

Early Years/Border Counties Childcare Network

Cross border Training Programme Part 2

Final Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the final evaluation of the Early Years/BCCN Cross Border Training Programme Part 2, funded under the EU PEACE II Extension Programme, Measure 5.4 Joint Approaches to Social, Education, Training and Human Resources, administered by Co-operation Ireland for the period September 2006-July 2008. The project provided training in:

- Committee Management
- Working with Children with Special Needs
- Developing an Outdoor Learning Environment in the Early Years
- Supporting Creativity in the Early Years
- The Voice of the Child
- Training for Trainers
- Promoting Understanding

The project builds on the work of the two organizations through funding from Peace 2, and it builds on basic development to provide committee training and specialist learning that leads to quality childcare. All modules are important in the training phase, but key issues are contained in the modules 'Promoting understanding' and 'Working with Children with Special Needs'.

The project achieved its targets of working with over 300 beneficiaries and this evaluation concludes that it has met both its own and funders objectives. The evaluation concludes that the Early Years sector is one in which there is growing opportunity and interest in developing cross border relationships and approaches because of the strong policy focus in both areas on the development of high quality Early Years provision. The project has contributed to enhancing the skills of the workforce and of the service and will have long term benefits in terms of providing skills for employment and training for peace building.

There are also strong features of organisational learning for Early Years and the Border Counties Childcare Network. The recommendations from this evaluation form the basis for a strong cross border lobby to redress some of the barriers that inhibit this work, and are, in summary:

- Develop the 'Special Needs' training
- Allow for a longer lead in time and additional funding for new technology in future applications
- Further enhance the 'Promoting Difference' module
- Lobby to have all major recommendations from the Celebration Event 2008 implemented. These focus on developing common accreditation, training and child protection systems north and south, amongst a range of other professional issues.

Section 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Background to the evaluation

This is the final evaluation of the Early Years/BCCN Cross Border Training Programme Part 2, funded under the EU PEACE II Extension Programme, Measure 5.4 Joint Approaches to Social, Education, Training and Human Resources, administered by Co-operation Ireland for the period September 2006-July 2008.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for this evaluation as defined by the funder were:

- Outline the development of the project
- Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the project
- Highlight any implementation difficulties and/or models of good practice
- Show how the project met the needs of Co-operation Ireland, the funding agency
- Highlight how the project met the criteria of the Peace Programme overall
- Make recommendations on the strategic future development of the Cross border training programme

Methodology

The focus of this evaluation was both quantitative and qualitative. It used the following processes:

- Desk Research: Analysis of all monitoring materials, minutes of Management Committee meetings, conference reports, completed evaluation returns
- Interviews with project beneficiaries
- Attendance at seminar with Co-operation Ireland to develop their evaluation template and attendance at two meetings of Project Management Committee
- Observation/attendance of at least four major project events, including training and celebration event
- Five meetings with project co-ordinator Mary O Reilly
- Two Focus Groups with beneficiaries, one in Blacklion, Co Cavan, the other in Strabane, Co Tyrone

Co operation Ireland Framework

The evaluation was conducted within the framework of the Co-operation Ireland structure:

Stage 1

- Establishing a baseline

Stage 2

- Formative Monitoring

Stage 3

- Summative assessment and final evaluation

The impact indicators used were those developed by Co-operation Ireland ie

- Building positive relationships
- Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society
- Acknowledging and dealing with the past
- Significant cultural and attitudinal change
- Substantial social, economic and political change
- North South Cross border co operation
- Impact on addressing legacies of the conflict and taking opportunities arising from peace through targeting

A Logframe and Change Theory had been developed by the Cross Border Management Committee of Early Years/BCCN in conjunction with Co-operation Ireland, and a revised Logframe was developed in a dedicated session of the Cross Border management committee meeting in March 2007, which further elaborated on the changes the project would expect to bring about. The indicators of achievement will address the specific impact of the project and are:

Evidence of cross-border/ cross-community participation in training courses	Increased cross-border contact/ travel
Cross-border/cross-community friendships developed	No. of participants in all training modules and Promoting Understanding training programme
Increased understanding of other cultures and traditions	Increased respect for cultural diversity
No. of participants on training courses	No. of participants gaining recognised qualification
No. of participants securing employment/promotion in Early Years sector	Increased interest in pursuing career in Early Years sector
Increased no. of participants' services entering onto and achieving external quality assurance programmes	Evidence of improvements in practice, policy and procedures
No. of action plans developed and implemented to improve indoor and outdoor environment of day care premises	Parents report improvements in quality of service provided
No. of participants on committee management training course	No. of participants gaining recognised qualification
Increased confidence among participants in their capacity to contribute to local community	No. of peer support meetings/ exchange visits organised for staff and volunteers

Evidence of learning and good practice exchanged and implemented	Linkages/joint initiatives established and/or planned on a cross-border/cross-community basis
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The report is comprised of five sections:

Chapter One: Introduction

- Outlines the background to the evaluation and the methodology used

Chapter Two: Review of Project performance

- Outlines the development of the project and reviews progress/challenges

Chapter Three: Effectiveness of project operations

- Reviews the management and staffing structures

Chapter Four: Summary and Conclusions

- Summarises key findings and highlights some conclusions made by the evaluator

Chapter Five: Recommendations

There are five appendices, i.e.

Appendix A: Outline of cross border training programme

Appendix B: Logframe and Change Theory developed

Appendix C: Key Messages from the Cross Border Special Needs Project

Appendix D: Year 2 Training Evaluation Form

Appendix E: Training of Trainers Evaluation July 08

Section 2 Review of Project Performance

2.1 Early Years and BCCN

Early Years is the representative organisation for Early Years provision in Northern Ireland and their vision is as follows:

Early Years Vision : all children are strong, competent and visible in their communities. All children are physically and psychologically healthy, eager to learn and respect those that are different.

