

early years

This Month

IFI funding for
Respecting Difference

Developing Rural Childcare

Programme for Two
Year Olds



Pictured at the South Down Branch event in Ballynahinch (from left to right) Anne Marie Mulholland, Early Years EYS, Margaret Ritchie MLA, Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Early Years Chief Executive, Willie Clarke MLA and Marilyn Warren from the Department of Education

Early Years Lobby MLAs

Early Years Group Highlight Financial Struggle to Achieve Third Level Qualifications

The South Down branch of Early Years, the organisation for young children told local MLAs how they often had to work two jobs to pay for their third level qualifications, and how many had to simply drop out of their drive for a degree because of financial hardship. The 100 strong group of playgroup and day care staff from across South Down made a strong appeal to a cross party group of local MLAs and a senior representative of the Department of Education regarding the need for the swift introduction of a Transformation Fund to help bring their members up to graduate level.

The meeting of the branch took place at the Millbrook Lodge Hotel in Ballynahinch on Monday 25th of February. Department of Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie, along with other South Down MLAs Jim Wells of the DUP and Willie Clarke of Sinn Fein heard from several members of the group who told them that the fund would indeed transform the sector's workforce, further enhancing the already high quality service provided. The group of MLAs outlined their support, with some being simply taken aback by the strength of opinion on the issue.

Speaking after the event, Early Years Director Siobhan Fitzpatrick said that it was very heartening to see the members of the South Down branch highlight both their commitment to the sector and to its development.

"It was great to hear our members vocalise the deeply held commitment which exists across the sector, and to outline practical reasons why the children of Northern Ireland and their parents will be extremely well served by the introduction of a Transformation fund. Tonight we heard how staff are going through simply unacceptable financial hardship in order to improve their qualifications and the service they can provide. Early Years has an ambitious policy agenda based on international studies which highlight the economic, educational and health benefits to be had from investment in early years learning. Playgroup staff already do a fantastic job but want to raise their skills which will in turn allow them to provide higher quality care for young children."

One playgroup worker described how he had had to stop his degree course because of the financial strain it was putting on his family, while another mother of three young children highlighted how she had been forced to take a weekend job, in order to pay for her third level course.

Early Years - the organisation for young children strongly believes that a properly remunerated graduate-led workforce will improve the quality of the care and education our children receive, and that this investment in the future of our children will reap financial and educational benefits for children throughout their lives. The organisation has been lobbying on this and other issues for some time, and is very hopeful of a positive outcome to its efforts.

In Northern Ireland there is no training and development strategy for people working with young children. In England and Wales £200 million has been allocated for this type of training.

Recent research has reinforced the importance of the education of early childhood educators as the study found that children fare significantly better in language skills

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DEAR READERS ...



Welcome to the Spring issue of Early Years. As we go to print we are anticipating important decisions on how the new money for Early Years announced by Minister Catriona Ruane in February will be allocated. Our hope is that we will see a commitment from the Department of Education to the Transformation Fund. The South Down Branch of Early Years had a hugely successful event in February to gain support for the Transformation Fund with over a hundred members present putting their views to local politicians.

We have lobbied hard on this and have been heartened by the all party support. Regardless of what happens over the next couple of months we will continue our strategy of highlighting the need for a graduate workforce and appropriate remuneration for the early years workforce.

We are also delighted to receive a massive funding boost from the International Fund for Ireland for the Respecting Difference Programme. The funding will ensure the programme is implemented in pre-school settings over the next three years.

In this issue of Early Years we are highlighting and showcasing a number of rural early years services and the importance of rural child care as part of rural social and economic development. We felt it was important to get our rural members thinking about this important issue in anticipation of the possible announcement of a Rural Child Care Programme by Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Michele Gildernew. As members may be aware for the past six months I have been Chair of a Stakeholder Task Force on Rural Child Care. The group was asked to identify the problems and solutions to creating sustainable rural child care services across Northern Ireland. The report will be presented to the Minister in the next couple of weeks and we are hopeful that there may be an announcement of a Rural Child Care Programme.

Members should be thinking now about how they could respond if such a programme was announced. We know from all of the research evidence that successful sustainable rural child care services are those which are needs led, developed in partnership and respond creatively to the issues facing rural families. Talk to your local Early Years Specialist if you need ideas and support and keep an eye out for any announcements about funding. We will aim to keep members informed and up to date on any developments.

Enjoy this issue of Early Years we would welcome your comments and ideas for further editions.

Siobhan Fitzpatrick
Chief Executive Early Years

EARLY YEARS LOBBY MLAs continued from page 1

development with teachers who have achieved a higher level of education.

Currently in Northern Ireland staff working in community or voluntary pre-schools have to pay for their own training and professional development and on-going training, and face a significant disparity in levels of pay with the statutory sector.

