Minister Announces an Increase in Funding

Reactions to the news by Early Years member, Roe Valley Community Playgroup

The Education Minister Catriona Ruane recently announced an increase in funding to all Private/ Voluntary pre-school settings as part of the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme for the current school year.

The Minister stated that “one of the key objectives outlined in the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy is to improve equity and access to early years provision…[and] ensure that children are provided with a high quality pre- school education regardless of setting. This funding is a step in ensuring that we achieve this aim.”

General Manager of LCDI (Roe Valley Community Playgroup), Mr Damien Corr has welcomed the news, saying that the additional £200 per child was a step in the right direction. He said that it was encouraging to see that we are at last being viewed on par with our statutory colleagues. Mr Corr also noted that the new funding was for the ‘current year’ and that the Minister will consider the level of funding for future years.

He urged the Minister to continue to address the funding inequalities between the Community and Statutory sectors.

Generally speaking, the Management Committee of LCDI are happy with the increase in funding and have praised Early Years – the organisation for young children for our lobbying over the last ten years to reach this outcome.

Playgroup leader, Charlene Quinn said that the award of an increase in funding is a massive morale boost for the staff and parents. She said: “We know that our service is as good as any other facility and the Minister’s announcement confirms that!”

Roe Valley Community Playgroup offer 24 funded places and 24 non-funded places. The service operates a morning and an afternoon session five days each week.
Dear Readers…

By the time you receive this newsletter the consultation period on the proposed 0-6 Strategy will have closed. We were delighted by the active participation by our membership in the wide range of consultation events which were held and believe our response to the strategy represented a robust engagement with the sector. The Department of Education have asked me to represent the membership on the implementation group for the Strategy. Hopefully this will be a time limited focused piece of work which will identify the short medium and long term priorities in relation to implementation issues. I will keep members informed about any developments through this newsletter.

Members funded by the Preschool Education Expansion Programme will already have been notified by the Education and Library Boards that they are to receive an additional £200 per child backdated to September 2010. Early Years were delighted by this development as it reflects a long standing lobby for a single funding formula for all settings providing preschool education. However not everybody was as delighted by this positive action by the Minister. In this newsletter we have taken the unusual step of publishing a response made by the National Association of Head Teachers to the Education Committee outlining their disquiet in relation to this development. We have also published the Early Years response. We have taken this step to highlight to the membership that at this time of progress in early years policy not everyone holds our view that early care and education can be delivered by partners in the voluntary, community, independent and statutory sectors. It is critical that we as a sector have a strong voice, clear messages and an inclusive vision for the future development of services. The organisation wants to work in a collegiate way with all our partners across the care and education field but in doing so we will not allow our members to be treated in a disrespectful manner.

We are already preparing for the May elections and will be launching the Early Years manifesto at an event near you towards the end of March. We will also be sending you copies of the manifesto for you to use as an advocacy tool in your local area. I look forward to working with you over the next few months to ensure that the early year’s agenda is a top policy agenda in the local elections.

Siobhan Fitzpatrick CBE
Chief Executive
Early Years – the organisation for young children

The State of the Sector

This year Early Years commissioned a survey by iReach to explore the economic and social contribution of the sector to Northern Ireland. Useful information about the current state of the sector that we would like to share with you is detailed below:

- Approx. 28,000 childcare places in facilities run by Early Years members (supporting 10,000 families)
- 47% of facilities have between 21 and 40 childcare places
- 81% of respondents are operating at over 80% capacity (523 facilities)
- 40% are operating at 100% capacity (258 facilities)
- 58% have an immediate waiting list (approx. 4,488 places)
- 40% of the immediate full time vacancies are for those aged 6-9
- 74% of respondents have a future waiting list (approx. 7,170 places)
- The pragmatic approach of prioritising children for places if they have siblings attending the facility was most popular, followed by families from the local area, and then first come first served.
- 53% of facilities are local community with management committee structure
- 37% of members rent their premises while 81% are in permanent premises
- 47% are in a purpose built or renovated structures
- 52% of respondents expect their financial situation to get worse in the next 12 months while just 15% expect it to improve, the remaining 33% expect there to be no change
- 68% expect their expenses to increase while 29% expect them to remain the same and 3% feel they will decrease
- 51% of respondents expect their income to remain the same while 26% expect it to decrease while 23% expect to see an increase
- 79% of respondents expect volunteer numbers will remain the same while 15% expect them to increase and 6% expect a decrease
- 84% feel staff numbers will remain the same while 6% foresee a decrease and a further 10% expect an increase
- 45% of respondents expect Government policy will have a negative effect on their setting while 20% expect it to have a positive effect and 35% expect it to remain the same.
- 74% of respondents charge fees for the service they provide while 26% do not charge.
- The most common daily rate for a full time baby place for a child up to 1 year is between £26-£50 with 73% charging this rate. This is also the case for a full time place for a child aged between 1 and 3 years and a child aged 4 to 5 years.

