

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 currently over 3000 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.





Pauline Walmsley

CEO, Early Years – the organisation for young children

Dear Reader, Welcome to the fourth edition of the Sharing from the Start newsletter. This year marks the third year of participation for settings and I am delighted to report that the project is achieving improvements in educational outcomes for children involved. As well as this we have deepened the peace and reconciliation outcomes with a specific focus on respect for difference including sectarian, ethnic, physical and socio-economic. The newsletter highlights the evidence based training and ongoing mentoring support provided for participating teachers and practitioners to enable them enhance key areas of the curricula and frameworks in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland to support these outcomes. Key skills include effective work with parents,

management boards and local communities to build a supportive culture of respect for difference within and around the partnership settings and the inspiring comments from parents involved speak to the importance of this work. As we look forward to Peace Plus, it is vital that more preschool settings in both Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have the opportunity to participate and effect positive change in educational and peace and reconciliation outcomes for the children and families they serve. We at Early Years, together with our partners in the National Childhood Network and Fermanagh Trust are committed to taking the learning from this project forward to ensure a widening and deepening of the outcomes in the next phase of Peace funding.

Practitioner Comments



Eileen Owens

Loughlinisland Playgroup

Sharing from the Start has been a great asset to our preschool learning. The children really get excited and enjoy their play dates with partner preschool, learning names of friends and staff. One child couldn't remember my name and called me "Miss Loughlinisland". They have been learning that there are "other preschools" out there not just theirs and that they can all learn together. Children have been encouraging each other to play together and parents have been telling us that their child(ren) get so excited about meeting up with their new friends. Parents have commented on how they love the programme - their children having the opportunity for cross community

play dates and wish these kind of programmes had been around when they were young. Parents even look forward to attending sessions and joining in when they can. Staff from both partnerships have formed friendships and some of the parents also - some re-kindling old friendships with people they haven't seen for years! So that's an extra bonus. Sharing from the Start Programme has enabled both settings to have shared interest outings, visitors, etc - something that we probably wouldn't have done otherwise because of funding.



Loretta Cunningham

Shaftesbury Nursery

"Our school is based in the heart of the Shankill, I have found that we have developed strong links with our partner school, St Teresa's Nursery School. Both schools work very closely and diligently to ensure we deliver fun and stimulating sessions, which help our children develop an awareness of differences, and begin to set the foundations of acceptance within our communities."

Ballyconnell preschools making community connections



The two playgroups in Ballyconnell; Clever Clogs and Krafty Kids work together on the Sharing From The Start programme.

The two settings, one private and one community, based in the Co Cavan border town have partnered together to engage children in curriculum based sessions which are fun, inclusive and respectful of difference, on the premise they can provide more opportunities working together than they can apart.

Their focus for the curriculum this year has been around community development. Parents have praised the idea of the out of the classroom learning environment as a means of providing new opportunities and enhancing their confidence and social skills.

Ballyconnell is significantly more diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged compared to the rest of the country. Sharing From The Start is helping the community address difference, take away stigma and foster relationships among children, parents and staff.

Annette Coyle leader at Krafty Kidz said “Historically there wouldn’t have been co-operation between the two services and that’s something we wanted to address because many of these children are living together on the same streets and will be going to the same schools. Sharing From The Start has helped to break down barriers and remove any stigma that may have been there. It’s given the two services coming together along with the parents and children a shared purpose and a shared vision working together as part of the community. We would have children attending from all different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and we really wanted to give every child the opportunity to feel connected to their peers and to socialise with other children that they may not otherwise meet. The programme has really opened up a lot of doors for us to explore all the fabulous facilities that we have locally. Before Sharing From The Start that’s not something we would have had the opportunity to do, so it’s benefitted not only the children and families but also the wider community as well.”

Paula Donohoe leader at Clever Cloggs said “Sharing From The Start demonstrates that barriers only exist where you put barriers and it’s great if you can be seen to remove barriers. Us working in collaboration is very visible in the community because we’re out there going to the library, fire station and so on. It’s wonderful to see that we can come forward with a project like this to build cross community acceptance. Probably the greatest benefit of the project is looking at a generation of children that are being brought up to accept all children, all forms of society and I think maybe we’re helping to form a better generation.”



The Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference programme



Ninety staff involved in the Peace IV Sharing from the Start Project attended two-day peer cluster sessions focusing on the implementation of The Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference programme (MIFC). These sessions were facilitated across NI and the border counties from October '19 to January '20, with extra sessions planned to accommodate demand. The use of interactive activities in day one provided opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their own values, attitudes and prejudices. Day two enabled the exploration of MIFC resources, with time for participants to reflect on how the materials could be used to enhance the NI and ROI preschool curriculum and to support the implementation of SFS shared sessions.

The MIFC is an evidence-based intervention programme aimed at improving long term outcomes, so that children, staff, parents and communities become more aware of diversity and difference issues, with the anticipated outcome being that 'young children will respect those who are different'. The implementation of this programme in the 45 nursery and preschool settings will enhance the outcomes currently being promoted by the Sharing from the Start, 'to improve educational outcomes and cross-community cohesion, inclusion and diversity through Shared Education'.

One of the key elements of all successful early childhood programmes is a strong partnership between the early childhood settings and parents. Paul Connolly, 2002 stated "As parents and guardians we have an important role to play in combating prejudice and discrimination among our children. We are the most significant and influential people in our children's lives" (Fair Play Booklet, Barnardo's). The delivery of parent's workshops, as an element of the MIFC programme, will help build parents own confidence in dealing with diversity issues with their own children at home. They will also support practitioners and parents to work together towards successful implementation of the MIFC.

An integral part of the Sharing from the Start programme is the provision of training to preschool teachers that develops capacity to facilitate shared education. In line with the Shared Education Framework peer cluster sessions have been facilitated to empower and support staff in shared education, and evaluations from the training demonstrated how this had been achieved. "We have very limited opportunities for professional development and feel so lucky to be able to access this through Sharing from the Start", "Today made me think about what difference it makes for parents to be involved", "Implementing the MIFC, alongside the SFS will build a solid foundation for our children to grow and develop in so many ways", "excellent session, lots of opportunities to discuss, reflect and ultimately improve on my delivery of the MIFC programme".



Derry nurseries making music and new friends



Lisnagelvin Nursery and Galliagh Nursery have formed a partnership and been working together as part of the early years Shared Education project 'Sharing From The Start'. The children have been visiting each other's settings and learning new songs together as their curriculum focus this year is music.

The nurseries are situated in the city just a short drive from each other on opposite sides of the river Foyle. Travelling between the settings for the shared sessions has provided the children with the opportunity to recognise and name familiar landmarks in the environment. There are many similarities between the two, particularly when it comes to addressing the needs of young children, regardless of socio-economic, political, geographical and religious factors.

As well as play, music and movement sessions, the children have also had the opportunity to visit local residential homes together to sing along with the residents. Staff are able to avail of joint training opportunities and the sharing of good practice. Many of the parents involved commented positively on their experience and how they were made to feel welcome in both settings.

Patricia Taggart, Principal of Lisnagelvin Nursery School said "It's great for the children's confidence and social skills. They love going to visit their new friends and having them over. We're also pleased that our parents are so supportive and keen to be involved as well."

Majella McDowell, Principal Galliagh Nursery School added "The two of us working together is not only beneficial for the children but also it's a valuable way for staff to learn from each other and develop our own ideas and skills."



Meeting with Mairead McGuinness MEP

The Sharing From The Start team were delighted to meet with Vice President of the European Parliament Mairead McGuinness MEP. An opportunity to celebrate the project and it's benefits as well as discussing future opportunities. Early Years along with their partners Fermanagh Trust and National Childhood Network shared findings from ongoing evaluation of Sharing From The Start which shows the project is building cohesive communities and improving outcomes for staff, children and parents.



Newtownabbey preschool join together



Newtownabbey preschool Providers Ashgrove Nursery School and St Mary's on the Hill Playgroup have partnered together as part of a Sharing From The Start, aiming to bring about positive attitudinal and behavioural change amongst children, parents, staff and the wider community.

