

ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2021

# E-NEWSLETTER



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Early Years, in partnership with the National Childhood Network, implement the **Rural Respecting Difference Programme (RRDP)**, which is based on the **Media Initiative for Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme**.

RRDP is specifically aimed at rural pre-school, daycare and after-school settings across Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland targeting children 2-12 years old, their parents, teachers and leaders to increase awareness of diversity and develop respect for difference.

This project is supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

**early years**  
the organisation for young children  
media initiative for children

National  
**Childhood**  
Network

**Peace**   
Northern Ireland - Ireland  
European Regional Development Fund

## Chatterbox Day Nursery, Newcastle

Chatterbox Day Nursery, Newcastle, Co. Down, had two staff members trained in the Rural Respecting Difference Programme for pre-schools. Following on from the training, a parent workshop was held on Tuesday 28 January 2020 at the setting.

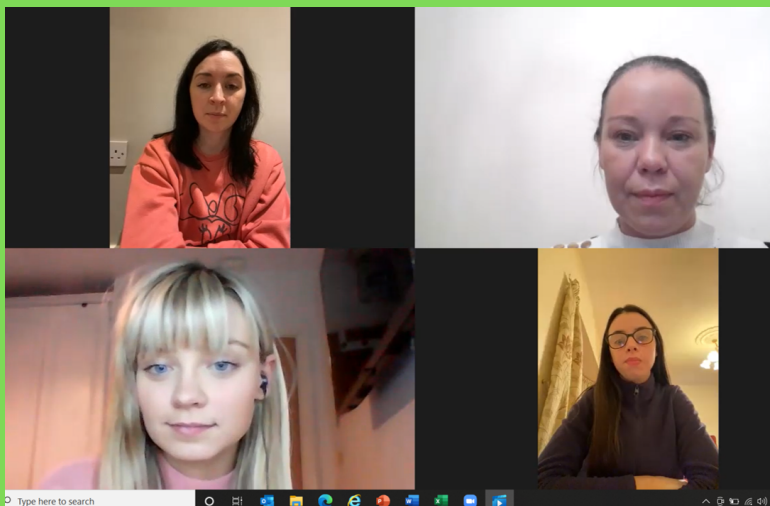
A total of 22 parents attended the workshop facilitated by Emma Magowan (Early Years - the organisation for young children) and co-facilitated by Chatterbox staff Tara and Helena, who introduced the MIFC puppets to the parents.



Time had been carefully taken to create the personas for these puppets to ensure that they reflected the diversity of children and families who attend Chatterbox Day Nursery. The parents gave positive feedback on how they could see their children/families represented by the puppets and how the time spent on the night reflecting on their own beliefs had made them aware of the impact they could be having on their children.

Nursery Manager, Maria, gathered feedback from parents around the outcomes that were achieved on the night, "From speaking with our parents, they have realised the importance of increasing their level of understanding in regards to inclusion for children and families. This was achieved through group activities and parents gaining knowledge of the different ethnic backgrounds and cultural differences within our local community. The parent workshop was beneficial as it has increased everyone's confidence in dealing with diversity and any prejudices regarding religion, race and disability. It makes us all feel valued and respected for being unique individuals within our schools, nursery and community."

## Cheeky Monkey Montessori and After School Club, Ardee



Cheeky Monkey Montessori School and After School Club, Ardee, Co. Louth took part in online Good Relations training as part of the Rural Respecting Difference Programme in early January 2021, facilitated by Rural Action. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, we have been able to continue delivery of our programme virtually and settings have embraced the experience!

The setting, established in 2007, is a private service located in Ardee Parish Centre in Co Louth. It provides pre-school sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE) Programme and follows a comprehensive Montessori and play based approach focused on children's own interests and strengths.



## Button Moon Pre-School, Tandragee



Staff at **Button Moon Pre-School**, Tandragee, recently took part in RRDP training. The training helped staff develop increased awareness about diversity, different cultural traditions, festivals, and experiences. We are aiming to help young children understand what it feels like to be excluded and encourage them to be more willing to include children who are different from themselves.

