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The Youngest Ages Can Turn Pages

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The Youngest Ages Can Turn Pages

Fingal County Libraries

Early Years Literacy Strategy







Fingal County Libraries Early Years Literacy Strategy:

Our approach to promoting



Early Years Literacy and Learning in Fingal

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Fingal RAPID

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Little Learners Crèche

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Message from the Mayor



Cllr. Kieran Dennison
Mayor of Fingal

We think of literacy as reading and writing, something children learn at school. But literacy is much more basic than that and begins at birth. Children develop the ability to learn and communicate very early in life from their parents and carers. They learn to listen and to speak before they read and write. Not all parents and carers realise the important role they play in the future development of their children. By helping to develop a child's literacy levels they can give them a really good start not just in school but in life. Simple things like engaging children in conversation, sharing a picture book or reading with them can do so much to enhance literacy skills and help them develop their full potential.

The Fingal Libraries Early Years Literacy Strategy is designed to raise awareness of early literacy among the significant adults in children's lives. The strategy aims to motivate and equip parents and carers with the means to promote literacy among children under six. I am very proud that Fingal County Council has one of the highest library memberships in the country. We also have one of the most innovative and proactive library services. Over the years it has grown and developed by listening to the needs of our citizens. This early years literacy service is part of a process of working with the community to increase the level of literacy and enrich the lives of our people. It will foster a joy of learning and help many children develop the most delightful habit in the world – the habit of reading.

Foreword from the County Manager



David O'Connor
County Manager

There's a great saying that "the best pictures are on the radio". Direct access to the spoken word to light up the imagination is even more true of reading. The possibilities that are opened to a young mind during the process of learning to read are truly limitless. Andrew Carnegie, the great philanthropist who built so many public free libraries, had a simple motto "*Let there be Light*". It captures that idea perfectly.

The competition from the distracting world of TV and video games is the context in which our Literacy Strategy sits. This is a daunting challenge, but is met with imagination and a very innovative programme driven by the dedication and conviction of our library staff.

I sincerely hope that the Literacy Strategy opens up the wonderful world of reading and books to young people – a world that is limited only by their own imagination.

Fingal Libraries Early Years Literacy Strategy: The Vision

The vision for Fingal Libraries Early Years Literacy Strategy is to support the significant people in the lives of children from birth to six years, and to give these children the best start in life through the use of books as fuel for the imagination and lifelong learning.



Executive Summary

Our vision

Through the formulation of a specific literacy strategy, Fingal County Council Libraries Division seeks to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy.

We also wish to explore collaborative opportunities to enhance early literacy with local further education agencies, early childhood settings, schools and colleges.

We aim to be a catalyst for an enriched level of literacy in the community. Fingal Libraries are thus developing specific actions to underpin our strategy with a view to supporting the literate child.

The key actions are to:

1.	Develop a core Early Years Collection called Early Readers
2.	Establish and maintain Baby Book Clubs in our branch library network
3.	Deliver a family learning programme in association with the AKSES
4.	Engage with authors and illustrators
5.	Facilitate the development of a Storybag module designed by the Institute of Technology in Blanchardstown
6.	Maintain and develop an exemplary collection of literacy materials in each Fingal library
7.	Deliver literacy training to library staff
8.	Use our mobile library service to engage in a community storytelling initiative
9.	Create leaflets and tip sheets relating to early reading
10.	Explore the possibility of a Book Gifting Scheme

Our Commitment

We will initiate all of the above key action areas in the short to medium term.

We will form the foundation for a standard on which we will continuously strive to improve.

We will ensure that we engage positively with the key stakeholders in the area of early childhood learning.

Introduction

Fingal County Council Libraries Division is seeking to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy and how best to enhance early literacy in collaboration with local further education agencies, organisations with an interest in early years development, early childhood settings, schools and colleges. Fingal Libraries are thus developing specific actions to inform and educate the public with a view to supporting the literate child.

This document details **Fingal Libraries Early Years Literacy Strategy** (referred to as the Strategy from here on). It begins with an outline of Fingal County in general and Fingal Libraries in particular. The formulation of the Strategy, its aims, and the principles underpinning it are then presented. The rationale for Fingal Libraries' focus on early or emergent literacy precedes a section discussing relevant research on early literacy. The document ends with the key actions of the Strategy, how these will be achieved and some case study examples of the actions in practice.



Fingal in context

The population of Fingal increased by 22% between 2002 and 2006 and by a further 14.2% in the five years to 2011.¹ Despite the current economic downturn we expect Fingal's population to continue to grow. Blanchardstown and Swords are our major growth centres and Balbriggan has also grown significantly. Consequently, Fingal has one of the youngest populations in Ireland.

The mission statement of Fingal County Council is “to improve the quality of life of our citizens and communities by developing our county and strengthening the region through sustainable economic growth”.²

In support of our mission statement Fingal Libraries seeks to enable our citizens to be prosperous, community focused, smarter, healthier and greener. We work towards achieving this in the following ways:

Prosperous	Community focused	Smarter	Healthier	Greener
We provide a rich source of information suitable for leisure, cultural and business uses. This information enables our citizens to make full use of all economic opportunities. We will endeavour to support the information needs required for economic growth well into the future.	We provide a public space where all of our citizens are equally welcome. Often working in collaboration with community groups and representatives, we aim to maximise access to our services supported by qualified staff. We aim to provide a service as diverse as our citizens.	With the resources we provide in our libraries, we assist our children to gain the best start in life and prepare to succeed. We will continue to provide the spaces and services that underpin self-directed and lifelong learning for all, thereby enabling people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.	We ensure access to a wealth of information in relation to the wellbeing, life chances and leisure activities of all our citizens. We will continue to offer our Healthy Reading Scheme ³ and to maintain and promote this collection.	We support the community in becoming a greener place by providing information on all aspects of the environment. Along with other Council departments we will take part in environmental awareness campaigns for our citizens.

Our core values underpin everything we do. Considering this and the need to enable a competitive advantage for our county and citizens, Fingal Libraries undertook an assessment of literacy needs in the County. We consulted with practitioners in the field of literacy and reviewed the most recent government report: *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life*.⁴ We decided that our focus should be in the area of early years literacy and therefore this has become our primary focus, while maintaining a parallel commitment to family literacy.

¹ Central Statistics Office, (2012). Accessed 1st March, 2013 at website: <http://www.cso.ie/en/qnhs/releasesandpublications/qnhs-calendarquarters/TableS9a>, Q. 3, 2011.

