  - Ongoing learning curve
  - Awareness and understanding of challenges

# Overview of Themes

- ▶ Mentor Themes:
  - Thought and attention given to own role
  - Importance of mentor–parent relationship

# Theme 1: Programme Effects

## Mentors

- ▶ Positive impact on families
- ▶ Programme materials excellent
- ▶ “Just taking part”
- ▶ Trickle effect: recipients pass knowledge to others
- ▶ Good group sessions available to families

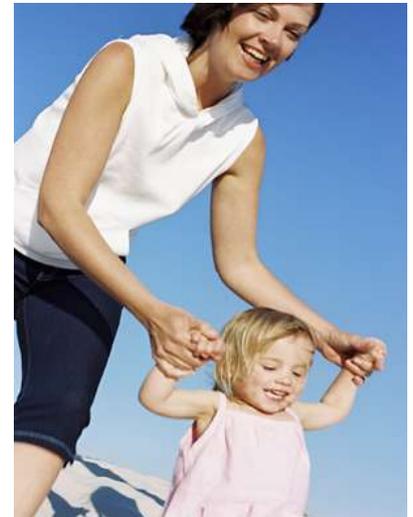
## Information Officers:

- ▶ Positive impact on families
- ▶ Materials useful & practical
- ▶ “Just taking part”
- ▶ Developmental packs enable rapport
- ▶ Community beginning to embrace programme

“The tip sheets are the core of the programme and they have such an effect, they make such an impact on their lives”

“being a part of a programme, it still seems to help [parents]. And even if it is just that they meet with me and have a chat, it does seem to have a positive impact on them”

“It’s great when you see a mother cooking something...just being aware of the children and themselves as well...they’re much more confident”



# Theme 2: Ongoing Learning Curve

## Mentors

- ▶ Learning from families
- ▶ Learning from the programme itself
- ▶ Mentors and families learning together
- ▶ Learning how to negotiate the relationship

## Information Officers:

- ▶ Learning from colleagues: different backgrounds
- ▶ Increasing own parenting skills
- ▶ Learning the value of play
- ▶ Increase own social awareness

“You can say...’I don’t know a lot of things and you have to correct me’, and I think the minute you say [that] to a parent...that gives them a little bit of power as well”

“professionally I always feel that I’m learning as well as I go along...I have learned an awful lot since I started here”



# Theme 3: Challenges

## Mentors

- ▶ Local culture
- ▶ Resistance
- ▶ Change is slow
- ▶ Fidelity to the manual
- ▶ Coping mechanism: development of strategies

## Information Officers

- ▶ Local culture
- ▶ Engaging hard-to-reach groups
- ▶ Administration difficult
- ▶ Heavy workload
- ▶ Sticking to the boundaries of the role
- ▶ Frustration at not being in the high treatment group

“the overwhelming sense is of...”no way, this is not what we do around here”...and it’s hard to chip away at that”

“you can invest millions & millions on your advertising campaigns...if it’s not word of mouth, they just won’t believe you”



# Theme 4 : Mentor Role

- ▶ The aims of the mentor role:
  - ▶ Dispense information
  - ▶ Modelling
  - ▶ Empowerment and encouragement
  - ▶ Clear communication

# Theme 4 Continued...

- ▶ The finer details...
  - Be persistent, but patient
  - Maintain boundaries
  - Have realistic expectations
  - Value small changes
  - Respect parents

“you’re not going to address an awful lot of the issues that come up, so you just have to be rigorous about your boundaries...what you can and can’t do”

“you find some little avenue...some little tiny thing that works with them, you sort of latch onto it straight away and...move on from there”



# Theme 5: Mentor–Parent Relationship

- ▶ Relationship is key to programme success
  - Mentors help parents by listening and being friendly
- ▶ Building trust is an essential part of the role

“I have one mother say to me once...”oh like I should go on now...I’ll let you get back to your work”...that’s so great.”

“”Here’s somebody who has nothing else on the agenda except to listen to what this person is saying, and some mums don’t have anybody else like that in their lives”



# Interpreting the findings...

- ▶ Findings support studies by Wesley et al (1997) and Bordin (1979) who place the relationship at the heart of programme success.
- ▶ Barrier of family and local culture is slowly being broken down but some hard to reach groups are not being accessed (Astuto & Allen, 2009).

# Future directions

- ▶ Compare staff perspectives to perspectives of parents in focus groups (Brophy–Herb et al, 2009).
  - ▶ Do follow–up interviews to identify changes over time.
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# Thank you!

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- ▶ Wesley, P. W., Buysse, V., & Tyndall, S. (1997). Family and professional perspectives on early intervention: An exploration using focus groups. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 17, 435-456.
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