

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 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



“As we move into the fourth year of the Sharing from the Start programme, we take this opportunity to reflect on the continued success of the project and the lasting positive impact on educational and shared outcomes for children participating in the project. We look forward to hearing this in more detail at the Launch of the Shared Education Impact Evaluation findings Conference being hosted by SJC Consultancy and NCB, which will showcase a number of Sharing from the Start partnerships. To date, over 7,000 preschool children from 106 different preschool settings, have been benefitting from participation in purposeful, direct and sustained curriculum based shared education classes and over 150 preschool practitioners have built their capacity to confidently facilitate.

Although the last number of months have been challenging, 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, partner settings have been working closely with the Senior Early Years Specialist team to develop innovative and creative methods for facilitating virtual engagement across communities. As we move into 2021 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

Chief Executive Officer, Early Years

Online Conference – ‘Building a Better Society – The Impact of Shared Education’

Sharing From The Start will be featured at an online conference, taking place January 2021. Hosted by SJC Consultancy and National Children’s Bureau, where they will be launching the findings of their Impact Evaluation of Shared Education on behalf of SEUPB and the EU PEACE IV Programme. The conference will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss and reflect on Shared Education’s contribution to improving educational outcomes and promoting good relations.

SJC consultancy, in partnership with the National Children’s Bureau (NI), were commissioned by The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assess the impact of the interventions within the PEACE IV Programme Specific Objective 1, Action 1: Children participating in Shared Education.

The funded projects and delivery partners include:

- ▶ €4.2m, Sharing from the Start (SFTS) – involving early years’ settings. Delivered in partnership by Early Years – the organisation for young children; the National Childhood Network (NCN); and The Fermanagh Trust.
- ▶ €28.8m, Collaboration Through Sharing in Education (CASE) – targeting primary and post-primary schools. Delivered in partnership by The Education Authority and Léargas.

Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education, Northern Ireland and Norma Foley T.D., Minister for Education, Republic of Ireland will be addressing the conference.



Practitioners and pupils who have taken part in shared activities will be sharing their stories and experiences. The guest speaker will be Rima Salah former Deputy Exec. Director of UNICEF.

The €33m PEACE IV Shared Education projects, delivered across Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland, has to date benefited over 400 preschools, primary/national and post-primary schools. At its conclusion, Shared Education will have benefited 144,000 children and 2,100 teachers.

The conference is open to anyone with an interest in furthering the Shared Education agenda across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, including government officials, politicians, academics, schools, early years settings, churches/faith representatives, and organisations within the children and young people's sectors, and wider civil society.

The Zoom conference will take place Thursday 28th January, 1pm-3pm. For more information, and to reserve your place & access joining details visit the 'latest news' section of www.sharingfromthestart.org

"Our participation in Shared Education has greatly benefited our children and school. We have been able to upskill our teachers, invest in resources, and visit places we never have been before." (Teacher)

"The benefit is hopefully children are growing up in a different society to what we grew up in, and Shared Education is contributing to that." (Principal)

"We have absolutely loved being part of this project! We have witnessed huge benefits for our children, parents, staff, school, and community. We hope that this may continue in our normally divided society." (Teacher)

"Myself and my team have all really enjoyed participating in Shared Education. It has given us the confidence in providing new experiences to our children, encouraged more parental partnership and involvement with the community as a whole, that we would not have been able to experience had we not signed up to the programme." (Preschool leader)

"We have had a wonderful year being part of this programme and really do hope that this is something that we can continue with in the future. It is so important in helping us meet the needs of our children." (Preschool leader)



Guest speaker: Rima Salah

(former Deputy Exec. Director, UNICEF)

Rima Salah, Ph.D., served as a Member of the United Nations High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad. In addition, Dr. Salah has had a distinguished career with UNICEF. Her service includes: Deputy Executive Director for UNICEF (2004-2007, 2011-2012), Regional Director for West and Central Africa (1999-2004), and UNICEF representative in several countries including Vietnam, Burkina Faso as well as head of office in Queta, Pakistan.



As a highly effective advocate for the rights of children and women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, she contributed to Security Council (SC) Resolution 1612 on child rights violations and Security Council (SC) resolution 1325 Women, Peace, and Security. Dr. Salah has received many awards of distinction from several non-governmental organizations and U.N. Member States, including the French Legion of Honor.

