

# early years

**The Tuscan Approach –  
Trust, Opportunity and Time**



**Children's Social Care  
Statistics for Northern  
Ireland**



**Complaints Policy –  
update from ETI**

**8,000 volunteers: research  
into the governance of  
community and voluntary  
based early years settings**

# CEO Welcome

## Dear Readers

May I take this opportunity to wish you a very happy and successful 2020. We are delighted to see a new government in place. The publication of “New Decade, New Approach” outlines the Executive’s intention to publish a Childcare Strategy and the attention with immediate priority to childcare initiatives for children aged 3 to 4 years. We



await the publication of the strategy and will continue to advocate for a

comprehensive strategy addressing the development and care needs of all children and families.

We also welcome the continued commitment to shared education in order to build a shared and cohesive society. We also saw the launch of the Peace Plus consultation and are actively working to influence the shape of the programme to enable future investments in shared education and supporting children and young people.

We are delighted that the Pathway Fund is open for 2020 to 2021 and welcome applications from new and existing projects.

I would like to thank those of you who supported our recent governance survey

and conference. We have a lot to celebrate with over 8000 people actively involved in voluntary management committees across Northern Ireland and plans to enhance and develop our governance support.

2020 promises to be a year of new opportunities and also change. I am looking forward to meeting up at Early Years Branches to discuss and debate these with you.

Pauline Walmsley

Chief Executive Officer

Early Years – the organisation for young children

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## Peace Plus – Have your say and make a difference

Early Years welcomes the commitment from the EU and Member States for the delivery of a PEACE PLUS programme, a new EU cross-border programme that will contribute to a more prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

The Special EU Programmes Body are seeking our help to shape the content of this programme. Early Years, as a member organisation, will be submitting a sector wide response, with the key messages below identified for the sector.

### Calling all members

We want all our members to have their say in the programme consultation by completing the short survey by Wednesday 19 February 2020 available from [www.early-years.org/peaceplus](http://www.early-years.org/peaceplus)

## Over 8,000 people volunteer to help run our early years settings

Early Years - the organisation for young children has recently been carrying out research into the governance of community and voluntary based early years settings. These settings are governed by management committees made up of parents, beneficiaries and stakeholders. These management committee members give up their time voluntarily to ensure that settings are well run in the interests of the children, the families and the communities which use them. In a survey of over 170 settings, the research discovered that they had an average of nine members per committee. When that is multiplied across all community and voluntary settings, a conservative estimate puts the number at over 8,000.

This represents a vast contribution of time, skills and expertise into the management of our early years settings and plays a fundamental role in supporting high quality provision and improved outcomes for young children. Management committees play a vital role in areas such as the management of finances, the support and supervision of staff, compliance with legislation and regulations. Management committees are accountable to various bodies such as the Charity Commission and Health and Social Care Trusts.

The research is examining the challenges which management committees face and will go on to make recommendations which support them in their roles. For example, one third of the respondents to the survey said that they had difficulties filling places on the committee and a similar proportion had difficulty filling the office-bearing roles of Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary.

Around 10% said that they were not confident that they had an appropriate range of expertise to make their committee an effective governing body. Whilst this is worrying, it is not completely surprising as some volunteer management committee members may not have a background in management before taking up a position on a management committee.

The research will help with the understanding of this situation and will make recommendations for ways in which sector bodies, such as Early Years – the organisation for young children can support management committees. This will ensure that as well as acknowledging the many strengths of voluntary management committees, we give the 8,000+ voluntary workforce the support they need to carry out their roles in the interests of children.

The research into governance in community-based early years settings will be launched at the Early Years conference in November and will be available from the Early Years website after that. If you have queries about the research, please contact Diarmuid Moore, Senior Community Development Specialist, [diarmuidm@early-years.org](mailto:diarmuidm@early-years.org) or 028 9066 2825.