Early Years - The Organisation for Young Children
• Sessional places are charged at a rate of £1-£25 daily with 95% of those stating this.
• Breakfast clubs are also charged at £1-£25 per day with 96% of those stating this. After school care is also charged at £1-£25 per day while drop-in/occasional care is on average charged at £26-50 per day.
• 92% of respondents don’t offer a sliding scale for fees in relation to those from lower income groups. 52% don’t operate a sliding scale for same family members while 81% don’t operate a sliding scale in any kind of special circumstances.
• 44% of respondents offer places that are directly subsidised by Statutory or Non-Governmental Organisations. 34% of sessional places are supplied by PEEP.
• Staff salaries are the most significant cost for members, estimated at £43.9m in 2010 based on employment levels of 5,170 salaried staff. These numbers are augmented by an additional 1,200 Volunteers and Supporters that lend a helping hand for free.
• Salaries account for 76% of facilities costs with the remaining 24% representing running costs such as rent & rates and consumables.
• Running costs are estimated at £14m and are broken down into overheads (45%), rent & rates (20%), consumables (11%) and Insurance (3%). The remaining 22% of costs cover a wide variety of miscellaneous costs encountered in the day to day running of facilities.
• Total costs are estimated at £579m in 2010 when we add annual running costs of £14m to salaries of £43.9m.
• We see 3 key categories of income or funding outlined as follows:

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• Total costs (£579m) compared to income (£55m) show a shortfall of £2.9m suggesting a need for increased Grand Aid, Government funding, or parental fees to provide a larger proportional contribution to annual costs. However in the current economic climate neither approach is popular, so it is likely that facilities will have to look at ways to reduce their individual costs base which will likely impact on staffing levels and other services.
• Social Services are the most active agency in the number of grant allocations, PEEP provide the highest levels of grant aid in value terms.
• Government funding remains critical in the running of child care to support the sector in improving buildings and facilities space. Subsidies and grant aid will also remain critical in support of on-going services.
• A small number of member facilities invested in capital projects (13%). This totalled 72 individual projects worth £3.6m.
• 47% of these capital projects were allocated to improved buildings, 42% to improved outdoor services or space and 11% were activity based investments such as the purchase of musical instruments.
• DARD is the most active agency in the provision of funding or aid for capital investment projects followed by the funding administered by the Childcare Partnership.
• 79% of members would like to develop their services further with 61% looking to develop their outdoor space, 61% looking to enhance the role of existing staff and 58% looking to increase the quality of fittings and equipment in their facility.
• 89% of members believe the main barrier to this development is finance, 49% believe it is the current capacity of the building, and 5% feel there are no barriers to further development.
The National Association of Head Teachers Upset Over Increase in Funding

In relation to the recent announcement of an increase in funding to all Private/Voluntary pre-school settings as part of the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) have written a letter to Mervyn Storey, Education Committee Chairperson raising their concerns.

The Nursery Education Committee from the NAHT are seeking urgent clarification from the Education Committee on the points listed below with which we have included direct quotations from their letter.

Primary schools are being penalised.
“Where has this additional £200 per child (amounting to £1.5 million) for the private/voluntary sector come from? Has it been taken from the overall education budget before it is distributed to the statutory sector? If so, then nursery, primary and post-primary schools have all been penalised at a time when our budgets already face cuts”

Surplus of any funds accrued by PEAG settings should be seized.
“This is an unbelievable set in the context of reduced funding for education. Furthermore, will any surplus accrued by PEAG settings also be seized by the Treasury as it has been from schools?”

Has the funding come from the Open Enrolment shortfall before September 2010?
“If this amount the same £1.5 million that was made available for additional places in the private/voluntary sector following the Open Enrolment shortfall before September 2010? (Most of this funding remained unspent as a majority of settings in the private/voluntary sector were unable to increase their capacity.)”

Minister shouldn’t be exercising draft 0-6 Strategy as consultation period has not closed yet.
“It appears that the Minister is attempting to implement the draft 0-6 Strategy, a strategy that has been widely criticised and condemned by politicians, parents and professionals alike, and in spite of the fact that the consultation period has not yet closed. How does the Minister justify the public expense of a costly consultation exercise if she is not going to consider responses and has, in fact, totally disregarded those received to date?”

The increase in funding will not improve quality.
“There is no evidence to support the claim that increasing funding will improve quality. As EPPE, EPPNI and a huge body of longitudinal international research prove it is the teaching qualification of the pre-school educator that produces the highest standards and long-term outcomes for children, and not funding for resources.”

Education Committee MUST seek details of how this additional funding will improve quality.
“The Education Committee must seek details of how this additional funding is to be used to improve quality. The Chief Inspector’s Report provides evidence that less than 35% of private/voluntary pre-school settings are achieving very good or outstanding in recent inspections, compared to over 60% in Nursery Schools and 55% in Nursery Units. The capability and capacity of suppliers of training to the private/voluntary sector has to be addressed as a major issue rather than a small disparity of funding.”

