

Implementer Portrait: Olivia O'Connell



Olivia O'Connell is a Project Specialist (Implementation) at the [Centre for Effective Services \(CES\)](#) in Dublin, Ireland. CES is a non-profit organisation that aims to improve the lives of people on the island of Ireland by supporting the implementation of excellent public services through evidence-informed policy and practice. Olivia has over twenty years' experience of public sector policy and project implementation in Ireland. She joined CES with an interest in implementation science and how to best apply its tenets in ways that are accessible, impactful, and useful to policy makers and practitioners.

What is one of your favourite articles on implementation?

The 2023 article by Christoph Knill, Yves Steinebach & Dionys Zink, "[How policy growth affects policy implementation: bureaucratic overload and policy triage, Journal of European Public Policy](#)". As someone with a background as a social work practitioner and implementation manager in the public sector in Ireland, I find this journal article quite relevant to my interests. My experience with the policy-practice gap and the concept of 'policy overload' that social workers face ties in well with the article's focus on "organizational policy triage." This approach, which looks at policy implementation from an organizational standpoint, seems particularly pertinent to the challenges I've encountered in my work. The article's development of a theoretical framework to explain differences in policy triage across organizations is interesting and provides insights into the factors affecting policy implementation, a topic central to my professional and research interests. Additionally, the paper's use of case studies in environmental policy implementation in Ireland and England provide a broader perspective. Although my focus has primarily been on children and families, learning from other sectors could reveal useful strategies and ideas that might be adaptable to my area of work. This article provides a valuable resource for deepening my understanding of the intersection between policy and practice in my field.

What are you currently working on that relates to implementation?

I have ongoing projects with government agencies, community/voluntary organisations in supporting their implementation efforts. I recently completed a project with the Irish Prison Service to support their implementation of a new practice model around the management of suicidality among the prison population.

If you were to have lunch with another 'implementer', whom would you pick?

Dr. Enola Proctor. Like me, she has a background in social work. She is a professor of social work research, Washington University, USA. Enola's research is motivated by the question,



how do we ensure that people receive the very best possible care? She has studied this question in a variety of social work, public health, and health care settings, ranging from hospitals to community agencies.

If you had the resources for it, what within implementation science or practice would you want to work with next?

I am passionate about supporting frontline practitioners and developing mechanisms to influence the policy cycle – how/why policies are generated, how they are implemented and how they are reviewed in a real-world setting. There is a dearth of research on this from a practitioner perspective and how they negotiate the tension between **text** and **context**.

Interested in Olivia's work? Contact Olivia at ooconnell@effectiveservices.org!
