

Sharing From The Start Newsletter

The 'Sharing from the Start' project is supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). It involves early years settings throughout Northern Ireland and the Southern Border counties forming cross-community and/ or cross-border partnerships, and the children taking part in joint curricular classes, improving educational outcomes and promoting good relations.

Sharing from the Start is administered by Early Years working in collaboration with the National Childhood Network and the Fermanagh Trust. Together these three organisations have a strong track record and over twenty years experience of working for the benefit of children and good relations development.

The project which started in September 2017 and will run to June 2021, aims to bring about positive attitudinal and behavioural change among children, parents, teachers and the wider community. This will be achieved through the implementation of purposeful, direct and sustained curriculum-based contact between children of predominantly different religious backgrounds and different ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds.

A number of neighbouring partnerships have been formed. In this first year of the project over 1800 children have been involved and this will increase year on year. We hope you enjoy the stories in this newsletter which provides a snapshot of just some of the work which has taken place so far.





Siobhan Fitzpatrick
Chief Executive
Officer, Early Years

“Early Years the Organisation for Young Children is delighted to partner with Fermanagh Trust and the National

Childhood Network(ROI) in the delivery of the Sharing from the Start Project. We believe that this important new development, building upon 50 years of cross community early childhood initiatives will contribute significantly to the Shared Education agenda in Northern Ireland and the Southern Border counties of the Republic of Ireland. The commitment shown to the project in the first six months, by over 100 preschool providers bodes well for the future success of the project and our objective of making sharing a reality for all preschool children in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.”



Alison Chambers
Department
of Education,
Director Promoting
Collaboration

“The Sharing from the Start project, with a

budget of over €4.2m, and targeted exclusively at pre-school children, is an exciting opportunity to make a real difference, both in Northern Ireland and in the border counties. The project’s targets of almost 10,000 children sharing in 100 settings by December 2021 represent a significant leap forward. Equally important is the project’s target of 157 early years practitioners trained with the capacity to facilitate shared education. We cannot hope to embed sharing as a normal part of school life without a skilled workforce. Similarly, we need parental and community buy-in and I know that this is a key element of Sharing from the Start.”

Gina McIntyre
Chief Executive
Officer, Special EU
Programmes Body

“Shared education will help us transition into a confident, outward-facing society which has the ability to celebrate its differences. By giving pre-school children an opportunity to have meaningful, sustained contact with young people from another background they will become positive agents for change influencing their own families, peers and friends outside of the pre-school environment. It has also been proven that children participating in shared education initiatives benefit from an increase in self-confidence, self-awareness and self-reflection.”



Ian McKenna
Department of
Education and
Skills, International
Cooperation Section

“At a time when there are so many expectations, a holistic and positive early years’ experience for children lays their foundation for positive personal development and building relationships which become life-long. Whether this happens along a border or in the middle of Belfast or Dublin, we must reflect on learning from this initiative and ensure it becomes the norm rather than the exception. The Department of Education and Skills is committed to supporting this initiative, and commends the willingness of all early years educators to ensure its success.”



Playtime, McClintock and Denamona pre-schools visit An Cregán outdoor classroom – Co Tyrone



Playtime Eskra, McClintock Pre-school and Denamona Pre-school have been visiting An Cregán as part of their work together on the Shared Education project ‘Sharing From The Start’.

Children from the partnership have been enjoying outdoor play at An Cregán’s purpose built Wild Woods outdoor classroom. The play facility features a tree house, campfire area and pond dipping platforms all set in natural woodland. This type of play provides exercise, encounters with wild animals and a connection with the environment in a way that cannot be achieved in the classroom.

Mairead McCaughey from Playtime Eskra said “It’s so important for the children to have fun and free play like this. It’s a great way for them to learn about the outdoors and they always look forward to it every week”. Belinda Moffitt from McClintock Pre-school said “Coming here is really building their confidence and it’s lovely to see friendships and bonds forming. We’re fortunate to have help from parents as well.” Nicola McCormick from Denamona Pre-school added “We wouldn’t have been able to have a programme like this on our own. It’s just one of the many benefits of the three of us working together”.

Cosy Cats and Acorn Montessori – Co Sligo

Cosy Cats and Acorn Montessori came together earlier this year to begin their work on ‘Sharing From The Start’ The pre-school leaders and their staff team planned a series of activities to enhance their work and provide the children with new opportunities. Their story of Shared Education is based on community connections, when they had their first two sessions they observed how the children enjoyed playing with the trains. They planned a trip to local library and museum. It came to their attention that one of the parents worked as a train driver. With all this information they decided they had to have a shared session in Sligo train station and go on a train journey. The children learnt so much about transport and history and literacy in these sessions and built on their partnership with parents. The partnership also held a joint sports day – the ‘Sharing From The Start Olympics’ – to encourage discussion about the different countries taking part.