In furtherance of the Early Years aims, objectives, values and principles, Early Years provides the following support activities for the Early Years sector:

- A team of highly qualified Early Years Specialists working with local community based playgroups, parent-toddler groups, full day care groups and after school providers to support ongoing quality improvements in Early Years services and family support services.
- Community Capacity Development workers who support the development of voluntary management committees, based on sound community development principles and practices.
- A team of Early Years Trainers who provide a range of accredited training and assessment opportunities including basic initial training, ongoing professional development opportunities and training and support activities for parents.
- A team of High/Scope Training and Development workers who support settings to implement the High/Scope approach.
- A finance and administration team who provide support and advice on a range of financial and administrative issues, including a comprehensive insurance service, payroll support and financial management.
- An Information Research and Publication service providing a range of information services including updates of recent national and international research.
- A funding support team who provide information and support on accessing a range of Early Years funding opportunities, including European, Lottery and Charitable Trust Funding.
- A consultancy service which provides advice, training and support on a range of strategic, policy and lobbying issues related to Early Years.
- Specialist support and advice to develop appropriate childcare solutions in rural communities.

Early Years is committed to working in partnership with the community, voluntary, independent and statutory sectors to promote the development of high quality Early Years services for all children.

BCCN: The Border Counties Childcare Network is the network for the border counties of Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth

The partner organization in this cross border project is the Border Counties Childcare network, (BCCN). The Network functions mainly in counties Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. However since 2001, when funding for the Network's activities became available from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, it has extended areas of work to cover other counties.

BCCN also receives some funding annually from the North East and North West HSEs. The Network is thus an inter-agency, inter-county group, involving representatives from the community/voluntary, statutory and private sectors working at county and national level. The vision, aims and objectives of the BCCN are as follows:

Vision

That all children from birth to 14 years will have access to high quality early childhood and out-of-school services.

Mission

To promote the development of a co-ordinated, integrated and strategic approach to the delivery of accessible, affordable, culturally appropriate and quality early childhood and out-of-school services.

Key Aims

- To promote the needs and rights of all children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- To promote quality standards in all childcare settings for children, parents and staff
- To promote equality of access for all children to quality childcare
- To promote partnership and collaborative working at all levels

2.1.1 Involvement in Peace 1

The initial need for a cross border approach to the development of childcare was developed through initial collaborations between Early Years and BCCN. It was perceived by the BCCN that they, in the Republic of Ireland lagged far behind in the provision of early years services as compared to Northern Ireland.

Cross Border Projects such as the IPPA/Early Years Action Research Project funded by the Inter Reg11 and the High Scope Communities in Action Project funded by the International Fund for Ireland, highlighted the benefits and components of quality childcare but equally highlighted the lack of financial resources available to support their delivery within the Republic.

Cross border childcare training and development has been, and continues to be, an important catalyst to change and socio economic development in both regions, and it has raised children's issues to the top of the policy agendas.

The lessons from previous joint working led to this current project, which promotes quality and management training. This is to build on and further develop the growing infrastructure in both regions and ensure that it is of sufficient quality to achieve all of the project outcomes identified in the aims and objectives.

2.1.2 Contribution to economic development

The development of this training was clearly opportune. There is now a wide base of cross party support both in NI and the Republic of Ireland, for the development of quality services and Early Years interventions. This has gained momentum in Northern Ireland since the development of the power sharing administration, with political support predicated on the need for a better trained Early Years workforce.

Education Minister Catriona Ruane is quoted in 'Early Years' magazine September 2007 as saying:

I fully recognise that a suitably qualified workforce is essential to ensure that quality services are provided in early childcare and education. A high quality workforce is the foundation of high quality services. The objectives of the early-needs strategies are; to set out a clear vision for early-years policy; to be consistent with early-years strategies in Ireland and Britain, together with international frameworks; to establish evidence-based policies that draw on research and good practice elsewhere; to identify suitable structures for service delivery; to examine interrelationships between Early Years and wider childcare and education reform; and to examine appropriate funding mechanisms and to identify outcomes, based on quality service delivery and taking equality issues into account.

2.2 Project Aims and objectives

The Cross Border Training Programme Part 2 is funded under Peace 2 extension programme of the EU Programme for peace and reconciliation Measure 5.4-Joint Approaches to Social, Education, Training and Human Resource Development. The two year programme, funded from September 2006 -July 2008 aims to:

Provide training in:

- Committee Management
- Working with Children with Special Needs
- Outdoor Play
- Art and Design
- The Voice of the Child
- Training for Trainers
- Promoting Understanding

The project builds on the work of the two organizations through funding from Peace 2, and it builds on basic development to provide committee training and specialist learning that leads to quality childcare. All modules are important in the training phase, but key issues are contained in the modules 'Promoting understanding' and 'Working with children with Special Needs'.

2.2.1 Definition of Quality Childcare

Since one of the main aims of this project is to promote quality in childcare through training, it is important to provide a definition at this stage as to what this term implies:

Quality Childcare: What does it mean?

The term 'quality' conjures up different meanings for the many different groups that childcare impacts on. This includes the children, parents, providers and staff within services, family support organisations and many others such as pre-school inspectors, childcare trainers and teachers within schools. Perceptions of quality has varied hugely from one group to another

Informed by research

While those involved have had practical experiences and a passionate belief in how quality childcare has helped children, parents and families there is a need to be informed by evidence-based research regarding the benefits of quality childcare. One of the most exclusive pieces of research highlighting these is the High Scope Longitudinal Research study from the United States which highlights that the benefits of quality childcare include the following:

- Children's learning and all-round development is increased
- Developmental delays are identified and treatment sought earlier in the child's life.
- Children are more likely to adjust to formal schooling, less likely to drop out of school, more likely to avail of third-level educational opportunities, more likely to form positive lasting relationships, more likely to access and remain in employment, more likely to be

home owners, pay life insurance, own a car, be less likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour and contribute positively to their communities

- Parents are better informed and supported in their role as parents and further supported in their role as workers and in achieving work/life balance
- Families are more likely to feel socially included and be involved in their Communities
- Children and parents more likely to move out of the poverty trap

It is important that provision is of sufficient quality to support and facilitate these measurable outcomes, and this is the standard of quality approved by Early Years and BCCN in all of their work. The training they provide on a cross border basis is thus unique, innovative and fills a perceived gap that is crucial to the development of quality childcare in both jurisdictions.