Anne-Marie Mulholland of Down branch said the event had been useful to both Early Years members and to the speakers who attended:

"It's excellent for our members to see the work which we are doing at the Assembly, and to hear how that lobbying work is paying off. Since the establishment of the Assembly we have had two debates and a series of questions and statements on the whole issue on the Transformation fund, and the wider issues relating to young children. Our members are hugely committed and while it was great to hear that commitment is valued and understood at the highest level, it was also moving to hear just how hard our staff have to struggle to simply achieve a higher qualification. We look forward to hearing what the Department of Education's exact intentions are in relation to the whole area of early years provision and in particular to the development of a Transformation fund which can have a direct and practical impact on our members."



Pictured with Margaret Ritchie, MLA is Marion Flanigan, Anne Marie Mulholland, Veronica Gordon, Ann Tolson, Veronica Hughes, Linda Logan and Dolores Magee



Siobhan Fitzpatrick Opens Lobby Event

D.E.N.I. ANNOUNCE INVESTMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR

Education Minister Caitriona Ruane announced her first budget for schools on Tuesday 12th February, with a total of almost £1.8 billion in funding for Education for next year. Out of this amount, schools and Education and Library Boards will receive £1.45 billion. Included in this budget announcement was a provision for the early year's sector, as worded in the D.E.N.I. press release:

'£8 million a year to enable Early Years services to be funded, plus a further £8 million over the next three years for service development.'

Early Years - the organisation for young children has welcomed the investment announced for the early years education sector, especially funding for service development over the next three years. However at this stage the department of education has not outlined how the money for the early years sector will be allocated. We will be lobbying on behalf of the early years sector and monitoring the situation closely.

ASSEMBLY MOVES TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN

Early Years welcomed an all party motion and debate in the Assembly in January calling on the Executive to maintain and further develop its support for young children. The Assembly debate recognised investment in early years intervention and prevention, noting the work of Professor Heckman and Mark Greenberg.

The motion proposed by the All Party Working Group on Children and Young People, debated on the 14th January 2008, was supported by representatives of the DUP, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP, Alliance and the PUP. The motion read:

That this Assembly notes the work of Professor Heckman and Mark Greenberg on government investment with young children; urges the Executive to take note of the outcomes from this work, and to invest in early intervention and prevention; and calls on the Executive to protect, maintain and further develop the investment that has been made in children and young people, through Executive Programme Funds, the Children and Young People's Priority Funding Package, and the Supporting Families Package.

The hour and a half debate focused on a range of children's issues calling for children's needs to be addressed by alterations in the draft budget, especially as the removal of the Children's Fund in March 2008 will leave many children's programmes and organisations in financial difficulty.

At a symposium organised by Early Years in November 2007, Prof. Heckman, whose work was noted in the debate demonstrated how an investment of £1 in early childhood services can yield a return of up to £17 over time, helping our population to become better learners, more creative, more adaptable in their attitude to life, more likely to live a healthy lifestyle and to be more law abiding. Investment in early childhood services and in the staff providing them will significantly enhance the quality of life for our youngest children and pay dividends for the future of Northern Ireland.

Early Years welcomed the Assembly debate on this important issue and in particular that the potential of Prof. Heckman's work has been so fully recognised.

RESPECTING DIFFERENCE

International Fund for Ireland Announces £1.1M for Early Years Respecting Difference Pre-School Programme

The International Fund for Ireland has announced funding of just over £1.1m/ €1.6m to support the roll out of the Early Years 'Respecting Difference' Programme over the next three years.

The 'Respecting Difference' Programme will deliver mutual understanding and diversity training and resource packs for teachers, parents and pre-school management committees across Northern Ireland. Teachers will then deliver the programme to pupils, with ongoing support from Early Years specialists. There will also be a series of TV cartoons complementing and supporting the classroom based programme. These will be screened three times a year by UTV, RTE and Channel 4.

It is hoped that 240 pre-schools across Northern Ireland, County Louth and County Donegal will take part in the Programme over the next three years.

Confirming the funding for the Programme at the fund's recent board meeting, Denis Rooney, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland, said: "Research has shown that children as young as six have sectarian attitudes and are making sectarian and racial remarks. If we want to move forward in our society towards lasting peace and a shared future, we have to find ways to help our children to embrace diversity and difference. The 'Respecting Difference' Programme provides an innovative and proven way of helping young children to understand the need to be inclusive and respectful of others. We are delighted to be able to support such an initiative."

Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive of Early Years - the organisation for young children said:

"The announcement by the International Fund for Ireland to support the Early Years Respecting Difference Programme will make a significant contribution in changing sectarian attitudes and behaviour of young children in Northern Ireland and



Tom, Jim, Jenny, Bukola and Kim of the Respecting Difference Programme Playing Together in The Park

Southern Border Counties. The funding will ensure the roll out of the programme over the next 3 years to pre-school children providing the materials, training and skills for pre-school teachers to tackle issues of sectarianism, racism and inclusion. The IFI is making a significant investment in our children and our future"

Continuing, Siobhan Fitzpatrick said: "The Respecting Difference Programme is a unique media initiative for children using cartoons and interactive play materials to help young children understand and respect those who are different and encourage inclusion in a very simple child-friendly way. The programme, backed by research and evaluation from Queen's University Belfast, has been effectively tested and piloted to ensure it delivers an effective programme for young children - what is good for children is good for everyone."

The Respecting Difference Programme is also being funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

The International Fund also approved a further £1.97/ €2.88 million for a range of community regeneration and reconciliation projects across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties.

PROGRAMME FOR TWO YEAR OLDS



New Two Year Old Guidance Pack

The Department of Education has commissioned Early Years to produce a Training of Trainers programme which will enable Sure Start staff to continue to deliver the training to SureStart projects throughout Northern Ireland. This Training of Trainer's Programme began in February 2008 with a mix of trainers from SureStart projects and NICMA.

Caroline Dobson Early Years Training Manager said: "Interest and training in the developmental programme for two year olds is continuing to grow and Early Years has to date delivered the developmental programme for two year olds to 159 SureStart staff working directly with children."

The programme is focused around the Birth to Three Framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage, DfES and also takes account of key messages learned from Reggio Emilia, Italy. The programme stresses the importance of a play based approach to learning and development within an appropriate environment.

The Training Programme is divided into eight modules:

- Introducing the 2 Year Old Child.
- Value of Play/ How young Children Learn.
- Child Development.
- Physical Environment.
- Observation and Interactions.
- Influences & Innovations/ Creativity.
- Outdoor Learning.
- Learning Together in Partnership with Parents, Communities and Other Professionals.

Early Years in partnership with the Department of Education have also produced a guidance pack for practitioners who are currently working with two year olds. This pack will be available to practitioners who have attended or plan to attend the Two Year Old Training Programme.

The guidance material is to act as a guide or aide memoir to practitioners who are working with two year olds. It recaps the aims and objectives of each module of the programme and gives the practitioners suggestions for consideration and implementation.

It has been recognised that this training programme is only the starting point for the successful delivery of an appropriate developmental programme for two year olds across Northern Ireland. An increasing number of practitioners are reporting on the success of the programme and are recognising that an ongoing system for support and professional development for all staff working with this young age group is a critical feature in the delivery of high quality provision.

SureStart projects have started to implement a developmentally appropriate programme for two year olds. This training has helped staff to focus specifically on the needs and characteristics of this particular group of children. The guidance pack will further support these practitioners in providing high quality provision.

The programme for Two Year Olds is appropriate for those working within Day Care provision. Inquiries from Day Care are welcome. Please contact Caroline Dobson, Training Manager, Early Years - the organisation for young children, Tel no: 028 9038 7902, Email: carolined@early-years.org

DEVELOPING RURAL CHILDCARE by Margaret Alton and Jennie Hammond



Michelle Gildernew Launching
The Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group

Rural Childcare is an important issue in the development of rural communities and promoting rural and economic development. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has established a Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group to examine the issues and needs of rural childcare in Northern Ireland. The group will report back to the Minister, Michelle Gildernew, and launch a report in the next few months.

The main task of the Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group, chaired by Early Years Chief Executive Siobhan Fitzpatrick, was to look at access to childcare, existing strategies and to examine best models of practice. In this article we are going to look at two models of best practice by Early Years members in rural childcare provision: a farm diversification model in Donaghadee and a social development model in Eskra, County Tyrone.

Country Kids in Donaghadee

Looking ahead and planning for the future is necessary in all our jobs but for one farming family it has taken them on a very unusual route. Ian Donnan, a farmer running a family farm outside Donaghadee, County Down, was increasingly aware of the challenges and uncertainty facing traditional dairy farmers and wanted to diversify adding another income stream to strengthen the farm business. Ian and his wife Lisa heard from friends and family how difficult it was to find quality child care providers in the area. After reading an article in a farming magazine about a day nursery established on a working farm in Dorchester, Ian and Lisa made arrangements to visit its founders, Martin and Carol Cooper, to see first hand how the farm and the day nursery operated side by side.