## Trust, Opportunity and Time



### Trust, Opportunity and Time – an Approach to Children’s Education in San Miniato, Tuscany

Early Years – the organisation for young children was very pleased to be part of the Four Nations tour, undertaken by Aldo Fortunati and Barbara Pagni, and organised by Early Years, Early Childhood Ireland, Early Years Scotland and Early Years Wales.

Aldo Fortunati is President of La Bottega di Geppetto, the International Research and Documentation Centre on Childhood. Gloria Tognetti and Barbara Pagni are Scientific Co-ordinators of the same institution.

Aldo and Barbara visited Dungannon and Coalisland Sure Start in September to provide a twilight session on their perspective on how early childhood education and care services can be delivered to enhance children’s and parents’ experiences.

The event was extremely well attended with the audience composed of representatives from Health and Social Care Trusts, the Department for Education, Education and Training Inspectorate, Childcare Partnerships, statutory education and community and voluntary early childcare settings and members of Early Years – the organisation for young children.

Aldo and Barbara presented their Tuscan approach to children’s education, around three main themes – Trust, Opportunity and Time.

### Trust

The theme of relationships was explored with a clear focus on how adults relate to children and children relate to each other. Video clips were used to demonstrate the effective role of the adult through less direct interaction in the play and social construction of children.



### Opportunity

This theme reflected on the organisation of the environment and the role of relationships within that organisation. People's differences were identified as the basis for the foundation of growing together. The curriculum was presented as being built around the opportunities made available with links to the use of chance occasions and creativity recognised.

The focus was on the organisation of the context rather than the direct influence of the learning. This was further explored in a sub theme of care as a context, so that nutrition, physical well-being and time for sleep were addressed using video clips to illustrate the plentiful opportunities we all have available to us.

### Time

This theme encouraged the audience to contemplate how childcare settings use time as a way of allowing children to transition, settle, build relationships, develop competencies, attitudes and dispositions, also how families are provided with time within the setting to build and be part of these different types of relationships which support learning.

The audience had many opportunities for round table discussion which, due to the sectoral make-up of the participants, resulted in strong cross agency conversations about and examination of the themes delivered.

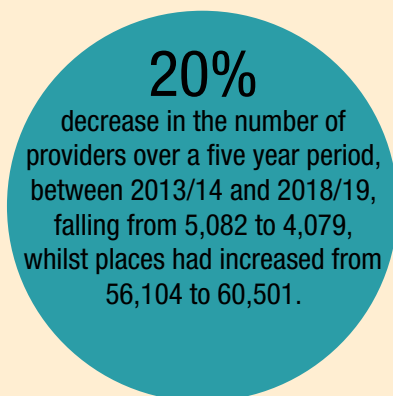
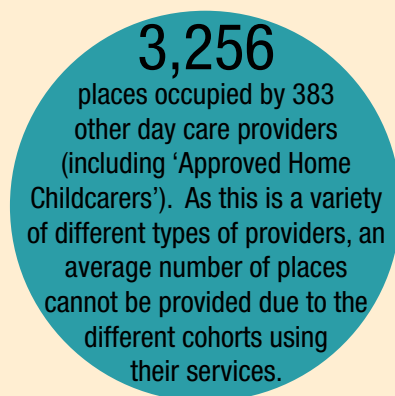
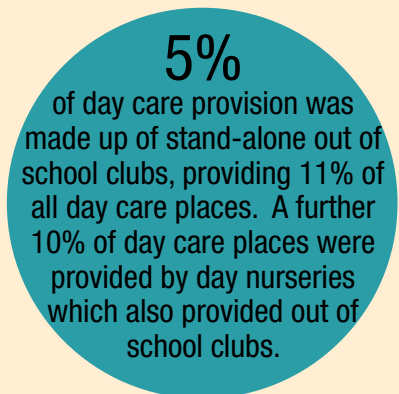
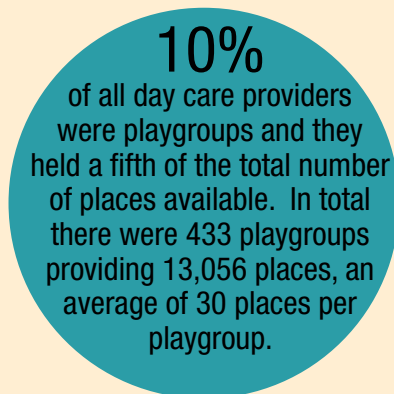
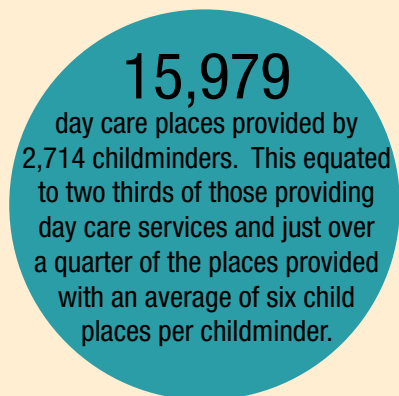
The feedback from participants has been very positive. The opportunity to discuss specific themes with other agencies has been identified as a feature which Early Years has acknowledged and will include in future events.