In October 2015, Dr. Salah was elected to Chair the newly formed Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) of which Yale is a founding member. The ECPC, launched at UNICEF HQ in September 2013, brought together leaders from international organizations, academia, practice, philanthropy, networks media and development.

Dr. Salah is Volunteer Faculty at the Child Study Center, Yale School of Medicine. She is co-editor of the volume at MIT Press, Pathways to Peace: The Transformative Power of Children and Families. Britto obtained her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1999.

Loughinisland and Crossgar Partnership



Like all the Sharing From The Start partnerships, Loughinisland and Glasswater preschools have been adapting and coming up with innovative ways to carry out Shared Education virtually.

The children had all participated in painting and cutting out their hands - each child has their name on their hand - one set stays in Loughinisland CC Preschool to be put on the Notice Board along with a whole class photograph and one set is sent to Glasswater CC Preschool along with a group photo of Loughinisland. Glasswater CC Preschool will return a set of their hands and class photo for Loughinisland's Notice Board so the children can compare hands, learn names and faces of their partner preschool.

Some children in Loughinisland were able to comment on how they knew Crossgar as they went to McCarthy's Coffee Shop, Tobar Mhuire Forest for a walk, their Doctor's was in Crossgar and one had an Uncle who lived there. One said they knew Crossgar - "It is just down the road"..

Further videos will be shared between the settings and virtual zoom will take place :- sharing of Virtual Video of setting, Nativity Play - Zoom session Singing Christmas Songs & Action Rhymes.

Visit the Sharing From The Start Twitter account (@SharingStart) to view a video of the Loughinisland children making their plans for learning with their friends at Glasswater.

Sharing From The Start staff facilitate virtual Media Initiative for Children training



Noletta Smyth, Senior Early Years Specialist who has been facilitating MIFC training

The Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference programme (MIFC) is an evidence-based intervention programme aimed at improving long term outcomes. It aims to support 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'. Evidence suggests that implementation promotes positive attitudes to physical, social, and cultural differences amongst young children, practitioners, and parents.

To date, more than ninety Sharing from the Start settings have been trained in the programme, with many already implementing this in their nursery and preschool settings.

The training and subsequent implementation is supporting the delivery of the Sharing from the Start outcomes, both educational outcomes and cross-community cohesion, inclusion and diversity through Shared Education.

One of the nursery teachers from Bligh's Lane Nursery attended the MIFC training in January 2019 and recognised how the programme could enhance outcomes for their children, parents, and the wider community. As a staff team involved in Sharing from the Start, they identified that if all staff could access the training it would empower and support them to deliver the programme to full fidelity. Delivery of the MIFC programme to the ten staff from Bligh's Lane Nursery took place virtually in October 2020. Covid-19 restrictions meant that the use of an online platform was utilised effectively, participatory evaluation indicated that all staff developed their knowledge of the MIFC programme, skills for implementing and confidence in addressing issues around diversity over the three days delivery.

Feedback also indicated that virtual engagement in the training provided opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their own values, attitudes, and prejudices. Exploration of the messages and resources demonstrated that the programme would complement the current pre-school curriculum and will enhance the shared and educational outcomes of Sharing from The Start.

The staff are looking forward to implementing the MIFC programme and embarking on Year 4 of the Sharing from the Start project with their partner settings, Stepping Stones and Cockhill Playgroups.



Early Childhood Ireland Research Symposium

As part of the Early Childhood Ireland Research Symposium in October Fiona Scullion, Senior Early Years Specialist with Sharing from the Start presented on how the programme is supporting effective relationships with parents.

At the beginning of the project, settings in Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties were asked to baseline strands of their provision, including parental engagement.

In NI the preschool settings Shared Education framework, published in 2016 and provides early years partnerships with the means of self-evaluating the extent and quality of their shared education provision and to set targets for development.

It was recognised that settings would have different starting points and that not all would reach the final 'embedding' stage by the end of the project. Settings were encouraged to use this self-evaluation method to identify progress made in relation to educational outcomes and delivering social change.

While the NI settings had access to this document the ROI were encouraged to use the Siolta Practice guide to demonstrate progress which they had made.

They were encouraged to complete an initial baseline for the Components on Rights of the Child; Partnership with Parents; Identity and Belonging and Community Involvement.