On returning to Donaghadee, Ian and Lisa completed a preliminary DARD Farm Diversification 'Business Start Up' course and Ian began making plans to convert a barn on the farm and applied for the Rural Diversification Grant under PEACE II to assist with building the day nursery. Ian involved his social services team from the beginning of the planning stage to help create a comfortable, spacious and airy setting. Ian and Lisa purchased a business start up pack from Carol Cooper and a nursery management software package. Converting the barn has created bright spacious airy rooms in an idyllic location. Ian and Lisa had decided they wanted the nursery to provide the highest quality service possible and knew that qualified experienced staff would be essential to their success. Roberta Strain, with over seventeen years experience and the same commitment to excellence in childcare, was appointed manager and Country Kids opened in September 2004.

Outdoor play is a key daily activity which provides children with the opportunity to develop their green fingers, weeding and growing plants and flowers and learning about the farm animals. Children are happy to be outside no matter what the weather: walking in the rain, jumping or sitting in puddles is all fun. Children can begin to experience the wonder of the world around them in this stimulating environment. All the food at Country Kids is homemade and prepared on site using fresh farm vegetables and ingredients with no unnecessary additives. Over the past three years Country Kids has extended the baby room and are planning to develop an adventure playground.

Playtime Day Nursery and Playgroup in Eskra

In the midst of the Clogher Valley in County Tyrone sits an impressive Community Centre with Playtime Day Nursery and Playgroup operating from its own wing. This is a community owned and managed childcare centre providing care for over 90 children from three months to fourteen years of age through its full day care, playgroup, breakfast club and out of schools wraparound service. The centre is open from 8am until 5.30pm each weekday and provides much needed support to working parents in this rural community.

The centre has a workforce of over 20 staff, both full and part time, including a cook, manager and an administrator. Staff development is encouraged and staff are fully trained in all areas of childcare, attending relevant training to enhance their skills.



Children at Country Kids in Donaghadee

The centre grew from small beginnings in 1989 when a group of mothers, including the current manager of the centre, Colette McCaffrey, set up a playgroup attended by eleven children. Ten years later a community audit was undertaken to establish issues relating to services, amenities and facilities in the area. Through this it was identified that there was a need for childcare within the Eskra area. The people of Eskra worked tirelessly to raise a considerable amount of money to develop a quality rural childcare setting. This generated investment from outside funders and Eskra Childcare Ltd. was formed in 2001, managed by a voluntary board of directors. The centre is a registered charity, operating on a non-for-profit basis for the benefit of the community. When its doors first opened, there were fourteen playgroup children and eight day care children with a staff team of just five.

The renovation of the community centre in 2005 saw a new and improved childcare centre being developed including an outdoor play area, a large hall for physical activities and a computer suite for after school activities. The six week summer scheme is also an invaluable service provided in this area and as such boasts a registration of around 90 children. One parent comments: *"It provides my daughter with a wide range of activities including arts and crafts, educational visits and physical exercise and she thoroughly enjoys it every year."*

Colette McCaffrey Playtime Manager said: *"This centre was greatly needed for Eskra and the surrounding area and from our first day right up to today we have daily enquiries regarding childcare places for more children. This is no more obvious than within our playgroup as for September 2008 we have 30 children seeking PEAG places."*

Playtime Day Nursery and Playgroup have identified further areas for potential development, not least the need for an after school collection service. Feedback from parents has indicated that because children are attending from a ten mile radius, an after school collection service would enable more families to avail of after school care.

The childcare centre creates a vibrant atmosphere and much needed employment in the Clogher Valley area. This is made possible through the hardworking staff team and the countless hours of voluntary time given by those who sit on the management committee. Rural Community Network Director, Michael Hughes states: *"This is a great example of how a community can transform an existing building for the benefit of a new rural generation."*

