

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.

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 and the benefits that shared education is bringing.



Denise McCormilla – CEO of National Childhood Network



Having partnered with Early Years, the organisation for young children on many different cross border initiatives, National Childhood Network feels very privileged to engage with their staff team again and the staff team at Fermanagh Trust in the delivery of the Sharing from the Start programme. The three organisations work really well to collaboratively deliver the programme to preschool services in Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties. Collaborative working builds on the strengths of the three agencies which in turn impacts positively on all of the preschool staff, children and families involved in this valuable cross border initiative. In communities where there can be many different divisions, having pre-school services that are inclusive and embracing of all families is so valuable. The SFTS programme provides the information, training and support to pre-school staff, management and parents that helps to enhance community relationships and build community cohesion.

Belfast Nurseries Seaview, St Mary's and Lowwood Controlled



The partnership of three nurseries have been working together on a range of activities. Visiting each other's settings, children have been engaged in an enriched learning environment.

By working together the groups have been encouraged by the staff development and involvement of parents as well as the children making new friends. Through their curriculum focus on topics such as arts, crafts and physical development the nurseries have seen real benefit to the children's language and listening skills, their use of mathematics and their confidence.



Cluster Meetings

An integral part of the Sharing from the Start programme is the provision of training to preschool teachers. In line with the Shared Education framework the aim of the training is to empower and support staff in shared education. This year the peer learning cluster provided a platform for practitioners to engage in reflective practice including documentation and portfolio building. The sessions looked at the promotion of parental engagement through the Sharing from the Start and building on reconciliation through the facilitation of shared outcomes.

Loughinisland and Crossgar pupils wear “Odd Socks” in support of World Down Syndrome Day

Loughinisland Playgroup and Crossgar Pre-school held an ‘Odd Socks Day’ to raise awareness of Down Syndrome and raise money for local support group ‘Down Right Incredible – Saintfield’. This was all around their work on diversity and inclusion. Throughout the day the children had the opportunity to learn some sign language.

To celebrate St Patrick’s Day the two pre-schools held an event learning about different cultures and music. Parents and grandparents even had the chance to take part. The children have had music & physical sessions such as Jump Jiggle & Jive, have been on visits to Tobar Mhuire Forest, Crossgar and will be visiting places such as Delamont Country Park & Castle Ward where they will be learning about plant life, minibeasts, wildlife and shore life.

Eileen Owens, leader at Loughinisland Playgroup commented “Through Sharing From The Start we have been able to have these exciting opportunities for the children where they have learned so much and had lots of fun along the way.” Judy McSherry leader at Crossgar Pre-school added “It’s great for the children to make so many new friends and by working together we are able to do so much more and learn from each other. We are so encouraged as well by the support of parents and the wider community.”





Early Childhood Ireland Conference

In April the Sharing From The Start team had the opportunity to present to the Early Childhood Ireland Conference in Dublin. The event brought together the best in the Early Learning and Care Sector to showcase the empowering and influential work taking place. Sharing From The Start updated delegates on the programme and our child centred practice. Wonderful to hear from professionals, academics, students and researchers sharing their insights with the wider Early Years community.



Fingers & Toes Community Childcare and Rockcorry Community Childcare – Co Monaghan

The two pre-schools enjoyed a trip to Rossmore Forest Park as part of their shared education work with the Sharing From The Start project. Parents and staff supported children in a natural environment to explore real tools and build dens. Lots of fun and outdoor learning.



Parents

Parents from a sample of early years settings involved in Sharing From The Start gave their feedback on the impact of the programme on their child, via interviews and focus groups. In summary, all reported that their children had benefitted greatly from participating in Shared Education.

The parents talked about how their children had made friends from the other pre-school and how they would talk about their new friends. They've become more sociable, it's widened their horizons and it's felt that they will be better equipped for attending primary school.

Without exception the parents talked about how excited their children are to take part in shared classes. Their children talk with great enthusiasm about the next session coming up and they are eager to tell their parents about what took place. A number of parents recounted how they witnessed their children pushing themselves beyond their comfort zone in terms of meeting new people and doing new things and the positive benefits that have come from that.