## 'Children's Social Care Statistics for NI 2018/19'

In October, the Department of Health published 'Children's Social Care Statistics for NI 2018/19'. This Bulletin is the eighth annual reporting of 'Children's Social Care Statistics for NI', which replaced the 'Children Order Statistical Tables for NI' and 'Children Order Statistical Trends for NI'.

Areas covered include Children in Need, Child Protection, Children in Care, Residential Care and Day Care, both at and for the year ending 31 March 2019.

Section Five (accessed from pages 44 to 46) relates to 'Children's Day Care'. This is divided into five main categories: childminders; playgroups; day nurseries; out of school clubs; and other organisations. It outlines potentially significant information in terms of provision:



Access the full report here

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/childrens-social-care-statistics-northern-ireland-201819>

Statistics for the year 2019/20 will be published in October 2020. We endeavour to keep our members informed on further developments, trends and publications as they are released.

# When ‘one for all and all for one’ is NOT the right approach

## **New Support and Best Practice Groups**

Early Years – the organisation for young children has listened to the feedback from settings around the effectiveness of the Clusters approach to Continuing Professional Development using peer support.

Feedback identified that content matching the need of the audience was an issue. Previously, Clusters needed to encompass the needs of those new to the theme and those who were experienced.

In response to this need, we are trialling a new approach. The new groups have been targeted with an ‘essentials’ element and then a ‘masterclass’ element which enable settings, with advice from their Quality Specialist, to select which one matches their current need.

‘Essentials’ groups are a very important element of ensuring the foundations of practice are correct. Settings choosing an ‘essentials’ group demonstrate that they have sound self-evaluation to identify where support is required. This essential requirement may be for several reasons but it clearly demonstrates a setting which has self-awareness and clear vision on how to improve practice and outcomes for children.

‘Masterclasses’ are targeted at those settings which have embedded sound practice, consistently providing good and better outcomes for children. This grouping enables settings to challenge themselves to further improve good practice through building their own capacity to bring about innovation in their own settings for their children and families.

Groups are facilitated by an Early Years Specialist to support the participation and involvement of peers within a structured format.

The success of the groups depends on the sharing and discussing of good practice together and the process of this is the learning for improvement.

Settings which have their own Early Years Specialist are invited to participate in the support and best practice groups at an advertised fee per person.

For more information, please contact the following for area information:

South Eastern and Belfast - [debraw@early-years.org](mailto:debraw@early-years.org)

Southern - [mariannah@early-years.org](mailto:mariannah@early-years.org)

Western and Northern - [joanb@early-years.org](mailto:joanb@early-years.org)

## Saul Community Pre-School Playgroup quality recognition

Saul Community Pre-School Playgroup in Downpatrick, a member of Early Years – the organisation for young children, received the second highest rating of ‘good’ for quality of learning provision, leadership and management and outcomes for children in their latest inspection report from the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Playgroup Leader, Delia McLaughlin, explained that staff joined with her working tirelessly over the months, often staying late at night to prepare for the inspection.