The Minister should audit the accounts and sources of funding for each private/voluntary pre-school setting and Early Years – the organisation for young children.
“Has the Minister taken account of additional sources of funding available to the private/voluntary sector such as grants, awards, bursaries etc as well as the ability of parents to ‘top up’ funding for before or after session care? Has the Minister carried out a detailed audit of the accounts and sources of funding for each private/voluntary pre-school setting and of the Early Years Organisation, a private sector business?”

It is unethical practice to employ a private business training organisation to produce an evidence based study for the 0-6 Strategy.
“Has the Minister considered that it is unethical practice to employ a private business training organisation to produce an evidence based study for the 0-6 Strategy? It is hardly surprising for all to read that their results recommended the up-skilling of the private/voluntary workforce.”

If funding is to become equitable amongst sectors, these settings should also be bound by legislation.
“If funding is to become equitable amongst sectors, does this mean that private/voluntary settings will also be bound by legislation and practice such as SENDO, the Code of Practice for SEN, and the Appeals process for Open Enrolment?”

Standards across the sectors are not the same, therefore there is no justification in these inequalities being addressed.
“The statutory sector considers that inconsistencies and inequalities can only be addressed when ‘like for like’ comparisons are made. As the Chief Inspector’s Report demonstrates, standards across sectors are not the same, and the reasons for this are not related to resource constraints.”
Early Years Responds to Letter from NAHT to Education Committee

The Chairperson of the Education Committee, Mervyn Storey, gave Early Years the opportunity to respond to and clarify a number of points made by NAHT, a summarised copy of our letter to the Chairperson is included below:

Dear Mervyn

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to and clarify a number of points raised in your recent letter to you by the NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers).

I am writing in response to your letter dated 13th October 2010 and to the Audit Committee Report published on 16th December 2009 in which the Education Committee agreed to look at attempting to remedy a number of such discrepancies prior to the full implementation of the Early Years Strategy.

While the additional £200 per child is most welcome, it is at this stage a ‘one off’ payment. Using money set aside for the implementation of the Early Years Strategy in the 2010/11 financial year. This funding would have been lost if not spent and does not represent a reduction in expenditure to other parts of the education system. The amount now available to the voluntary and independent sectors is £1,725 per child for pre-school provision. This is still less than what is available to the statutory sector and we in Early Years would still call for a single funding formula to be developed as part of the Early Years Strategy to support all children receiving pre-school provision.

The NAHT asks a number of questions about the financial and legal status of the voluntary and independent sector and whether it should be subject to the same audit and inspection requirements as the statutory sector. I welcome the opportunity to highlight why the sector was recognised as an early education partner in 1999 as part of the then Labour Government’s commitment to develop universal pre-school provision.

The voluntary early years sector is made up of registered charitable organisations which have gained charitable status on the basis of their educational objectives. As charitable organisations they are able to contract with government to deliver public services such as the pre-school expansion Programme, but they are also able to raise additional funding to subsidise government funding. So for example the current pre-school funding subsidies 2½ hours but the sector is able to provide three to four hours service to children which represents enormous value for money. The sector is subject to the same curriculum and Education Inspection requirements as the statutory sector but is more flexible in terms of governance, fundraising, terms and conditions of staff etc.

The private sector providers are able to both provide the part-time session educational programme and then charge parents for wrap around childcare both before and after the pre-school session. This approach is something we believe all providers should be able to provide and have recommended this as part of our response to the Early Years Strategy. The private sector has taken enormous risks in terms of capital investment and investment in running costs so as to ensure they can provide pre-school education and must compete in the marketplace to sustain their services.

The NAHT suggests in its letter to you that only 35% of voluntary and independent sector providers have reached ‘very good’ or ‘outstanding’ in their Education and Inspection Reports. I don’t know how they have reached this figure. We in Early Years have been collating figures on inspection reports since 1999 and we know that 68% of the voluntary and independent sector is achieving very good or outstanding in their Education and Inspection reports. I believe this achievement is remarkable given the fact that at the moment the funding available to the sector is significantly lower than that available to the statutory sector.

In the letter to you the NAHT makes a number of inaccurate statements about my organisation which I would like to take an opportunity to correct. Early Years is not a private business organisation. Formerly known as NIRA, we are a charitable, not-for-profit organisation which has been operating in Northern Ireland since 1965. All monies generated by the organisation (approximately £10 million per year) are reinvested in providing high quality care and education to 30,000 children and families every day. The activities and financial standing of the organisation are subject to an annual audit publicly available at Companies House (NI).