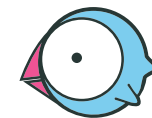
² Fingal County Council. (2010, p.3). Corporate Plan 2010-2014. Dublin: Fingal County Council.

³ Fingal Healthy Reading Scheme leaflet in association with the HSE and Daughters of Charity.

⁴ Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.



Fingal Libraries



Fingal Libraries serve a population of 273,000 through a network of branch libraries and with the support of a dedicated Mobile Library Service comprising four vehicles. We also have a Housebound Service and a Local Studies and Archives Service.

Our membership has increased by 25% since 2010 and we currently have 160,308 registered borrowers, with the highest percentage of members in the country. There were a total of 1.2m visits to Fingal Libraries in 2012. Over 1.2m items, ranging from books to console games, were borrowed in 2012.

In recent times we have earned a reputation as one of Ireland's most innovative library services, with the introduction of online services such as ebooks, online learning applications and online magazines. We have embraced user-friendly technology and self-service lending. We will continue to strive for innovative ways to meet the information needs of our citizens.

In tandem with this, we have worked hard to include the community in all that we do. We provide a public space for all of the citizens of Fingal, whether they wish to study, borrow books and other items or attend one of the many events (4,552 in 2012) that we host on a regular basis such as storytelling, computer classes, educational talks or arts and crafts activities as part of local, national and international initiatives. This public space is available for young and old, and we have a long history of providing positive experiences of literature and learning for all.

We pride ourselves on being a forward-looking library service with a real knowledge of our citizens and a deeply-rooted community inclusion ethos.

As a result of this positive engagement with the local community, we are now launching a targeted literacy programme underpinned by a formal strategy. We aim to provide a number of programmes, delivered through and beyond our library network, with the youngest members of society in mind.



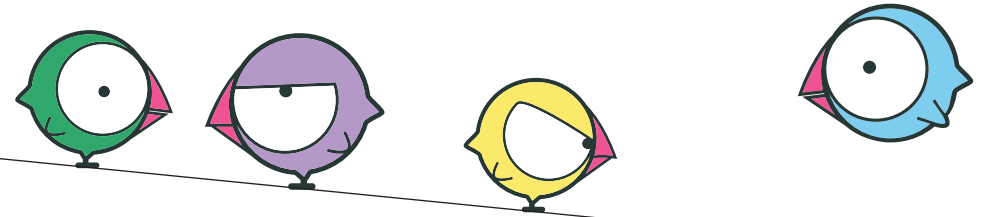
Strategy Formulation

Our starting point was to identify all key stakeholders and to bring them together in order to facilitate a group discussion. This period of community consultation led to a facilitated meeting in November 2012. As many stakeholders as possible were involved, including Barnardos, the Fingal County Childcare Committee, Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board, the Institute of Technology in Blanchardstown, home school liaison officers from local schools and early childhood care providers (see Appendix 1 for those present at the meeting). The aim was to engage in a participative process with a view to producing a literacy strategy in response to the real needs of the community.

Fingal Libraries took on board many of the suggested tasks, and this led to the creation of 10 key actions.

The aims of the Strategy are:

1. To encourage and support parents and carers to share books, stories and rhymes with their babies and young children and to promote reading as a worthwhile source of pleasure and fun which enhances children's early development.
2. To collaborate with community organisations, schools and crèches to bring books and storytelling to life.
3. To increase awareness and use of the local library service as a lifelong valuable resource for parents, carers and their children.
4. To promote the idea of reading within the family.
5. To work closely and in partnership with other local stakeholders in the area of literacy and numeracy, including schools and early childhood education leaders, and to bring about a more cohesive approach to service delivery.



The principles⁵ underpinning the Strategy are:

- Children are communicators and readers from birth. Oral language is the foundation for literacy development. Oral language provides children with a sense of words and sentences and builds sensitivity so that children can acquire the sounds of their language. The words children hear and use in the early years are the words they will be able to understand when they encounter them in text in primary school and in other contexts.
- Children's experiences with books and print greatly influence their ability to understand what they will read. Reading with adults, looking at books independently and sharing reading experiences with peers, are some of the ways that children experience books.
- Learning to read and write is an on-going process from infancy and has long-lasting effects. From the earliest years, everything that adults do to support children's language and literacy is important.
- The significant people in children's lives – parents, carers, early years educators, teachers, librarians and others – understand that literacy development is a result of:
 1. Exposure to a large vocabulary through language-rich environments with songs, stories, rhymes, conversations and input from adults in addition to the child's own abilities in thinking and language.
 2. Opportunities to take part in extended conversations that require children to develop understandings beyond the here and now and involve the use of several sentences to build a structure of language, such as in explanations, narratives, or pretend talk.
 3. Homes, early years and school settings which encourage children's thinking and language.
- The significant people in children's lives value play as a pathway to learning and understand the importance of creating and maintaining high-quality environments where children are motivated to talk.
- Children are most likely to experience conversations that are rich with vocabulary, understandable, interesting and extended when their significant people obtain and read good books out loud and provide relevant and meaningful play experiences that are varied and stimulating.
- The significant people in children's lives work hard to provide appropriate literacy related learning experiences and build relationships with children and reflect and evaluate together those experiences and relationships.
- The significant people in children's lives are imbued with a sense of passion about children's language-learning and literacy development.

This programme will be delivered using our current resources, capabilities and skills. We aim to deliver simple and consistent long term goals underpinned by an increased awareness of the importance of early childhood literacy. It is also our aim to develop a sustainable programme to fit the early literacy needs of our communities.

⁵ Adapted from French, G. (2012). *Early literacy and numeracy matters: Enriching literacy and numeracy experiences in early childhood*. Dublin: Barnardos Training and Resource Service.

Rationale for the Strategy

What do we mean by early literacy?

What we understand by literacy changes continually. It is not limited to reading and writing, but includes a broader range of skills and competencies associated with new forms of technology. Traditionally, literacy has been thought to refer to the skills of reading and writing, but we now know that literacy 'emerges' gradually in the early years and includes a broad range of competencies.

