

Sharing From The Start Newsletter



The 'Sharing from the Start' project 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. The initiative is supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

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, is bringing positive attitudinal and behavioural change amongst children, parents, teachers and the wider community. This is being 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. Now in it's second year there are over 2400 children 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 this term.





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 have had a very successful first year and look forward to engaging with even more preschools as we begin the second year of the project. We believe the Sharing from the Start initiative building upon 50 years of cross

community early childhood initiatives is contributing significantly to the Shared Education agenda in Northern Ireland and the Southern Border counties of the Republic of Ireland. The commitment shown by our pre-school practitioners from the very beginning is so inspiring. Already we can see the benefits sharing is bringing for the staff, children, families and communities both in terms of educational outcomes and inclusion and sharing outcomes. Now with over 2400 children involved, it bodes well for the future success of the project and our objective of making sharing a reality for all preschool children."

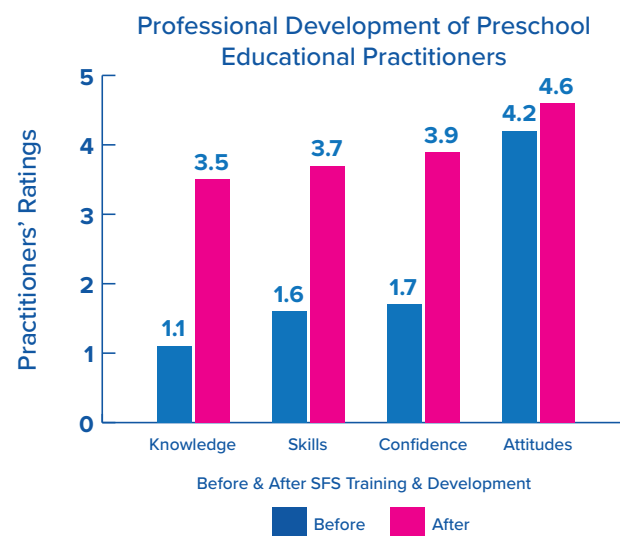
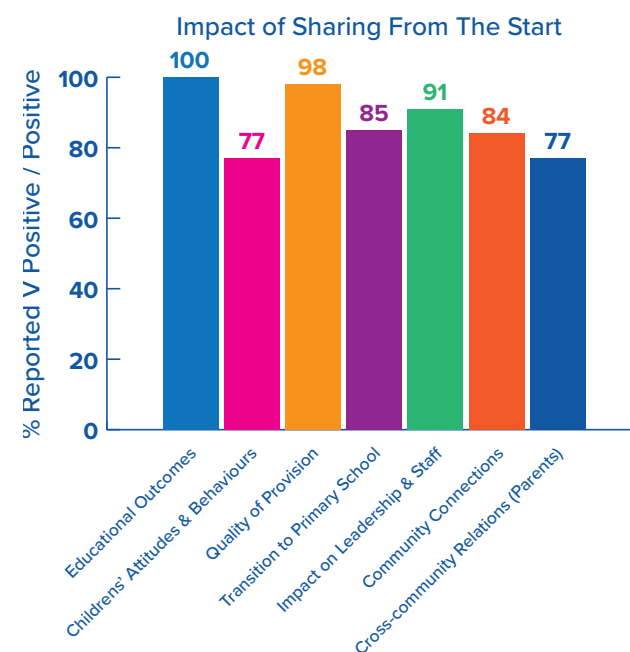
Outcomes of Year 1

The first year of Sharing from the Start has provided significant evidence of the positive impact of the project on children and their parents and carers and preschool educational practitioners. A survey of all the settings involved in year 1 (2017 – 2018) reported 'Very Positive / Positive' impact on children's educational outcomes (100%). A summary of the survey results is depicted in Chart 1 shown here. Many examples were given of the impact on the children's Personal, Social and Emotional development in Northern Ireland (NI) and Well Being and Identity and Belonging in the Southern Border Counties (SBCs). It is not surprising that as many of the shared curricular sessions took place outside, there is evidence of the impact on the Physical Development of the children; their Exploring & Thinking skills and their knowledge of the World Around Us.

It was also reported by over 70% of education practitioners that Sharing from the Start project has

had a positive impact on bringing about greater cross-community interactions between parents; and improved community involvement with the early years setting (84%). The settings have also reported improved quality of provision (98%) and enhanced leadership & management (91%) in the preschool.

Indeed professional development of the preschool practitioners and their increased knowledge, skills, confidence and attitudes has been a major factor in the success of Sharing from the Start in Year 1. Sharing from the Start provided three days off-the-job training, along with on-going mentoring, facilitation and support by Senior Early Years Specialists throughout the year. The adjoining chart shows the increase in the practitioner's ratings from when the project commenced to a review at the end of year one. The aim is to build on the successes of year one, during the second year of the project.



Omagh Integrated Nursery, Omagh North Nursery and Christ the King Nursery

Children, staff and parents from these three Omagh nurseries are excited to be working together on Shared Education activities this year thanks to the €4.2 million project 'Sharing From The Start'.