Shaftesbury Nursery and St Teresa’s Nursery - Belfast



Children and staff from Shaftesbury Nursery and St Teresa’s Nursery, Belfast have been busy working together focussing on literacy work and outdoor play, this is a chance for staff to collaborate and for the children to make new friends.

Loretta Cunningham from Shaftesbury Nursery commented “There’s quite a lot of Shared Education taking place between schools in the area so this isn’t totally new to us and we’ve able to see through these schools how shared education works and the benefits that come from it. Our classes have adapted so easily. Part of this is of course the social aspect and seeing the children being comfortable with other children. It’s so lovely to start seeing bonds being developed and friendships being made. Not only is there sharing between the children but also our staff, utilising the skills and resources of both nurseries to develop good practice.”

Clare Evans from St Teresa’s Nursery added “For our work together we’re going to focus on language and literacy as well as outdoor play. So far we’ve had a joint Christmas Carol service, worked together on a fairy dummy tree and we’ve had a visit from the Easter bunny. Over the coming weeks we’re going to be doing some Spring craft, visits to allotments and a Teddy Bear’s picnic. Our nurseries are keen to get parental involvement and we’re fortunate that our parents and grandparents have been so supportive and engaged in our work together.”

Killen and Drumquin Pre-Schools – Co Tyrone

Children and staff of First Steps Pre-School, Killen and Sugar and Spice Early Years, Drumquin have been having fun and learning together in a number of shared education sessions.

The two pre-schools came together at Omagh Library where the children enjoyed rhyme and story time and arts and crafts. They’ve been playing together at each other’s settings and they had a special event by Ink Wing Academy involving activities around the story of ‘The Gruffalo’.

Ruby Smith, leader of First Steps said “This is an exciting experience for the children. We’re seeing friendships develop and they’re getting so confident exploring each other’s pre-schools. They’re always eager to visit each other and they love to welcome their new friends. For the staff it’s a great opportunity to share resources and experiences.” Bernadette McCrossan, leader of Sugar and Spice Playgroup added “It’s always such fun meeting up with our buddies in First Steps. Feedback from parents is very positive and the children really enjoy it. From story time, to arts and crafts and outdoor play, it’s great for them to enjoy these curriculum based activities.”



Ardstraw Playgroup and Little Flower Playgroup have ‘Fun With Drums’ – Co Tyrone



Fun With Drums’ was the latest session in a packed programme between Ardstraw Playgroup and their friends from Little Flower Playgroup, Sion Mills. The two pre-schools have been working together on the Shared Education project ‘Sharing From The Start’.

Sandra Harper from Little Flower Playgroup said “For our work together we’ve been to Barrontop Fun Farm, had music sessions in Strabane Library, a fun with drums session and in the coming weeks we’ll be visiting Tropical World in Letterkenny. The big benefit we notice from taking part in Sharing From The Start is the social aspect, not only in the children making new friends but getting out and about, doing new things and having new experiences.”

Heather Nicholl from Ardstraw Playgroup added “It’s so great to see the children interact and engage with each other. It’s all about learning new skills, building confidence and encouraging creativity all whilst having fun. We’re keen to have parental involvement and we’re fortunate that our parents have been so supportive and engaged in a number of our sessions.”

Brookeborough and Maguiresbridge Playgroups visit Crom Estate – Co Fermanagh

The stunning Crom Estate on the shores of Upper Lough Erne was the setting for the latest shared session between Brookeborough Playgroup and Maguiresbridge Playgroup. The two pre-schools have become partners as part of the Shared Education project ‘Sharing From The Start’.

Children, staff and parents enjoyed the visit to the Castle and country estate. They had opportunities to interact with each other as they took part in a nature walk and educational talk about the various land and water insects. Children were able to inspect frogspawn, small perch and others creatures, all of which helped their observation and language skills to describe what they saw.

Then it was off to explore woodlands looking for bugs. Children and parents had time to get to know each other in a relaxed atmosphere. During snack time children all sat around together with their peers chatting about what they enjoyed during the visit

Audrey Rainey (Early Years), Programme Manager of ‘Sharing From The Start’ commented “It’s great to see such fun, curriculum based work like this visit taking place. The Brookeborough and Maguiresbridge playgroups have shown a real dedication and enthusiasm and we wish them well for the rest of their sessions together. This is what the project is all about, creating opportunities like this for the children, parents and teachers to learn and work together.”



Mary Mallon Pre-school and Eivers Lane Pre-school– Co Leitrim



For one of their sessions, the two pre-schools came together at Mohill Library where the children enjoyed story time and arts and crafts. The programme introduced many of the children to the library for the first time, providing them with the opportunity to achieve education in a fun, relaxed yet inclusive and respectful manner. Patrons of the library commented on how wonderful it was seeing all the children mingling and creating a great buzz in the building, utilising many areas provided by the library, especially the children’s area and sensory room.