The definition of literacy as contained in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is:

*...the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.*⁶

Central to literacy is the search for meaning and understanding. Stories, books and visual, technological and cultural literacies are significant.⁷ In early childhood, the development of literacy involves: babies hearing sounds and having them identified by sensitive adults; babbling and repeating sounds and rhymes; later sharing stories and books on DVD or TV or other information communication technologies (e.g. computer-based texts, images, voice and music recordings or games on mobile phones); listening, looking at and talking about the pictures with others, and making marks in sand and on paper.⁸ Literacy is therefore the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing, for communication and learning to learn.⁹ Literacy learning occurs during meaningful interactions and experiences with a broad range of materials, texts, digital technologies and events.



⁶ Department of Education and Skills. (2011, p. 8). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

⁷ Whitehead, M. (2007). *Developing language and literacy with young children*. (3rd ed.) London: Sage Publications Ltd.

⁸ Epstein, A. (2007). *Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

⁹ Department of Education and Science. (2005). DEIS (*Delivering equality of opportunity in schools*) - for educational inclusion. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.



Why develop an Early Years Literacy Strategy?

Research reveals that the children most at risk of reading difficulties in the primary classes are those who began school with fewer verbal skills, less phonological awareness (awareness of the sounds that make up words), less letter knowledge and less familiarity with basic purposes and mechanisms of reading.¹⁰ As a component of basic education and a foundation for lifelong learning, literacy is the key to enhancing human capabilities and achieving many other rights. In short, literacy carries wide-ranging benefits not only for individuals but also for families, communities and societies.

According to the most recent report on literacy and numeracy in early childhood, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, says:

Literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to a person's ability to develop fully as an individual, to live a satisfying and rewarding life and to participate fully in our society.

Children who do not learn to read, write and communicate effectively at primary level are more likely to leave school early, be unemployed or in low-skilled jobs, have poorer emotional and physical health, and are more likely to end up in poverty and in our prisons.^{11,12} Literacy difficulties are linked to outcomes such as truancy, social exclusion, alcohol or drug abuse, increased health risks and greatly reduced life chances.

Therefore, Fingal Libraries, through this written literacy strategy and the actions contained therein, aim to make a sustainable and long term difference to literacy amongst our youngest citizens.

We aim to equip our young citizens with a tool set of skills for a literate life. By creating events such as storytelling, baby book clubs and family learning programmes in our branch libraries, we will introduce a fun and dynamic learning environment to the community. The benefits will not be limited to our target audience of the very young, but will also ripple outwards and will bring benefits to the families of those children involved.

¹⁰ Burns, S.M., Griffin, P. & Snow, C.E. (1999). *Staring out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

¹¹ KPMG Foundation. (2006). *The long term costs of literacy difficulties*. UK: KPMG Foundation.

¹² National Economic and Social Forum. (2009). *Child literacy and social inclusion: Implementation issues. Report No. 39*. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.



What research says about early literacy

Oral language and communication development is important

Literacy is not rooted in letters and words initially, but in communication and language i.e. non-verbal communication (smiling, gestures, pointing) and warm reciprocal relationships. The importance of the development of children's language and communication skills from birth is recognised as a precursor to literacy development. Speaking, listening, reading and writing develop concurrently rather than sequentially.

We know that the greater children's experiences of books and language are, the greater the chance of reading fluency. However, the converse is also true. The fewer experiences children have with literacy and language (i.e. vocabulary and speech) the greater the chance that they will have difficulty learning to read. Research has revealed a high correlation between vocabulary size at age three and language test scores at ages nine and ten in areas of vocabulary, listening, syntax (sentence structure, grammar, language rules) and reading comprehension.¹³ The size of each child's vocabulary at aged three correlated most closely to a single factor: the number of words the parents spoke to the child in the home. It follows that early childhood settings (crèches, play groups and so on) also play a significant role in exposing children to vocabulary and talk.



¹³ Hart, B. & Risley, T.R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore, Maryland: Brookes.



The specific early literacy skills to be encouraged

Emergent early childhood literacy skills that have been identified as strong predictors of later literacy achievement include:

1. **Oral language development**, which comprises the growth of a large vocabulary acquired by children being immersed in conversations and stories, exposure to a broad range of vocabulary and encouragement to talk¹⁴.
2. Understanding and being capable of **explanatory talk**, which involves children being able to explain situations or ideas, for example what does 'holiday' mean?
3. Understanding and being capable of **narrative talk**, for example children talking about events in the past, the ability to answer 'what happened in pre-school today?' in the correct sequence, or to plan future events.
4. **Demonstrating phonological awareness**, which constitutes the general ability to decipher the sound patterns within the words of a language¹⁵. When exposed to and supported to repeat a range of sounds through nursery and action rhymes, children develop an awareness of the important constituent sounds within words, such as those that rhyme, syllables and phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound within a language. It can be represented by one letter, (grapheme) 't' or more 'th'.
5. **Demonstrating phonemic awareness**. Phonemic awareness involves the insight that every word can be broken down into sequences of constituent phonemes, for example, 'sat' is made up of, 's' /'a' /'t'.¹⁶
6. **Demonstrating some letter identification before age five**, for example, children knowing the letters in their names.¹⁷
7. **Print knowledge/concepts**, which include knowledge and experience of environmental print, how print is organised on the page, and how print is used for reading and writing.¹⁸
8. **Understanding writing functions**, for example, children understand that writing is a way of sharing one's ideas and knowledge; it is a method of personal communication and conveys a message that can be read at a later time.
9. **Emergent writing/mark making**, which involves children making marks in yoghurt, in sand, on paper, drawings, a child's first attempts at letters or his name is important. It provides a means through which children may communicate their feelings and thoughts to others. Learning about writing – as with reading – begins in infancy.¹⁹

¹⁴ Strickland, D. & Riley-Ayers, S. (2006). *Early literacy: Policy and practice in the preschool years. Policy Briefing 10*: Rutgers, New Jersey: National Institute for Early Education Research.

¹⁵ Kennedy, E., Dunphy, E., Dwyer, B., Hayes, G. McPhillips, T., Marsh, J., O'Connor, M. and Shiel, G. (2012). *Literacy in early childhood and primary education (3-8 years)*. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Research Report No 15. Accessed 24th Jan, 2013 at http://www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Reports/Literacy_in_Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education_3-8_years.pdf

¹⁶ Kennedy *et al* (2012)

¹⁷ Strickland, D. & Riley-Ayers, S. (2006). *Early literacy: Policy and practice in the preschool years. Policy Briefing 10*: Rutgers, New Jersey: National Institute for Early Education Research.

¹⁸ Strickland, D. & Riley-Ayers, S. (2006). *Early literacy: Policy and practice in the preschool years. Policy Briefing 10*: Rutgers, New Jersey: National Institute for Early Education Research.