Children and teachers from both preschool settings are enjoying a range of activities together. Experiences include a focus on promoting children's Health and Well-Being, particularly through the use of the Arts area of the curriculum, culminating with a joint picnic in Lillian Bland Park in Glengormley at the end of the academic year.

Joanne Barr, Principal at Ashgrove Nursery School is delighted to be part of this 'Sharing from the Start' initiative and said, "When I was made aware of the possibilities of

a joint project such as this, I just knew it was something special and that Ashgrove Nursery School had to be involved. The funding we receive from 'Sharing from the Start' gives these children an opportunity to meet with other children from within their own community and to join together through play-based experiences, which is a universal means to building good relations with others. This is only the beginning of this initiative, and I am looking forward to watching it grow from strength to strength in the coming years."

Liz Morgan, Leader at St Marys on the Hill preschool Playgroup said, "I am so delighted to take part in this fantastic project. 'Sharing from the Start' is a great way to develop stronger community links with our partner group in a natural way. I feel our shared sessions will highlight the fact our children will engage and interact naturally, in a familiar setting. It will help our children to develop confidence and social skills, having the opportunity to collaborate on a number of exciting planned programmes. We are at the beginning of our journey together. It's so amazing to start seeing connections being developed and friendships forming already."

Newtowncunningham and Rainbow Playgroups Shoebox Appeal



As part of their work together with Sharing From The Start children from Newtowncunningham Community Playgroup, Co Donegal and Rainbow Child and Family Centre, Derry put together shoeboxes full of toys and gifts as part of the Team Hope Christmas Shoebox Appeal.

Carrie Tracey from Rainbow Child and Family Centre said "Our two settings see so many benefits in partnering together. The children are making new friendships, we are making new community links and we're able to take part in projects like this. We thought the shoebox appeal would be nice to do together, teaching children from a young age the joy of giving and the importance of helping those less fortunate."

Almost 100 shoeboxes, thanks to the generosity of the playgroups' children and their families, were sent to those affected by poverty and conflict in Africa and Eastern Europe, spreading joy and excitement to children in difficult situations. Before making up their boxes, the children had a chance to watch a video showing where their gifts will go and the difference it will make for children who normally would never get a shoebox, or a present at any time of the year.

Theresa McGrath from Newtowncunningham Community Playgroup added "This is our third year taking part in Sharing From The Start. As a cross border partnership we learn a lot from each other and the different ways of doing things. From visiting each other we've been able to share ideas for the development of our outdoor spaces. So there are wider benefits, not only for the children but the staff and parents as well. We're all very much looking forward to taking part in many more educational activities this year."