2.3 Project Actions

CROSS BORDER TRAINING PROGRAMME PART 2

PROJECT ACTIONS

DATE	PROJECT ACTIONS
September 2006	Project Co-ordinator and Project administrator in post M/C meeting 12/9/06 Tenders out for evaluation of project BCCN Awards Ceremony CB Finance meeting WACP Quality & Development Meeting
October 2006	Evaluation Meeting with Co-operation Ireland M/C meeting 3/10/06 Meeting with Evaluator Cross Border Conference Newry WACP Quality & Development Meeting Course materials and resources collated and reviewed
November 2006	M/C Meeting 2/11/06 Meeting with Evaluator Special Needs TOT Voice of the Child TOT WACP Quality & Development Meeting
December 2006	M/C Meeting 5/12/06 WACP Quality & Development Meeting Outdoor Play TOT Art and Design TOT
January 2007	WACP Quality & Development Meeting Tutor Cluster Training Meeting Flyers out for CB Courses Administrator leaves project

February 2007	Special Needs course Ballybofey Outdoor Play course Fermanagh Community Management 1 M/C Meeting 6/2/06 WACP Quality & Development Meeting CB Finance Meeting ETI Special Needs Seminar Strategic Planning NIPPA
March 2007	Community Management 2 Community Management 3 Special Needs Tutor (Sub-group) WACP Quality & Development Meeting M/C Meeting 20/3/06 Conflict Resolution Training Course materials and resources collated and reviewed
April 2007	Special Needs course Blacklion Art and Design Newry Outdoor Play Monaghan Tutor Cluster Inclusion Seminar Monaghan Finance Meeting Co-operation Ireland
May 2007	WACP Quality & Development Meeting M/C Meeting 8/5/07 Inter Board Conference N.I. Special Needs Seminar planning group Promoting Understanding Workshop CB Finance Officer in post
June 2007	Promoting Understanding x 2 CB Admin Officer in post NIPPA AGM Tutor Cluster OCN Interim Evaluation Report
July 2007	Training schedule prepared and circulated Flyers prepared Course materials and resources collated and reviewed Administrative & Management work WACP Quality & Development Meeting
August 2007	Seminar Preparation Evaluation meeting OCN training-tutors R&S Training
September 2007	M/C Meeting Seminar meetings and preparation Course info circulated WACP Quality & Development Meeting
October 2007	Special Needs Seminar Courses begin-Outdoor Play, Art and Design (2) Voice of the Child CB Finance officer resigns
November 2007	M/C meeting BCCN Conference Schedule Jan-March prepared Promoting Understanding Workshop
December 2007	Special Needs course ends Training flyers prepared and circulated for 2008 Collate findings S.N. Seminar Tutor support Administrative & Management work

January 2008	Courses begin- Outdoor Play, Special Needs Preparations for seminars and events Course materials and resources collated and reviewed WACP Quality & Development Meeting
February 2008	M/C meeting Voice of the Child course begins Tutor support WACP Quality & Development Meeting Early Years Strategic Planning
March 2008	Art and Design course begins Planning for Celebration event Administrative & Management work Cross Border Funding meeting Special Needs leaflet research
April 2008	M/C meeting Planning for Good Practice Seminar Tutor support Finance meeting Special Needs sub group WACP Quality & Development Meeting
May 2008	Evaluation meeting 2 Promoting Understanding Workshops WACP Quality & Development Meeting Celebration of Achievement Event
June 2008	M/C meeting Good Practice Seminar Production of Special Needs Messages leaflet Tutor support Finance meeting
July 2008	TOT Respecting Difference Evaluation of Project Administrative & Management work Cross Border Funding meeting Quality & Development Meeting

2.4 Project progress

Due to funding delays the project was somewhat late in starting and there were initial recruitment problems with the admin and finance posts. When the training was advertised, there was initially a low take up of places. Quarterly Progress (at appendix) demonstrated the impacts of this external environment on project activity and the need to continually re-focus and adjust to meet changing demands. Given the support and co-operation of management committee and staff, this was successfully done, and steps were put in place to make up any short fall in numbers in the second year of the project.

2.4.1 Meeting the targets set

The table below shows that 319 participants completed the training, which is just above the target set. The numbers applying for accreditation is less than the numbers participating. This reflects two issues:

- That current accreditation does not have currency within both jurisdictions and would therefore not seem relevant to a number of participants
- That some participants were simply upskilling and did not seek accreditation as a preferred outcome
- That most of the courses were relatively short and would attract participants not seeking accreditation

Targets	Achieved
15 places on Committee Management Training	46 participants (39 completed accreditation)
60 places on Special Needs training	59 participants (43 completed accreditation)
80 places on Art & Design	54 participants (47 completed accreditation)
80 places on Outdoor Play Training	70 participants (50 completed accreditation)
80 places on The Voice of the Child training	71 participants (59 completed accreditation)
315 Participants in Total	300 + 19 TOT participants (238 completed accreditation)
Seminar attendance	Participants
Special Needs Seminar October 07	73
Good Practice Seminar June 08	46
TOT Respecting Difference July 08	12
Celebration Event May 08	87
Promoting Understanding Workshops 2007 and 2008	95

There were low participation numbers in Year 1 which can be explained by the fact that there was a greater recognition of training need in the Republic of Ireland due to the lobbying of BCCN, resulting in new increased funding being made available to County Childcare Committees in R.O.I. to run their own training programmes

In addition, when the Cross Border Training programme began in September 2006, the training schedules were already planned within the County Childcare Committees in R.O.I. On the other hand, in N.I. Childcare Partnerships received slippage money which had to be spent on training before March 2007. This meant that the cross border training was starting too late for them. All of these factors had an impact on the take up of training on the Cross order Programme in Year 1.