Children will be encouraged through play to demonstrate respect and the active inclusion of others who are different rather than ridiculing, fighting, or rejecting their peers. RRDP will be linked to our Pre-School curriculum through a range of resources and activities. Children will have the opportunities to discuss and acknowledge similarities and differences between themselves and others. Therefore, part of our curriculum will be designed to support parents and carers in discussing differences with their children.

Our aim is to involve parents and carers in training sessions using our resources of persona dolls, visual aids, slideshows, and prompt cards. It is important for parents and carers to have this knowledge so they can follow through developing the programme with their child from home and for everyone to have positive experiences in the outside world.

## Rainbow Pre-School, Dromore



**Rainbow Pre-School**, Dromore, have used the Persona Dolls in lots of imaginative ways, especially during lockdown. Their feedback really demonstrates the creativity of the setting in bringing the programme to life!

“We found that being trained all together as a team really helped us to implement the programme as much as we could!”

“In January 2020, pre-lockdown we took the children and dolls on a trip to the Museum. We went by Train.”

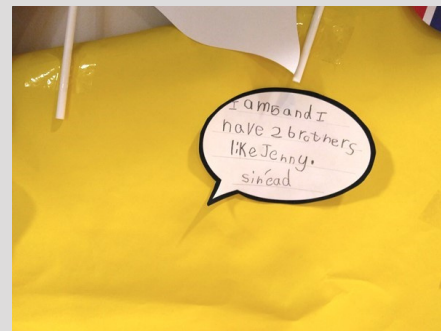
“From March to June 2020, we used the Persona Dolls with our remote learning. You can see Bukola here with a caterpillar, We also sent pictures of the Dolls playing outside in the garden to encourage our children to do the same at home. “

“When we returned to school in Sept 2020, one child went through a family bereavement due to COVID. He used Jim’s Sad face to tell us his mummy was sad because Grandad died. We then went on to use the persona dolls to discuss emotions with this child on a one to one basis.”

“One of the children’s aunts wrote a children’s book about COVID and we used the persona dolls to read this to the children.”

“The Persona Dolls also featured in our Virtual Tour of the setting as we are so proud of them!”

## Paddington Out of School Club, Dungannon



**Paddington Out of School club** leader, Susanne Rafferty, was trained in the Rural Respecting Differences Programme for After Schools in October 2018. The setting received support visits from an Early Years Specialist (EYS) and a further follow-up training day to ensure the programme was being implemented to full fidelity. A parent workshop took place at the setting in February 2019. Workshops help build parents own confidence in dealing with diversity issues with their own children at home. They also help to support parents and practitioners to work together towards ensuring that the MIFC is implemented. Workshops also provide the opportunity for parents to explore together how the approach can foster a culture of inclusion and diversity within their local community.

The EYS delivers this parent workshop with the trainee co-facilitating but on this occasion something additional also happened! On arrival the EYS was presented with an iPad containing a video that the After School club children had created themselves about the positive impact that the Rural Respecting Differences Programme had been having in their setting. This was an excellent opportunity to share the voice of the child and to showcase the visible outcomes of implementation with the parents attending and the EYS.

Parents reported that whilst the activities they engaged in on the night really challenged their thinking and beliefs about diversity, it was really the video the children had created that clearly showed the impact of the programme and how it could potentially be furthered with the involvement of parents in the programme.

“When we introduced the Rural Respecting Difference puppets into the setting we found that some of the children connected with them immediately. They found connections and similarities between the puppets and themselves and were keen to share these with the staff and their parents. This in turn has developed their willingness to accept the feelings of others. Since engaging in the programme the staff team are acknowledging the benefits of working in a more diverse environment and we are continually working on ways to involve the children in activities that extend their knowledge of their own traditions and those of others.”

## Good Relations Workshops

As part of the Rural Respecting Difference Programme, our Good Relations Mentor Clare has been delivering workshops in locations across Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties.