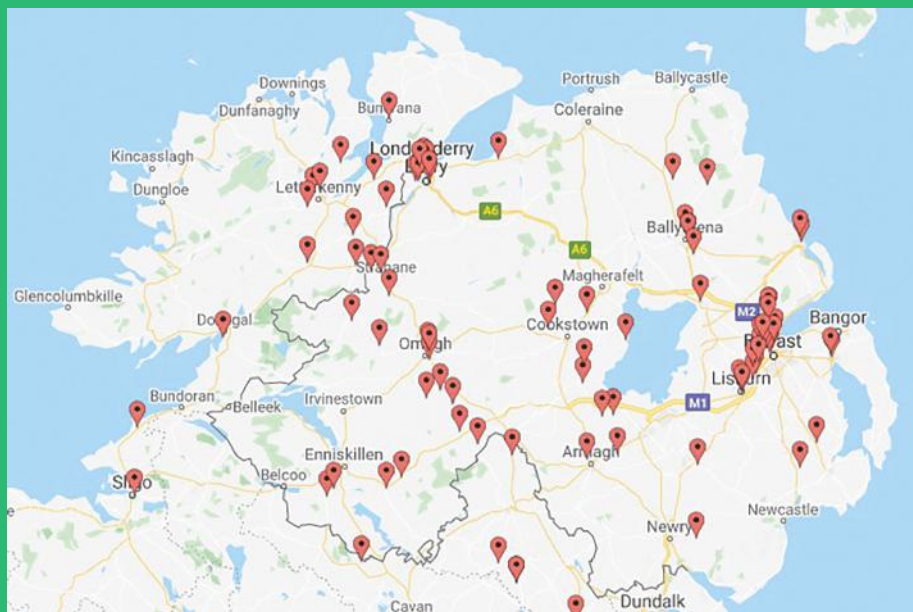
Feedback from Parents

Parents from a sample of early years settings gave their feedback on the impact of Sharing From The Start on their child, via one to one interviews and focus group discussions. In summary, all of the parents reported that their children had benefited greatly from participating in SFS.

Sample of Parent / Carer Comments:

- ▶ I would definitely recommend it. It brings together children of different cultures, abilities and religions and gives them a chance to accept each other at an early age. Great Work!
- ▶ This is a very worthwhile project. Teaching children from a young age that we are all different but we are all the same. Even though they don't realise now, the learning will kick in as they grow and develop. I hope this project will continue. Well done!
- ▶ My child has grown in confidence by going to a different setting. He also now knows to be a little more caring and tolerant towards other children, who might have difficulties in the areas he's more capable.
- ▶ My child is able to recognise his sister school and will talk about his friends if we drive past. He is much more aware of sharing and how his actions can impact others feelings.
- ▶ Enjoyed having the opportunity to take part in the project. Also pleased that my daughter through shared project became familiar with a new community and made new friends, which is an important step at encouraging cross community relations at an early stage. Also the visit to the local nursing home where the children had the opportunity to meet the clients and engage in a music session with them.
- ▶ It is a fantastic programme for the children in both services. They get to mix and make friends from an early age together as many will be going to school together in the future. Its building confidence from an early age. It's great to see 2 services working together in such a small town and having the children at the heart of both of them. Well done to all!
- ▶ I think this programme is great! Small children don't care about who a person is or where they are from as long as they can play and have fun together they are happy and I think as parents we should embrace this completely and follow this on throughout our children's lives. I firmly believe that this generation of children have the ability to make a change in NI and I feel that it's up to us as parents not to teach them the old prejudices that have held us back so long.
- ▶ This is wonderful opportunity given to all these children, learning from a young age how to accept other children regardless. It certainly boosts confidence as the children go to different settings and meet other adults as well as children. I have been very impressed with how these sessions have been organised and have thoroughly enjoyed the end performance. Thanks to all the staff for making me feel welcome and I can say my child and I have both benefited from a worthwhile experience.
- ▶ As a parent it has shown me how much my child has come along socially. One of my main concerns at the start of the year was how she would come out of herself socially. By getting to help on the trips, I got to see for myself just how far she has come. As a parent it was nice to see her excitement about going on trips beforehand and then hearing stories after.
- ▶
 - I have been able to visit other playgroup and see how children learn. They take risks e.g. climbing trees and exploring outdoors. It has made me more confident and I have been able to get out after years of being at home caring for my children. I had previously given up work and it makes me want to get back out.
- ▶ Really helped parents to have more time together to get to know each other instead of a 'hello' meeting at drop off / collection time. This also helped to feel more confident around the other parents
- ▶ It has made me a better parent I think, as it really gave me an insight to what she was doing and also to interact with others around the community. It has been a great impact and I think everyone should do it.
- ▶ Reinforcing an awareness that my child can play comfortably with children from different backgrounds from an early age.
- ▶ It was a great experience and very fulfilling and a great bunch of people to be along with, learning about your child and interacting with parents you never normally meet or talk to.
- ▶ I got to visit new locations and see how my child interacted verbally and socially with his peers and other adults, which reassured me and gave me more confidence in his abilities to settle into school life and new situations.





Location of preschools participating in Year 3 of the project. We are very pleased with the feedback and look forward to additional preschools becoming actively involved in the programme.



For more information visit www.sharingfromthestart.org

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

E: audreyr@early-years.org

Tel: **028 9066 2825**