¹⁹ Whitehead, M. (2007). *Developing language and literacy with young children*. (3rd ed.) London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Access to libraries and books is important

We know that . . .

“Children are most likely to experience conversations that include comprehensible and interesting extended discourse and are rich with vocabulary when their parents obtain and read good books and when their teachers provide classrooms with a curriculum that is varied and stimulating.”²⁰

A seminal research project shows that children who were read to frequently by a variety of people, had access to a large number and broad range of books and who used a library regularly scored highest “on all three measures of early literacy (receptive vocabulary, narrative production, and emergent literacy)”.²¹ That libraries are an excellent resource to try out lots of different kinds of books without any expense, means we are uniquely placed to facilitate early literacy development. Moreover, in another study, the frequency of library visits showed a positive association with language, literacy and early number attainment at school entry.²²



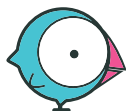
²⁰ Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P. (2002, p. 13). Fostering Language and Literacy in Classrooms and Homes. *Young Children*. March (pp. 1-18). Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

²¹ Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P. (2002, p. 13). Fostering Language and Literacy in Classrooms and Homes. *Young Children*. March (pp. 1-18). Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

²² Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004). Quality teaching in the early years. In A. Anning, J. Cullen, & M. Fleer (Eds.). *Early childhood education: Society and culture* (pp. 137-148). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Acknowledging diversity is important

Differences between children's home and school languages and cultures can affect literacy development in each of their languages. Knowledge, respect and support for the diversity of children's families, cultures and linguistic backgrounds are important in early literacy development. Fingal Libraries are committed to being an inclusive public service with respect and support given to all. Our book stock contains a wide range of foreign language books, we have specialist on-line language learning tools (Transparent language online at www.fingalcoco.ie/library) and conversation groups for a wide range of languages meet in our branches. Our free internet service means that we offer an important channel of communication for the many new Irish who have taken up residence in Fingal, as well as allowing people access to information on a vast range of subjects such as employment and welfare rights.



The home learning environment is important

Extensive research supports the importance of the relationship between children's exposure to books, experience of book reading at home and their pre-school language abilities. The number of picture books in the home is positively linked to children's receptive (heard and understood language) and expressive (spoken) language.²³

Particular activities which indicate a strong home learning environment that links to children's ability to engage with the academic content of school and improve educational attainments are:



1. The number of times parents teach their child songs or nursery rhymes.
2. The number of times the child plays with letters/numbers at home – which is linked with all aspects of educational success.
3. Parents drawing children's attention to sounds and letters – which is linked to literacy skills, early number skills and non-verbal attainment.
4. The number of times parents read to their child – which is associated with higher scores in all educational outcomes.
5. The number of times children visit the library – which shows a positive association with language, literacy and early number attainment at school entry.²⁴

²³ Payne, A., Whitehurst, G. & Angell, A. (1994). The role of home literacy environment in the development of language ability in preschool children from low-income families. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*; 9(3-4),427-40.

²⁴ Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004). Quality teaching in the early years. In A. Anning, J. Cullen, & M. Flear (Eds.). *Early childhood education: Society and culture* (pp. 137-148). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Shared reading is important

Finally, early expressive language development is facilitated by 'joint reading strategies' that engage, support and promote children's active participation in the book reading opportunities. The longer a child stays engaged in a book reading episode and the more an adult encourages the child's active participation by expanding on what a child says, or by asking open-ended questions, the greater the effect the reading experience has on the child's language development'.²⁵

As expressed by Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations:

*"literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health, and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship."*²⁶

Research indicates that there may be a societal lack of awareness of the importance and pleasure of talking and listening to young children, how communicative behaviours start from birth onwards, and the importance of pretend play, music, rhythm and rhyme on language development. Or there may be an expectation that children will develop speaking skills from general chatter around them, or learn language once they begin pre-school.²⁷ Fingal Libraries aim to bridge that gap in awareness.



²⁵ Hamer, C. (2011) *Guidance for developing a strategic approach to speech, language and communication in the early years*. London: National Literacy Trust.

²⁶ Kofi Annan cited in the National Economic and Social Forum National Economic and Social Forum. (2009, p. 17). *Child literacy and social inclusion: Implementation issues*. Report No. 39. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

²⁷ National Literacy Trust. (2004). *Early language advocacy kit for early years professionals*. London: National Literacy Trust. Accessed 27th July, 2012 at www.nationalliteracytrust.org

Portrait of a Literate Child

Children being talked to and encouraged to talk back, experiencing a wide variety of action rhymes, songs, stories and a broad range of vocabulary.

Children having a literacy and print rich environment (with stories, signs, labelled pictures) and frequent access to a library.

Children enjoying rhymes and stories and the feeling that their family's culture and language is celebrated and encouraged.

Children being able to explain ideas and tell the story of their day in the right sequence. Children knowing that words are made up of sounds.