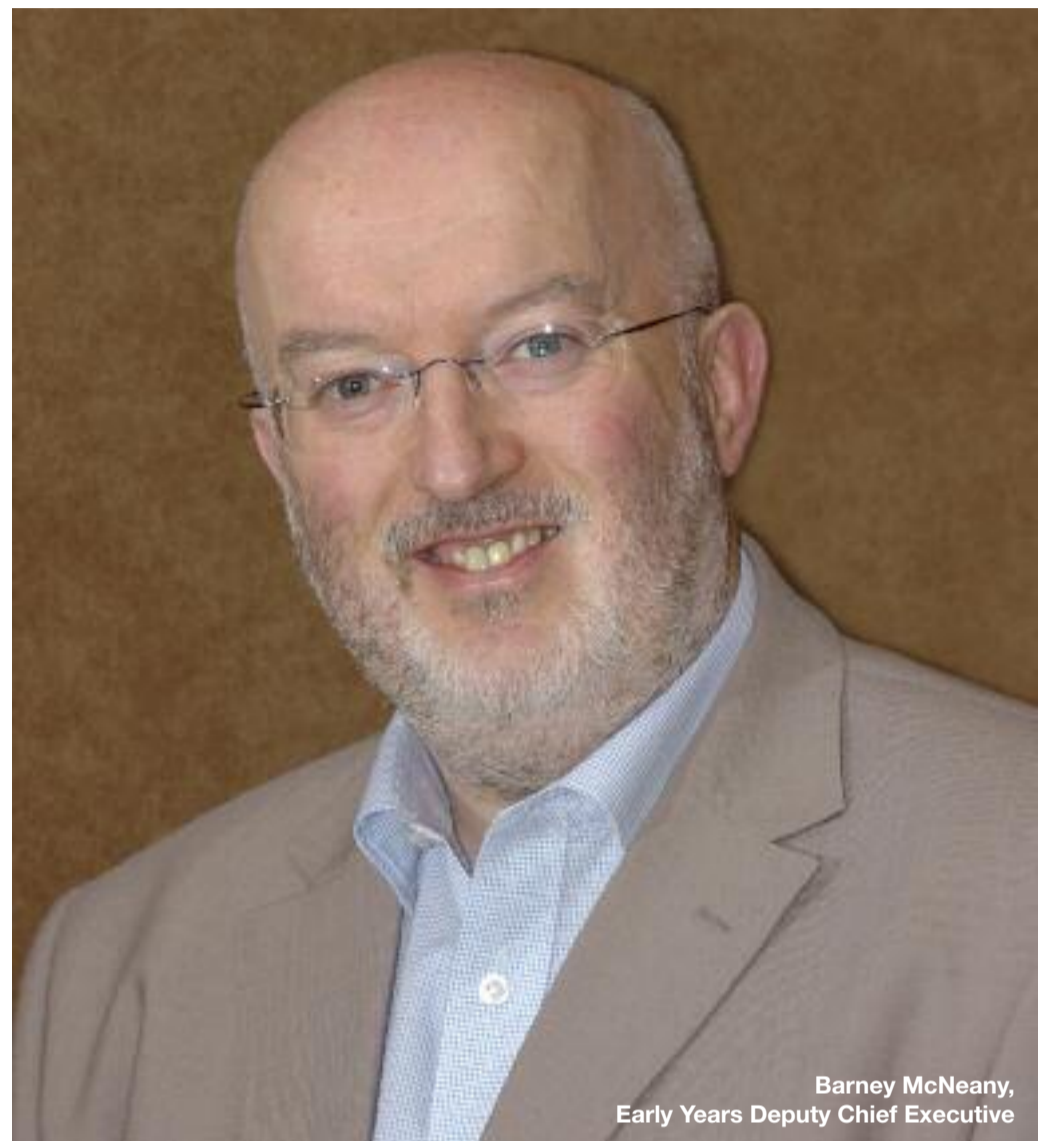
Children and staff come from a cross-community background, helping to develop a more inclusive community centre where children and families of all social, ethnic and religious affiliations can thrive in a comfortable and welcoming setting.

It is with this knowledge that Early Years will carry out extensive research on the impact of quality physical environments, physical activity, quality interaction on children's levels of involvement and well being. This is in keeping with our strategy to provide evidence based programmes that deliver outcomes for children and their families.



Children and staff at Playtime Day Nursery and Playgroup in Eskra

NEW DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOR EARLY YEARS



Barney McNeany,
Early Years Deputy Chief Executive

Barney McNeany has recently been appointed to the new Early Years post of Deputy Chief Executive. Barney brings with him a wealth of experience on children's issues having previously worked as a Social Worker in children's services in both England and Northern Ireland in both child protection and mental health. He has also worked in senior management roles in Health and Social Care Boards and Trusts, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland before moving to the Children's Commission to take up the post of Chief Executive and acting as interim Commissioner, following the untimely death of Nigel Williams. It was in this role that he began working closely with NIPPA/ Early Years, funding extensions to the Respecting Difference Programme and acting as an advisor on the international reference group for The Atlantic Philanthropies project.

In this new post Barney's main responsibilities will be to lead and manage Early Years in support of its key objectives through the direct management of senior staff and in supporting the Board and the Chief Executive. Barney will have a lead responsibility for the internal management of the organisation and managing external relationships with commissioners of services. In common with other SMT members Barney will lead on a key Early Years theme - in his case inclusion.

Barney said:

"I have watched the growth of NIPPA and now Early Years for some time now. I have always been very impressed with the work of Early Years. I'm very keen in my new role to ensure we continue to develop the early years sector. We must invest in our children and our future to ensure that children achieve their rights; are eager and able to learn, respectful of difference, are physically and emotionally healthy and visible in their communities."

Siobhan Fitzpatrick, CEO Early Years in welcoming Barney to the organisation said:

"We are delighted that Barney has joined us. He brings a wealth of experience which will support the long-term development of Early Years in delivering high quality services to young children and families in Northern Ireland".

