PURPOSE
There are many reasons why one child born today will grow up to reach their full potential while another child will struggle all along the way. Understanding why these differences exist, what barriers stand in the way of optimal development, and how to dismantle those barriers is essential.

The Center for the Economics of Human Development (CEHD) at the University of Chicago and Preparing for Life of Dublin, Ireland have partnered to address these questions.

What if we could find out more about how interactions with caregivers influence children’s development? That would mean that caregivers, service providers, and other early childhood professionals would have better guidance on how to best support the development of children in their care. It would provide policymakers with evidence to push for the best policies for children and families.

To help reach those goals, we are looking for an experienced early childhood or social services organization with a commitment to strengthening families and communities to be the third pillar in this new home visiting initiative.

This document outlines the proposed research project and expectations from CEHD, PFL, and for a potential service delivery partner (SDP) in Chicago. It provides details on requirements for consideration, details on how to submit a proposal, questions and concerns.

The document is laid out as follows: 1. Background information on the evolution of the project. 2. Research, and evaluation overview. 3. Collaborative partnership responsibilities 4. Timeline 5. Requirements for Consideration 6. Questions and Concerns.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION
This project was started in 2021 to understand the mechanisms at work in home visiting programs that drive child and family outcomes. The researchers at CEHD, including Nobel Laureate James Heckman, have long been interested in how early experiences shape the lives of children and influence the adults they become. In this capacity, the Center has worked to understand the critical drivers of optimal outcomes in life.

Through our work, we have come to understand the enormous impact that early interactions with caregivers can have on optimal early experiences. Home visiting seems to be an effective and efficient way to encourage and improve these interactions.

CEHD’s research has been widely used by policy and lawmakers to support the idea that high-quality early experiences lead to better outcomes for children and the adults they become. We are excited to partner with an organization in our community who can help us provide services to families, improve outcomes for children, and contribute to the body of evidence that will shape tomorrow’s policy landscape.

Preparing for Life
CEHD has enjoyed a long-running partnership with Preparing for Life (PFL), an established early intervention program in Ireland designed to improve school readiness. Preparing for Life is a program of Northside Partnership, a community based non-profit established to support social and economic regeneration Dublin City, Ireland.

The program is provided on a progressive universal basis in targeted neighborhoods (defined by a range of demographic factors, including poverty, unemployment, and low school attainment). Parents and partners join before the birth of their child and remain with the program until their child enters school at age five. The program provides home visiting, prenatal education, baby massage, evidence-based parenting programs, and case-management support for families.

At CEHD, we have years of experience evaluating social service interventions for young children and families using the most advanced economics tools available. Since 2008, PFL has created and implemented one of the most successful home visiting programs in Ireland. We aim to implement that program in Chicago to support children and families and measure the impact to guide future programs and policies. We seek a partner who shares our commitment to children and families and to grow the general understanding of best practices and how to best serve families.

CHICAGO HOME VISITING PROJECT
Request for Partnership

Purpose of the project
- There are many reasons why one child born today will grow up to reach their full potential while another child will struggle all along the way.
- Understanding these differences, barriers, and how to dismantle them is essential.

Partnership
- CEHD and Preparing for Life of Dublin, Ireland have partnered to address these questions.

Mission
- To find out more about how interactions with caregivers influence children’s development.

Goals
- To provide caregivers, service providers, and other early childhood professionals with better guidance on how to support the development of children.

Role of SDP
- CEHD seeks a partner with expertise in early childhood or social services, a commitment to strengthening families and communities.

Structure
- The project is divided into 6 sections:
  1. Background information
  2. Research and evaluation overview
  3. Collaborative partnership responsibilities
  4. Timeline
  5. Requirements for consideration
  6. Questions and concerns

CEHD and PFL
- CEHD enjoys a long-running partnership with PFL.
- CEHD’s research has been widely used by policy and lawmakers.

Preparation
- PFL is an established early intervention program in Ireland.
- PFL emphasizes home visiting, prenatal education, baby massage, evidence-based parenting programs.

Innovation
- CEHD aims to implement PFL’s program in Chicago.
- CEHD seeks a partner to collaborate and measure impact.