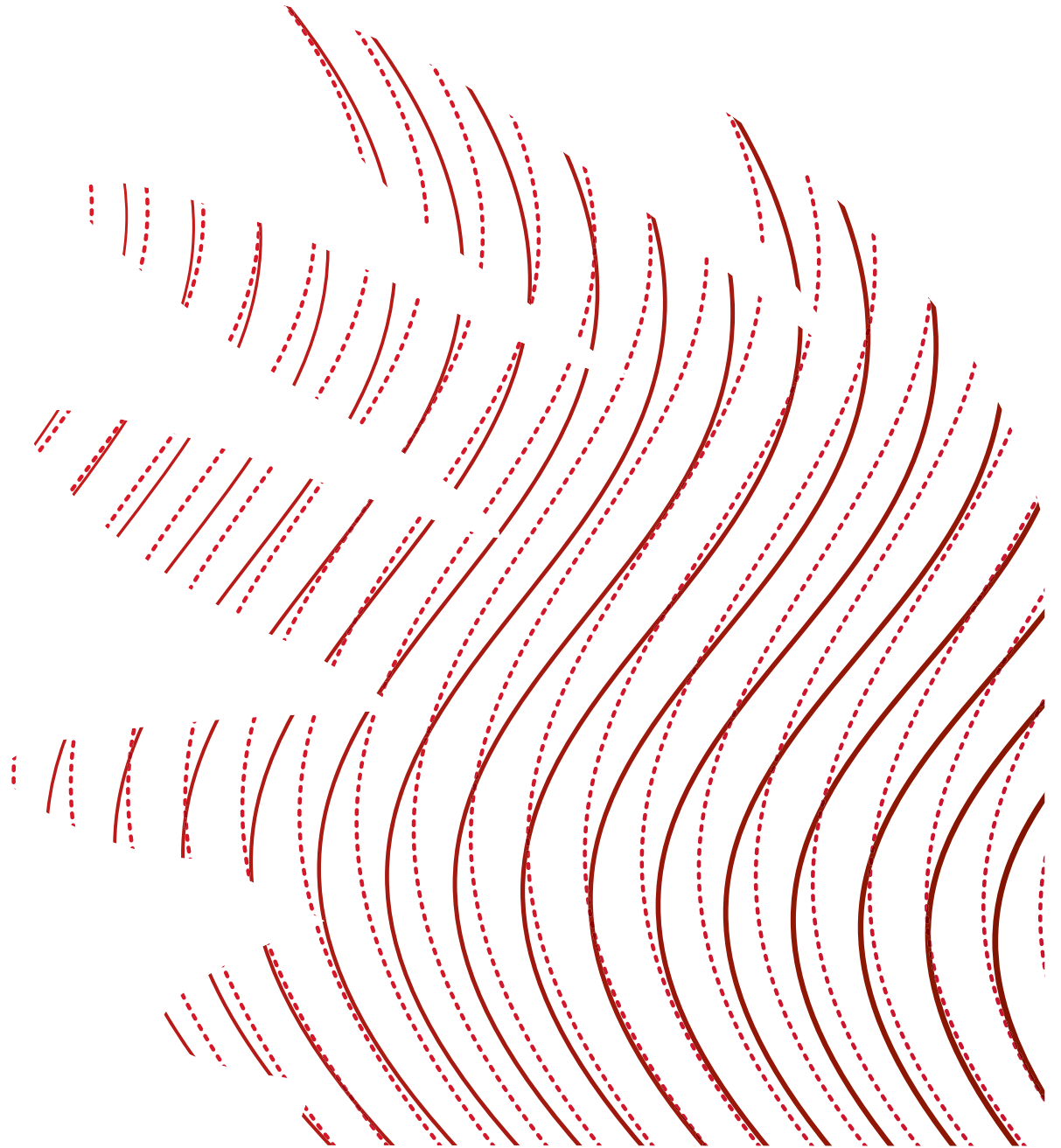
Children experiencing a home learning environment with a variety of interesting books, which are read frequently to them.

Children knowing some letters (e.g. those in their name before five), understanding that writing is about sharing ideas, and having experience of making marks on paper.

Children experiencing a broad range of exploratory and fantasy play and opportunities to participate in extended purposive conversations.

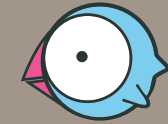
Children experiencing shared reading where adults engage with children while reading: highlighting the author and illustrator; asking children to guess what the story could be about; asking open-ended questions; and expanding on what children say about the story.

Dr. Geraldine French





The Early Years Literacy Strategy
Key Actions and Goals



Key action 1

We will develop a core Early Years Collection called Early Readers

Fingal Libraries will establish and maintain a core collection of books suitable for use from birth. This collection will contain sets of books that will be available for lending and which can be used in a classroom or playschool setting and will comprise 10, 20 or 30 copies of each title. This collection will be clearly branded as part of the Strategy and will be maintained and expanded.

Early Readers will contain a wide range of story books for young children and will reflect the advice of the key stakeholders in this project.





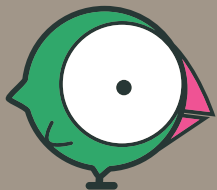
Key action 2

We will establish and maintain Baby Book Clubs in our branch library network

Baby Book Clubs will be established in our branch libraries. These clubs will be modelled on our already successful parent and toddler groups and will include storytelling sessions and other fun activities for the very young. A special selection of board books has been purchased for this activity.

These clubs will take place in Swords, Howth, Malahide, Blanchardstown and Balbriggan libraries, with a view to expanding the initiative to all library branches.

See Case study 1 for more details of this key action



Key action 3

We will deliver a family learning programme in association with AKSES

In collaboration with the AKSES (Adult Key Skills Education Service) programme from the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (formerly VEC) we will host family learning programmes in Blanchardstown library and the wider community.

The family learning programme will consist of three modules:



1

A storybag creation

module: An arts and crafts based approach using a story book (fictional) and a fact based book to generate materials that assist in the learning to read process.

2



What's the story?: A programme focused on book selection and reading techniques that highlights the parents/guardians role in developing a love and appreciation of reading in their children. It also aims to promote lifelong learning.

3

Adults count too:

This programme aims to support parents / guardians of children in primary school from 1st to 6th class to improve their maths skills and enable them to help children with their maths homework.



Key action 4

We will engage with authors and illustrators

We will provide access to children's authors and illustrators in order to provide an enriched experience of the reading and writing process. We will facilitate access to talks and workshops given by a range of specialists in the area of children's literature for pre-schools, crèches and schools.

Working closely with author and illustrator, Mary Murphy, we have developed a shared reading programme called "Children reading together". A number of successful workshops have already been hosted by one of our stakeholder schools and we aim to replicate this success elsewhere. These interactive workshops engaged 9 to 10 year olds and aimed to give children the confidence and enthusiasm to share stories and read books aloud to their younger brothers, sisters, friends or cousins. The workshops were also an opportunity to discover what life is like as a working author and illustrator. In this way, the joy of reading and storytelling reaches the entire family.

We will continue to develop a training programme on storytelling skills based on a successful pilot earlier this year with library staff. In the future, this training will be offered to the significant people in children's lives.