BARNARDO'S BIG TODDLE

Get Your Under Fives Ready For Some Serious Summer Fun!



Want to do your bit for charity? And find a reason to get the kids exercising in the fresh air? We've found the solution - The Barnardo's Big Toddle.

This annual half-mile sponsored walk for under five's saw almost 400,000 toddlers from across the UK register in 2007, raising £1.4 million for Barnardo's work with disadvantaged children and their families.

The Big Toddle can be as easy and as flexible as you like. There are Toddles organised by Barnardo's throughout the UK during the summer months. However, you can Toddle at any time of year and it has become a popular trend for nurseries and pre-schools to host their own events.

Barnardo's Big Toddle Manager Terence Lovell said:

"It is so simple to arrange your own Toddle, nurseries and pre-schools often prefer to host their own. It means they can choose a convenient location for their children, such as a local park, invite families, take a picnic along and make a day

of it. Taking part in the Barnardo's Big Toddle is a great way of teaching children about those less fortunate. This year we hope to see more Toddlers than ever joining in, having fun and helping us to raise vital funds for vulnerable children throughout the UK."

Barnardo's encourages nurseries and pre-schools to arrange their own Toddles by offering them the opportunity to keep 25% of funds raised if they so choose, helping them to buy much needed equipment and materials.

Funds raised via the Barnardo's Big Toddle 2008 will be spent across the charity's services working with young children and their families; including projects for children with disabilities, family centres, play schemes and helping to lift children out of unsuitable or temporary accommodation.

For more information on Barnardo's Big Toddle and how to arrange your own event, you can visit the website www.bigtoddle.co.uk or call 0845 270 9900

FOSTERING ACHIEVEMENT

Fostering Achievement Celebrates its First Year

Fostering Achievement has celebrated a highly successful first year as reflected in its inaugural annual report - a major milestone. Fostering Achievement is an innovative and practical scheme, which was launched to equip and support foster carers in Northern Ireland, so that they can help those children and young people in their care.

With the help of Manleys, the Branding House, Fostering Achievement were able to actively and innovatively reach foster carers and children.

Kate Lewis, Director of the Fostering Network commented:

"We called on Manleys to help us effectively reach foster carers and children. We could not have asked for better results. The aim for the first year was to reach 500 fostering families across Northern Ireland and within the first 3 months, 250 children had already been reached!"

The scheme has been built from scratch from the design of logos and print materials, to producing bright purple translucent envelopes, fun notebooks and an interactive website - all communicating that 'dreams can come true'.

The latest installment of the annual report just goes to summarise the fantastic work being carried out by the Fostering Network over the last year. The actual target reach was exceeded with 979 children receiving a wide range of goods and services - this included everything from providing a computer at home to driving lessons and home tuition. There is little doubt of the success of the scheme and the benefits it has provided to date.

Much of the work over the last year has stemmed from direct communication with foster carers and foster children, whose valuable input and feedback enabled the scheme to be engaging, relevant and significant in supporting those in foster care.

Lester Manley, Chief Executive of Manleys commented on what a joy it was to work with the Fostering Network and children, and the ongoing promotion of the scheme:
"The promotional tools used were implemented across a range of targeted media, based on the first 3 E's of the Manleys Circle Of Progress - to educate, to excite and to engage. We did this not only with the Fostering Achievement staff, but with direct contact with some of the fantastic children who would benefit from the scheme."

The aim of the scheme is to make dreams come true, and the project team has achieved substantial returns. With a bright future ahead, the scheme driven by the project partners; Fostering Network (NI) and Include Youth will continue to develop and support opportunities for children and young people - truly 'Fostering Achievement'.

For more information log on to www.fosteringachievement.net

ACCESS NI

New Vetting Rules for Groups Working with Children

Access NI comes into effect on 1 April 2008. It will replace the current Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (POCVA) checking system.

Access NI was established by a joint programme between the Northern Ireland Office, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Access NI enables organisations in Northern Ireland to make more informed recruitment decisions by providing criminal history information about anyone seeking paid or unpaid work in certain defined areas, such as working with children or vulnerable adults. Access NI is part of central government and operates under the provisions of Part V of the Police Act 1997.

Access NI's services can be used by individuals or organisations in situations where an employer requires a job applicant to supply criminal history information. This may be an application made directly by the individual or through a potential employer as part of the recruitment process.

Individuals do not register to apply for a Disclosure Certificate but they can apply to Access NI directly for a certificate of their unspent criminal record.

Organisations should register to apply for Disclosures to safeguard vulnerable people in their care, or where they need to protect certain sensitive aspects of their business. Some organisations are required by law to consider the suitability of an applicant for certain positions or to ensure that they are not barred from working with children or vulnerable adults.

