



1997 - 2015



2015 -

National Conference

QUALITY CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN IRELAND: WORKING TOGETHER TO SHAPE OUR 2020 VISION

Childminding | Crèche/Full Daycare | Sessional Pre-school | After-school

Fast Forwarding Proposals & Action

Sheraton Hotel, Athlone
Fri 20th & Sat 21st March 2015

Ireland's right to high quality childhood services deserves a comprehensive and imaginative range of supports that will promote the rights of children and meet the diverse needs of parents/families and the workforce. Getting it right for all will require collaborative working, informed decision making, creative thinking, policy development and increased investment. This two day conference provides an opportunity for a broad range of stakeholders to come together, discuss, debate and agree the way forward to ensure the delivery of quality childhood services in Ireland for all.



Supporting the achievement of national quality standards in early childhood and after school services

Background to the Conference

In 2004, the Border Counties Childhood Network (National Childhood Network from March 3rd 2015) held an Open Space Conference for people and organisations working in the Early Childhood sector. That conference - Investing, Sustaining and Supporting Early Childhood Services: Writing Ireland's Future Success Story - provided a valuable forum for discussion and debate which resulted in delegates from a diverse range of backgrounds achieving agreement on many key issues and recommendations for change. New proposals to secure the sustainability of services and the achievement of quality standards were agreed and presented to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to inform Government policy.

A decade later significant developments have taken place, but we are still a long way from securing the delivery of high quality, affordable Early Childhood and After School services for all children and families in Ireland. Many problems identified in 2004 remain and new ones have emerged - despite much work, investment and great ambition, the provision of Early Childhood and After School services is weighed down with many problems, not least the poor terms and conditions for staff.

We know the barriers to excellence and outstanding services - but what are YOUR solutions for now and into the future? To achieve real change we must collectively agree what needs to happen to accelerate progress and ensure all childhood services are supported to meet national quality standards and that children today get the very best experiences that will impact on their lives now and into the future.



Who should attend?

The conference is open to everyone who has a contribution to make to building an excellent and sustainable early childhood and after school sector delivering the very best experiences to children and families.

You are cordially invited to join us in Athlone where we aim to create an agreed agenda for action, combining and building on many of the proposals and ideas circulating currently with such great energy. Harnessing that energy will enable us to present our agenda with real solutions developed jointly by all in attendance.

Conference Themes

In preparing for the conference we have identified some of the themes that require discussion. You are invited to indicate which of these topics you would like to discuss over the two days. You are also invited to highlight other topics that you feel need discussion.

1. **Affordable, accessible, sustainable services** – how best can this be achieved – tax cuts or direct payment to services? Could a system for funding services be agreed such as that developed for secondary school education in the 1960s?
2. **Visible and valued** – how do we create a new professional identity for the Early Childhood and After School sector and raise the status within society?
3. **Securing the right staff** – how do we secure the engagement of staff in all services who want to work with children and who have the right attitude, values, heart and competencies for the valuable role that they play in the lives of children and families?
4. **Increasing funding to services to ensure appropriate pay and conditions** – how can Early Childhood and After School staff be paid appropriately for all of the work that they must do to deliver a quality service?
5. **Ensuring ongoing knowledge and skills development for all** – how do we grow and develop all stakeholders working in and impacting on services – practitioners, managers/management committees, support and training agencies, inspectors and decision makers?
6. **Quality in all services** – how do we fast track the development of a system that will support all service providers to work towards achieving, sustaining and exceeding national quality standards? Should services receive increased Government funding when validated at a high standard? Should the achievement of quality standards become compulsory by law in the future?
7. **Measuring progress** – should we introduce a system for measuring the quality of services, building on the Síolta and Aistear framework, similar to that used by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland which recognises services operating at six different levels from inadequate to outstanding?
8. **Governance and Management** – how can services be supported to comply with Governance and Management responsibilities? Do we need a new model of Governance and Management?
9. **Development of an integrated, standardised quality support service** – how do we ensure that all the agencies working to support the achievement of quality standards work together in a consistent, cohesive and standardised way? How can support agencies work hand in hand with all others who are inspecting or training the sector so that there is consistency across the board?
10. **Providing additional funding for younger children** – the introduction of a second free pre-school year has been a hot topic of debate in recent months. How could this be best introduced?
11. **Department responsibilities** – how can each Department contribute to the development of quality childhood services? Should the Department of Education and Skills take lead responsibility for promoting children's learning and development from birth?

Open Space Conferencing – the principles

Passion with Responsibility

Once again we are using 'Open-Space' principles so that every participant helps shape the agenda, the debate and our best thinking. The conference themes provide a general guideline to what we know covers many issues, but there may be others and these are welcome.

Delegates propose the specific questions and issues that this conference will address. Delegates decide which workshops to attend, moving around the conference themes and issues to make the very best contribution.

To help develop the agenda, participants are asked in registering for the conference to indicate themes, topics or issues for discussion. These ideas will build the preliminary agenda, and over the two days of the conference more topics may be added as we work on issues and new thinking emerges.

Open Space conferencing provides for immediate feedback, with workshop reports and recommendations being available to all delegates as we work across the themes and topics. By the end of the conference, all the key issues and recommendations will set out the path ahead and inform Government thinking and policy development.



Conference Schedule

Please note booking priority will be given to those who can attend the full conference.

Tea / coffee / light refreshments will be served throughout both days.

On Friday night a buffet meal will be available for delegates who want to network and carry on discussions. Please note this is an optional extra and will be served between 8.00pm - 10.00pm

Day 1

- 11.00 Registration + tea / coffee / scones
- 12. 00 Welcome / Setting the Scene:
Imelda Graham, Chairperson of the National Childhood Network
- 12. 15 Agreeing the conference agenda:
Conference facilitators: Caroline Mc Camley and Rita Burtonshaw
- 12.45 - 18.15 Workshops

Refreshments will be available throughout the afternoon
- 18.30 - 19.30 Plenary - review
- 20.00 - 22.00 Informal buffet and networking

Day 2

- 08.30 Registration for new arrivals
- 09.00 Opening plenary - review the agenda from day 1
- 09.30 - 12.00 Workshops continue
- 12.00 - 13.00 Working lunch
- 13.00 - 14.00 Final workshops - drawing the threads together
- 14.15 - 15.15 Final plenary, concluding remarks and close