Future
- CEHD and PFL aim to improve outcomes for children and families.
- CEHD seeks a partner to grow the understanding of best practices.
The core of PFL is the home visiting process in which trained home visitors meet with the parent and child at least monthly (although the visits take place more regularly in pregnancy and early infancy). The visits are structured around the delivery of 200 age-appropriate tipsheets which cover the primary areas of child development:

1. Cognitive Development
2. Social Emotional Development
3. Nutrition
4. Rest and Routine
5. Safety and Security
6. Parental Support
7. Transition to School

The home visitors work with parents one-to-one to establish a collaborative, reciprocal relationship, supporting the parent over time to build a warm, secure attachment to their child. Throughout the process, the home visitors seek to identify and build on the parent’s inherent strengths and resources. The tipsheets describe the child development process and provide simple, practical, suggestions on how to encourage healthy child development and positive social relationships. The home visitors provide an opportunity for the parent to experiment with new practices and offer positive feedback and support.

In addition to home visiting, the program provides additional services. These include prenatal education and breastfeeding support as well as baby massage to promote secure attachment. As the child ages, parents can participate in evidence-based parenting group programs. The home visitors are accredited Triple P Parenting providers and they facilitate the group sessions. The home visitors also help the family manage practical challenges and direct them to local services and resources.

PFL is designed to create the following outcomes in the lives of children:

- Strong cognitive, language, literacy and social/emotional development, with children reaching key milestones
- Increased school readiness
- A nurturing, safe and positive home learning environment
- A responsive relationship with parents/caregivers
- Positive child health and wellbeing
- Strong attachment with parents
- Increased rates of intentional and actual breastfeeding

Additional expected outcomes for parents include positive birth outcomes and greater self-efficacy in their role as a parent.

PFL has been the subject of a comprehensive randomized controlled trial involving more than 200 families. Beginning in 2008, the evaluation followed the first cohort of participants from intake into the program until school entry. This trial has identified significant outcomes for children in cognitive development, social emotional development, physical health and wellbeing and parenting practices at age 5. A follow-up study at age 9 demonstrated significant outcomes in the area of cognitive development and school attainment. The age 9 study took place five years after the program ended, demonstrating that the outcomes were sustained over time. An additional follow-up study is planned for 2024, when the children turn 13.

The goal of PFL is to support parents to nurture children, so the child, the family and the community can thrive. We celebrate all accomplishments (no matter how big or small) and recognize the potential for growth in everyday interactions. We value the strengths, resources and capability of participants, staff and community partners and we work collaboratively to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families. We believe in constantly striving to improve and learn, to find ways of connecting theory and practice and in translating this into improvements in programme delivery.

Ongoing Project

We are now looking to partner with a local social service organization to implement our own home visiting intervention in Chicago in order to study these mechanisms more closely. Our aim is to study how home visiting influences short and long-term outcomes of children and families. For this we plan to set up and run a randomized control trial (RCT) on this intervention.

Our Goals: This project will utilize the skills and expertise of all three partners to create a new intervention designed to help caregivers understand and support their child’s developments. We expect to gain a robust understanding of the mechanisms involved in optimizing a child’s development from the earliest days and years.

This partnership will begin with a formal partnership agreement and last for the duration of the intervention. Because PFL is a five-year program with an emphasis on school readiness, this formal partnership could last from five to eight years, depending on the amount of time it takes to adapt materials, pilot the program and recruit a suitable number of families.

Long-term follow-ups of the participants and staff is expected as well. In order to study the effects of this intervention on the lives of participants, the research team will reach out to participants in the treatment and control groups to regularly collect data with greater frequency in earlier follow-ups. These data could include information about life events, academic performance, health and family resources.

2. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

For this RCT, the SDP will be asked to recruit two times as many families as they are able to serve, to establish both the treatment (visited) and control (not visited) groups. The treatment families will receive monthly home visits and group services conducted by the SDP’s home visitors following the Preparing for Life Model. Content, structure and other details of the home visits will be designed by the Preparing for Life team, partly in partnership with CEHD and the SDP. Some of these details will include:

- Home visit content
- Data collection methods
- Structure and frequency of home visitor supervision
- Materials to be used in the home
- Methods for engaging families

It is our hope that we can formalize needed partnerships and finalize the details of the research study in the first half of 2022. We intend to run the experiment for the amount of time it takes to adapt the materials, pilot the intervention and recruit the desired amount of families and serve them for the duration of the program, which could take up to eight years.
While the program is ongoing, the research team and/or SDP will be collecting data on treatment and control families. Possible tools and measures to be collected are listed in the Appendix.