For further information please contact Access NI on 028 9025 9100 or visit www.accessni.gov.uk

TINYTOTS

Tinytots Community Playgroup Officially Open New Premises

Tinytots Community Playgroup in Kells officially opened their new purpose built premises at the end of February. The premises located in a business unit in the centre of Kells, have been customised for the sole use of the playgroup and have been developed in both a child friendly and play focused manner. There are currently 40 children enrolled at Tinytots Community Playgroup and 5 staff members that contribute to the running of the preschool on a day to day basis.

Tinytots community playgroup was officially opened by Early Years' Director of Programmes, Clare Devlin and Sarah Woods, the Playgroup's leader.

Clare Devlin said: "I am delighted to formally open these new premises today. This new facility is a credit to the Tinytots Playgroup and the local community, it will provide an excellent play environment for children and a greater support for

parents. What is good for children is good for everyone. We hope that other communities in Northern Ireland will follow suit, to ensure that we invest in our children and our future."

Speaking at the ribbon cutting ceremony Sarah Woods said:
"We are thrilled at being able to open a state of the art play facility within the villages. This would not have been possible without the community support and fundraising effort provided by many local businesses in Kells and the committee and parents.

"Tinytots would like to show great appreciation to all those people that contributed to the £30,000 funding that it took to develop this facility, it has been a significant achievement.

"We look forward to being able to service the local community in the future by providing more high quality child care to many more families. We hope that our next project will be the development of an outdoor play area at these premises which would further enhance our child care provision in the area."



Staff, Parents and Supporters at the Opening of New Premises for the Tinytots Community Playgroup in Kells

THE CONSTITUTION

Shirley Hawkes of the Early Years Community Unit Looks at the New Constitution for Member Groups

Why Do We Need a Constitution?

A constitution is not only an effective tool for running an organization but also a requirement because of the activities they are undertaking. For example a group that wishes to register as a charity, or to undertake to provide services in the community, or to apply for funding, will face barriers if they do not have a constitution. A constitution is also a way of ensuring that public and other funding bodies feel confident that a group is being run effectively and its money managed properly.

What is a Constitution?

A constitution is a legally binding document which sets out the rules of an unincorporated association (i.e. an organisation that is not a company). It should include the aims and objectives of the organisation, the duties and responsibilities of officers, the powers of the trustees or Management Committee and the frequency of management meetings etc.

A Constitution Must Have:

- Name of group/ organisation
- Aims and objectives i.e. the advancement of education
- The organisation's activities - i.e. daycare/ playgroup/ afterschool
- The geographical or catchment area for which the organization is catering

A Constitution Should Include the Following Rules:

- **Powers**
What the organisation can legally do to carry on its activities - for example raise money, take loans, employ staff.
- **Membership**
Who is eligible for membership, how people become members, and how people are disqualified (the group may have special rules on who is eligible to be a member, i.e. a parent or guardians of children who attend or attended the group)

• Committees

This committee has responsibility for management of the group and employment of staff. It is up to the group how many committee members it has, although for most organisations the minimum allowed would be three. There is no maximum but it would make the group unwieldy and inefficient to have too many. It should also state how and when the committee is elected.

• Annual General Meeting

Once a year the organization should call a meeting for all its members when the committee is elected and the annual report is presented.

• Finance

The Procedure to ensure effective management of finances.

• Amendments to the Constitution

The procedure for altering any organisation's rules - this should be at a general meeting with an overall majority.

• Dissolution

There must be provision in the constitution to close down the group. A group must pay all its bills. If there is any money left, it should be given to a group that does similar work.

Early Years have adopted a new constitution to coincide with their name change. This new constitution will increase the powers of a group. The changes enable groups to take out loans, introduce a rotation system for the election of new members and allows groups to join together.

Early Years are advising local branches and groups to adopt these changes in time for the Early Years AGM being held on the 12th and 13th June 2008. From April 2008 the following will be downloadable from the members section of the Early Years website:

www.early-years.org

- A step by step guide on how to adopt a Constitution
- Draft Model Constitution for a Playgroup Day Care, Parent and Toddler, or Out of School Group.
- Draft Model Constitution for Branch.

Or alternatively contact your Early Years Specialist for advice.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND AGM

'Young Children are Eager and Able to Learn'

12th - 13th June 2008, Derry City Hotel

The 2008 International Conference and Early Years AGM will be held on the 12th & 13th June 2008 at the Derry City Hotel. The theme will be "Young Children are Eager and Able to Learn". The conference will offer a range of learning and networking opportunities including master classes, workshops, field visits and key note speakers aimed at parents, childminders, practitioners from pre-school groups, daycares, crèches, Sure Starts and Teachers in Nursery and Foundation Stage I and II.

