

Introduction

You will often hear the Igbo and Yoruba Proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child'. This phrase refers to the collective responsibility of the whole community in supporting children to grow and develop into active citizens. As more and more children are spending significant time in their early childhood being cared for by people other than their parents, and many of these children attend an early years service, the service is a key part of the 'village'.

As an early years educator, you have a role to play in supporting this ideal of a collective, community-based approach to caring for and educating young children. How this might look depends on many factors and there is no 'one size fits all' approach. However, the concept of promoting and supporting the development of a child's identity and feelings of belonging should be at the core of any approaches taken to community involvement.

In this booklet we outline the benefits of community involvement for young children in early years settings and address some of the practical approaches that you, as an educator, can implement within your service.

What is Community Involvement?

Community involvement in an early years service can take many forms, from proactively seeking the resources, amenities and opportunities available in the community, such as sports clubs, the local library, local park/green area and shops, to establishing networks and working relationships with other organisations, for example, health services, your County Childcare Committee or early years networks.

Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006), states that a quality approach to community involvement factors in all of the above:

Promoting community involvement requires the establishment of networks and connections evidenced by policies, procedures and actions which extend and support all adults' and children's engagement with the wider community.

(Siolta Standard 16)

One of the key elements of community involvement is the importance of making connections with voluntary and statutory organisations. This takes the form of professional links with national and regional organisations and, more importantly, local community ones. It is important for early years services to establish themselves as being part of that community. For many families, the early childhood setting may be their first contact with the wider community beyond their home. It is, therefore, often a resource for families to learn more about their community and make other connections.

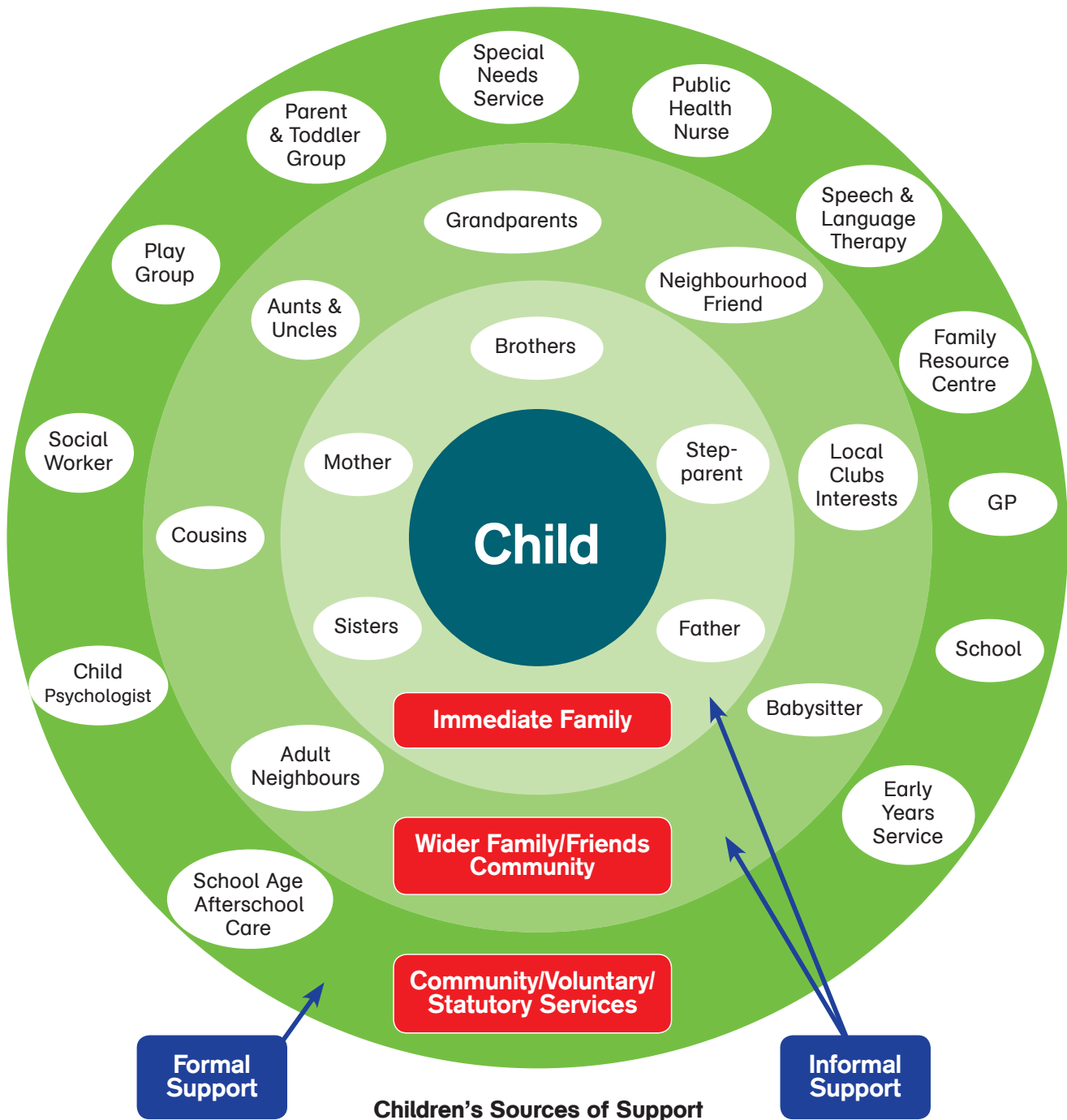
A sense of community plays an important role in the development of children's awareness of their identity and feelings of belonging. If the early years service can demonstrate clear connections with the community in a meaningful way, this can promote a child's sense of belonging to that community and help shape their responsibility to it.