Targets were met and exceeded in Year two, so overall the project achieved all of the targets set.

2.5 Addressing objectives

Early Years/BCCN Project objectives

To Build Peace and Reconciliation by attracting course members from across the border counties and by arranging cross community visits as appropriate.	During recruitment for the Cross Border courses, the project sent out flyers to Early Years providers on both sides of the border.
To organise termly cluster and support meetings for all tutors taking part in this project to allow for continuous professional development opportunities.	Meeting with tutors bi monthly in from Jan 2007 Ongoing individual tutor support meetings Sept 07 – June 08
To run 8 Training for Trainers programmes for all courses for Early Years/ BCCN tutors if necessary, recruit new tutors from both sides of the border to meet the demand if required.	4 TOTs completed Autumn term 2006 with 19 participants Funding from 4 TOTS not taking place to be used to run 1 good practice seminar in June 08. Seminar on ICT in early years settings with 46 participants
To Organise Cross-Border Special Needs Information Sharing Seminar.	Planning meetings held to organise this for October 07 in Monaghan Special Needs Seminar held on 4 Oct 2007 with 73 delegates
To have a Cross Border management committee representing Early Years interests from a community, voluntary and statutory perspective.	Cross Border Management Committee met monthly from Sept 06 – May 07 and then bi monthly for the duration of the programme until June 08

2.5.1 EARLY YEARS/BCCN Project outputs:

Outputs	How achieved
Evidence of cross-border/ cross-community participation in training courses	Fully achieved and confirmed by monitoring
Increased cross-border contact/ travel	All training delivered in differing cross border locations requiring most participants to travel cross border
Cross-border/cross-community friendships developed	Given the short duration of courses, this is not necessarily a realistic target for people who have not known each other before. However, it is clear that those who worked in close proximity different sides of the border had formed friendships for the first time
No. of participants in Promoting Understanding training programme	95 participants underwent the programme and for many it was the first time they had addressed diversity issues
Increased understanding of other cultures and traditions	Questionnaire and verbal feedback indicates that this was achieved
Increased respect for cultural diversity	Achieved
No. of participants on training courses	Low take up in Year 1 was compensated for in Year 2, so targets were achieved with 319 participants
No. of participants gaining recognised qualification	238 participants achieved accreditation. For some, there was no benefit, in that the qualification is not recognised in ROI, for others the training was a refresher course. This issue of accreditation is part of the recommendations for the future.
No. of participants securing employment/promotion in Early Years sector	Long term monitoring not in place at this stage. Majority of beneficiaries currently in employment in EY sector
Increased interest in pursuing career in Early Years sector	Training beneficiaries felt more valued and more skilled through participation in training and this led them to value their career in Early Years settings
Increased no. of participants' services entering onto and achieving external quality assurance programmes	The majority of participants services (60-70%) had either achieved accreditation, were on their way to achieving it, or were re-registering next year. Of those who had not achieved quality assurance registration, many were from the Republic of Ireland, where the process has only recently started.
Evidence of improvements in practice, policy and procedures	Verbal parental feedback to all participating playgroups was extremely positive
No. of action plans developed and implemented to improve indoor and outdoor environment of day care premises	71 Action Plans were developed and it is clear that enhancing the outdoor environment had a major impact on participating projects
Parents' report improvement in quality	Yes, this ascertained through verbal feedback

of service provided	and returned questionnaires.
No. of participants on committee management training course	46 participants on shorter course rather than the initial target of 15
No. of participants gaining recognised qualification	Achieved with some shortfall
Increased confidence among participants in their capacity to contribute to local community	Very much noted in evaluation questionnaire returns and Focus Group feedback
No. of peer support meetings/ exchange visits organised for staff and volunteers	Unquantified
Evidence of learning and good practice exchanged and implemented	Verbal feedback indicates that this is taking place and this is further reflected in the feedback from the celebration event for more exchanges and good practise visits
Linkages/joint initiatives established and/or planned on a cross-border/cross-community basis	Participants viewed these short courses as the foundation for developing future exchanges and this is clearly highlighted in the feedback from the celebration event highlighted at 2.5.2.2.

2.5.1.1. No. of action plans developed and implemented to improve indoor and outdoor environment of day care premises

It is clear from all feedback that most of the above objectives were achieved. In particular the high number of action plans developed to improve indoor and outdoor environments (71) is impressive. Some comments on the development of external play environments give a flavour of what participants had learnt:

- *We are developing a sensory garden, great idea!!*
- *We realise now that children with disabilities need to be catered for in an indoor and outdoor setting*
- *We sent out a parent questionnaire re developing an outside play area and the response was really positive*
- *We now have a five year plan for an outdoor play area*
- *We are now planned for the year ahead-its great!!*
- *We have a new slide and playhouse*
- *It would be great to have more visits from experts in outdoor play environments*

Some of the more quantitative aspects were not included in evaluation questionnaires, so they are unknown. This includes the following objectives:

- No. of peer support meetings/ exchange visits organised for staff and volunteers

Future Early Years/BCCN programmes may wish to develop ways in which to measure these objectives.

2.5.2 Funder objectives:

These were:

- Building positive relationships

- Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society
- Acknowledging and dealing with the past
- Significant cultural and attitudinal change
- Substantial social, economic and political change
- North South Cross border co operation
- Impact on addressing legacies of the conflict and taking opportunities arising from peace through targeting

Feedback from Focus Groups in Blacklion and Strabane and from course questionnaires gives an insight into how groups felt that they had dealt with these issues.

2.5.2.1 Feedback

All responses indicate that these objectives are both clearly understood within this project and have been achieved.