“We also had support from our Early Years Advisor, Megan McConaghy, and our management committee. We are all delighted to have received the second highest rating and are committed to maintaining this standard over the years to come.”

Accredited by Early Years – the organisation for young children, the playgroup aims to provide quality pre-school care to children aged from two years and ten months to four years.

A huge congratulations and well done to Delia and all the staff team at Saul!



## Bulrush Day Nursery is celebrating 15 years in the business

We are passing on huge congratulations to Bulrush Day Nursery in Belfast, a member of Early Years – the organisation for young children, which celebrated 15 years in the early years sector.

Bulrush is a social economy day care for the Vine Centre based on the Crumlin Road, catering for 39 children daily and employing 16 members of staff, both part-time and full-time posts.

The team at Bulrush Day Nursery is passionate about early childhood care and education, and continues to provide quality provision for the children in the setting.





## Book Week NI – Reading Together and Bonding

Fermanagh Early Years Children and Family Centre joins the Libraries NI's and BBC Northern Ireland's reading campaign to encourage and support communities to read more together. To celebrate the children's book day theme, the Centre invited two local authors to read to the children.

Aideen McGinley, first time author, long-term Habitat supporter and well-known personality for her work throughout Fermanagh and beyond, brought along 'The Secret of the Pooja Bears', the book which she has written for her grandchildren.

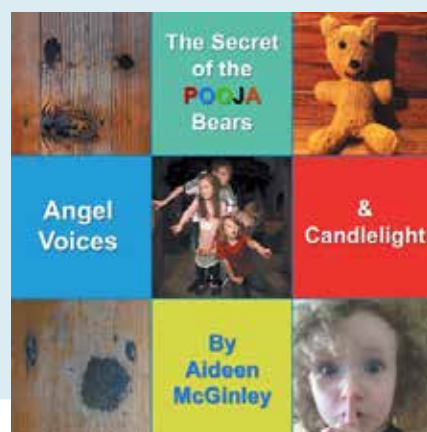
The book is the story of the Pooja (meaning prayer in Sanskrit) Bears which live in secret in a special place in St Michael's Church in Enniskillen. They have very powerful hugs which bring hope to all they meet and an extra special hugging game to play at the end of every day.

Joan Jackman, Project Manager, said "The children in the Centre were enthralled throughout Aideen's storytelling. They had lots of questions to ask and loved the bears they got to hold while the story was told."

The second author invited for the afternoon session was Seamus McCanny, a local traditional storyteller and folklorist.

Joan explained "Seamus brought to life an interactive story which had the children on the edge of their seats with excitement and anticipation to what was coming next. He told the story of the old man and brought the children on a journey through a town with many characters encountered on the way."

A great day was had in the Centre with children dressed to resemble their favourite characters. The Centre would like to say a big thank you to the authors for taking the time to visit and making children's book day that bit extra special for us all.



## Family Health Initiative

**Author – Hannah McBride, Acting Community Health Co-ordinator**

One in four children are either overweight or obese and three in four children are not active enough. The Family Health Initiative aims to encourage families to make healthier choices together, and prevent obesity from a young age. A range of outcomes is embedded focusing on healthy eating, physical exercise and emotional well-being.

### Family Health Initiative for parents and children 0-5 years

This is a fun active health promotion programme for families with children under five years old. It provides parents with useful information on how to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviours. Over eight weeks the programme encourages parents to explore the importance of healthy eating and physical activity in their lives and that of their families.

Each week parents and carers discuss a variety of health-related topics. Children are given the opportunity to have fun and use their creativity through play and activities. Families are active together during activity time and at story time they learn from puppets 'Ben and friends'.