Community involvement can be a challenge as establishing links takes time and conscious effort. While it is important to be realistic about any limitations, it is essential to remember that while you may think the approaches you need to take are big or overwhelming, sometimes small steps are fine.

Why is Community Involvement Important?

For the child

As learning and development takes place in a social context, children's ever-evolving learning occurs not just in the family but also in community and society. Urie Bronfenbrenner highlighted this in his Ecological Systems Theory, which reminds us that the child does not exist alone, that there are a number of interdependent relationships and networks that support the growing child. Each contact a child has impacts on their view of the world. If these interactions are considered and children are supported, they gain an understanding of how that world operates.



Having close links with their community also plays an important role in the development of children's identity and belonging, enabling them to feel part of society and ultimately become active citizens within it. For a child to know where they 'belong' enhances their sense of who they are and gives them the confidence to form relationships and to try new things. This, in turn, will have a long-lasting impact on their social and emotional well-being. The earlier the role of the community in the lives of young children is recognised, the better the chances children have of achieving at school and in life in general (Cotton, 2000).

Children are increasingly living in multicultural and diverse communities, and in order for them to appreciate this and understand where they 'fit', it is important for them to develop a sense of identity. This identity can be enhanced and supported by a child's community being represented



within the early years service, along with a conscious awareness on the part of educators as to how this impacts on the child's well-being. The development of identity, therefore, primarily comes from experience; children acquire new ideas about themselves and others, and modify old ones, as they encounter their social and physical world (O'Dwyer, 2006).

By using the wider community within the context of the curriculum, the early years service is providing a broad learning experience for the child. Venturing out into the community adds to the richness of children's lives and helps to broaden their perspective, encourages positive exploration, allows them to make connections between the service and the outside world, and opens up the possibility of them doing similar things with their parents.

It is also important to bring the community in to the service. This can be achieved by inviting a variety of people in to meet the children. This might include people children might not normally have the chance to meet such as those from different cultures or people with a disability. Educators can also display images of their local surroundings and community, or this could be part of a project that involves the children.

By exposing the child to different elements of their community and supporting them when doing so, educators are also contributing to children's understanding of the importance of their participation in community development and sustainability. Involving children in local environmental issues such as clean-up campaigns, for example, will impact on their understanding of the role they can play in looking after their community in an active way.

For the parent/carer

The link a parent/carer has with the early years service may be one of the first that they establish outside of their immediate family or community. The relationship that is developed plays a crucial role in supporting them as a parent/carer. Initially that support may be in relation to child development and parenting advice, but as time progresses and the growing needs of the child and family change, other types of information about accessible community amenities and facilities are important. These could range from information on health services to details of events on in the local library that might be of interest to them as a parent/family, which will enhance their capacity to meet the needs of their child and support their well-being as a parent/carer.

