



Welcome to the first Newsletter on the national evaluation of NEYAI and Síolta. NEYAI refers to National Early Years Access Initiative (2011-2014) and is made up of 11 projects, each demonstrating different ways to improve quality in early years services. Síolta refers to the formal quality improvement programme (2010-2013) and was set up to enable 140 childcare centres to reach the 16 Síolta standards.

This Newsletter gives you latest news about the evaluation, some emerging findings, and lets you know about the overall timeframe for producing the final evaluation report. The Newsletter is also a way of acknowledging everyone who contributed to the evaluation. It is a way of saying thank-you for your support since the evaluation could not have happened without the staff and parents who completed the questionnaires.

This evaluation is not just about producing a report however. It is also about finding and implementing ways to improve the quality of early years services so that children enjoy it more, thrive under its influence and, for children in the Free Pre-School Year, are more ready to learn when they start school. Quality improvement can only happen when those directly involved in early years services, especially staff, are open to developing their understanding of what is best for each child's development, are motivated to improve their skills in working with children, and want to be the best they can be. We know from the evaluation that this is already the case.

We are sending you this Newsletter at an important time in the evaluation since we are about to start collecting follow-up data and we need your support to make sure that everyone who completed a baseline questionnaire (the first questionnaire) also completes a follow-up questionnaire. It is only by matching baseline and follow-up questionnaires that we can know what changes may have happened and what may have contributed to those changes.

NEWSLETTER May 2013

National Evaluation of NEYAI & Síolta

NEYAI Evaluation of
National Early Years
Access Initiative

 **pobal**
government supporting communities

What is this study about?

The evaluation focuses on children in the Free Pre-School Year.

Its purpose is to identify the 'active ingredients' associated with improving the skills and capacity of staff and how this, in turn, influences each child's developmental outcomes.

With that in mind, it is trying to answer two specific questions:

- Do childcare centres in NEYAI and Síolta have an impact on staff capacity and child outcomes?
- If yes, what are the 'active ingredients' associated with improved staff capacity and child outcomes?

There are 89 centres in the evaluation. Nearly 750 staff completed the on-line Staff Questionnaire at baseline. Detailed baseline assessments were carried out on nearly 500 children and we have also interviewed the parents of these children. The follow-up questionnaires will be completed between the end of May and the end of June 2013, as close as possible to the end of the Free Pre-School Year. You can read more details about the evaluation at: www.neyai-evaluation.ie



What is the Free Pre-School Year?

The purpose of the Free Pre-School Year, according to the Department of Children & Youth Affairs, is to make early learning available to children in the year before they commence primary school. Children between the ages of three years two months and four years seven months are eligible. In 2012, the Free Pre-School Year was delivered by over 4,000 childcare providers to nearly 66,000 children. The minimum staff ratio is one staff to 11 children which is a more favourable ratio than the EU average of one staff to 14 children. Because of the Free Pre-School Year, Ireland now has one of the highest enrolments of 3-4 year-olds in early childhood education in the EU.

21,000 staff employed in the childcare sector in Ireland

Did you know?

- There are approximately 4,300 childcare centres in Ireland, more than all primary schools (3,300) and second-level schools (723) combined.
- The number of staff employed in the childcare sector in Ireland is around 21,000. By contrast, there are approximately 32,000 full-time equivalent teaching staff in primary schools.
- **Síolta** is the Irish word for seed. It expresses the potential of children to grow and succeed.
- **Aistear** is the Irish word for journey. It expresses the idea that early childhood marks the beginning of a child's lifelong learning journey.

What has been happening in the early years sector in Ireland?

The early years sector refers to the care and education of children aged 0-6 and contains three phases in the life of a child: children from birth to 18 months; children from 18 months to three years; children from three to six years. The most significant developments in the sector over the past few years have been:

1. The National Framework for Early Childhood Education (Síolta) published in 2006 and the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (Aistear) published in 2009;
2. Introduction of the Free Pre-School Year in 2010 for every child aged between three years two months and four years seven months;
3. Initiatives to improve quality and outcomes in the early years sector through NEYAI and the Síolta Quality Improvement Programme;
4. Investment in early years services, especially the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme, by Atlantic Philanthropies and Government Departments.

How much is the Irish Government investing in the early years sector?

In 2012, public expenditure on childcare services in Ireland was €266m, about two thirds of this on the Free Pre-School Year. If this is averaged across the 66,000 children in the Free Pre-School Year in that year, average State expenditure per pre-school child amounts to €2,629 which is about half the average expenditure in the EU per child on pre-primary education in 2009 (€5,189).

4,300 childcare centres in Ireland, more than all primary schools (3,300) and second-level schools (723) combined.

Who works in the early years sector?