The NAHT suggests in its letter to you that research carried out by us has had a biased influence on the evidence base for the Early Years Strategy. This statement is incorrect. The Evidence paper developed to support the Early Years Strategy referenced a range of international research evidence as well as referencing the Respecting Difference Research conducted on our behalf by Queen’s University as part of our Improving outcomes agenda. This research has now been recognised as a ground-breaking piece of international research and the largest ever randomised control trial in the three to four age group. I hope that this research will positively influence how we shape early years and primary school education in Northern Ireland in the future.

As you are aware, Early Years has attempted to promote a consensus building approach to the development of an Early Years Strategy in Northern Ireland. We will continue to do this through the implementation phase of the Strategy. We are surprised at the constant negativity shown to the voluntary and independent sector by the NAHT. We would hope that it is just a phase and that we will be working with them as the Early Years Strategy unfolds but are concerned that views expressed in this recent letter do very little to support open, collaborative and respectful relationships. I will be writing to NAHT asking for a meeting to discuss how we might work in a constructive manner in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Siobhán Fitzpatrick CBE
Chief Executive Officer

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Respecting Difference and Shared Education

February saw our Respecting Difference team deliver training at the Manor House Hotel as part of the Shared Education Programme funded by Fermanagh Trust. There were 43 participants (including principals, teachers and classroom assistants) from 17 schools. These settings will be implementing the Respecting Difference Programme on a cross community partnership basis.

Parents and grandparents from St Oliver Plunkett Pre-school Playgroup recently took part in a parent information session on the Media Initiative for Children. This is the second year that the playgroup has been implementing the programme which was recently subjected to rigorous research by Queens University. The findings published last October show that the programme can help children develop positive attitudes to difference.

In the first year of implementation the playgroup was funded by the International Fund for Ireland to train and resource the playgroup staff. The fund also provided two parent information sessions and play resources to enable parents to support their children at home.

The management committee and staff of the playgroup are committed to making this programme an integral part of their early years curriculum. Parents attending this year’s session had an opportunity to reflect on their own first memories of difference and become aware of how children can develop negative attitudes at an early age. Parents were delighted to take home DVD’s, books and finger puppets to use with their children in the home.

MIFC Reaches out to Parents at St Oliver Plunkett Community Playgroup
Early years and pre-school practitioners from the Armagh, Newry and Mourne, Banbridge and Craigavon council areas came together recently in the Canal Court Hotel Newry for a celebration event and presentation of certificates to mark the end of the Media Initiative for Children respecting Difference Project, funded by the Southern Peace III Partnership.

The project received £24,988 from the European Regional Development Fund under the PEACE III Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Councillor Charlie Casey, Chair of the Southern PEACE III Partnership said:

“I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Early Years who successfully delivered the project through the Southern Cluster area to staff teams and parents of children from pre-school settings.

“Funding such as this is vital to our local community to help individuals become more aware of diversity and difference issues and positively change attitudes and behaviours to those that are different, as well as addressing racism and sectarian issues.”

Kevin Fearon from Early Years celebrates the success of the Media Initiative for Children project funded by the Southern PEACE III Partnership with Thelma Mallon and Claire Holmes from Toybox; Catherine Fitzgerald from Snowdrops Day Nursery; Carmel Mallon from Kyle Little Treasures and Pauline Willis and Jacqueline Bagnall from Poyntzpass Community Playgroup who all participated in the project.

New Member of Staff for the Media Initiative Team

Early Years is delighted to welcome a new member of staff to the Media Initiative for Children team. Suzie Erskine from Aughnacloy is joining the team as part of the PEACE III funded project and will be responsible for delivering the Media Initiative in counties Cavan and Monaghan. This is an exciting opportunity for Early Years as the Media Initiative will now be implemented in all six border counties in the Republic of Ireland.

Royal Day Care Celebrates Respecting Difference Achievements

Staff and children from the Royal Day Care Belfast celebrated recently the end of the Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Project, funded by the Belfast PEACE III Partnership.

The project received £24,388 from the European Regional Development Fund under the PEACE III Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Early Years Chief Executive, Siobhan Fitzpatrick CBE, welcomed the success of the project:

“On behalf of Early Years, I would like to congratulate all those pre-school and early years settings from the Belfast Partnership area, including the Royal Day Care, who have completed training under this project.”

“It’s always great to recognise the achievements which the organisation is making as well as the benefits which are being felt across our society. This programme, funded by the Peace III Programme, is hugely important and has a real impact on young children, their families and the wider society. The Media Initiative teaches young children valuable lifelong lessons on respecting difference and together we can build a better understanding among children of physical, racial and cultural differences.”

Kevin Fearon from Early Years celebrates the success of the Media Initiative for Children project funded by the Southern PEACE III Partnership with Thelma Mallon and Claire Holmes from Toybox; Catherine Fitzgerald from Snowdrops Day Nursery; Carmel Mallon from Kyle Little Treasures and Pauline Willis and Jacqueline Bagnall from Poyntzpass Community Playgroup who all participated in the project.