A healthy snack is provided, encouraging families to try new healthy foods and tastes. Each week families receive free incentives, eg beach balls, shopping bags and water bottles to encourage them to make healthier choices in their homes.

In 2019, programmes were delivered in The Munchkin Club Parent and Toddler Group, Lurgan, Forever Friends Playgroup, Coalisland, St Patrick's and Ballysaggart Nursery, Dungannon, Gilford Parent and Toddler Group. The programme is currently being delivered in Newry Early Years.

*Forever Friends playgroup, Coalisland, receiving their certificate for completing the Family Health Initiative*



## Family Health Initiative for parents and children 8-11 years

Early Years also offers a fun interactive programme for parents and children aged between eight and eleven years. This programme supports families to become healthier and get active together. The programme is jam-packed with fun activities including football, games, smoothie making, cookery sessions and much more. This programme gives families the opportunity to spend time together trying new sports and tasting new foods.

In 2019 programmes were delivered in St Colman's PS, Dromore, St Francis of Assisi PS, Keady, Brownlow Hub, Craigavon, and it is currently being delivered in Windsor Hill PS, Newry.



Some recent comments from families on the Family Health Initiative include:

- **“We would say it has improved our physical health because ... we had lots of physical activity and really good fun”**
- **“We would say it has improved our eating habits because ... I am more tuned in to the contents of foods now and am horrified at the sugar content in some products that I had previously assumed were ‘good’ for us.”**
- **“Thank you for the opportunity to spend this time trying to make my family a better, happier and healthier one.”**
- **“This was the best course ever, very good experience. It’s really worth going to, you will find something for yourself.”**



*Families from St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry, on a supermarket tour in their local Tesco store*

## New Physical Activity Guidelines – are we and our children getting enough?

**Author – Diane Glasgow, Early Years Physical Health Mentor**

The UK Chief Medical Officers have reviewed the 2011 physical activity guidelines, and are highlighting the benefits of everyone 'moving more,' breaking up inactivity and that small changes make a big impact on our health. The guidelines have been divided into the following groups:

### Under 5s

#### Infants (less than one year):

- Physically active several times throughout the day in a variety of ways.
- Infants not yet mobile – at least 30 minutes tummy time throughout the day when awake. Include opportunities to reach, grasp, push, pull, and roll.

#### Toddlers (1-2 years):

- At least 180 minutes (three hours) per day in a variety of activities throughout the day at any intensity, including active and outdoor play.

#### Pre-school (3-4 years):

- Same as toddlers but above should include at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity activity.

#### Children and Young People (5-18 years)

- At least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity across the week.
- Engage in a variety of types and intensities of activities.
- Minimise time spent sitting, break up long periods of not moving.

**Adults (19-64 years)** (includes specific guidelines for pregnancy and adults with a disability):

- Be physically active every day, any activity is better than none, more is better.
- At least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) throughout the week of moderate intensity activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity.
- Include muscle strengthening activities two days a week, eg gardening, carrying heavy shopping, resistance exercise.

- Minimise time spent sitting, break up long periods of not moving.

#### Older Adults (65 years and over):

- Same as recommendations for adults above with a particular focus on including muscle strengthening, balance and flexibility activities two days a week.

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey 2018 found that only a shocking 13% of children in Northern Ireland aged 10-18 are meeting the recommended physical activity levels. By providing children with the opportunity to be active and play from an early age, we have the power to support children to be active and gain the many benefits, which will be carried into later life.