The leaders of the two pre-schools have been commended for their progressive attitude and motivation to ensure the success of the project, implementing purposeful, direct and sustained curriculum based contact, improving educational outcomes and community relations. The two settings also visited Lough Rynn Castle Hotel. The children were warmly greeted by the staff who told them all about the work they do at the Hotel. They also got to play in the gardens, learning all about the different plants and taking part in a scavenger hunt.

Dance Performance by Tiny Tots Playgroup and Little Bridges Nursery – Co Fermanagh

Children from Tiny Tots Playgroup, Mullmesker and Little Bridges Community Nursery, Florencecourt have had a number of sessions together focussing on dance, facilitated by Dylan Quinn. Recently the children put on a joint dance performance, showcasing everything they’ve learnt to parents from both playgroups.

Rachel Harron from Tiny Tots commented “We are so delighted to take part in this project. It is something we’ve always wanted to do as there has been Shared Education happening in this area for a number of years so this is a natural fit for us. It is lovely that the children will get to carry on with Shared Education when they move on to primary school.” Tara Kingston from Little Bridges added “Children have really enjoyed

the curriculum based work, especially their sessions with Dylan Quinn. We can really see their confidence growing and friendships forming. They are always so excited to go and visit their new friends and then to have them visit us as well. It is a great for communities, staff and parents to come together.”

Audrey Rainey, (Early Years) Programme Manger of Sharing From The Start said “This is a great example of the benefits of working together. The two have been able to share resources and facilitation, resulting in an excellent performance for parents. Well done to all the children and the staff and for all their hard work embracing Shared Education so fully.”



Ebrington Nursery and Holy Child Nursery partner up for a series of Shared Education activities – Derry/ Londonderry

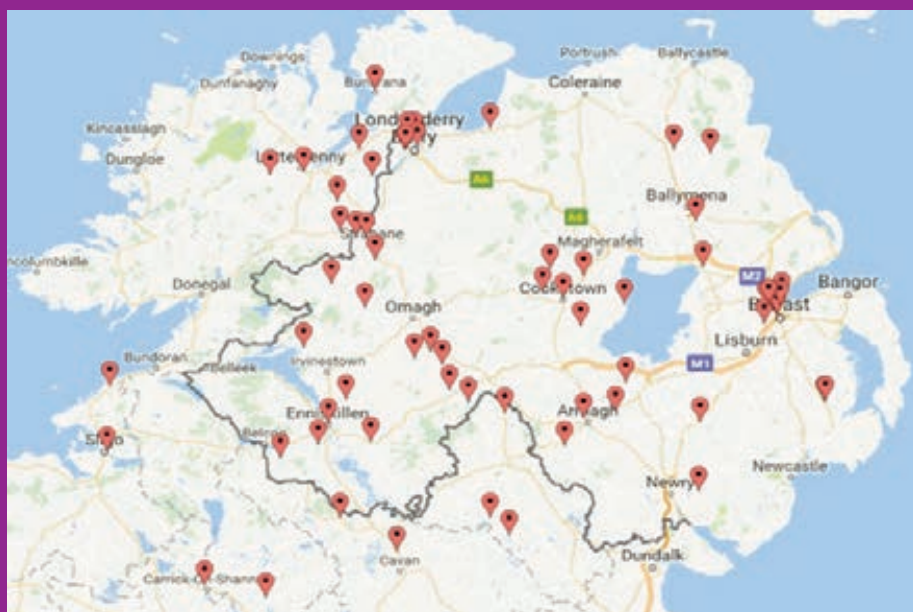


Gymnastics, music and visits to the Library – lots of opportunities for fun and learning for Ebrington Nursery and their friends from Holy Child Nursery who have been working together on the Shared Education project ‘Sharing From The Start’.

The two partners have been visiting each other’s nurseries to play together and have sessions focussing on exercise and music. They’ve also been visiting Creggan Library for story time. In the coming weeks they will be having a joint showcase performance at the Waterside Theatre.

Pat Concannon from Holy Child Nursery said “Both our schools are involved in Shared Education so this project is a natural fit for our nurseries. The children are really enjoying the new opportunities. We’re able to do a lot more together than we could on our own.” Sarah Caithness from Ebrington Nursery added “Sharing From The Start has been great not only for our pupils but also our staff in terms of sharing expertise. It’s encouraging to have support from parents and see the children enjoying these experiences with their new friends.”





Location of pre-schools participating in Year 1 of the project. We are very pleased with the feedback and look forward to additional pre-schools becoming actively involved in the programme.



For more information visit www.sharingfromthestart.org

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