Key action 5



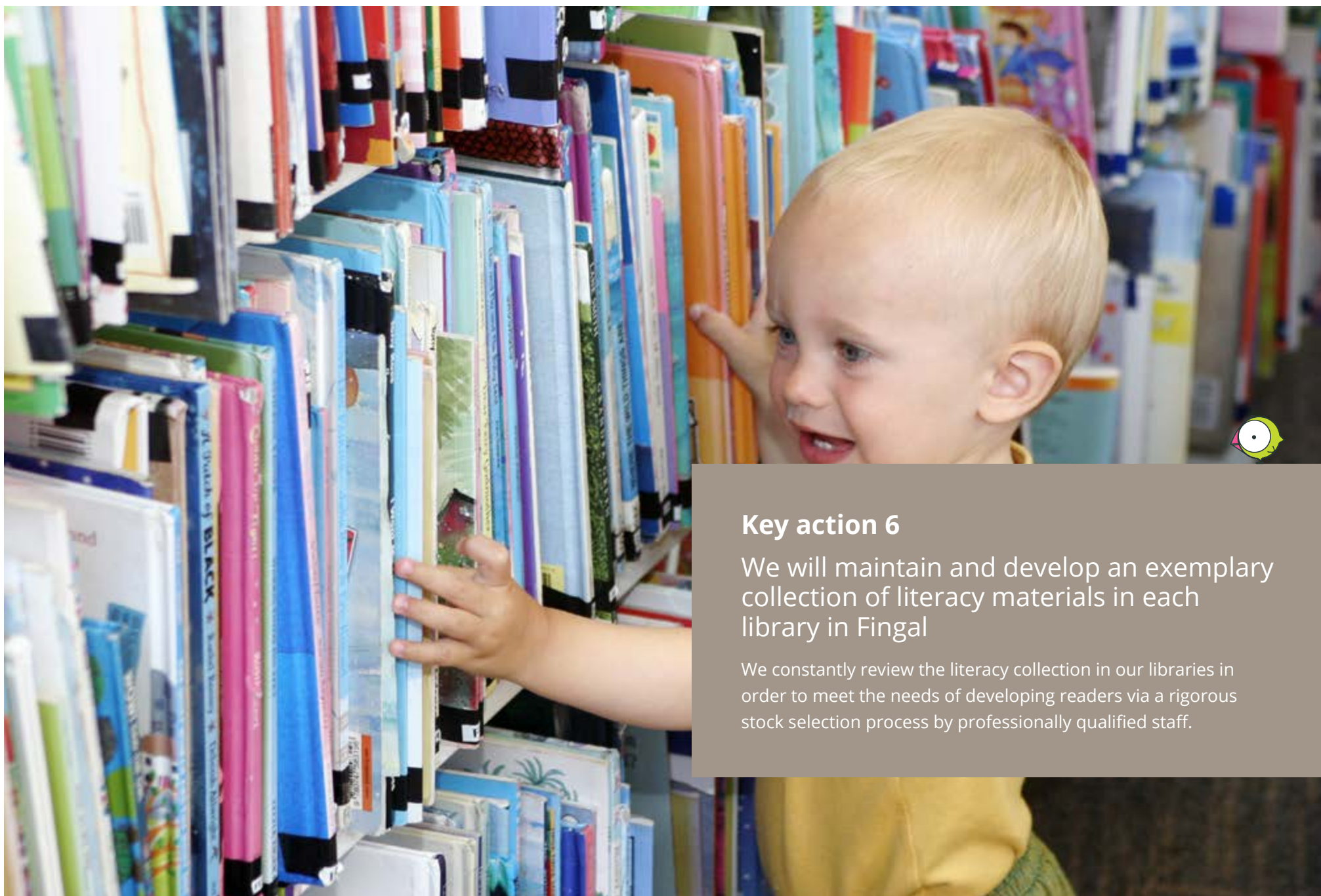
We will facilitate the development and delivery of a Storybag module designed by the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

We will facilitate the organisation and delivery of a Storybag module by students of the BA in Early Childhood Care and Education in the Institute of Technology in Blanchardstown.

We will continue to work with the ITB in order to deliver this programme in different settings, including junior and senior infant classes in primary schools and community crèches.

See Case study 2 for more details of this key action.





Key action 6

We will maintain and develop an exemplary collection of literacy materials in each library in Fingal

We constantly review the literacy collection in our libraries in order to meet the needs of developing readers via a rigorous stock selection process by professionally qualified staff.

Key action 7

We will deliver literacy training to library staff

We will deliver focused staff training in the area of literacy awareness.

This will be facilitated by a number of experts in the area of early childhood learning.



Key action 8

We will use our mobile library service to engage in a community storytelling initiative

Following a successful pilot using the mobile library in the Dublin 15 region, we will bring a storyteller to a number of community crèches in Fingal. As well as providing a fun and interactive experience for pre-school children, it will afford the very young and their carers the opportunity to access a library.

This interaction will create awareness and a positive view of library services, stimulate interest in books and encourage early reading.



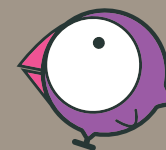
Key action 9

We will create leaflets and tip sheets relating to early reading

Library staff, in consultation with the project stakeholders, will create a leaflet detailing the resources available in the area of literacy.

We will also create a number of leaflets and tip-sheets for parents and carers on subjects such as reading to your child, helping your child to read, how to choose books for children and recommended reads.





Key action 10

We will explore the possibility of a Book Gifting Scheme

We will explore the possibility of working with publishers, booksellers and other stakeholders in order to pursue this key action in which we would “gift” a book to each child.



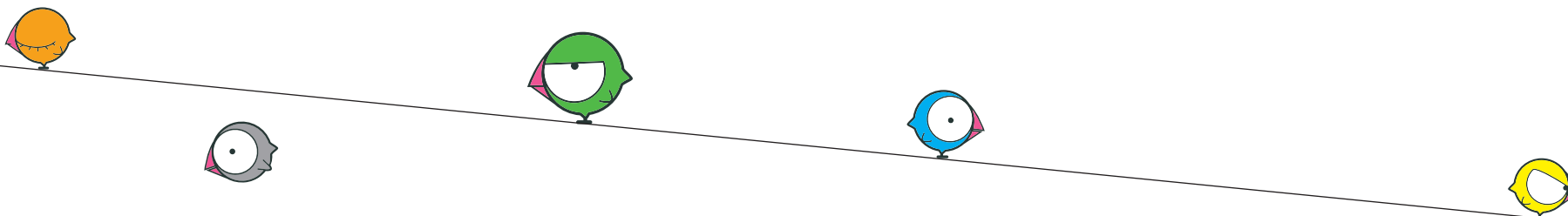
Conclusion

Our vision is to improve literacy levels across Fingal by supporting the significant people in the lives of children (from birth to six years), to give these children the best start in life through the use of books as fuel for the imagination and lifelong learning, thereby unleashing opportunities for creativity and learning in early childhood literacy. We aim to achieve this through and beyond our branch library network by completing each of our 10 key actions.