Parents also offered examples of how they thought the project is meeting its aim of developing more positive relations between our two main communities with a particular focus on encouraging inclusion and respect for diversity amongst the participating children. There was clearly a desire that their children would grow up in a more cohesive society than they the parents had experienced and they felt that Sharing From The Start can help achieve this.





Rosemount Nursery School and Orchard Community Playgroup – Derry / Londonderry

Orchard Community Playgroup, Ballykelly and Rosemount Nursery School, Derry / Londonderry have had a number of shared sessions together this year.

They have been visiting each other's settings and engaging in football training facilitated by a coach from Maiden City Soccer. The leaders from the two settings have been grateful for the support from their parents, particularly their involvement helping out during the shared lessons.

Cathy Campbell, teacher at Rosemount Nursery said "This year we are focusing on the physical development of our children, alongside other benefits of our shared education programme. I feel our sessions highlight the fact that our children will interact and engage naturally, especially in a familiar environment".



Ramelton Community Playgroup and Learn n Play Pre-School – Letterkenny

Learn n Play Pre-School and Ramelton Community Playgroup visited Ballymacool Town Park as part of their shared education work together.

The children had a free play session in the park and then sat down together to have a Teddy bears picnic where they were entertained by staff to the story of Going on a Bear Hunt. Leaders commended Sharing From The Start for the new opportunities the children have availed of adding they can do much more together than apart.



Tiny Tots and Bosco Playgroup - Co Tyrone

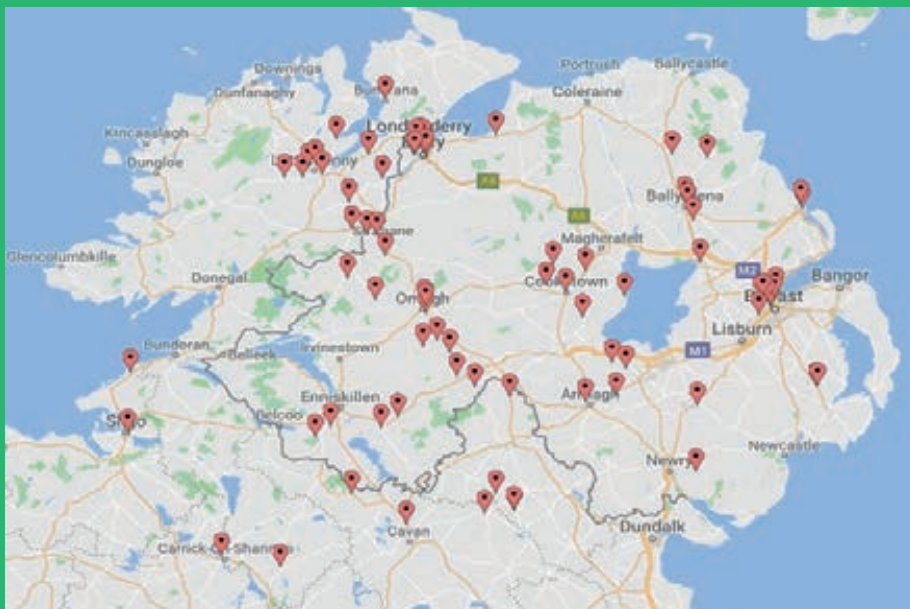


Staff and children from Tiny Tots playgroup in Stewartstown and Bosco Playgroup in Cookstown came together to visit An Creagan as part of their shared education work. The bad weather didn't deter the children from exploring the Wild Woods as they climbed the hills using the rope ladder, 'dug for gold' in the Sperrins and made lots of 'tea' using the naturally collected spring water.

Fishing in the pond the children found frog spawn and gently explored the feel of it under their hands taking care to touch it carefully as they learned to respect living things. They even had the opportunity to observe a frog at close range before releasing it carefully back into the pond

Throughout the session the children from both settings were developing friendships and bonding as they developed their physical skills climbing, swinging, reaching and stretching as they explored the outdoors.





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**