For the educators/service

Community involvement can take many forms for an early years service from proactively seeking information and making connections with the different amenities and groups within the local community to establishing links with professional organisations at a regional and national level.

Strong links with the local community provides early years educators with invaluable information and resources. By drawing on community knowledge and expertise, you will be better able to understand the children and families with whom you work, and better able to provide children with learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant to their lives. In order to understand and respond to children's needs, early years services need to connect and interact with the environment in which children live and grow, thus reflecting the reality of children's lives.

There is no denying that making these connections or getting involved takes time and effort. However, by viewing community involvement as part of the curriculum and with an understanding of the long-term benefits, you can build activities into your daily routine that will enhance and support it. It is also important to remember that getting involved with the community does not always need to be on a grand scale. For example, an activity such as watching the bin truck collect the refuse may mean not even having to leave the premises, therefore staff ratios remain the same and the whole group can be involved. This activity could be built into the curriculum and the learning extended to environmental issues and the importance of keeping our communities clean.

Maintaining links with regional and national organisations can help a service keep up to date with policy changes and new regulations. They can offer advice and support to enhance your role as an educator.



Community Involvement in Quality Frameworks and Regulations

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009), promotes the importance of community involvement in all four of its themes.

The Aistear theme of **Identity and Belonging** is about 'children developing a positive sense of who they are, and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community'. This is broken down into the following aims:

- **Aim 1** Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories.
- **Aim 2** Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.
- **Aim 3** Children will see themselves as capable learners.

The theme of **Well-being** is about children being confident, happy and healthy. Aistear describes two elements of well-being – psychological and physical – and further explains that 'children's relationships and interactions with their families and communities contribute significantly to their sense of well-being'. This theme includes the following aims:

- **Aim 1** Children will be strong psychologically and socially.
- **Aim 4** Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life.

The theme of **Exploring and Thinking** is about children making sense of the things, places and people in their world by interacting with others, playing, investigating, questioning, and forming, testing and refining ideas. This is highlighted in the following aim:

- **Aim 1** Children will learn about and make sense of the world around them.

The theme of **Communicating** is about children sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes.

Being involved with their community will support and enhance all of the above for children.

Siolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

The 12 Principles of Quality in Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006), represent the vision which underpins and provides the context for quality practice. The Principle focusing on parents highlights that ‘the development of connections and interactions between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also adds to the enrichment of early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which the child lives and grows’.

There are a number of Standards within Siolta that reference the importance of involving the wider community in the care and education of the child.

Standard 16 Community Involvement promotes community involvement in all four of its components while Standard 14 is about the importance of Identity and Belonging. In Standard 3 Parents and Families, Component 3.3 highlights the importance of educators being ‘responsive and sensitive to the provision of information and support to parents in their key role in the learning and development of the child’.



Early Years Regulations

The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 (DCYA, 2016) include several aspects of practice relating to community involvement that services must take into consideration. These include:

- Outings Policy
- Parental consent
- Risk assessment
- Planning
- Staff ratios

Early Years Education Focused Inspection (EYEI)

Early Years Education Focused Inspections are based on a quality framework that is informed by the principles of Síolta and Aistear as well as national and international research related to early childhood education and inspection. The quality framework incorporates the key elements of best practice in early education and categorises provision under four broad areas. Within these areas, the importance of a child developing a strong sense of identity and belonging is highlighted as well as promoting the best use of your environment to support the child's learning and development.

Community involvement is specifically referenced in the following (DES, 2016):

- **Area 1 Quality of context to support children's learning and development:** Key outcome 3 – Children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured.
Signpost for practice... consider the extent to which the setting has made connections and is integrated with the local community.
- **Area 3 Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements:** Key outcome 14 – Children are developing a sense of identity and belonging and personal and social skills to support their learning and development.
Signpost for practice... consider the extent to which the children have an awareness of their local community and roles of different people within that community.