In addition to the baseline, groups captured evidence in a portfolio to demonstrate how involvement in Sharing from the Start enhanced their provision

The research findings identified that as the project started in Sept 2017, 100 % of settings recorded that they were at the defining stage in relation to parent engagement – this is – they were enabling parents to understand and appreciate the educational benefits for their children of shared education.

For many settings they were embarking on this shared education journey and they were making plans for implementation. Recognizing that we had groups with very different religious, ethnic or social economic backgrounds coming together and gaining parental consent for children to take part in the Sharing From The Start programme was the starting point in forming respectful relationships.

The settings were able to evidence how participation in the Sharing From The Start programme supported them to provide 'a variety of opportunities for parents to be involved in activities within the setting, taking into account the range of parents' interests and time constraints.'

Through professional discussions parents have highlighted that involvement in Sharing from the Start has supported relationships with staff, other parents and the local community.

Many highlighted that this experience has increased their knowledge and understanding of early years education and enabled them to further develop this in the home environment. Improving the educational outcomes for the children.

Feedback from questionnaires, surveys and focused groups has been very positive from both parents & grandparents. As the programme progressed, parents have seen first-hand the educational value of engaging in cross community projects and are now as enthusiastic and excited as the children to learn about the experiences planned.



**Fiona Scullion, Senior
Early Years Specialist**



Evaluations demonstrated that 86% of parents reported that involvement in Sharing From The Start had a positive/very positive impact on their relationship with their own child.

Increased engagement with parents has also had a positive impact on the relationship with staff within the settings with 84% of parents reported positive/very positive impact on relationships with staff

The research findings highlighted that not only are the project outcomes being met, the data also captures the added value which Sharing From The Start has had on parental engagement and improving outcomes for children.

The Symposium this year was presented online and is available to view on the Sharing From The Start Twitter account (@SharingStart)

Transitions Webinar Training provided for Sharing From The Start practitioners

At the start of this academic year the Early Year's team provided 'Transitions Webinar Training' for Sharing From The Start practitioners. This provided reassurance and ideas of how to help children with transitions and how, in a COVID-19 environment, to have the virtual world with parents rather than the usual open days and information evenings.

Practical information and Government protocols were provided. Most importantly, this was an opportunity for preschool leaders to be creative and share with each other innovative ideas, which is one of the objectives of the Sharing From The Start programme. Feedback from those settings who took part in the training show it led to a comprehensive increase in knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence.

Jacqueline Coulter from Ballymena Nursery said "As an over 60 year old.... I was anxious about joining the webinar but with our Early Year's specialist Fiona's gentle encouragement I did join the transition webinar. ICT skills is not my strength. It was my first webinar and although I did appreciate listening to the discussions and ideas I was not confident to take part in the chat room, question times or conversations. However, since that I have joined other webinars and I am grateful for Fiona's encouragement and I was pleasantly surprised how professional and worthwhile the session was. I liked the ideas of having bubbles blowing for the children to enter and the ideas of having gate greetings. We did virtual walk abouts demonstrating the new 1 way systems for our parents and we use our nursery website and Tapestry app to communicate with our parents and children. Thank you to Fiona and Early years team for their excellent support and encouragement to embrace new skills, especially ICT"



Jacqueline Coulter,
Ballymena Nursery

Other feedback from participants:

"I wasn't as secure in my appreciation of transitions post COVID-19 as I thought I was – great to get and ideas on how to help children."

"I was very interested to find out about the changes we would have to make to our transition programme in order to take into consideration the impact COVID-19 has had on the children. Also there were some excellent ideas about linking with parents online."

"Thank you to everyone who facilitated this worthwhile and valuable training."

Throughout the pandemic, technology has been a critical component. Practitioners and teachers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have utilised virtual working to maintain relationships with other settings. These relationships have enabled staff to connect with one another, share ideas, reflect on current practice and support one another. Preschools involved in Sharing From The Start continue to utilise technology as a means of facilitating Shared Education in this, their final year of the programme.

Meet The Team

One of the benefits for those preschools involved in **Sharing From The Start** is a robust package of support including training and mentoring from a **Senior Early Years Specialist** offering one to one professional development.

Anne Marie Mulholland



Anne Marie has worked within the early years' sector for over 25 years. She has been working with Early Years the organisation for young children for 18 years supporting member settings to develop high quality learning and good practice. Anne Marie is currently a SEYS supporting Pre -schools and Nurseries implementing 'Sharing from the Start' – a shared education programme for pre-school children. She is a MIFC trainer and a HighScope trainer.