The control group will not receive home visits or group services like the treatment group, but will have to be monitored using the same data collection tools at the same frequency. CEHD and PFL in partnership with the SDP will determine what benefits to offer the control group families for their participation before recruitment begins.

We plan to begin a pilot phase by the end of 2022 with a small number of families recruited for this purpose. In this pilot, we will run our program as adapted to understand if any additional improvements should be made before full implementation and rollout of the study in 2023. Evaluation of the study will begin in 2023 and continue at least until the end of the program. Evaluation includes data collection and analysis. Future follow-ups to collect similar data with the participants is expected every two to 10 years.

3. COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

CEHD Responsibilities
For this project, CEHD team members can expect to:

• Fund the home visiting program operations that could include:
  » HV salaries
  » Supervisor’s time allocated to the supervisory duties of the HVs on this project
  » Materials needed for conducting home visits with families in this project
  » Transportation costs to and from families’ homes in this project
  » Training costs
• Design the research project and evaluation
• Conduct some, if not all, data collection
• Collaborate with FFL and SDP to adapt and design the PFL model to fit local contexts
• Conduct training sessions on data collection
• Advise home visitors on data collection procedures
• Participate in training sessions on model implementation
• Conduct data analyses and lead evaluation reporting

PFL Responsibilities
For this project, PFL team members can expect to:

• Conduct model training of HV and supervisors
• Manage ongoing coaching and supervision (fidelity, support and maintenance)
• Provide CEHD and SDP with materials, resources and schedules of developmental packs
• Lead adaption of materials to local context
• Be available for onsite consultation
• Advise on research design
• Provide logos, outreach materials and design consultation

SDP Responsibilities
In the project, our potential implementation partner can expect the following responsibilities:

• Collaborate with the PFL and CEHD teams to adapt the curriculum to local needs
• Recruit and employ home visitors for this project
• Recruit up to 215 qualifying families for pilot, treatment and control groups (total)
• Participate in all required trainings in model implementation, data collection and professional development
• Home visitors can expect to:
  » Participate in trainings
  » Travel to families’ homes to provide home visiting and group services to participating families
  » Participate in supervisory sessions both one-on-one with supervisor and in groups with peers
  » Video record home visits on a regular basis for the purposes of reflective supervision and family coaching
  » Work with the PFL and CEHD teams to change and improve processes
  » Collect required data (demographics, assessments, screenings, etc) on agreed upon schedule
  » Engage families to reduce attrition
• Supervisors can expect to:
  » Participate in trainings (including on how to conduct reflective supervision)
  » Conduct reflective supervision sessions regularly with individual staff members
  » Review recorded home visits and provide HV with feedback on work with families
  » Assist the research team in making sure the data collected is complete and accurate
4. TIMELINE

Early 2022:
• Begin search for community partner

Mid 2022:
• Finalize partnerships
• Begin adaptation of program to community goals

Late 2022:
• Begin to recruit families for pilot program

2023:
• Continue pilot program
• Begin to recruit families for full implementation
• Begin data collection and analysis

2024 and Beyond:
• Continue serving families
• Continue data collection and analysis
• Conduct follow-up data collection every 2-10 years after program completion

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR CONSIDERATION AND APPLICATION EVALUATION

To be considered for partnership, the organization must submit a 1-4 page letter of intent that includes the following information:

• Brief history of the organization and kinds of services provided
• Why you are interested in partnering with CEHD and PFL on this project
• What community or communities do you envision the project being delivered in? What value do you think this project would bring to the community?
• Any other relevant information (optional)
  » Current early childhood or parenting focus
  » Prior experience with RCTs
  » Interest in research

Select organizations will be invited to interview and submit an application based upon their letter of intent. This application will be available after letters of intent are reviewed. The applicant will be asked to provide more detailed information about the organization’s history, current activities, social service practices and willingness to partner in specific research tasks.

6. QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

If you have any questions about this project or its requirements for consideration, please contact the home visiting support team. We are happy to help guide you through this process. You can send an email to: CEH Dhhomevisiting@UChicago.edu, or call us at (872) 212-4544