

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. 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 sixth 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 focus on the role of the practitioner and the benefits Shared Education has brought to their role.



Michelle Hart – CEO National Childhood Network



“National Childhood Network is delighted the Sharing from The Start Programme has been extended for another year. The extension of the programme will enable us to continue our important shared education journey together and to provide continuity for settings as we transition into the new Peace Plus Programme. Over the coming year, together with our partners Early Years, Fermanagh Trust and with early years settings we will embed our focus on quality, diversity, inclusion, and social cohesion in all its multiple forms. We will continue to challenge prejudice and division bringing children, educators, parents, and the wider community together through a meaningful shared education focus. As we approach the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we continue to see the need for the ongoing work of peace and reconciliation. The legacy of our shared past is still with us, our reconciliation journey is still in its infancy across the Island of Ireland and between these islands that we call home. We see how the Sharing from the Start Programme has transformed positive attitudinal and behavioural change with children, parents, educators, and the wider community. Together we will utilise our learning to support a lasting shared future for us all.”

Lauri McCusker - Director of Fermanagh Trust



“As we progress now into Year 6 of Sharing From The Start and reflect on how far we’ve come, the programme has truly been all about partnership working. Not only the preschools working together with their Shared Education partner – but our three organisations who in partnership deliver the programme, Early Years, National Childhood Network and Fermanagh Trust. Over the years we’ve built professional relationships and friendships, we’ve shared skills and learned from each other. A common theme when talking to our preschool leaders involved in Sharing From The Start is how beneficial it is to be working alongside their neighbouring preschool. Someone to lift the phone to and run things past. We can relate to that because it’s the same for the delivery partners. We can get in touch on a range of subjects, even beyond Shared Education. We hope you enjoy the stories in this Newsletter. As we move into 2023 we remain focussed on continuing to deliver high quality outcomes for children, developing respect for diversity and promoting good relations within the community.”

Pauline Walmsley - CEO Early Years



Sharing from the Start has been a real success for the settings, children and families that had the opportunity to participate. As we look towards Peace +, these settings are great exemplars. Further resourcing is vital, given that less than 10% of the pre-school sector has participated in shared education. Pre-school children learn about our world in a very concrete and present way. They learn by doing. It is vital for young children and the dynamic society we live in, that Sharing from the start is supported to engage more settings. For young children, this needs to be purposeful, meaningful sharing in a real, face to face and concrete manner to effectively support learning and development. Congratulations to all the settings continuing on this journey, you are exemplars! The Sharing from the Start team look forward to continuing this vital work with you, engaging with further settings and continued collaboration with our funders and lead departments.

Orchard Community Playgroup, Ballykelly and Rosemount Nursery School, L’Derry

The Orchard Playgroup and Rosemount Nursery partnership had a shared session at Sperrin Fun Farm, enjoying and celebrating Christmas festivities together.

Cathy, Rosemount Nursery teacher said “**Lovely day meeting up with our friends, playing together and seeing Santa. Perfect way to spend our last day of school in 2022**”. Before this Christmas event the preschools had a few ‘Zoom’ sessions. Tara Del, Orchard Playgroup Leader commented that the virtual connections have allowed children to become familiar with one another and get to know names in advance of their Christmas shared session.

The two preschools have been partnered together for a number of years as part of the Sharing From The Start programme. In previous terms they have visited each other’s settings and engaged 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.

Leaders also commented that alongside other benefits of their shared education programme they feel their sessions highlight the fact that children will interact and engage naturally, especially in a familiar environment.



Practitioners network and share ideas



An integral part of the Sharing from the Start programme is the provision of training to preschool teachers. A recent peer learning cluster provided a platform for practitioners to explore the outcomes of Sharing From The Start, reflect on their successes of being involved in Shared Education and share ideas with each other. The session looked at the promotion of parental engagement through the Sharing from the Start and building on reconciliation through the facilitation of shared outcomes.

The meeting in Omagh saw preschools involved from the beginning of the programme, new groups coming on board and new teachers meeting their partner school for the first time. Planning their shared education activities and excited for more in person rather than the online sessions throughout the Pandemic.

The preschool leaders shared the importance on involving parents and wider community in their shared sessions and how Sharing From The Start has given their staff the confidence to try new things. Children are now more involved in their own community as well as exploring other communities. Showing that there's life outside their own bubble and that other schools exist.

Leaders shared their experiences of the programme and how it is an example of good, non-tokenistic Shared Education with equal consideration to educational and shared outcomes. Building relationships with their partner school has broken down barriers for children, parents and grandparents. The innocence of children, they don't see barriers at all, everyone is a new friend to play with. In many cases a friendship that will continue right up through Primary School.

The preschools involved in the programme have a mix of Rural / Urban, statutory / community, North / South etc, all learning from each other. One urban school has 24 nationalities. This teaches the children and staff about valuing your own culture but valuing others too. Promoting good relations and enhancing skills.