Childcare staff in Ireland are predominantly female with only 2-3% male. In this study, the proportion of staff who have a Level 5 or higher qualification in childcare (83%) is above the national average for the childcare sector (76%).

Employment in the childcare sector in Ireland breaks down:

those who are full-time 46%
part-time 40%
and on employment schemes 14%
and this is broadly the same in our sample.

The work experience of staff divides into:

those with up to three years 32%
those with 4-8 years 34%
and those with 9 years or more 34%

In the next newsletter, after the follow-up data has been collected, we will report other findings about what staff think and feel about their work and workplace, their personal well-being, and the quality of their relationships with children and parents.

Are there any conclusions from the study yet?

The study has collected a large amount of baseline data but we can only draw conclusions about the impact of the Free Pre-School Year when we collect and analyse the follow-up data. The results so far tell us that the quality of the data is very high, thanks to the staff and parents who completed the questionnaires. There is almost no missing data which is rare in a study like this and great credit is due to all who participated. A particularly reassuring finding is that all the questionnaires work well in measuring what we term 'staff capacity' and 'child outcomes'.

What are the next steps?

The next step involves collecting follow-up data. This will take place between the end of May and the end of June 2013, as close as possible to the end of the Free Pre-School Year. Analysis of the data, including case studies, will be undertaken in the second half of 2013 and the first quarter of 2014. Our expectation is that this work, and the final report, will be completed in the first quarter of 2014.

Evaluator's Timetable

May / June 2013	Follow-up data collection
Second half 2013 & first quarter 2014	Analysis of data; case studies on staff capacity & child outcomes
End March 2014	Final Report

What do we know about children in the Free Pre-School Year?

In this study, children were assessed by staff using the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The EDI is widely used for measuring the overall development of children from three years eight months and older. In Australia for example, every child is assessed using the EDI when they start school and the same applies in Canada where the EDI was first developed. The EDI covers five domains of a child's development: physical health & well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language & cognitive development; communication skills and general knowledge.

This is the first study in Ireland, or indeed anywhere, to use the EDI outside the formal school setting where it is completed by childcare workers rather than teachers. The results so far indicate that the EDI is a suitable way to measure child outcomes of the Free Pre-School Year.

In this study, children's EDI scores were highest for physical health & well-being and lowest for language & cognitive skills. The EDI also identifies children who are 'developmentally at risk', defined as those with the lowest 10% of scores, and in this study these are much more likely to be boys. This is not unexpected and is consistent with all other EDI studies because of recognised differences in the developmental pathways of boys and girls. Staff also identified a minority of children who need additional learning supports (13%), similar to the proportion of children identified by teachers as having special education needs in primary school. Again the prevalence is higher among boys.



Parent Questionnaire Prize Winners



1st prize Winner NEYAI:

Ringsend and District Community Crèche

Child: Sophie Browne
Mother: Eileen Browne
34 O'Rahilly House,
Ringsend, Dublin 4



2nd prize Winner NEYAI:

Southill Children's Nursery

Child: Lucy Dillon
Mother: Deborah Dillon
Castleroberts, Adare,
Co. Limerick



3rd prize winner NEYAI:

St. Brendan's Pre-school

Child: Jaden Rutherford
Mother: Marguerite Rutherford,
7 Chapel Gate, Ballyvolane, Cork



1st prize winner Síolta:

Grovelands Childcare

Child: Aaron Meares
Mother: Susanne Meares
43 Rivervillage, Athlone, Co
Roscommon



2nd prize winner Síolta:

Ruan Community Childcare Ltd

Child: Sarah Curtis
Mother: Fiona Roche
Attyterilla, Ruan, Co. Clare
*Fiona has donated the prize to the
Ruan Community Childcare Centre.
Photo of Orla Fitzpatrick from the
Ruan Community Childcare Centre.*



3rd prize winner Síolta:

Newtowncunningham Community Playgroup

Child: Ryley James Doherty
Mother: Sarah McGrath
Ballybegely,
Newtowncunningham,
Co Donegal

Who funds this Initiative?

- The Atlantic Philanthropies
- Mount Street Club Trust
- Department of Education & Skills
- Department of Children & Youth Affairs

Who supports this Initiative?

- NEYAI Steering Group
- Evaluation and Learning Expert Advisory Group
- Pobal (www.pobal.ie)

Who are the Evaluators?

The Evaluation is led by Kieran McKeown
(www.kieranmckeown.ie) in collaboration with
Trutz Haase (www.trutzhaase.eu).

Other Events

Pobal and the evaluation team is planning another
Newsletter to disseminate findings of the evaluation.
There will also be a conference to launch the final report
in 2014.

The National Early Years Access Initiative 2010-2014

The National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) is a collaboration between a number of funding partners namely, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Mount Street Club Trust, The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Board of Pobal.