European Union European Regional Development Fund Investing in your future

Mary Quirke from Early Years joins in the fun at the Royal Day Care Belfast
Sugar and Spice Celebrate 20 Years

The playgroup began in 1990 and started as it meant to go on as a cross community venture which would bring more than a little sunshine into local children’s lives.

One of the original founders of the group, Bernadette McCrossan, who is still working at Sugar and Spice today was delighted to be a part of the celebrations saying “this is a huge milestone for us and personally, for me, this really means a lot.”

A party was held for all the current children and their parents and on the following day, past members of staff, local politicians and current staff came together for a meal to mark the occasion. They also unveiled a new outdoor reserve will help children learn about new environments

The nurseries and other early years groups that take part can keep 25% of the money they raise to help buy materials and books, or perhaps to subsidise a trip.

How do you join the Big Toddle?
It has never been easier to take part in the Big Toddle, you can register online in minutes at www.bigtoddle.co.uk or call 0845 270 9900.

Join In!

Community Planning – Get Involved!
Community planning has been operating in other parts of the UK for many years and is a process where the community, voluntary, statutory and private sectors become more involved in decision making with the aim of delivering better, more joined-up services.

In Northern Ireland there is currently no legislative requirement for local government to consult with organisations and communities to prepare a community plan, however funding from the Big Lottery to deliver a pilot project across Fermanagh and Omagh District has recently been successful. Other pilots will soon run across Belfast City Council area and Derry and Strabane Council areas as well.

A critical part of this process will be bringing all sectors together with the creation of a Community Planning Forum – this will be the precursor to the Community Planning Partnership, which will be established once statutory powers for community planning are devolved.

The aim of community planning is to make sure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in decisions made about the public services which affect them. This requires a commitment by all those who deliver services in the council area to work together to provide the coordinated, high-quality outcomes people rightly expect.

When people are involved in shaping their local surroundings, the benefits can include:
• Additional resources
• Better decisions
• Building community
• Compliance with legislation
• Democratic credibility
• Easier fundraising
• Empowerment
• More appropriate results
• Professional education
• Responsive environment
• Satisfying public demand
• Speedier development
• Sustainability

In line with our vision that young children are strong, competent and visible in their communities, Early Years is committed to supporting and developing community planning. This will be achieved by developing closer working relationships with District Councils, and supporting the development of effective partnerships between District Councils and other community, voluntary and statutory organisations.

For more information on the pilot projects please contact:
Fermanagh/Omagh
Engage NI
www.engageni.com
info@engageni.com.

Rural Development Council:
028 86 766 980
Tracey McNally or Eamon McMullan.
Derry: 028 90 402 296
DCP Strategic Communication:
Strabane/Londonderry
Derry City Council:
028 71 365 151
alice.mcglone@derrycity.gov.uk
Alice McGlone
Belfast
Belfast City Council:
028 90 220 202
generalenquiries@belfastcity.gov.uk

Early Years would like to congratulate Sugar and Spice Early Years Centre, the popular Drumquin playgroup marked its 20th Anniversary recently with 2 days of celebrations.
Early Intervention - Improving outcomes for our Most Disadvantaged Children

Below is a summary of a recent article in the Derry Journal by Clionagh Boyle – EYS at Early Years, as part of a feature on the Regeneration Masterplan in Derry and the Early Intervention Catalyst Programme. The full article is available from Early Years on request.

A key challenge for the Regeneration process is that if we look at child indicators in health, education, economic and environmental wellbeing, Derry is not the best place to be born and grow up. There is a correlation between family income and negative outcomes therefore children in poorer families encounter multiple challenges to their holistic development. The difference promised in the Regeneration Masterplan is that economic prosperity will make a difference to the most disadvantaged. In this context a coherent informed approach to Early Intervention is essential in order to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

A report on Early Intervention by C4EO, the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services proposes the definition ‘Intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children and families’. The definition includes ‘both interventions in the early years of life and interventions early in the development of a problem. It includes universal interventions to prevent problems developing, and targeted interventions offered to particular children and families to protect them from developing problems or to reduce the severity of problems that have started to emerge.’

My only issue with that definition is that ‘problem’ is mentioned five times while ‘children’ are mentioned only twice. It is vital to see the child first before the problem, to build the strength and resilience of the child.

So what would an Early Intervention City look like? It would be a city which would enable children, parents and families to become more empowered and resilient, being thereby better able to achieve success, resist stress, manage change and uncertainty, and make responsible decisions about their future. It would provide a framework for integrated services using innovative evidence based practice, re-shaping existing provision and working together more effectively putting the child at the centre of our thinking.

The early years matter more than any other period in a human being’s life and inequalities emerge early. By the age of 18 months, differences in the vocabulary of a child open up according to the economic status of their parents and that gap actually widens when the child begins formal schooling.

The social and emotional development of young children is also crucial. We now have research on brain development which shows how emotions are embedded in the architecture and function of the brain. So early literacy experiences are very important for young children but even more important is their social and emotional development.