The Conference Keynote speakers are Professor Guy Claxton one of the UK's leading experts on practical ways of developing young people's learning and creative capacities and Dr. Larry Schweinhart an early childhood program researcher and speaker throughout the United States and in other countries.

Guy Claxton's work impacts on education policy and practice at local, national and international levels. Much in demand as an inspirational conference speaker, Guy has been an adviser to the Primary National Strategy, the National Education Research Forum, the Royal Institution and the Campaign for Learning. He is currently Assistant Director for Learning at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Internationally, Guy has been a member of the OECD High Level Forum on Education and the Brain, and has recently spoken at conferences in Spain, Sweden, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and the US.

Larry Schweinhart has conducted research at the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan, since 1975 and now serves as its president. He has directed the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 40, the Michigan School Readiness Program Evaluation, High/Scope's Head Start Quality Research Center, and the development and validation of the High/Scope Child Observation Record. Dr. Schweinhart received his Ph.D. in Education from Indiana University in 1975 and has taught elementary school and college courses. He and his wife have two children and three grandchildren.

Branch Resolutions - The Early Years AGM is also an opportunity for Branches to have a democratic voice and put forward resolutions to be debated at the AGM. Individual branches need to decide upon issues and form a resolution for the AGM. Proposed resolutions must be sent to Early Years by the 1st of May 2008 to be considered for debate at the AGM.

EARLY YEARS PUBLICATIONS TRANSLATED INTO POLISH

Two popular Early Years publications have been translated into the Polish language. Early Years has enjoyed a friendship and partnership with the Comenius Foundation for Child Development in Poland for the last 15 years.

As part of on-going information sharing, we frequently exchange publications and were delighted when Teresa Ogrodzinska - Director of Comenius Foundation, asked if she could translate two publications into Polish for distribution, through the Comenius network, to families in Poland.

Given the numbers of Polish families with young children now living in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, we felt that it was important to make these resources available here. They are of interest to parents and to those who work with Polish children and their families.

"I Want to Play" remains one of our most popular publications. It provides a range of practical play ideas to use at home with small children. The book emphasises the fun aspect of play and shows parents how much their child is learning and developing through play. It highlights the importance of their interactions with their child to support this.

"Managing Children's Behaviour" supports parents and early childhood practitioners promote positive behaviour and provides developmentally appropriate strategies for dealing with tantrums, reluctant eaters, bedtime and a range of other causes for concern.

ZOO DAY 2008



Those of you who attended our Zoo Day in May 2007 will probably remember the continuous rain as much as the visit itself, however we are hoping for sunshine this year on Wednesday 14th May when we invite all our members to come along to Belfast Zoo from 10am for our annual members' event. Members are invited to take advantage of the 30% discount we are offering on standard admission prices:

Admission Type	Admission Fee	Early Years Zoo Day Fee
Adults	£8.10	£5.67
Children (aged 4+)	£4.30	£3.00
Children (aged 3 and under)	FREE	FREE
Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons	FREE	FREE
Education Pack (admits 3 adults)	Normally only available to schools!	£11.00

To register your group for this event please complete your Booking Form and return to Early Years Headquarters along with payment on or before 16th April 2008.

As with all group outings, please remember to advise your insurer of your intention to attend this event. Please also ensure that recommended adult/ child ratios are adhered to and that you have permission for children to be photographed or that children for whom such permission has not been granted are not photographed on the day. Don't forget, as a member of Early Years - the organisation for young children you can avail of the 10% discount offered by Chambers Coach Hire by contacting the company on **028 8674 8152**, quoting the password supplied in your membership pack. We hope you will take up this opportunity to enjoy a fun filled day out with your group!

For further information please contact our Membership Administrator on 028 9038 7904.

NES ARNOLD AND EARLY YEARS - WORKING TOGETHER



NES Arnold are delighted to be working alongside such a well renowned and successful organisation as Early Years. We have enjoyed a successful relationship since 2004, and will be a key supporter at the Early Years 2008 AGM and look forward to many more years working with Early Years and its members.

As market leader within both the Early Years and Primary sectors NES offers an innovative, curriculum-based product range with many of our products having been recommended by early years and teaching professionals.

Early Years Member Offer

Early Years members are entitled to an exclusive 10% OFF all orders. Simply quote NESM100 when placing your order by phone, freefax or online at www.nesarnold.co.uk. New Early Years members can also benefit from 20% OFF their order, by simply quoting NESM101.

To request your FREE comprehensive Early Years or Primary catalogue please call our Contact Centre Team on 0845 120 4525 or visit www.nesarnold.co.uk for further details. You can also register online at www.nesarnold.co.uk for exclusive offers including sale previews and new product news.