

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 led by Early Years working in partnership 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 programme, which is now in its fourth year, 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.

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.

Forward



The close of the academic year is an important time for reflection on achievements and planning ahead. I want to congratulate all the settings on their continued participation in Sharing from the Start over the year. We do not underestimate the enormous challenges settings faced over a difficult and uncertain year, however, they continued, as far as possible, to embrace a sharing approach. I want to commend settings for the changes in pedagogy and professional practice to meet the challenges of sharing using virtual platforms. It is rewarding to hear the future commitment of the settings to face to face sharing at partnership level and continued work with parents, grandparents, boards of governors/management and the wider community to progress educational and community cohesion objectives based on a respecting difference approach. I wish you and your families an enjoyable summer break and look forward to progressing our collaborative work in the new term.

Pauline Walmsley - Chief Executive Officer, Early Years

£100,000 IT Investment

The Sharing From The Start programme, has made a £100,000 technology investment. Preschools and nurseries involved in the programme have received equipment including laptops, projectors, webcams and broadband infrastructure. As part of the investment preschool staff have also received online training, upskilling them in the latest resources and supporting settings in Continuing Professional Development opportunities.

Pauline Walmsley, Chief Executive Officer of Early Years – the organisation for young children commented, “It is clear from the continued commitment and dedication shown by the preschool settings, that Shared Education remains an integral part of their development planning and vision for their setting. With ongoing restrictions in place which do not currently support peer face to face contact, we have been working closely with preschools to develop innovative and creative methods for facilitating virtual engagement across communities. This significant IT investment that we have made enables settings to adapt and remain focussed on continuing to deliver high quality outcomes for children. There has of course been missed valuable pre-school experiences as a result of the pandemic. Thanks to the wonders of technology, which we are so pleased to be able to provide, this investment will go some way towards alleviating that – and help strengthen their shared education, keeping those relationships between partner settings going. Investment in IT for early years and improving connectivity are always important topics, but especially so in times like this.”



Ballymena:

First Steps Playgroup, Ballymena Nursery and Castle Tower Nursery are just some of the settings who received equipment. The three-preschool partnership were able to use their new TV, webcams and laptops to carry out their shared lessons virtually. The training received has allowed staff to become more efficient in the technology which will in turn help children be able to connect with their friends in their partner preschool. The preschool leaders are pleased to have this equipment which has helped keep everyone connected much easier and allowed Shared Education to continue.

L'Derry / Donegal:

Bligh's Lane Nursery School in L'Derry, Stepping Stones Playgroup in St Johnston and Cockhill Community Pre-School in Buncrana, have been partnered together for a number of years as part of Sharing From The Start and have found that Shared Education has been great for the children to make new friends, have new learning experiences and improve staff development. Some of the IT equipment they have received include wide angle cameras, providing great coverage of the room so all children are visible in their online shared classes.



Loughinisland:

This year Loughinisland Preschool and Glasswater Preschool have adapted and come up with innovative ways to carry out shared education virtually. During their 'Zoom' lessons together, through photographs, videos and virtual connections, children are having the opportunity to form partnerships by sharing activities between the settings and learn about themselves and one another. They are able to develop awareness of their local community and that of their partnership. Using videos, props, instruments and virtual connections, children are gaining respect for differing traditions/cultures and diversity.

Newtownabbey:

Mossley Nursery and St Macnissis Preschool partnership – Principal Julia Henderson said, "In Mossley Nursery School we were fortunate to be provided with a TV, laptop, and webcam to enable us to connect with our partner school as our current IT facilities didn't support this. We are lucky to have been working very closely with our colleagues in St Macnissis virtually in our support cluster during this difficult year, this has been invaluable."



PEACE IV SHARED EDUCATION

Launch of impact evaluation findings

PEACE IV

Shared Education

Week  2021

Launch of
Evaluation Findings



SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, was commissioned by Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to undertake an impact evaluation of EU PEACE IV-funded 'Shared Education'. The Shared Education objective of the PEACE IV Programme is designed to create a culture of good relations amongst school children and equip them with the skills and attitudes needed to help build a more cohesive, peaceful and prosperous society.

The impact evaluation findings were launched in April, at the start of a week of social media activity to share the messages around the positive impact Shared Education has had for those involved.

The report concluded that, "Based on the impact data, there is strong evidence of improved shared/reconciliation outcomes being achieved through the development of cross-community relationships and friendships between children, as well as between practitioners/teachers in partner schools. This, coupled with wider cross-community and cross-border connections being established, will create a legacy of the funding."

To read the report's Executive Summary click here <https://www.sharingfromthestart.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/1.-PIV-Shared-Education-Executive-Summary-publish.pdf>

End of Year Celebration Events

The recent online Sharing From The Start celebration events provided an opportunity to reflect on the continued success of the project and the lasting positive impact on educational and shared outcomes for children.