Karen Cooke



Karen Cooke is a Senior Early Years Specialist with Early Years – the Organisation for

Young Children. She supports groups involved in the Sharing from the Start programme which aims to improve Educational Outcomes and Good Relations for young children in Northern Ireland and the border counties. Karen has a BSc (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree and PGCE (Specialising in Early Years) and has worked in both the Statutory and community/ Voluntary sector for the past 21 years.

Fiona Scullion



Fiona Scullion is a Senior Early Years Specialist (SEYS) with particular expertise in the promotion of inclusion and diversity in Early Years. With 30 years experience in the field of Early Year, Fiona's career has moved from leading and managing practice to her role as Senior Early Years specialist, supporting Early Years settings to self-evaluate in order to continually improve and develop practice for young children.

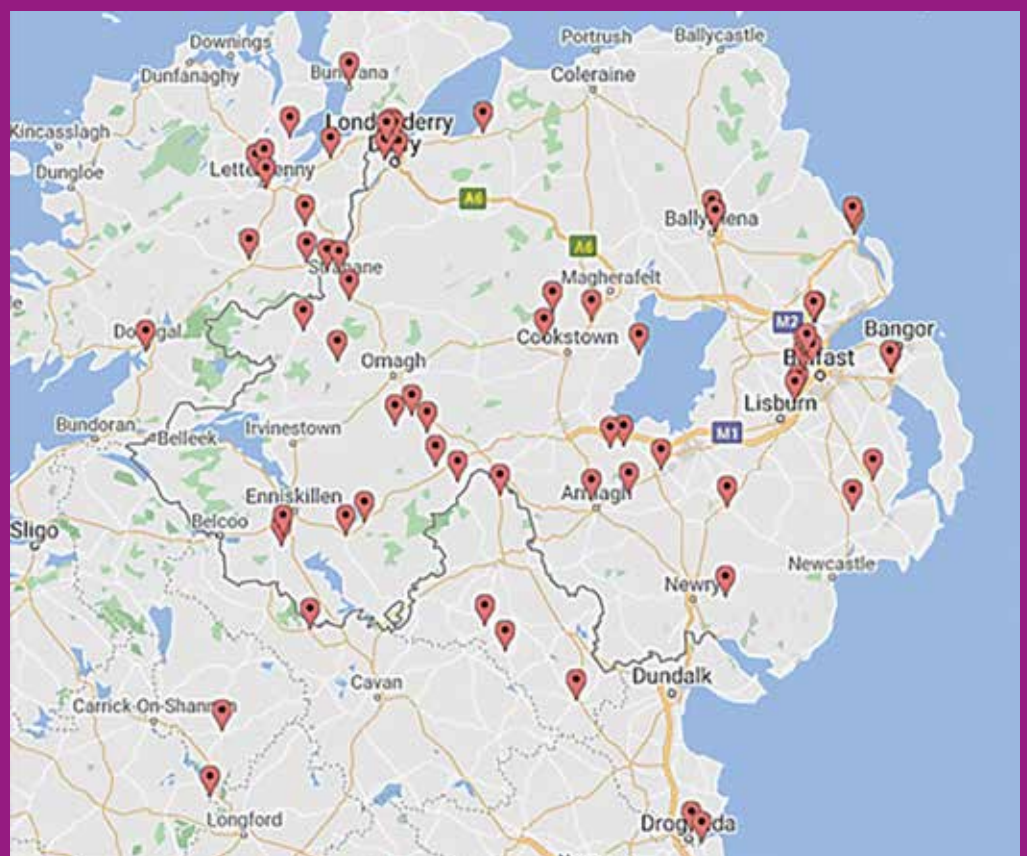
Noletta Smyth



Noletta Smyth is a Senior Early Years Specialist working for Early Years the Organisation for Young Children and has had 25 years' experience working in the field of early years, leading, and managing practice, delivering high quality training regionally, nationally and internationally; supporting, and mentoring groups to improve and sustain high quality provision and assessing on the Level 3 and level 5 Leadership and Management qualification. Noletta has gained valuable experience and expertise through working on range of diverse projects within the Organisation and over the years has attended various study trips and participated in international learning communities and uses her expertise and experiences to promote high quality care and education and improving outcomes for young children in the services she supports.



Location of preschools participating in Year 4 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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