This written strategy was undertaken by Fingal Libraries to maximise the capacity in professionally resourced libraries to address the need for literacy education and support for the youngest members of our society. We will also provide a range of additional supports for parents and carers through the diverse range of activities that are ongoing in our branch libraries. We will undertake to listen to our citizens' needs, and will provide targeted supports to the areas most in need.

We view this literacy initiative as a participative process achieved through engagement with our community and education stakeholders in order to unleash the potential of our developing readers.

We aim to initiate provision of all of the outlined key action areas, with the written strategy becoming the foundation for our actions in the medium term. We hope to create a lasting standard for the provision of literacy supports within our branch network, and we will ensure that we engage positively with the key stakeholders in the area of early childhood learning.



Case Study 1

Howth Library Baby Book Club

To date there have been four very successful Baby Book Club sessions in Howth's children's library, the first of which was held on 14th March 2013. In the interests of consistency, and ease of planning for parents, the sessions are held on the same day and time every month.

A combination of storytelling, music, and action rhymes was used to interact with the children. Four stories were read aloud, using board books and oversized picture books. The children were very responsive to the storytelling and enjoyed exploring the books they were given. In order to create a comfortable, colourful environment for the children the floor was covered with animal-themed play mats & cushions.

Attendance has been significant, and in order to generate renewed interest in the Baby Book Club it was decided that the session for June would have a "Teddy Bears' Picnic" theme. This meeting was also opened up to pre-school children. These factors resulted in an increase in attendance, with ten excited children, each clutching a teddy bear, and seven eager adults showing up. Library staff facilitated storytelling and encouraged colouring-in of pictures featuring characters and objects from the day's stories.

Parents have expressed enthusiasm for future Baby Book Club meetings, with a variety of reasons for their interest. Some have said they hope that listening to storytelling will give them confidence in their own ability to read stories to their children. Another parent felt the experience of storytelling would benefit her, as English is not her first language and she hopes it will improve both her and her child's English language skills. In addition to this, parents liked the idea of a book club simply because their children love listening to stories being read aloud.



Figure 1 Is everyone ready for a story? The inaugural Howth library Baby Book Club



Figure 2 Parents and carers have expressed their appreciation for the Baby book club

Case Study 2

Storybag sessions



Figure 4 Students from the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown ready to go.

Neil Griffiths (2000)²⁸ first conceived the idea of a storybag (which he calls a storysack). Storybags are a popular, non-threatening way of encouraging parents and carers to start sharing stories with their children, especially those parents with little positive experience of books. Griffiths now manages a 'Storysacks National Support Project' in the UK. The purpose is to stimulate reading activities and make shared reading a memorable and fun experience. The storybags can include soft toys of the book's main characters, and props and scenery that parents and other adults can use with children to bring a book to life, even if the adult's reading skills are limited.

In cooperation with the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB), Fingal County Libraries facilitated the delivery of storytelling sessions using the storybag model. Junior and senior infant classes from St Philip's School in Mountview welcomed students of the Early Childhood Care and Education degree course from the ITB.

²⁸ Griffiths, N. (2000). *Practical workshops for parents*. (2nd ed.) Bury: Storysacks.

²⁹ French, G. (2012). *Early literacy and numeracy matters: Enriching literacy and numeracy experiences in early childhood*. Dublin: Barnardos Training and Resource Service.

The storybag takes the title of a book as a starting point, then builds on the theme and story, using props to bring the story to life. "The bag might include a non-fiction book on the same theme (for example, a book on bears in the wild in addition to *The Teddy Bears' Picnic*), a language-based game using images from the story, written instructions for a small group learning experience such as a drama activity or suggestions to go on a real teddy bear's picnic, a short guide containing questions to ask and vocabulary to consider, a DVD of the story, and other supports to extend the reading activity".²⁹ The storybags and their contents were designed to be visually attractive and tactile in order to motivate and excite the children about reading.

The sessions involved a lot of hands-on fun and interaction. The children had a fun and positive experience while engaging in valuable reading and literacy based activities.



Figure 5 All the essentials for a bear hunt – binoculars and torches

Teacher feedback:

"Very well resourced . . . Asked children questions and engaged them . . . Lots of props, relevant to the story . . . Bright, colourful, child friendly."

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Appendix 1

Stakeholder consultation

On the 30/11/2012 a meeting was held with key stakeholders in the local community to engage in an inter-agency consultation process with a view to gaining valued input from relevant individuals and organisations on the potential components of the Strategy. The meeting's objectives were:

1. To capture what is currently happening in the area of early literacy
2. To ascertain a vision for the Fingal County Libraries Early Literacy Strategy
3. To identify the potential components of that Strategy
4. To identify the next steps in the development of the Strategy

Representatives from local organisations and schools attended this meeting which was facilitated by Dr Geraldine French.

Our stakeholders include the following organisations:

AKSES – Adult Key Skills Education Service

The Adult Key Skills Education Service (AKSES) is part of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board Adult Education Service. “Key Skills” refers to a range of important skills every adult needs in order to take active part in activities in the home, community and workplace. They are vital to ensure success in education, training and improving job prospects.

Key Skills include literacy, numeracy, communication skills, basic computer skills, learning to learn, information processing, personal effectiveness, critical thinking and working with others.

AKSES became involved with the Fingal County Library literacy initiative to support parents/guardians through our Family Learning programme. The Family Learning programme aims to support parents/guardians to develop in their children a love and appreciation of reading, and promote lifelong learning and break the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage.

Barnardos

Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity having worked with more than 6,300 children and families last year.

Our vision is an Ireland where childhood is valued and all children and young people are cherished equally. Our mission is to challenge and support families, communities, society and government to make Ireland the best place in the world to be a child, focusing specifically on children and young people whose wellbeing is under threat.

All Barnardos work is needs led and outcome focused; responding to the individual needs of each child and family by offering a variety of specialised services, ranging from literacy support to assistance during difficult times. We offer practical and professional supports to enable children to achieve their full potential in life.

www.barnardos.ie

Bláthanna Beaga Teo trading as Mulhuddart Lifestart

A community project whose aim is to educate, empower and support parents of children from birth to 5 years on the holistic development of children.

The information is presented by trained Family Visitors monthly within the family home. Age appropriate developmental information and resources are also provided. Our aims are to:

- Build self esteem, morale and confidence
- Provide professional and peer support
- Promote mother's physical and mental health
- Enable more effective communication with Public Health Nurses and other Health Care Professionals.