Martina Curry, Omagh Integrated Nursery said "This term we have been focussing on arts, music and creative working. In particular, as an integrated nursery, our ethos fits in with Shared Education so we're delighted to working our neighbouring settings."

Amanda Duffy Phillips, Omagh North Nursery added "Building on an existing nursery teacher cluster where the professionals met regularly, we jumped at the opportunity to be able to bring our children together to play and learn alongside one another, celebrating inclusion and diversity."

Emma McDonald, Christ the King also commented saying "Sharing From The Start is a great way to develop stronger community links and break down barriers. We're really looking forward to having lots of fun and making new friends."



Mary Callaghan Mallon pre-school and Eivers Lane pre-school, Co Leitrim

The two pre-schools have been focussing on transitions and building respectful relationships. The children had the opportunity to engage in natural play experiences and have begun to develop friendships as they moved into this their

second shared education session of the year. Together the settings learned a new song which will play a fundamental role in retaining the ongoing connections between the settings until their next shared education session.





Sharing From The Start showcased at cross border event

At National Childhood Network's event celebrating 21 Years of EU Peace Funding in the Southern Border Counties and Northern Ireland we were delighted to meet with An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar and receive kind words of encouragement and support for our work.

(L-R) An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Audrey Rainey Programme Manager of Sharing From The Start and Heather Humphreys Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Clogher, Augher and Emyvale cross-border partnership presents to PEACE IV Project Management Committee

During a presentation to a meeting of the SEUPB project management committee the cross border partnership had the chance to showcase their work. Sinead Donaghey, leader at Clogher Valley Playgroup said "Our key educational focus last year was physical development including gymnastics which was led by a parent volunteer. Our focus this term is music and drama and we plan to extend the children's experiences within the arts whilst encouraging local individuals with different musical talents to become involved within sessions. Another positive and unexpected outcome is that it has helped children in their progression to primary school."

Dympna McKenna, leader at Tru Beginnings playgroup said "Through this project, we are really encouraged by the support of our parents. It has also strengthened our professional practice. We have learnt a lot from each other and have developed our skills and knowledge,

values and attitudes. Participating in this project has supported us to connect and integrate with the local community more, we are actively supporting children citizenship and we will continue to grow and build on this going forward."

Roisin McGovern leader of Woodland Adventure Playgroup added "Having three different settings who follow a variety of different guidelines gives us all the opportunity to learn from each other. This is something that we have never been gifted to do until now. I feel this is a brilliant programme as it gives all children the opportunity to engage with each other and this helps to promote their confidence, communication and social skills. I would like to hope that this will be continuing for many years to come and that we can continue to work together through Shared Education for a more peaceful community."



Ballymena Nursery, Castle Tower Nursery and First Steps Playgroup

Sharing teddies, making new friends and singing songs – all part of the fun for this Ballymena pre-school partnership.

The three pre-schools curriculum focus for their sessions together is music. They're even planning to make their own theme song about the partnership. Staff are busy planning a joint Christmas jumper day where the children will be singing Christmas songs. At the end of the year they will have a performance for parents and families where the children will sing all the songs they have learned throughout the year.

Anna Logan from Castle Tower Nursery commented "We are unique to Sharing From The Start in that we are the only special school involved but it's working out so well for us and we can already see the benefits. Castle Tower is right beside Ballymena Nursery and it's so wonderful that the children used to see each other over the fence and now they're playing together."

Jacqueline Coulter from Ballymena Nursery said "Already the children are so comfortable with each other and comfortable visiting each other's settings. It's great for their confidence and social skills and in having new opportunities like collaborating on this music programme." Caroline Cannon from First Steps playgroup added "The three of us working together is a valuable way for staff to learn from each other and develop our own ideas and skills. The children are so excited and we're looking forward to the rest of our sessions together."



The Park School For Early Learning and Bomany Nursery, Letterkenny

The two pre-schools recently had their first shared session at The Parks premises. Wonderful opportunity to involve parents as they continue their Shared Education journey.



Developing a Shared Education policy



The importance of developing Shared Education policy was highlighted at the Early Years conference on Leadership and Governance. The pre-school practitioners, many of whom are taking part in Sharing From The Start, were given help and guidance on how to put in place a Shared Education policy for their setting at a special conference workshop.

Policies are important because they help a pre-school establish procedures and create standards of quality for learning and safety, as well as expectations and accountability. They guide the actions of all those involved in the service. When policies and procedures

are well thought out and implemented they provide a common understanding and agreement on how things should be done and it helps new staff and families familiarise themselves with the service's practices.

Making a Shared Education policy is a recommendation from recent legislation. All pre-schools are at different stage in their journey and every setting and their circumstances is different. So it's important for them individually to set out their logistics and intended outcomes in a measured way, being mindful of sensitivities. All of which is part of embedding Shared Education and building positive relations.