How Community Involvement Works in Practice

Establishing networks and connections

Establishing networks and connections can take time but the long-term benefits for an early years service are immense. Affiliation to national organisations such as Barnardos and Early Childhood Ireland, regional organisations such as County and City Childcare Committees and networks will provide information and keep you up to date with what is happening in the development of early years care and education in Ireland and abroad. This applies in particular to legislation and regulation issues but also to new research and approaches, as the field of early years care and education is ever changing.

The resources needed to achieve professional practice may be accessed through the above organisations in terms of training and information about funding opportunities that arise on a yearly basis. Attending events and/or availing of both accredited and non-accredited training opportunities will promote your service, widen your professional network and expose you to new ideas in terms of practice, none of which can be undervalued. There are also a number of local and national programmes and initiatives that will be of benefit to all those in the early years setting such as the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme for pre-school services run by the National Childhood Network.



- How do you ensure that your service keeps up-to-date with new legislation, regulations, policy/practice developments?
- Can you think of ways that this can be improved upon or further developed?

On a local level, each service will take a different approach to community involvement as it depends on the nature of the community with which you are working. What matters most is that your approach is genuine, and that everyone in the service appreciates and understands how making connections with local organisations will have a positive impact on all children and adults using the service.

- **Team up with local residents associations.** These can be a great source for understanding the community in which children are living and the issues that are impacting on that community. Residents associations are also a forum where the service can be represented and seen as a resource in the community for others to use.
- **Support local events and get involved in local issues.** As mentioned previously, getting involved in local clean-ups is a great way to engage with the community, to promote a sense of belonging and address environmental issues. This ties in with the Aistear theme Well-being, Aim 4, Learning Goal 6 that children be 'active citizens'. Some services participate in local fun days such as St Patrick's Day Parades or cultural events such as art festivals.
- **Engage with local statutory organisations** such as Tusla, HSE, Garda, schools, Early Intervention teams, local GP, dentist etc. For example, most services will promote healthy eating and build this into their curriculum throughout the year and some will invite the local Public Health Nurse to the service to talk about this. A lead on from this could be to invite a dentist in to talk about the importance of oral hygiene. Both of these visits could include parents by having them in attendance or having leaflets available to them in relation to both topics.
- **Invite members of organisations to sit on the management committee.**
- **Contact local sport clubs and sporting facilities.** Making these connections not only supports the promotion of these clubs and groups but also provides opportunities for them to visit the service and share skills with the children.
- **Engage with local cultural amenities** such as theatres, music centres, museums, art centres, libraries, heritage centres and voluntary groups (e.g., drama, dance). Libraries, for example, offer many free services such as story-telling sessions and art competitions, or consider having the children's art work displayed in the library. These amenities can support the Aistear theme of Communicating, Aim 4, Learning Goal 6 that children will 'show confidence in trying out new things, taking risks, and thinking creatively'.

- **Discover local social and environmental activities** and find out what events are happening in the community parks and gardens, sports facilities, fire station, open farms, zoo or cinema. Parks, for example, often have activities for children such as scavenger hunts, while simply being out in nature can be linked to many aspects of the curriculum, are great fun and loved by all.
- **Consider local parent supports** such as parenting programmes, social clubs/societies or support groups for families of a child with a disability. Whether your service is facilitating these types of support or not, providing information such as this can be a lifeline for some parents, particularly those who are new to the area or are feeling isolated.
- **Link with other services** such as parent and toddler groups, crèches, childminders, primary schools, after school programmes, post-primary schools and colleges to share information. Promote your service where possible, particularly if you are offering extra supports to parents such as information talks on issues such as child health and development.
- **Link in with existing local websites and social media pages** – most schools, organisations and local areas have developed websites and these can be a useful means of finding out what is happening in your area and promoting your service.



- What other services/amenities are in your local area that are relevant to parents and families?
- How do you link with them?
- How could you improve on what you are currently doing and who you are linking with?