#### What can we do in response to the new physical activity guidelines?

- Be a positive role model – reflect on our own activity habits. Why not get active with the children and both of you will benefit?
- Set small, realistic goals – take the stairs instead of the lift, stand up between TV shows, do an extra five minutes activity.
- Provide the opportunity for children to play outdoors every day – have umbrellas, wellington boots, coats handy to be prepared for rainy weather!
- Consider your room layout, and make adjustments to ensure children have floor space to move and play.
- Include activities which involve movement, eg songs and rhymes with actions, movement to music, construction, arts and creativity, role play.
- Support risky play to promote development of balance, co-ordination and strengthen muscles.
- Teach children about different sports and provide resources. Invite local clubs to visit your setting to share their skills with the children.
- Share guidelines with parents/carers, display on parents' noticeboard, do a newsletter article, share on websites/Facebook. Infographics can be downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-infographics>

## Education and Training Inspectorate Update – Group Complaints Policy

The Education and Training Inspectorate would like to notify all members of Early Years – the organisation for young children with DE-funded pre-school places that details for the NI Ombudsman should be added to the Pre-school’s Complaints Procedure Policy. They should be added as the final point on the flowchart showing parents how to make a complaint. This is for any setting with DE funded pre-school places.

The Ombudsman should not be included on the Safeguarding Flowchart. The final entry on the Safeguarding Flowchart is Children’s Services Gateway Team or the Police Service of NI.

The reason for the difference is that in a safeguarding complaint, if the parent is not content with how the complaint has been handled by the Children’s Services Gateway Team or the Police Service of NI, they should pursue the complaint using the complaints procedure for that particular organisation.



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Erasmus+ Programme  
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ERASMUS + KA2 Project

### WE ARE NOT ALONE

The overall aim of the WeNA (We are not alone) project is enhancing “life satisfaction and subjective well-being” of families with children with special needs and developing their skills in coping with the “difficulties of life”.

The intellectual outputs will result in a bespoke training course which can be rolled out within the early years sector. Members of Early Years – the organisation for young children will be kept informed when the training resource is available. Stay Tuned!



## Evidence-based early childhood programmes – a visitor’s perspective

**Author: Elizabeth Ma, MD, PhD**

*Elizabeth Ma was an MD/PhD student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham who visited Northern Ireland in 2019. Her interest in specializing in Child Adolescent Psychiatry made her interested in early childhood programmes, and how Queen’s University Belfast and Early Years worked in partnership to create these innovative, evidence-based programmes to promote high quality learning outcomes for children, families and communities. She is now in her first year of her psychiatry residency at Loma Linda University.*

“It was hard that I had seen my mother at supertime. She went out, and when she was brought back, she was in a coffin... I want my children to understand that the Catholics and the Protestants, we’re all the same, we bleed the same, we cry. My feelings are the same as the ones on the Shankill Road.”

Grief. Trauma. An unpredictable moment of violence intruding on an otherwise ordinary day, changing one’s life forever – a time when the battlefield was one’s neighborhood, and even home was no longer safe. Such was the picture painted through the quotes in the memorial at Belfast City Hall. As a visitor from the United States, my prior knowledge of The Troubles was limited at best, but that memorial, along with the later realization of what the Peace Walls actually were, gave me a glimpse into the horrors experienced by civilians and militia alike. It is not difficult to imagine that the insecurity and resentment from seeing family members killed in their own homes would become a rich breeding ground for prejudice, strife, and retaliation, with unprocessed fear and bitterness that could trap generations in anger and sorrow. How then, would it be possible for these divided communities to heal, and/or make amends?

Enter Early Years, a grassroots organization that grew into a formidable force across Northern Ireland. Early Years seeks to promote the development of young children and help them grow in a peaceful, respectful way through multiple services, engaging parents and communities. One of their far-reaching, innovative programs is the Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Programme (MIFC), which uses a creative mix of personas and cartoon media in a pre-school curriculum to promote positive attitudes towards different religious and cultural backgrounds in an easy way for young children to understand. Remarkably, they have been able to run their cartoon media for three weeks on national television three times a year, so children across the entire country have exposure to the messaging, in addition to DVDs and finger puppets for parents to engage with their children at home. Evaluation studies were encouraging, demonstrating MIFC helped pre-schoolers with socio-emotional development, increasing their abilities to recognise emotions in others, instances of exclusion, and how being excluded makes someone feel, though initial studies showed no significant difference in the children’s actual willingness to include others. The curriculum has since been modified to address this issue.