This training was specifically designed to support staff and committees of those settings currently participating in the Rural Respecting Difference Programme and was focused on increasing knowledge and confidence of the correct use of terminology in Good Relations work.



Correct terminology for diverse groups and the fear of using outdated, politically incorrect language is an issue that many of the practitioners attending our Media Initiative For Children training identified as an area they would like further support around.

The workshops brought together staff from different settings and provided an opportunity to begin creating partnerships that will continue to work together through shared projects in the next phase of the project.

If you want to participate in further good relations training please contact [clarec@early-years.org](mailto:clarec@early-years.org) for further information.

## Our Project Partner - The National Childhood Network

The **National Childhood Network (NCN)** aims to provide a forum for a range of stakeholders to work together in a collaborative and inclusive way to advance the achievement of national quality standards in Early Childhood and School Age Childcare services.

Other aims and objectives of NCN include:

- The advancement of children's rights and promotion of their health, well-being, learning and development in all childhood services.
- The empowerment and enrichment of the Early Childhood and After School Workforce.
- Interagency/cross-sectoral collaboration and partnership work leading to more effective integrated support to service providers that will secure best outcomes for children and families
- The development and delivery of high-quality training for all involved in the development, delivery and support of services
- Support for parents in the care and education of their children
- Integrated, strategic, needs led planning and evaluation
- On-going research at all levels to inform the development of services

Further information on NCN is available at: <https://www.ncn.ie>



## Project delivery support - Rural Action

**Rural Action** supports Early Years in delivering the Good Relations elements of the RRDP. Rural Action is a not-for-profit social purpose company established in 2019 to meet an identified need for a regional rural body with a focus on project and programme design, development and implementation.

Rural Action seeks to inspire action and make a positive contribution to the everyday lives of rural people. They believe passionately about engaging people to build a better future. They work to support living, working, sustainable and shared communities. More specifically, they:

- Seek to shape ideas into practical actions working within the team and with communities, partners and stakeholders to identify needs leading to the design and development of projects and programmes
- Want to spark creative ideas and answers to local issues through piloting and testing solutions and through the sharing and exchange of information

Rural Action has an experienced staff team involved in rural development, project design, management and delivery of programmes including good relations training and mentoring.





## Supporting Early Years practitioners: Good Relations in Outdoor Play

The Rural Respecting Difference Programmes team have continued to offer support to early years settings engaged in our programme throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the ways that we have done this is to continue to engage with the leaders in our settings about any concerns they have had to deal with as a result of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. As a response to these concerns, our team designed and delivered bespoke training, which for the first time, was rolled out online in accordance with social distancing guidelines. This took place on 15 September 2020 with five of our participating settings.

One example of this new way of working was the delivery of our online workshops on the role of adults in outdoor play. This virtual training piece came about as a direct response to the concerns voiced by many practitioners, who were feeling particularly anxious around the transition back into settings following a period of lockdown.

The benefits of outdoor play, for both children and adults alike, have long been noted. With this being the case, the RRD team were on hand to provide support to early years practitioners who were keen to ensure that the outdoor spaces and play opportunities they were providing were both effective and within guidelines. Given Early Years' commitment to celebrating and respecting difference, the workshops also helped practitioners to develop their thinking around any challenges that could emerge during outdoors play from a Good Relations perspective.

Workshop participants explored together how we could encourage gender neutral play in all outdoor spaces and avoid certain spaces or activities becoming dominated by one gender. The workshop also examined how cultural differences or disabilities may impact on outdoors play and how practitioners can ensure, through careful planning, that all outdoors play is accessible to every child within their settings.

In addition to the provision of advice and guidance from Early Years Specialists and the Good Relations mentor, the workshops provided a space for practitioners to share ideas and encouragement with each other, which was a particular highlight for many participants.

For further information please contact  
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Website: **[www.early-years.org/respecting-difference](http://www.early-years.org/respecting-difference)**