On another level, the day-to-day connections with the local community must be visible to the child. If we want children to make connections with their community, a service needs to consider the example they are setting and the opportunities that they provide for such learning to occur. Involving children wherever possible in such connections makes the experience meaningful in the child's eye and is more important than the service's once-a-year participation in a local event. Everyday engagement with the local community might involve:

- **Going to the local shop.**
- **Going to the post office.**
- **Engaging with the delivery man or postman** when the post is delivered. The postman delivering post is an everyday occurrence in an early years service and combining this with a visit to the post office will support children to understand the process of posting a letter and what happens to it. A starting point could be children writing a letter to themselves and having it delivered to the service. This supports the Aistear theme Identity and Belonging, Aim 2, Learning Goal 6 that children will 'understand the different roles of people in the community'.
- **Using local amenities such as the playground, library, park/forest.** This will support Aistear's Identity and Belonging Aim 2, Learning Goal 5



that children will 'see themselves as part of a wider community and know about their local area, including some of its places, features and people'. Being outside in nature is good for all aspects of children's development.

- **Engaging with the maintenance worker/gardener.** If your service directly employs or contracts out any work around the service, involve the children where you can. Children enjoy planting and digging or watching repairs being done. Through this they are learning about different roles/types of jobs as well as the importance of caring for the service. By involving children in this they will learn about the idea of collective responsibility.
- **Going to the recycling bank.** This can start very small in the service by involving the children in consciously recycling items. You can then expand on this by bringing items to a recycling bank with the children.
- **Getting involved in fundraising events** is hugely important in developing a child's sense of citizenship and promoting empathy in the child. Children can learn from an early age about support that others may need. For it to be more meaningful to the child, consider getting involved in an event that will benefit other children, for example, Barnardos 'Big Toddle', Early Childhood Ireland's 'Pyjama Day' or ISPCC's 'Cheerios Childline Breakfast'. These are national events but locally your service could do something small. For example, at Christmas, place tags on the service's Christmas tree if you have one, and encourage children to take a tag and purchase a gift for a child. This could be done in aid of your local children's ward or to support refugee families.
- **Visiting local care homes for the elderly** might not be easily achieved but with some planning and a clear aim, it can be very enriching for all involved. Possible suggestions include singing carols at Christmas time or participating in an Easter tea party. Have a conversation with the manager of your local care home to see what's possible.



- How does your service involve the community in your everyday practice?
- What small/medium/large activities are you currently doing throughout the year?
- What else would work for you and how can you do it?

Informing the community about the service

Informing the community about the service is very important. While early years services are perfectly placed to play an important role in the local community, they can easily become cut off and isolated from that community. The 'busyness' of the day takes over and often it is easier to stay within the boundaries of the setting. Raising the profile of the service helps to establish your position as a key player in the community, which will ensure that you are seen as a resource and support for parents/carers. This can be achieved through the following:

- **Put up signage** – people need to know who you are, what you do and where you are.
- **Distribute flyers/posters in key locations** such as the local post office, shops or health centre. The service can also be promoted in local newspapers.
- **Link with schools** – display flyers promoting information evenings and general information about your service in the school or on their website.
- **Link with parent/toddler groups** – display flyers about your service and any information evenings you are holding, and if possible meet with the group.
- **Display children's artwork in public areas** such as local shopping centres or libraries. This will support the Aistear theme Identity and Belonging, Aim 1, Learning Goal 5 where children 'feel valued and see themselves and their interests reflected in the environment'.



- How do parents and the extended community know about your service and what you offer?
- How do you promote the service?
- What could you do differently to improve upon this?

Displaying information in your setting

Displaying information about community events and amenities can be a vital resource for parents/carers as it highlights the range of supports and experiences that they can avail of. This information should be planned rather than ad hoc and be displayed clearly. The display board should be easily identifiable and, more importantly, updated regularly. A range of information can be displayed such as:

- Local and regional cultural events
- Family-orientated events
- Parent/toddler groups in the area
- GP opening hours
- Library information and events being held both locally and regionally
- Clubs and groups
- Local Health Centre information (opening times, services available etc.)
- Fundraising events

There can be a tendency to over-crowd displays, which can result in information being overlooked. This can be addressed in a number of ways, for example, assigning one member of staff to review the board on a daily/weekly basis, taking down any material that is out of date or no longer relevant. It also may be practical to display a full range of health-orientated information in a separate section if space allows.



- Where are your notice boards located?
- What information is displayed and who takes responsibility for it?



