

# ‘Creating Brighter Futures’

## Why Early Intervention Matters for Children with a Learning Disability



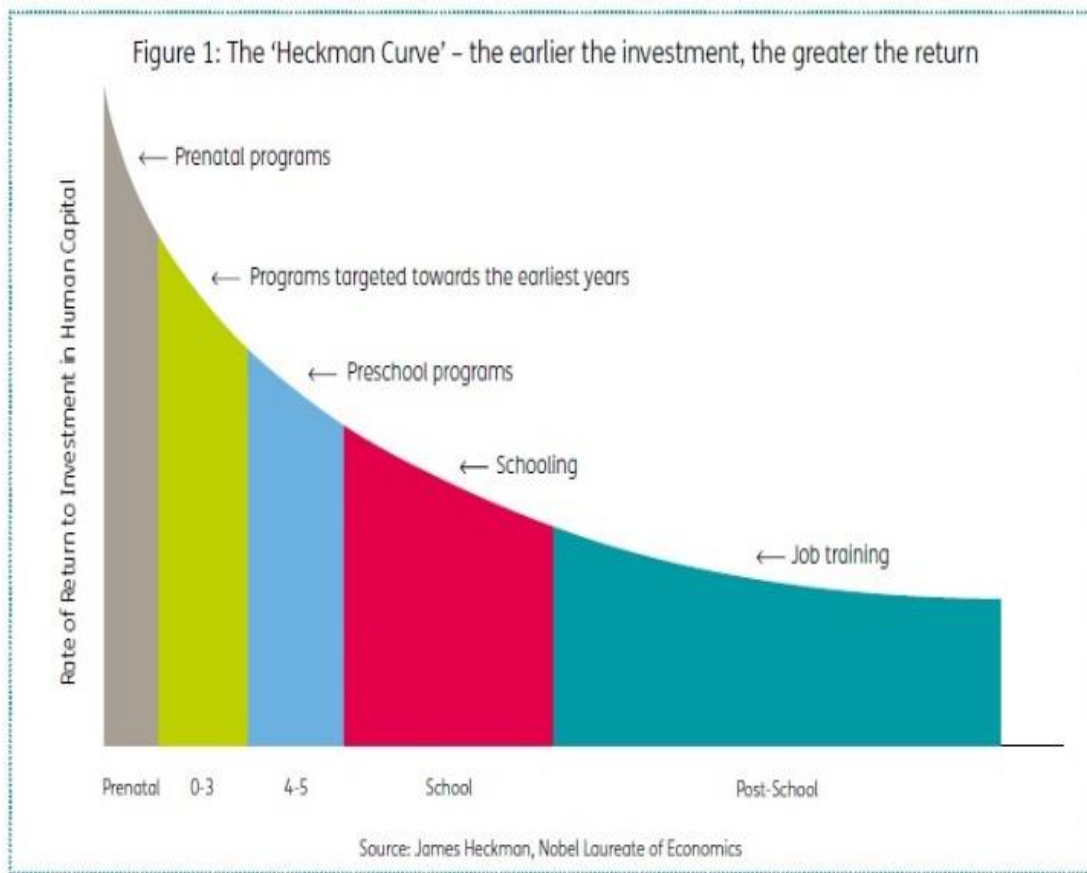
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# Priority for Mencap



- Children with a learning disability have the best start in life
- More children with a learning disability aged 0-7 have better health & development, improved cognitive skills, and stronger social & inter-personal skills

# Why? Early intervention is effective



- Child development
- Social and economic benefits
- Improves resilience
- Strengthens parenting skills
- Supports children's learning

# Why? Risk factors for children with a learning disability

- **Behaviours that challenge**
- **Adverse childhood experiences**
- **Poor outcomes**

# Children with a learning disability are more likely to:

- Have greater difficulty with sleep and feeding
- Grow up in poverty
- Have poor educational attainment
- Not be in education, employment or training
- Grow up in care

## **In Northern Ireland:**

- 2.5% of children have a LD
- 10% of looked after children have a LD

# Children with a learning disability are more likely to experience:

- **Being bullied in school**
- **Social isolation & loneliness**
- **Mental ill-health**
  - 1 in 7 children in UK with mental health problem has a LD
- **Poor physical health**
  - 30% - 70% increased risk of obesity at 5, 7, 11 years
  - Average shorter life expectancy of 16 years



# Barriers to service provision

“I would have really liked more support for us as parents and maybe a chance to meet with other parents in similar situations”

“The only support we received between diagnosis and age of two was medical support”

“Getting a diagnosis is a very emotional process...we would have found it useful to meet other parents and other children”

“I would have appreciated someone explaining the importance of sensory play, intensive interaction, early intervention and Makaton”



# Mencap NI Early Intervention Framework

## Theme 1. Supporting the child

### Interventions/activities

#### Programmes:

- Early development support
- Early education and reading skills

#### Summer schemes:

- Including early development support

### Outcomes

#### Children aged 0-7 will:

- Meet more of their developmental milestones
- Have opportunities to grow and develop through play in an inclusive environment

## Theme 2. Supporting the family

### Interventions/activities

#### Parent and family support:

- One-to-one
- Group-based
- Service / home-based
- Workshops
- Courses (including online)
- Peer-to-peer support
- Advice and information

### Outcomes

#### Families of children with a learning disability will:

- Have the emotional and practical skills to best support their child
- Be supported to promote their child's development and their family well-being
- Be better connected and understand how to access services

## Theme 3. Influencing systems change

### Interventions/activities

- Research projects
- Programme evaluation
- Mapping local systems and services
- Identifying policy and legislative barriers to accessing support; and campaigning for change

### Outcomes

- Policy and legislation recognises and supports families with young children with a learning disability
- Services will be evidence-informed and of higher quality
- Parents will have increased information and clarity on how and where to access services

# Supporting the child



- Early development support in partnership with **BHSCT**
- Allied health professionals
- High staff to child ratio
- Individual learning plans
- Three play-zone areas
- HighScope approach / measurement
- Early education & reading skills



# Supporting the family



- Early Positive Approaches to Support (E-PAtS)
- Functional Communication Training (FCT)
- Skills-based workshops
- Practical support
- Advice and information

# Influencing systems change



- Collaborative research projects
- Programme evaluation
- Mapping local systems and services
- Campaigning for improvements in policy and practice

# Recommendations

- **Early intervention services for children with a learning disability that support development from birth**
- **Access to family support services in every HSC Trust**
- **A specific focus on children with a learning disability in the PfG and the CYPs Strategy**
- **Inclusion of children with a learning disability in key policy areas – ACEs / IMH / family support / poverty**
- **A review of service provision**
- **Appropriate support and training for early years staff**

**Thank you**

**For more information, contact:**

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**The voice of  
learning disability**