Jack Shonkoff described the challenge of Early Intervention as blending ‘the skepticism of a scientist, the passion of an advocate, the pragmatism of a policy maker, the creativity of a practitioner, and the devotion of a parent’ - emphasizing our duty to use scientific knowledge to ensure a decent quality of life for all of our children. Are we up to that challenge as a city?
International Conference and AGM 2011
9th—10th June 2011

“Shaping the Future for Young Children in Northern Ireland”

Early Years - the organisation for young children will host a major International Conference focusing on shaping the future for young children in Northern Ireland. The conference will offer a range of learning and networking opportunities including Master Classes, Workshops, Field Visits and Key Notes aimed at parents, child minders, practitioners from pre-school groups, daycares, crèches, Sure Starts and teachers in Nursery and Foundation Stage I and II.

Key-note Speakers

Dr. Valora Washington

Dr. Washington is the President of the CAYL Institute. She is a recognized authority in early childhood care and education. Valora has organized and developed initiatives targeting policy change in different areas of early care and education, including higher education and local, state or federal government. Valora Washington directs several leadership programs for practitioners, including the CAYL Schott Fellowship in Early Care and Education, and the CAYL Principals Fellowship for elementary school principals with prekindergarten programs—both Fellowships offer new models for leadership development. She has co-created several institutions, such as Michigan’s Children, a statewide advocacy group, and the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative.

Dr. Phyllis Magrab

Dr. Magrab, Professor of Pediatrics, is a well-known pediatric psychologist and director of the Georgetown University Centre for Child and Human Development (GUCCHD), a component of the Department of Pediatrics, that brings together policy, research, and clinical practice for the betterment of children, youth and their families, especially those with special needs. For over thirty years, Dr. Magrab has provided service, conducted research, shaped policy, and trained future professionals on behalf of vulnerable children and their families. She has had extensive international experience related to developing services and policies for children, especially children with special need. Currently, among her many international activities, Dr. Magrab is a consultant to UNESCO and hold a UNESCO Chair; serves as the Vice-Chair of the US-Afghan Women’s Council, a public/private partnership to advance the status of women and children in Afghanistan; and leads an international health and literacy effort.

Conference Packages

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For details please contact:
Joanna Loane, Events Officer, First Floor, The Millcourt Centre, Main Street, Kesh BT93 1TA
T: 028 6863 3098  E: joannaal@early-years.org

Venue Details:
Best Western Magherabuoy House Hotel, 41 Magherabuoy Road, Portrush. Web: www.magherabuoy.co.uk

For regular updates on Master Classes, Field Visits and Seminars please visit: www.early-years.org
How to Compete in Today’s Market

A U.S. guru of marketing in the early childhood arena, Julie Wassom is famed for her article “Compete or Die” in which she advises that an important way to build enrolment in your setting is to differentiate yourself from the competition.

Having a high quality programme, first-rate staff, and well-maintained building is not enough anymore. To be a winner in today’s competitive child care market requires a keen awareness of what’s happening around you, a proactive and positive approach to marketing and enrolment building, and a willingness to take the competitive initiative.

Below is some helpful advice taken from Julie’s article on getting to know your competition and how you can differentiate yourselves.

First you have to be brutally honest - about your setting, your services, and the current needs of your target markets. Second you must be open - to what your parents want and need, and to changing the way you market and provide your child care services.

“But I’ve always done it this way, and it has worked until now,” you say. When a particular approach becomes comfortable, it’s easy to close your eyes to the changes going on around you. As your market becomes more competitive, you have a choice. You can change, or get left behind. To move forward successfully takes being honest and open.

The next steps are to investigate, differentiate, and educate.

Investigate Your Competition

The more you learn about your competition in comparison to your own services, the easier it will be to differentiate yourself from them. List differentiating factors between you and your competitors. For example, to a prospective parent, your setting may appear identical to what another setting in the same area is offering. However, perhaps you have a purpose built location and they don’t, or perhaps you provide an additional service such as a breakfast club, or maybe you have 20 years of experience in early childhood education. These are not judgments. They are the types of differences you should be promoting in your marketing efforts and discussing with prospective parents if you want to compete and win.

Differentiate Yourself

Don’t forget enrolment-building skills as a competitive differentiation. Telephone skills, in particular, can make a decisive impression on prospective parents. Be sure to state some differentiating factors during inquiry calls. Simply point out your differentiating features in a benefit statement, such as ‘Our building is designed specifically for preschool children, so Billy will never feel out of place here at Wonderland Child Care.’ Make sure to sell yourself but remember to never criticise your competitors by name, as it will only damage your own image in the end.