Visitors

Having visitors come in to the service is a wonderful way of expanding the experiences of the children and exposing them to different roles within their community. Contact with the surrounding community and people in that community provides children with a rich and diverse learning environment. Visits should be planned and well thought-out to ensure that the experience will support desired outcomes for the children and can be linked to the curriculum. It is important to spend time helping the children to prepare for the visit, for example, devising questions together to ask the visitor. Explain as best you can what will happen on the day when the visitor arrives and ensure that additional supports required by any of the children are considered. It can be helpful to pass any prepared questions on to the visitor and inform them of any children with specific requirements that are in the group. Planning is important to ensure that the visit is a good experience for all involved. You will also need to allow time for the children to engage and have fun with the experience... allow for the unexpected.

Community representatives can be drawn from a wide range of sources. Those that are commonly used include:

- Local Garda
- Fire service
- Dentist/Hygienist
- Public Health Nurses
- GP

While the above are a great resource for early years services, there are other types of visitors that are sometimes overlooked. These might include:

- A local farmer
- A parent/grandparent to read a story or demonstrate a skill. Grandparents may have knowledge of local history or tales of local folklore they can share with the children.
- A parent/grandparent from another culture
- A representative from a local club

There are many forms that such visits can take and within even the smallest team there will be established connections to other professionals and/or services that could play a part in the children's everyday experiences. Such visits will support the Aistear theme Exploring and Thinking Aim 1, Learning Goal 2 that children will 'demonstrate a growing understanding of themselves and others in their community' as well as Well-being Aim 2, Learning Goal 2 that children 'know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcomed'.

Remember that even from a young age children can project strong opinions about gender roles or cultural issues. When considering visitors, think about individuals working in roles that challenge stereotypes. Do you know a female fire officer or a male nurse?

Inviting parents to these visits will also enhance the experience for the child and could support the parent in their role.



- How often throughout the year are visits arranged?
- Who visits and how does it link with your curriculum?
- What preparation does the visit need?
- As a team, are there other potential visitors that you could consider?



Outings

Outings will enhance the learning opportunities provided within the programme as the wider environment will provide rich and new experiences that may be limited within the setting, particularly if outdoor space is limited. Organised outings such as nature walks, visits to local amenities and involvement in local initiatives provide children with essential opportunities to participate in new and exciting activities, as well as increasing their comprehension of life beyond the context of the home and setting. This supports the Aistear theme Well-being Aim 1, Learning Goal 1 that children 'make strong attachments and develop warm and supportive relationships with family, peers and adults in out-of-home settings and in their community'.

It is important that children have time to observe their surroundings and comment on them in order to expand their interest and understanding of the world around them.

There are issues to consider when planning an outing such as:

- Outings Policy
- Transport Policy
- Ratios
- Risk assessment



- How many outings do you facilitate throughout the year?
- What type of outings do you arrange?
- What could you do differently to make it possible to go on more outings?

The ideas that have been explored above should not be one-off activities, what matters is that any involvement in and with the community is regular and ongoing and is part of the everyday experience for the child. Early years services need to consider what is possible for them to achieve. Starting small but in a meaningful way can lead to bigger adventures.

Consulting with Children

For community involvement to have a greater impact on children, their voices need to be heard. Early years educators can find out what children are interested in through observations and by involving them in curriculum planning. Each of these methods will enlighten you as to the activities, outings and visitors you need to consider to have the desired outcomes. This will ensure that the Aistear theme Identity and Belonging Aim 4, Learning Goal 5 that children 'experience learning opportunities that are based on personal interests, and linked to their home, community and culture' is achieved.

Siolta Standard 1 Rights of the Child states that 'Ensuring that each child's rights are met requires that she/he is enabled to exercise choice and to use initiative as an active participant and partner in her/his own development and learning.' By including all children as co-constructors of their world, you encourage their continued growth and independence. When children realise that their ideas and suggestions are being valued – and see them come to life – this will give them more confidence in their own ideas and self-worth. Children, therefore, should be consulted about matters that affect them, including how they would like to be involved with their community.