I was also fortunate enough to be able to visit some of the playgroups and shared sessions which Early Years supports, the latter of which I thought was a wonderful way to help to break down social barriers, as both the children and their parents would have the chance to meet and bond with others of a different community. I was very impressed by the playgroups I visited and will use Carryduff as an example. Their curriculum was meticulously planned and thoughtful about incorporating ways to empower the children, such as putting the maximum number of kids allowed per activity on the wall to encourage them to self-regulate, or minimizing punitive use of a 'reflection bubble' for time-out by letting children use it voluntarily as well if they needed a break. They also made full use of their classroom, including educational decorations for seasonal holidays of different cultures like Chinese New Year, and they made excellent use of the Media Initiative puppets as 'real' members of their playgroup, which the children could take home in turns and share their adventures to the group later.

In addition, I was introduced to Splash Sure Start, which offers multiple services to help every child aged from birth to 4 years old get the best start in life, including engaging parents and carers, as well as the Toybox project, which provides a rights-based outreach service for Traveller children aged 0-4 aimed at tackling inequalities in Traveller education.

At Queen's University in Belfast, there is also incredible work being done for children and their families through their Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation (CESI). The LINKS network, in partnership with UNICEF, Yale, Harvard, and New York University, helps support the development and evaluation of early childhood development (ECD) programs that contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding in low- and middle-income countries that have been ravaged by conflict. The ECD services are broad in scope, from providing prenatal care and home-based programs for caregivers, to setting up community centers and schools for health, social care, and education. LINKS also trains and supports each country's local partners in research design, analysis, and reporting, to help them acquire the skills needed for further development and evaluation of these programs.

Other interesting projects at the CESI include Campbell reviews relating to children's social-emotional development and emotional regulation, the Youth Wellbeing NI study to assess the prevalence of mental disorders in 2-19 year olds across Northern Ireland, and the Care Pathways and Outcomes Study, a longitudinal study to evaluate where the 374 children who were under 5 years old and in public care in 2000 ended up living, and how well they are doing there.

In short, there is an impressive array of work being done by both Early Years and Queen's University to address previous traumas and provide a path towards healing for Northern Ireland (and beyond). Their efforts are the embodiment of this quote of hope from the memorial at Belfast City Hall, which happened to be on same panel as the first: "You can take something broken from the past and from that you can make something new that symbolizes looking forward and the future."

## Acknowledgements:

I'd like to thank Dr. Siobhan Fitzpatrick, and everyone at Early Years who welcomed me and helped plan and show me the various aspects of the work being done in the organisation, and thank you to all the playgroups, shared sessions, and programmes that allowed me to visit (see list below). I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Connolly and his team at Queen's University for helping to plan my trip, including housing and introducing me to the projects at CESI. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. James Leckman at Yale University, who introduced me to the both teams in Northern Ireland, and without whom this trip would not have been possible.

Special thanks to all settings/sessions/people who helped facilitate a visit:

Benmore Playgroup, Belfast

Carryduff Playgroup, Belfast

Splash Sure Start, Armagh

Sharing from the Start partnership session at Carr's Glen Primary and Nursery School, Belfast with Stanhope Street Controlled Nursery, Belfast and Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, Belfast

Sharing from the Start partnership session at Ballymena Nursery School (First Steps Playgroup and Castle Tower Special School)

Sharing from the Start partnership session at Clogher Valley Playgroup with Woodland Playgroup and Tru Beginnings Community Childcare



Dressing up in traditional ethnic wear of different cultures with new friends during an interactive lesson on Cultures Around the World at the Monaghan Shared Session.