Although this last year has been incredibly challenging, with increased workload and various restrictions, it is clear from the continued commitment and dedication shown by the preschool settings, that Shared Education remains an important aspect of their work.

Throughout the celebration events, project partners and practitioners shared their successes from this year and highlighting the ongoing benefits of Shared Education including the partnership Eivers Lane Childcare Centre and Mary Callaghan Mallon Outdoor Preschool, Co Leitrim.

During their presentation, Caroline, the Manager of Eivers shared, "Ours is a full day care community service with creche, preschool and afterschool. Mary's is an outdoor preschool, so it was two very different groups coming together. I want to say how much we enjoyed the programme; we did a lot of activities that we wouldn't have if we were just doing our regular preschool programme for the year. We got to make some friends ourselves, the staff in our service with Mary's service. We went out for dinner together at one stage..... It's nice to have colleagues in the industry to run things by and have a chat with. This year I suppose was one of the harder years of Sharing From The Start because of COVID but we still got to do lots of activities. We had a really good virtual St Patrick's Day Parade with Mary's group. We might have to do a little bit of virtual work at the beginning of next year but hopefully we'll get to go out and visit Mary again and her group will be able to come and visit ours. We really enjoyed the programme and looking forward to the following year.

Mary, the manager of Mary Callaghan Mallon Outdoor Preschool added, "All of these experiences enrich children and foster learning, curiosity, creativity and friendships, exposing children to the wider community, helping them learn about community life. This past year of Sharing From The Start has been so different. At first, we had no idea where to start. But with the help of our Senior Early Year's Specialist and the IT equipment, it gave us the confidence to continue the programme through Microsoft Teams. It took a while to learn about this technology, and..... from session to session we learn something new. For example, our sound system, poor internet connection, the angle of the camera, the quality of the video calls and many more. It was definitely beneficial to have the big screen which made our shared session more interesting as children could really see and hear clearly, most of the time, their friends from Eivers Lane and engage in conversation and joint fun activities. We are so glad to hear that funding has been approved for another year as without this funding it would not be possible to continue the shared events between our services. After these four years, we all know each other well and a considerable number of children have benefitted from these shared sessions. It will be necessary for the funding to be extended for this programme for the future so many more children can avail of these fantastic opportunities."





Also featured at the end of year celebration were Newtowncunningham Playgroup and Rainbow Children & Family Centre Derry / Londonderry.

They have celebrated festivals and events together over the past 4 years, both face to face and virtually. The groups reflected on some of their shared sessions – including working together on the Shoebox Appeal, sending much needed resources to children who are less fortunate than ourselves. “It was nice to see the children showing a caring side and the shock on their faces when they realised that not everyone is as fortunate as themselves. It led to a lot of discussion between our children and the Rainbow children about the different things we were putting in the boxes and helped them to realise they had similar interests.”



The children also took part in Intergenerational Working by planting flowers with the residents of Trinity Court – being visible in their communities and building relationships. Children became very engaged in the planting experience and expressed their understanding and thinking around the lifecycle of plants. One parent commented, “Z was delighted that R and N came out from their flat to take part. He knows them through his childminder and was full of news about working together and R helping him. I think it is lovely that you did something with the older people and Z got the chance to see different parts of his community.”

“Our setting benefited immensely from participating in this initiative - children, families & staff. We have built new friendships, overcome changes & become more aware of facilities within our communities” (NCP)

“We have shared ideas and observed our children interacting with others. We have gained new ideas and used these to enhance our provision thus improving outcomes for ourselves and our children” (Rainbow C&FC)



Case Study

As part of the wider evaluation of the impact of Shared Education, a number of partnerships were invited to participate in a Case Study. Case Studies were conducted via Zoom, they included in depth interviews with the setting leaders and a parent from each setting.

The objectives were to explore the journey, challenges, learning and outcomes for the settings participating as well as the benefits for the children, families, staff, settings, and the wider community.

Orritor Nursery Unit and St Peters Nursery Unit Moortown

Reflecting upon reasons for getting involved in Sharing from the Start, both leaders agreed they felt it was a great opportunity for the children 'to get to mix' with other children as they felt there were few, if any, opportunities in their area to meet children from a different religion, particularly in rural areas.

One leader advised the benefits for her fall into two categories, the 'Shared' and the 'Education'. In a rural area there are no opportunities for young children to 'mix,' opportunities in rural areas are through sport and these are for older children,

"Sharing from the Start is the only way these children get the opportunity to mix with children from a different background".

Attendance at Cluster meetings highlighted to both leaders how divided their area is compared to other areas, they felt the larger towns didn't seem to have the same challenges or hesitancy from parents as they faced, "We don't have anything like that, things here are seen to be for one side or the other, other areas seem to have cross community opportunities for children to meet up at this age, ours don't which leaves everything more divided. In this area, Sharing from the Start has been very important."