It was highlighted during the workshop that a Shared Education policy should include principles, policies and procedures. Firstly it should set out their commitment to Shared Education and why they are involved, the benefits and added values to the curriculum. It should also set out the aims for their setting and what they hope children, families and staff achieve from sharing such as increasing tolerance and respect, promoting increased community cohesion and enhancing children's skills and attitudes. Finally it should include information on procedures e.g venues, travel, resources, planning, monitoring and so on.

It's important to note also that policies should be 'living' documents that must regularly be reviewed, all in order to work towards fully embedding Shared Education into the normal delivery of the curriculum.

Ardstraw Playgroup and Little Flower Playgroup Sion Mills

Ardstraw Playgroup and Little Flower Playgroup, Sion Mills had the chance to showcase their work as part of Shared Education week in October.

Last year the two playgroups focused on a number of curriculum activities including music. This year they are visiting each other's settings working together on sessions around physical development as well as having a number of educational visits including library.

Their collaborative working featured on the BBC for their Shared Education week coverage during which Sandra Harper leader at Little Flower playgroup said "Without this programme our children wouldn't have these opportunities. It's great for building friendships, learning new things and experiencing different experiences."

Heather Nicholl from Ardstraw Playgroup added "We're really excited to be working together again this year with our friends from Little Flower. It's so great to see the children interact, having fun and learning with each other. We've been so encouraged as well by the support of our parents."



Carr's Glen Nursery, Stanhope Street Controlled Nursery and Naíscail Bheann Mhadagáin, Belfast



The curriculum focus for the North Belfast partnership this year is art. Local artist Anushiya Sundaralingam is helping the children to create three felt murals around the theme of gardening and the outdoors. They will all help out during their shared sessions at each other's settings and then each nursery will get to keep one and display as a memento of their work together.

As well as their art work Naíscail Bheann Mhadagáin pupils are teaching their new friends some nursery rhymes in Irish. Later in the year the nurseries will be having a number of educational visits together to Streamvale Farm and Carnfunnock County Park. The initiative between the three way partnership has drawn widespread support.

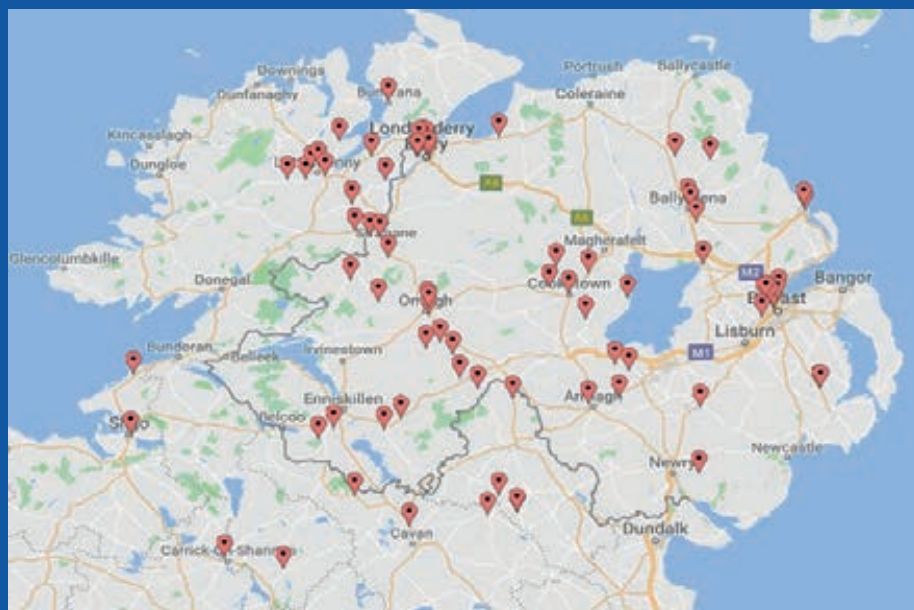
Karen Timmons leader at Stanhope Street Controlled Nursery said "This is a fantastic initiative as it brings children together in a natural way. As teachers we have learned a lot from each other and friendships have

developed not only between the children but the staff as well. We've also been so encouraged by the support of parents and many have even helped out during the shared sessions."

Seosaimhín Mhic Thomais leader at Naíscail Bheann Mhadagáin added "This programme is of course a very positive experience for the children but it's much wider than that in the sense that it has brought benefits to parents and teachers as well. Our pupils are enjoying teaching their friends from Carr's Glen and Stanhope greetings in Irish. It's wonderful for the children to experience different settings and learn together."

Carr's Glen Nursery leader Elaine Stewart commented "Our settings are collaborating and having experiences which without this programme we wouldn't have been able to. For our teachers and staff it's been very worthwhile working together and developing professionally."





Location of pre-schools participating in Year 2 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

Follow us on twitter @SharingStart

Contact Audrey Rainey, Early Years (Programme Manager of Sharing From The Start)

E: audreyr@early-years.org Tel: **028 9066 2825**