Fingal Childcare Committee

Fingal County Childcare Committee was established in 2001 as one of the 33 County/City Childcare Committees that exist throughout the country. FCCC was formed to act in an advisory capacity to all childcare services in Fingal county, providing advice, information and assistance on a wide variety of topics in the childcare field.

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown offers both full-time and workbased education at degree and honours degree level in Early Childhood Care and Education. The Early Childhood Care and Education teaching team became involved with Fingal County Libraries in the literacy initiative as we recognised that the development of literacy is essential in the first years of a child's life. Being part of this initiative strengthens our commitment to literacy and develops our links to other stakeholders in the local community who are interested in promoting literacy in the early years.

KIDZ ZONE Crèche

This is a community-based, non-profit preschool operated by a voluntary management committee. Our preschool enjoys a reputation for high quality early childhood education. All staff are fully qualified and/or have extensive experience within the early childhood field.

While lesson planning is an ongoing, changing process, it is underpinned by the four main areas of development contained in the themes of AISTEAR (The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework).

Emergent reading skills play a big part of curriculum planning. Our main aim with literacy in the under-five group is to show children that books are as much fun as any of the other toys they play with and give them the 'will' to learn to read.

Little Learners Crèche

Little Learners Crèche is an early years service operating within the community of Mulhuddart, Dublin 15. Our aim is to deliver a best quality, child centered, inclusive, affordable local childcare and early learning service which will enable parents to avail of employment, training and educational opportunities.

We provide a safe, friendly, nurturing environment for children to learn and grow with a structured play based programme of age appropriate activities incorporating the four themes of Aistear (Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, 2009) Well-Being, Identity and Belonging, Communication and Exploring and Thinking.

We recognize the importance of developing in children a positive lifelong relationship with reading and books from the earliest age and wish to create awareness, remove barriers and encourage and promote early literacy in the families and children who attend our service.

Appendix 2

Web resources³⁰

NYP (National Youth Project) Crèche

The aim of our service is to provide good quality, affordable childcare, which will enable parents to avail of employment, training and education opportunities. We will work in partnership with the parents/guardians to support the overall development of the child.

We provide the children with the opportunity to learn through play. We encourage children to reach their greatest potential through personal and social development. We aim to develop and implement a broad based curriculum where the individual needs of children are met. We will create a safe, caring environment for our children.

St. Philip's National School

St. Philip's is a junior school in Mountview, Clonsilla, Dublin 15. It belongs to Deis Band 1 which means it is classed as a Disadvantaged School. The focus of Deis schools is to target Literacy and Numeracy. The school places huge influence on these two areas.

A highly successful programme for development of reading has been very effective throughout the school. A love of reading is encouraged. The children are exposed to a wide variety of reading materials and books are continuously sent home to encourage parents to read with their child.

www.fingalcoco.ie a full guide to the resources provided by Fingal County Council, including our extensive library services.

www.barbarabushfoundation.com This was set to establish literacy as a value in every family in the USA by helping every family understand that the home is the child's first school, that parents and carers are the child's first teachers and reading is the child's first subject.

www.barnardos.ie This charity offers lots of supports for families. There are resources available for professionals working with children as well as free downloads of information and books for parents.

www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/learning/ is a good educational site for parents and for children who are doing projects.

www.cecde.ie is the website of the Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education, who developed Síolta. The CECDE closed in November 2008. The website still contains useful resources in relation to Síolta and early childhood education and care generally.

www.dyslexia.ie Dyslexia Association of Ireland, the main support organisation in Ireland for adults and children with dyslexia.

www.dyspraxiaireland.com Dyspraxia Association the main support organisation for dyspraxia in Ireland.

www.education.ie The Department of Education and Science site has information on all aspects of education.

www.familit.org The National Center for Family Literacy (USA) provides publications, videos and other material, such as a list of reading tips to support family literacy.

www.fingalcoco.ie/library is the website of the Fingal Libraries.

www.into.ie is the Irish National Teachers' Organisation site, with information on educational issues.

www.ivea.ie (Irish Vocational Education Association [IVEA]). VECs manage 126 local adult literacy programmes and many more vocational and family education initiatives.

³⁰ From French, G. (2012). *Early literacy and numeracy matters: Enriching literacy and numeracy experiences in early childhood*. Dublin: Barnardos Training and Resource Service.

www.kidsown.ie Kids' Own Publishing Partnership is the only dedicated publisher of books by children in Ireland. Kids' Own is dedicated to bringing the arts to the lives of young people, and provides a way of working that empowers children and young people to develop their own individual creative expression through authentic arts practice.

www.library.ie is a website for libraries in Ireland. This is a first stop on the web for information relating to libraries in Ireland.

www.linkslearning.org/ Kids LINKS provides children with a variety of learning tools and mathematical activities to check their understandings and skills. Parents, teachers and others may also wish to try some of these. You'll find read-along stories, maths games and maths lessons.

www.literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/familtnotebook/toc.html The Family Literacy Resource Notebook provides a wide variety of information, from what family literacy is to how to enhance an existing family literacy programme.

www.literacytools.ie The literacy learning and tuition website (see also National Adult Literacy Association www.nala.ie).

www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/ gotkids.html Got kids? Get Reading! is a UK website which includes publicity materials (banners and posters), a book collection and leaflets for parents and carers with positive messages about how the library can support them with their reading.

www.nala.ie The National Adult Literacy Agency can refer adults who want to improve their reading and writing skills to their nearest VEC Adult Literacy Service. This site also contains a variety of information on family literacy development.

www.ncca.ie The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. The Aistear Toolkit offers many online resources such as tip sheets, videos of practice, podcasts, training resources, background research papers, and other resources.

www.npc.ie National Parents Council- Primary is the nationwide organisation representing parents of children attending early and primary education.

www.oasis.gov.ie/education Main areas of interest related to the education system in Ireland.

www.pobal.ie/Funding/Programmes/early Contact details for City/County Childcare committees.

www.readwritenow.ie The read write now TV literacy series 5 (see also National Adult Literacy Association www.nala.ie).

www.rollercoaster.ie This gives access to a wide variety of information on parenting.

www.scoilnet.ie The main website for primary, post-primary and special needs education in Ireland.

www.skool.ie Has lots of subject tips for older children.

www.starfall.com This site contains a reading programme and is split into four skills levels with various types of interactive reading material and child-friendly activities aimed mainly at emergent readers and 4-7 year olds.

www.unesco.org/new/en/education/ themes/education-building-blocks/ literacy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) approach to literacy.