Feedback to questionnaires in the Focus groups held at Blacklion in 2007 and Strabane in 2008, highlight that many participants believe that the shared focus on childcare, particularly in the rural border regions, over- rides any conflict over difference. The development of training in shared interests ie children, is considered to: *Build positive relationships*

The focus on inclusion, promotion of diversity and open discussion of difference within the training opened participants to supporting the development of *An interdependent and fair society*.

Focus group feedback:

We want an interdependent and fair society for all, and our diversity is based on our focus on the needs of children rather than of Catholics and Protestants

All aspects of the training enabled participants to become more accustomed to talk about past conflict, how it affected their area and workplace, and in particular the issues of cross border closure, breakdown of established relationships etc. This enabled participants to *Acknowledge and deal with the past*.

Focus Group feedback:

Many of us and our children have not lived through the conflict of the past, so, though it is important to remember, we need to be sensitive as to how this is done

Playgroup leaders are very aware of the changes in their local communities and are conscious of their need to reflect these in dealing with small children and their families. Early Years/BCCN developed their training to equip them to deal with *Significant cultural and attitudinal change*

Focus Group feedback:

We live in the midst of cultural and attitudinal change and hope that this is reflected in all of our discussions on changing family needs and the need for society to change to accommodate differences in all aspects of children's lives. If you want to monitor how society is changing, then work with young families!!

As the participants responded:

Because the training is cross border, *North South Cross border co operation* is obviously a major theme and this is strongly linked to *Substantial social, economic and political change*

Focus group feedback:

Social political and economic change is definitely something we are contributing to through our cross border working and particularly through raising the issue of rurality and lack of access to services in the border regions. We build positive cross border relationships through our focus on children and improving our skills in working with them regardless of their backgrounds.

The training and travel to cross border location led to much consideration of new political developments and their impacts. This led participants directly to consider the *Impact on addressing legacies of the conflict and taking opportunities arising from peace through targeting*

Focus group feedback

We think there is a particular need to take opportunities arising from peace to develop training that equips people to deal with diversity and a changing post conflict climate. Sometimes people think that in areas like Monaghan, there is no sectarianism but nothing could be further from the truth. There are many people who live in small hamlets and who do not bother with 'the other side' there is still great fear as and a legacy of bitterness. We take particular care to reach out to the most isolated areas and make no assumptions about peoples background, denomination etc. Hearing about issues north of the border is important for us in the south, as it can be easy to forget about small minorities such as border Protestants.

Overall, Early Years and BCCN as organisations are well up to speed on cross border needs and developments in the field of family support and childcare:

We have worked on a cross border basis for a number of years and were one of the first children's organisations to become involved in EU Peace funding, ensuring that children were included as a target group.

We believe firmly that building peace and prosperity starts with working with children at a young age to build positive attitudes and supporting families to do the very best for their children and themselves in a rapidly changing society. All of our projects test out new ideas and theories and we target our efforts effectively to meet new needs. The test of how we are doing is the feedback we get from our membership and from those who participate in our training programmes. This is continually increasing particularly in the border region.

Mary O Reilly, Cross border training co-ordinator

2.5.2.2 FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS ON TRAINING AT CELEBRATION EVENT 22/5/08

All of the feedback from questionnaires, Focus Groups and EY trainers and staff is incorporated in the summary feedback received from over 100 participants at the Celebration Event held in Armagh City Hotel on 22 May 2008. These were all from a wide variety of projects both sides of the border. In summary, they stressed:

- Need for proper remuneration for Early Years practitioners
- All staff to have 2 full days paid professional development training annually
- More publicity around the training and qualifications that practitioners hold
- National All Ireland qualification framework
- Build on links with other educational establishments
- Need to advocate for the rural groups re accessibility to training venues and travelling at night
- More exchange visits should be arranged between groups in NI and ROI leading to exchange placements
- Develop common All Ireland vetting procedures
- Reduce number of assignments on training
- Cost in subcover for staff in future funding applications
- Hold refresher short courses to see how practice has developed
- Showcase examples of good practice
- Develop Regular meetings between practitioners to exchange ideas and discuss experiences
- Circulate Training newsletter
- Develop cross border degree training
- Develop database of qualification equivalencies across Europe
- Create common salary scales for the sector
- Market Early Years participation of men in services
- Develop more locally based training
- Make FAS funding available to people working for funded organisations

This range of feedback also demonstrates how much work there remains to be done in creating the conditions necessary for cross border working. The comments reinforce feedback on the difference in both jurisdictions that were apparent throughout this training project as follows:

- Differing accreditation systems at vocational level
- Lack of exchange placements
- Lack of agreed accreditation systems at third level
- Lack of synergy in childcare vetting processes north and south

There is real work to be done in beginning to make improvements in these areas.

Section 3 Review of effectiveness of project operation

3.1 Management Committee

A Cross Border Management Committee was set up and is a representative forum with specific management responsibilities and also a learning focus. The meetings particularly considered in detail the new proposed Co-operation Ireland evaluation framework and made suggestions for change.

Four meetings were held on the 12/09/06, 03/10/06, 02/11/06 and 05/12/06. After the first four meetings it was agreed that meetings would henceforth take place bi-monthly and these meetings took place on a bi monthly basis for the duration of the project. The cross border management committee includes the Directors of both Early Years and BCCN and is attended by relevant project staff who make written and oral presentations. Regular financial updates are made and priorities can be changed and amended if deemed necessary.

In the start up phase, the committee managed funding delays, staff appointments and dealing with low application for enrolment that entailed some re-scheduling. As such it took a hands on and formative role in developing a secured foundation for the new project. It was fortunate that the committee had a wide level of expertise and was particularly experienced in managing EU funding.

As soon as the project appeared to be back on track after initial delays, the committee decided to meet on a bi monthly basis and take comprehensive reports from the co-ordinator now as the project was running. This system is working well.