Shared Education Week

In November Special EU Programmes Body, SJC Consultancy and the National Children's Bureau launched the PEACE IV Shared Education Impact Evaluation. A weeklong campaign celebrated the programme's successes. The objective of Shared Education, part of the EU PEACE IV Programme, is to create a culture of good relations amongst school children in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. It equips children with the skills and attitudes needed to help build a more cohesive, peaceful and prosperous society.

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children's Bureau, was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to conduct a three-year evaluation to assess the impact of Shared Education (PEACE IV Specific Objective 1).

Key Findings

- ▶ The PEACE IV Specific Objective of providing direct, sustained, curriculum-based cross-community contact has been achieved as 'Sharing from the Start' (SFTS) and 'Collaboration Through Sharing in Education' (CASE) partnerships completed five years of shared activity, and progressed along the continuum of sharing from a baseline position of no/limited cross-community contact i.e. 'Defining' stage to subsequent stages of 'Developing', and 'Expanding', and in some cases 'Embedding' where in-depth and high-quality Shared Education has been achieved.
- ▶ Over the last five years (up to June 2022), 214 partnerships (46 SFTS and 168 CASE) have been funded, involving 494 pre-schools/schools representing different sectors (141% of 2023 target achieved); 2,360 teachers are now equipped with

the skills and capacity to deliver Shared Education (112% of 2023 target achieved) and 115,261 children have participated in cross-community contact delivered via an enriched curriculum through shared class activity (80% of 2023 target achieved).

- ▶ Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with partnerships highlighting the significant benefit to those involved. Overall, PEACE IV Shared Education has had a positive impact on: cross-border collaboration, cross-community relations; and educational outcomes for children, pre-schools/schools, and practitioners/teachers, as well as societal outcomes for children, parents, and the wider community.
- ▶ Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Project Partners and partnerships demonstrated resilience and perseverance to sustain Shared Education. Without the tailored training and mentoring provided by SFTS Early Years Specialists and CASE Development Officers, Shared Education could not have continued during the pandemic, instead the PEACE IV targets have been met/are on schedule to be met because of the creativity and dedication of Project Partners and participating settings and schools.
- ▶ Overall, there is an appetite for shared activities to continue and to build on the reconciliation and educational benefits achieved to date. A wider consideration is therefore the sustainability of connections and outcomes achieved as a legacy of PEACE IV funding and how key lessons can be considered for the future PEACEPLUS programming period.

To read the full report and case studies visit www.sharingfromthestart.org



First Steps Pre-School, Killen and Sugar and Spice Early Years, Drumquin



Sugar and Spice came together with First Steps for a special Christmas event. This was the partnerships second face to face meeting this term and some parents were able to join in the fun, helping make decorations for each other's trees.

Now into their sixth year of working together the two Tyrone pre-schools have had a whole range of shared sessions and opportunities including visits to each other's preschool and Omagh Library where the children enjoyed rhyme and story time and arts and crafts.

Teachers have praised the exciting opportunities that shared education has provided for the children. They've seen 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. 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, Sion Mills

Ardstraw and Little Flower playgroups are delighted to be back meeting face to face post pandemic. Their latest shared session, held in the local hall, focussed on sensory play.

The Ardstraw and Little Flower partnership began in 2017 at the beginning of the Sharing From The Start programme. 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. Year one was daunting but we're into the swing of it now. As a practitioner I've learnt so much being in the programme it's been a real learning curve, totally embedding Shared Education into our preschools way of working and thinking. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain from working in partnership.

Both settings are located in small rural villages in Co. Tyrone, five miles from one another. Heather Nicholl from Ardstraw Playgroup added "The way parents have come together is encouraging. Normally there wouldn't be connections between the two areas because they're from other sides of the community. In many ways it's taken us two as leaders to initiate that new link that we now have between our two communities. 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."

Shared Education has provided children with access to a wider range of learning opportunities. One of the most significant educational benefits that has materialised has been through the face-to-face meetings where children from each setting meet new staff and new children, and experience new environments. This contributes to curriculum areas such as the World Around Us, and Personal, Social and Emotional development. Children with additional educational needs enjoyed the sessions as much as their peers and the level of social mixing (particularly prior to Covid-19) presented lots of opportunities for new learning experiences to emerge.

Staff have noted the significant benefits of learning from each other in terms of the range of activities and their delivery in each setting. Attending each other's settings has enabled staff to see what learning resources and equipment are available/used. Settings were also able to share educational resources with one another.

Staff also highlighted one of the biggest benefits for them has been the friendships made. While the managers did not know one another before Shared Education, they now count one another as friends. The experience has really felt like a partnership, and when difficulties have arisen, they have been able to work through these together.





For more information visit www.sharingfromthestart.org

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Contact Stephanie Elliott
Early Years (Programme Manager of
Sharing From The Start)

E: stephaniee@early-years.org

Tel: **028 9066 2825**