- When consulting with verbal children, ask them questions that are open-ended rather than ones that require yes or no answers. Open-ended questions lead to creative and exploratory thinking.
- When you consult with children, be aware of any specific requirements, such as children who use non-verbal forms of communication, have hearing or sight impairments or cognitive issues.
- Picture boards and puppets can be used with non-verbal children to assist the communication process and to ensure the child's voice is listened to and acted on. These activities are suitable for all children and by engaging with them in this manner, you are structuring inclusive interactions.
- You can also engage children as a group. For example, at circle time you might ask children to suggest an activity they like and ask for a show of hands to see how popular it will be. You might enrich this by asking children to count the number of raised hands in order to contribute to their social and numeracy skills.
- You may need to engage with some children on a one-to-one basis to ensure understanding and recognition of their viewpoint in decision making.

Community Involvement and Families

For community involvement to have a long-term impact on children it is important that parents are aware from the outset what you do and why you do it. The benefits of their child being active in the community is an important message for them to hear, because it is only with their support that their child will reap the benefits.

The conversation with families starts when the child enrolls and it then should become an on-going message throughout the child's participation in the service. This is achieved through:

- Inviting them to talks by professionals aimed at families in the service.
- Inviting them to the 'fun' visitor days that are aimed at the child.
- Involving them in fundraising events.
- Encouraging them to 'show off' a skill.
- Keeping them informed through the noticeboard, photos displayed, newsletters of what the service is doing.
- Consulting with them – find out if parents/carers have ideas of how the service can get involved in the community... spark their interest!



Frequently Asked Questions

Q I am a lone worker, it is not possible to bring the children on outings. What can I do?

A This is a common challenge as many services operate like this. Two possible solutions to consider are:

- Is there another service in your area that you could work with for joint outings?
- Could you enlist the support of parents/grandparents to volunteer on these occasions?

Q Going on outings can be costly and as a manager I feel I can't ask parents to contribute nor can I absorb the cost. What should I do?

A Yes, transport is costly, particularly for services that are rural based, so always carefully consider the circumstances in which you need it.

Large-scale outings such as going to the beach, zoo or cultural event might require transport, but these are possibly only organised once per year. If there is plenty of notice given to parents, they often don't mind contributing. Contact local bus companies to see what the costs might be and build a relationship with them.

On a week-to-week basis, many outings do not require transport. Simply going out for a walk and engaging the children with what they see and hear will have a great impact on their learning and development.

Q My service is in an urban setting and there are not many 'nice' places for us to go to. What can I do?

A This too is an experience for many services, but that community belongs to the children, so it is part of their every day. Consider the idea of bringing the outside in – display photographs of the surrounding buildings, shops and businesses, and create a map of the community with the children. This can lead to many conversations about where they live and it might help you see what they see.

Q As a manager I don't live close to the service, therefore I don't know many people in the community or who is involved in clubs or groups. How can I find out?

A You may not be local but there is possibly a team member who is or a parent might be able and willing to provide you with information. When you start reflecting on how active your service is in the community, involve the team. Raise it as a topic in a team meeting and find out who knows who. Make a list of all possible contacts and then decide where to start. Begin with three or four contacts initially and establish them well before expanding. Parents can also be a great source of information and sometimes are involved themselves in groups/clubs/businesses.

Q Do visitors/volunteers need to be Garda Vetted?

A If an individual is volunteering or visiting the service on a regular basis they need Garda Vetting. For one-off visits or volunteering no Garda Vetting is required, but guidelines need to be in place to ensure children's safety.

Q Are risk assessments necessary if we are just going for a small walk?

A Yes. The purpose of the risk assessment is to help you identify possible risks and hazards but more importantly to identify solutions and resources needed. They are a very useful tool to help you plan for the activity.

For children to become active members of their community and develop a sense of citizenship they need support from all significant adults in their lives and to really experience what it means to be involved and participate on all levels.

Finding ways to effectively engage with the community and the time in which to do it can be challenging. Early years educators need to think carefully what can be done within the means of the service. Start with what you know already and consider your existing contacts as this will create opportunities for making changes that will be successful and more genuine. Effective engagement is based on building relationships, and relationships take time to develop. Even the most elaborate examples of community involvement usually started small.