

Traveller Focus Week

To mark 'Traveller Focus Week' which has been celebrated for the last four years in the last week in November, Toybox delivered and co-delivered four events from September to December. The events were focused on the recommendations of the Department of Education Task Force report which highlighted the need for better communication between agencies to ensure that Traveller children get the best start in life.

In September, an event in Omagh was attended by a number of agencies which work in the local area. These included SureStart, dental health, education, and health and safety representatives from within the local Council. The purpose of the event was to highlight to Travellers the various agencies which work in the local area, the services they provide and how to access them. A number of parents and grandparents attended the event which they found useful and informative and an excellent way of getting a lot of information in the one place!

In November in Derry, the Toybox project played co-host to a cross community 'Facts and Fun' event alongside the Western Childcare Partnership. The event was attended by parents of both settled and Traveller communities.

Several agencies and professionals attended in order to highlight their services and the support they are able to offer to the community. Information was provided on Toybox and the Media Initiative for Children, Respecting Difference Programme from Early Years - the organisation for young children, SEEDS (Solidarity Equality Education Diversity Support), the Play Trail, Central Library, Strathfoyle Women's Centre, Women's Aid and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association. One parent described the event as "worthwhile and enjoyable for the whole family".

Coalisland Library was the venue for another event in December 2011 when 48 people including representatives from local support agencies and Travellers shared photographs depicting Traveller culture and traditions in the area dating back over 30 years. Traveller grandparents and parents shared their knowledge and memories of growing up in Coalisland. Many shared their experience of play, daily routines and interests and compared these with life today. One parent spoke about her experience of play and how it had been mostly outdoors using the natural environment. Everyone present reflected on the visible changes in the community, the increased housing, new roads and more facilities. The exhibition of photographs continued to create interest throughout the rest of the week where it remained in the Library. Local

families and schools were able to share, learn and reflect upon the rich Travelling culture within the community.

Another event in December 2011 was a Health Awareness event hosted by Toybox in an indoor adventure playground in Ballymena. The venue was chosen so that families could share, experience and learn about physical movement. Parents were encouraged to think about ways they could make their children's play more physically challenging. Many recognised that simple materials such as balls could lend themselves to a range of play opportunities. Everyone tasted a range of healthy food options such as fruit and healthier sandwiches. Parents were provided with information in relation to healthy eating and making good snack choices for their children. Those present described the session as a fun way to learn new ideas.