3.2 Structure of training and staff

The Project co-ordinator, Mary O Reilly is a full time worker based in Belfast/Omagh

Mary O Reilly, the Project co-ordinator has the following qualifications:

- B.A. English
- NVQ 111 D32/D33
- NVQ IV in Enhancing Quality and Quality Control
- Post Graduate Certificate in Integrated Children's Services
- C&G Adult Teaching Cert.
- NEBS & NOCN Certificates in Management

The following is a list of trainers in the project:

Yvonne Tracey (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Priscilla Magee (Special Needs Tutor) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(Special Needs Tutor) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Janet Preston (EARLY YEARS EYS) M.A. Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) M.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Caroline Milligan (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Helen Robinson (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Hazel Brown (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Christine Robinson (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Elaine Sterritt (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Catherine Russell (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate
Fiona Scullion (EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies	(EARLY YEARS EYS) B.A Early Childhood Studies Adult Teaching Certificate

Feedback from course beneficiaries is unanimously favourable to the tutors and the quality of their input

3.3 Systems to collect information and data

The project went through much discussion of its aims and objectives, both internally and with Co-operation Ireland, to refine and develop its change theories and the framework for demonstrating impact and highlighting future needs.

The framework and change theory are highlighted at the appendix to this report. The discussion has been vital to assist the onward progression of cross border working and to clearly articulate the needs for childcare training within a changing social and political environment.

However, it has been time consuming in taking up time at Management Committee meetings and with dedicated staff, and it has undergone several changes after discussion between Co-operation Ireland and Early Years.

Some of the feedback from participants questions the need for post and pre evaluation questionnaires based on specific reconciliation criteria, particularly given that most courses

are short term and it would thus be unlikely, in participant's views, to view major changes in attitudes.

Some participants fed back in the Focus Group that the specific questions on 'other traditions' were pinpointing differences where there were none and that the questions were 'old fashioned' and from a pre peace era. Some responses to the questionnaire were as follows:

I felt annoyed at these questions-they assumed a level of enmity where there was none. We live in close proximity in the border area and know each other well.

We don't have the traditional 'divide'-we are all rural people and share common problems-these questions pose divides where there are none

What are the issues we should be asked about-de population of the countryside, PPS14, the fact that our rural schools are closing, the fact that we still don't have sufficient childcare infrastructure north and south of the border. Why ask about Catholics and Protestants when these are the issues we are affected by?

In terms of a longitudinal study, there may be a need to develop additional future systems that will record participant's progression routes from training and into other work or further development

3.4 Strengths and weaknesses in the implementation processes

The loss of administrative staff at the outset of the project, combined with the delay in receiving funding, did cause problems at the outset. It should be borne in mind in future applications, however that a longer lead in time is required in order to compensate for such delays.

3.5 Learning/models of good practice that have taken place

3.5.1 Special Needs Training

Feedback has been good on all aspects of the course, but in particular it is clear that the Special Needs module is especially innovative and is of a higher standard that participants have experienced at NVQ 3 level. The potential remains for the partnership organisations to develop a course specifically on this issue on a cross border basis.

Participant's feedback is uniquely positive:

I have never benefited so much from a course before, it has had major impact on me

I am encouraged by this module to go on to do a degree in Special Needs-this module gives me the experience and knowledge to do this

My NVQ 3 learning was not as detailed as this module-it should be known more widely-it is really excellent

3.5.2 Year 2 Questionnaire

Another aspect of learning from this project was developed for the second year of the course when the previous NIPPA evaluation was merged with the more detailed evaluation form required by Co-operation Ireland. This produced a more comprehensive Questionnaire for Year 2 that yielded additional information for this evaluation. The questionnaire is at Appendix D.

Section 4 Evaluation Summary and Conclusions

4.1 Conclusions

It is clear that the Early Years sector is one in which there is growing opportunity and interest in developing cross border relationships and approaches. In Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland there is a strong policy focus on the development of high quality Early Years provision.

This project has contributed to enhancing the skills of the workforce and of the service provided and this will have long term benefits for children, adults and communities.

Particular focus on the rights of children, the value of inclusion and development of problem solving skills, allied with a focus on promoting diversity in recognition of a changing demography throughout Ireland, is a feature of this training, and this is valuable in developing a preventative approach within the next generation that will assist a more diverse and tolerant society to develop.

Training of early years practitioners in these skills builds on their existing competencies and similarly assists them to become more mature and tolerant individuals, parents and practitioners. All of these features assist in peacebuilding.

This cross border training project also provides added value, in that it builds on previous training provided in Peace 2 and attempts to bring forward the whole concept of quality and good management.

It is part of a progression process, is intensive and innovative and entails accelerated learning for both Early Years and BCCN as organisations. It thus forms a vital part of organisational learning for both organisations within a developing political framework that is geared towards embedding peace.

In the first year of project operation there were funding delays and staff replacement difficulties, as well as a lack of take up of some aspects of the training. The project has recognised the factors that have led to low take up, which include:

- A training 'glut' due to introduction of training courses within the border counties through the County Childcare Committees and Childcare Partnerships at the same time as this Cross Border training was offered

These initial difficulties have been learning points that have been well absorbed by project promoters. The training has managed to pick up in the second year and in particular has offered Training for Trainers that will bring an extra dimension to future levels of training available on a cross border basis. In particular, feedback from the 'Special Needs' module highlights the need for such specific quality training in the future

The questionnaires devised in co operation with funders proved to be time consuming for participants so in the second year of operation the project developed a new questionnaire that incorporated both. This has improved the peace and reconciliation information for future training courses and has added value to the process.

Numerous participants on this training went to the 'Promoting Difference' workshops that were based on Highscope principles of conflict resolution and raised issues of diversity

and inclusion. The specific links between conflict resolution methods and promotion of peacebuilding were emphasised as was the importance of Early Years interventions in preventing prejudice formation. It also focused on Paul Connolly research that indicates how children can develop prejudice on the basis of physical and racial difference from the age of three. Feedback indicates that the specifically local message may 'not be heard' by some participants and this may need to be addressed in more depth within this module.