Educate

Include your staff in the actions you take to differentiate yourself from your competitors. Make them aware of your parents’ desires and how they can help you meet them, even in the face of stiff competition. Train them to become your partners in communicating to parents the unique features of your setting that set you apart.
My HighScope Journey

Excerpts from a letter from Aggie Corkery, Milltown Childcare Centre

It has to be said that for me my HighScope journey began much earlier than the Curriculum Implementation Course training. My own children were attending our playgroup and I volunteered for the Mothers’ rota in September 1991 and I have worked in childcare with the children of Milltown ever since.

An information evening organised by the South Kerry Partnership in late 1999 was to open up a new world to me about children’s development. As I listened to the presentation, I initially had my doubts about this American early education programme. It was the enthusiasm of the speaker, Imelda Madigan sharing the history of HighScope and its benefits for children, especially through the demonstration with the apple that really showed me the ‘experience’ of learning.

Following this we had the opportunity of travelling to Cavan for a HighScope conference and it was a visit to a local pre-school there, called Stepping Stones, which really brought HighScope to life for me.

My training began the following April with monthly workshops where I benefited from discussion, demonstrations, and role play. Further benefit came in the form of Imelda’s site visits as she always found the positives and gently guided us through the negatives.

Each workshop presented the staff with difficulties to consider in the restricted environment and setting we began in (the community hall). We had to provide solutions to defining areas in the setting; providing equipment and materials for the children; and trying to find funding for the equipment, books, and training. But with each workshop we brought back information to our team about this ‘new’ way of working with children, new communication methods, new skills in almost every aspect of care, development and early learning for the pre-school child.

This information opened a new aspect of childcare to me, not only from the child’s perspective but also in helping me realise that in working with children, I had not only the opportunity of being at the centre of the child’s development through learning but through these experiences I could also be a confident, caring and problem solving member of the community.

HighScope has meant so much to our setting, and now with all staff trained in the programme it has developed and grown from strength to strength. I am so lucky to have such an enthusiastic and dedicated team that see the benefit and the quality that HighScope has brought to the pre-school.

It has been hard work – of all the years working, rearing a family, of childcare training and the additional HighScope training has been the hardest thing I’ve ever attempted. Implementing the programme requires effort and constant encouragement and support to my team to ensure they understand our ethos and how we interact with the children – but it has all been worth it. The children just thrive on the HighScope programme as it is all about the child and meeting their needs.

HighScope also supports children with additional needs and it doesn’t matter the severity of the disability because the HighScope method makes you think outside the box to ensure inclusion in every possible way.

My day to day work with the children in ‘experiencing’ learning whether through using the life skills of problem solving, listening, sharing, supporting, turn taking, experimentation, concentration, planning and recall, or being responsible for their own actions and belongings has given me a real sense of ‘job satisfaction’.

There has been terrific feedback from the Montessori teacher in our service, from the teachers in the primary school and most of all from the parents and extended families on the holistic development of each child which reinforces the importance of my work.

HighScope has spread out to the wider community through the enthusiasm of the parents who attended Imelda’s workshops. Parents have introduced vegetable gardens at home because their child has been talking so much about our vegetable garden. Our parents are giving the children natural materials to play with in the home as they now see the benefits and the learning gained.

I know the positive effect that these children will have in their families, communities and later in society and this has made my journey of discovery through HighScope one of the most rewarding aspects of my life. HighScope has been the most gratifying thing I’ve done and I have loved every minute of my learning experience.
An Introduction to the HighScope Approach to Transitions

What is HighScope?
HighScope is a well established approach to early childhood education and care which is underpinned by developmental and learning theory and by long term research over a 40 year period. It is an approach which identifies and builds on children’s interests and abilities and is used internationally in a variety of settings.

Who is the course for?
The course is designed for early years practitioners who want to learn how to support children’s transition experiences. Settings do not have to be using the HighScope curriculum to avail of this training. Participants will be able to:

- Discuss the different types of transitions which occur in early years settings
- Discuss the importance of providing adult support for young children at these times.

What does the course cover?
This workshop will look at the ‘Areas of Transition’ from 3 perspectives:

1. Transitions for young children and their families from home to setting
2. Transitions within the early years setting
3. Transitions to another early years setting

This one day workshop will offer a mixture of discussion, group work, role plays, and active learning experiences to enable participants to explore the areas of transition for young children looking in particular at the topics of:

- Supporting young children during separation from home to setting
- Supporting young children through home visiting
- Supporting young children with consistent routines in the setting
- Supporting young children to prepare and make the transition to their next early years setting

The session will provide theory, practical ideas, and strategies to use in the above areas and will be suitable for practitioners working with young children up to pre-school age.

Course cost: 6 hour Workshop £561.50 / €700 + VAT for up to 20 participants

This course can be commissioned through the Early Years Training Department. Please contact Lyla Henderson at lylah@early-years.org or on 028 6634 2696.

Call +44 (0) 2890 662 825 for further information
Charity Concert to Support Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

This March, the Olympia Theatre in Dublin will host a special concert that unites tribute acts to three of the greatest musical acts of all time. Abbaesque, the Classic Beatles and Elvis: The Way It Was share billing in a brand new show, “A tribute to the Coombe with Abba, The Beatles & Elvis,” to raise vital funds for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital.