It was recognised that this year has been unprecedented in the impact that COVID has had on the Programme, on the participation of parents and the wider family engaging in the programme alongside their children. The parents present were able to reflect on their experiences of the programme over previous years with their now older children. Many were aware of parents who met through the programme and are now friendly and arrange to meet up with their children outside of the programme.

Both leaders advised that they could not have continued with the programme without the IT equipment given to them by Early Years. St Peter's, having no internet, would have meant an end to the communication between the children in the settings. The Orritor children think they are on television as are their friends in St Peter's, and they hear comments such as, "I can't wait to show the Peters Children this".

Both practitioners commented on how quickly the children have adapted and become confident in seeing each other and communicating with each other online. The children are now anticipating and looking forward to seeing each other and they are creating pictures and models to show each other, exchanging cards in the post and excited to see the children in the other setting opening their post.

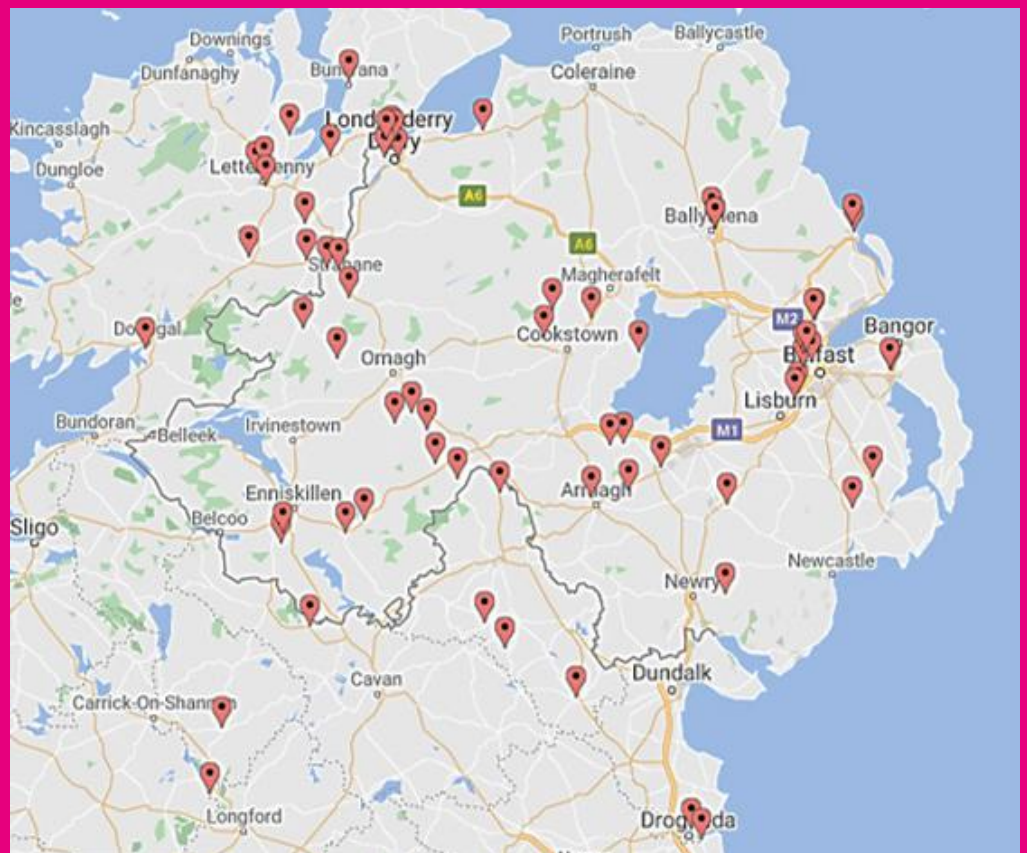
The nursery staff shared the opinion that the participation in Sharing from the Start has had 'ripples' of learning beyond the child, into their families and the wider community which has made their participation in the programme so worthwhile.

Congratulations to Sarah Thompson, nursery school teacher at Orritor Nursery School, who has been awarded an MBE for services to education, recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2021. "I'm feeling absolutely shocked and delighted. I don't know how it came about. I guess I was nominated but I don't know by who. It's an honour to come into work, to work with the children and do something that I really love."

Miss Thompson began working for the nursery 14 years ago. "I think the best motivation is the children. They are such a joy. We learn as much from them as they learn from us." Orritor Nursery School cares for 27 children aged from three to four-years-old. "I have two brilliant nursery assistants that I work with. Nurseries are a team effort, it's not all down to one person."



Location of preschools participating in Year 4 of the project. We are very pleased with the feedback and look forward to working with settings in Year 5.



For more information visit www.sharingfromthestart.org

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