Focus Groups participants indicated that they felt that issues of exclusion due to rurality were at least as relevant to them as cultural differences. Rurality within a cross border context was also seen as something that might be recognised and addressed as a specific factor that highlights many diverse issues.

The issue of a common All Ireland accreditation system is raised in this project. It is clear that the differing accreditation systems of OCN and FETAC, neither of which is recognised in the other jurisdiction, impact on participants especially in the border areas. The current training is registered with ILM, OCN and FETAC, and this does raise issues relating to how standards could be further developed to the benefit of participants who are keenly aware in particular of the needs of schools and other statutory agencies. There are a range of other issues that make developing on a cross border basis difficult and these are highlighted in feedback from the Celebration Event in May 2008.

There is a lack of readily available technology to deliver these courses, and a big reliance on Early Years resources, which may sometimes be detrimental to quality delivery

Issues of travel distance and lack of access to broadband have been expressed by some participants as particular problems in accessing the course more widely

Lack of payment for replacement staff to cover when others are on training has been raised as another major disincentive to participation

Section 5-Recommendations

Recommendation One

In future years, a longer lead in time should be allowed to overcome the problems caused by funding delays

Recommendation Two

Consideration should be given in any future proposals to particularly reflect on the success of and need for the 'Special needs' training, which seems to fill a major gap in the childcare sector

Recommendation Three

The 'Promoting Difference' module could be further developed to contextualise it more directly within the local context.

Recommendation Four

Future funding could usefully include a budget for data projectors and other technology and training resources necessary for use with modern training methods

Recommendation Five

Lobby to have all major recommendations from Celebration Event 2008 implemented. These are in summary:

- Proper remuneration for Early Years practitioners
- All staff to have 2 full days paid professional development training annually
- More publicity around the training and qualifications that practitioners hold
- National All Ireland qualification framework
- Build on links with other educational establishments
- Advocate for rural group access
- More exchange visits and placements between NI and ROI
- Develop common All Ireland vetting procedures
- Reduce number of assignments on training
- Cost in subcover for staff in future funding applications
- Hold refresher short courses to see how practice has developed
- Showcase examples of good practice
- Develop Regular meetings between practitioners to update skills
- Circulate Training newsletter
- Develop cross border degree training
- Develop database of qualification equivalencies across Europe
- Create common salary scales for the sector
- Market Early Years participation of men in services
- Develop more locally based training
- Make FAS funding available to people working for funded organisations

Appendix A

Cross Border Training Programme

Recognised by: ILM (Institute of Leadership and Management)
OCN (Open College Network) & FETAC (Further Education and
Training Awards Council)

Course	Accreditation
Committee Management Training	ILM
Special Needs (50 hours)	OCN Level 3 FETAC level 3
Outdoor Play (20 hours)	OCN Level 3
Art and design (15 hours)	OCN Level 2
Voice of the Child (12 hours)	OCN (level 2)
Promoting understanding Workshops	For all Cross border Training participants

Appendix B

Evaluation Framework

Project Objectives	Indicators of Achievement	Data Collection
<p>To promote peace and reconciliation by facilitating cross-border/cross-community relationship-building and increased understanding of cultural differences</p>	<p>Evidence of cross-border/cross-community participation in training courses</p> <p>Increased cross-border contact/travel</p> <p>Cross-border/cross-community friendships developed</p> <p>No. of participants in Promoting Understanding training programme</p> <p>Increased understanding of other cultures and traditions</p> <p>Increased respect for cultural diversity</p>	<p>Establish baseline</p> <p>Comprehensive Evaluation forms</p> <p>Statistics kept by project</p>
<p>To enhance the employment opportunities for women returnees within the early childhood sector by affording them training opportunities to achieve recognised qualifications</p>	<p>No. of participants on training courses</p> <p>No. of participants gaining recognised qualification</p> <p>No. of participants securing employment/promotion in Early Years sector</p> <p>Increased interest in pursuing career in Early Years sector</p>	<p>Establish baseline</p> <p>End data and follow through of participants to check progression</p>

<p>To improve the quality of Early Years services offered to children and families</p>	<p>Increased no. of participants' services entering onto and achieving external quality assurance programmes</p> <p>Evidence of improvements in practice, policy and procedures</p> <p>No. of action plans developed and implemented to improve indoor and outdoor environment of day care premises</p> <p>Parents' report improvement in quality of service provided</p>	<p>On site evaluation and/or evaluation feedback in selected projects to ascertain changes made</p> <p>Feedback from policy makers, social services etc on visible differences they observe</p> <p>Action plans on new services such as Outdoor play</p> <p>Parents questionnaire feedback</p>
<p>To increase the community capacity of volunteers by providing accredited committee management training</p>	<p>No. of participants on committee management training course</p> <p>No. of participants gaining recognised qualification</p> <p>Increased confidence among participants in their capacity to contribute to local community</p>	<p>Entry forms</p> <p>Evaluation forms</p> <p>End evaluation with group</p> <p>Information on any new groups developed and/or participation in existing groups</p>
<p>To share good practice and cross fertilisation of policies and procedures and establish connections between similar types of groups from both sides of the border</p>	<p>No. of peer support meetings/ exchange visits organised for staff and volunteers</p> <p>Evidence of learning and good practice exchanged and implemented</p> <p>Linkages/joint initiatives established and/or planned on a cross-border/cross-community basis</p>	<p>Observation by evaluator</p> <p>Tutor and Participant evaluations</p> <p>Photos Visible signs such as plaques</p> <p>Press Releases and project records</p> <p>Discussions with participants and promoters</p>

Project Change Theory

Identify theory(s) of change/assumptions underlying the project:

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increased contact and improved skills will lead to better cross border and cross community relationships▪ Better cross border and cross community relationships amongst Early Years staff and volunteers will have a multiplier effect and influence peace and reconciliation▪ Peace can be built through the provision of quality accredited Early Years training that will enhance childcare in NI and the Republic of Ireland, thus fostering inclusion, equality and economic development |
|---|

Appendix C

Key Messages from the Cross Border Special Needs Project

We believe in:

- A Rights based approach for all children
- A universal approach to access with special attention to children with Special needs (OECD)
- Children with special needs are children with special rights

In order to ensure the rights of all children on the island of Ireland, Governments on both sides of the Border need to:

- Develop consistent legislative approaches for children with special needs
- Agree policies and practices that will lead to shared conditions of support for children across all services
- Ensure policy development and practice embraces the UN Convention on the Rights of the child
- Consult and support parents, as children's first educators, to be positively involved in their children's learning and development
- Invest in the Early Years sector to deliver high quality services for all children
- Support the development of a strong and equal partnership between the voluntary, statutory, community and private sectors.

Quality Early Years Services

- Give children and parents the opportunity to be part of a social network within their own community
- Provide a safe, nurturing, stimulating environment where children can develop and grow to their full potential
- Provide experiences and opportunities for children that will build skills and promote their health, well being, learning and development
- Support parents and strengthen relationships between children and parents
- Share responsibility with parents in the care and education of children
- Encourage individuality and self determination
- Increase motivation
- Empower children and families

The Values of Inclusion in Quality Services for Children with Special Needs

- All children have a right to live in and be part of the community
- All children should have the opportunity to lead ordinary and valued lives
- All children/parents have dreams and aspirations
- All children have capabilities and qualities
- All children should have power and control over what they do now and in the future
- All children need friendships and independent relationships; a natural support network

- The whole community can benefit from embracing diversity
- Everyone has a voice and the right to be heard

All Early Years services need:

- Access for staff to appropriate information, training and support to better meet the needs of all children
- Increased support and multi disciplinary training from specialists working in the area of disability
- Financial investment

Government, Parents, Specialist Support Services and the Early Years sector working together across Ireland can make a difference to the lives of children with special needs giving them a better chance to reach their full potential and be recognised as valued members of society.

“Children with Special Needs are Children with Special Rights”

Early Years - the organisation for your children, 6c Wildflower Way, Apollo Road, Belfast, BT12 6TA

T 00353 4772469 **W** www.early-years.org

BCCN Unit 10d, M:TEK Building, Knockaconny, Armagh Road, Monaghan

T 04772469 **W** www.bccn.ie

Appendix D

Year 2 Questionnaire

CROSS BORDER TRAINING PROGRAMME PART 2 COURSE EVALUATION FORM (07-08)

Your views on the training that you have attended will provide us with valuable information. This will help us in designing, commissioning and delivering training that is relevant and effective in meeting the needs of your service.

We would appreciate it if you take the time to fill out the evaluation form and answer all the questions.

COURSE TITLE:	
AREA:	
DATE/S:	
TUTOR:	

To assist the evaluation process we would appreciate honest comments, which will be treated confidentially.

How would you rate the following?	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1.The suitability of the venue including room layout, toilets, parking					
2. The refreshments/catering					
3. The extent to which the stated objectives were met					
4.The relevance of the training to your present job					
5.The extent to which the trainers were able to put the message across clearly and explain the issues					
6.To what extent the training resources were helpful and easy to understand					

7. Have you ever visited Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland before?		
Yes	No	Comment

8. Have you formed friendships with others from different traditions through your participation in this project?		
Yes	No	Comment

9. Have you formed friendships with others from across the border through your participation in this project?		
Yes	No	Comment

10. Has your setting applied for or achieved an external accreditation award through your participation in this project?		
Yes	No	Comment

11. Have you made improvements to your practice, policy or procedures as a result of this training?		
Yes	No	Comment

12. Have you developed and/or implemented an action plan to improve the indoor/outdoor environment of your premises as a result of this training?		
Yes	No	Comment

13. Have your parents/carers fed back to you about improvements in quality standards in your setting?		
Yes	No	Comment

14. Have you exchanged learning and good practice with other settings through your participation in this project?		
Yes	No	Comment

15. Have you established and/or planned any cross-border/cross-community linkages or joint initiatives with peers in the Early Years sector as a result of participating in this project?		
Yes	No	Comment

16. Has this training increased your confidence and interest in pursuing a career in the Early Years sector?		
Yes	No	Comment

17. Have you secured employment/promotion in the Early Years sector since participating in this project?		
Yes	No	Comment

18. Identify the main learning points, skills, or knowledge for you resulting from this course and how you intend to implement these in your everyday practice?

1.	2.
3.	4.

19. Will you need additional support to put into practice what you have learned?		
Yes	No	Specify below the type of support required (eg; advice, visits)

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS EVALUATION FORM

Appendix E

CROSS BORDER TRAINING PROGRAMME PART 2 TRAINING OF TRAINERS – RESPECTING DIFFERENCE

Thursday 3 July and Friday 4 July 2008

Corcaghlan Community Centre, Monaghan

Due to the extension of funding from Co-operation Ireland to end July 2008, a 2 day TOT for Respecting Difference was organised in Monaghan at the beginning of July. The course was facilitated by Eleanor Mearns SEYS Respecting Difference and Mary O'Reilly, Cross Border Training Co-ordinator. Staff and tutors from Early Years in N.I, BCCN and County Childcare Committees in R.O.I. were invited to participate.

There were twelve participants, 5 from N.I. and 7 from R.O.I.

Evaluations were very positive.

'I work with different religious communities and this course has given me a greater awareness of diversity'

' An excellent application of previous learning. Excellent facilitation and pace for training delivery'

' Overall appreciation of the quality and significance of the programme'

' How to use different teaching methods to get messages through'

'Given me the ability to handle difficult questions'

'This training is very important in today's society'

'Increased awareness of the importance of addressing diversity'