On Sunday 20 March, fans of all ages can enjoy hearing the music of three of the most popular and influential acts of all time, and seeing those stars brought to life on stage by some of Ireland’s best known tribute bands.

The event is organised by Friends of the Ireland’s best known tribute bands.

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NES have been working alongside Early Years since 2004 and we are extremely proud to carry this successful relationship forward in to 2011.

First2learn, brought to you by NES, is our inspired early years range, offering you a wide choice of innovative and practical resources for 0-7 years.

**Giving you more for you budget...**

At NES we understand the pressures of a tight budget and an uncertain future which is why we believe you can have great value resources, without compromising on quality and service. We have done this by lowering the price of over 500 items, making our prices some of the most competitive on the market.

**Exclusive Early Years Member Offer...**

To help stretch your budget even further, Early Years members are entitled to an exclusive 10% off all NES and first2learn orders all year round. Simply quote NA1174 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 first order with NES (see your membership pack for details). (Please note discounts can not be used in conjunction with any other offers).

**Your No.1 Choice for Innovation & Expertise**

Unrivalled value for money is not all we offer our customers. We have extended our range to bring you over 2,000 new products, including our brand new Outdoor Learning & Play range.

To remain at the forefront of the EYFS we have also developed resources that meet your early years needs and objectives. One of our brand new favourites is our Through the Season Carpet, which is a beautifully crafted (and highly durable!) carpet illustrating the changing seasons – a great way to introduce this topic to young children whilst also creating an exciting new reading corner. Priced at £49.95 this is just one example of how we offer unrivalled value for money.

**Don't miss out...**

If you haven’t already received your brand new 2011 first2learn catalogue call us today on 0845 120 4525 to request your free copy of our catalogue.

To celebrate the release of our brand new 2011 catalogue we are offering one lucky reader the chance to win a Through the Seasons Carpet. Simply send your establishment name and address details along with your name, email address and telephone number in an envelope before 1st April to:

**Sarah Maddox, NES, Gregory Street, Hyde, Cheshire SK14 4SG**

**Good Luck!**
Early Years Annual Zoo Day 2011
Belfast Zoological Gardens

For the first time, Early Years annual Zoo Day will be taking place over 2 days on Wednesday 25th May 2011 and Thursday 26th May 2011 at Belfast Zoo from 10am to 3pm.

There will be a reduction on standard zoo admission prices and all our members are invited to come along for a fun-filled day!

Prices will include
- Zoo Admission
- Friendly Character Mascots
- Fire and Rescue Demonstrations

Booking forms will be sent to groups in March containing relevant information and prices.

For more information, or if you have any questions or queries, please contact Debra Doherty, Membership Officer on 028 9038 7940, or by emailing debrad@early-years.org.

Early Years Annual Folk Day 2011
Ulster American Folk Park

Our annual Folk Day will take place at the Ulster American Folk Park on Thursday 5th May 2011 and Friday 6th May 2011 from 10.30am to 13.30pm. This event is open to all groups from the areas of Co. Tyrone, Co. Fermanagh and Co. Londonderry.

Prices are £3.00 per adult and £3.00 per child and includes:
- Park Admission
- Traditional Games
- Story Telling
- Food Sampling
- Barn Dancing

Booking forms will be sent to groups at the beginning of March, and places will be allocated on a first come, first serve basis, due to limited space.

For more information, or if you have any questions or queries, please contact Debra Doherty, Membership Officer on 028 9038 7940, or by emailing debrad@early-years.org.

Fundraising Success

Coming up with the perfect fundraiser can be a real headache!

You want to discover a great new money making idea but it seems that everything has been done before.

Or perhaps you feel you don’t have the time, resources and support to put something really good together.

Don’t worry!

Raising funds for your group does not have to be difficult.

Having fun and engaging people is what works.

It gets them on-side. And...it brings in the cash!

We often hear of your wonderful fundraising successes and would like you to share these with the rest of our members through our Early Years newsletter.

We are looking for your easy to use ideas and brilliant top tips to help not only raise more money, but also have a bit of fun with your fundraising.

Please send your stories to Shannon Beattie at shannonb@early-years.org.

Really looking forward to hearing from you!!

FOR HIRE

Belfast Training Rooms
Now Available

Early Years would like to offer our Belfast Headquarters facilities for hire to members to accommodate training courses, conferences/seminars and meetings.

We have a large training room which can be divided into two rooms and one boardroom equipped to meet all your needs.

Free car parking is also available.

If you require further information please contact Anne Connolly or Seainé Currie on 028 9066 2825 or visit our website http://www.early-years.org/about_us/room_hire.

You told us you wanted a smaller sized newsletter with more local coverage in the recent member survey, so we’ve made some changes. Hope you like the new look!