‘Children’s Play - more than just fun and Games’
The importance of play in the Childminding setting

Evaluation Report

April 2013
NICMA received funding from the Western Childcare Partnership Early Years Fund for the development and delivery of a Play Programme aimed at childminders and their minded children.

**Aim of Programme:**
To enhance the outcomes for children within childminding settings by improving the childminder’s skills and knowledge in the importance of play and play based activities. This will help childminders to meet the requirements in the Minimum Standards of the importance of play and to develop their own Play Policy.

The programme entitled ‘**Children’s Play - more than just fun and Games**’ was delivered in two parts:

A **training workshop** which focused on the value and importance of play and covered the following:

- What is play?
- Stages and types of play;
- The value of active learning;
- The importance of child initiated play;
- Play activities that promote each area of development;
- Creative activities

and practical **Messy Play Sessions** which offered the children and childminders the opportunities to explore natural play materials and extend the childminders knowledge and skills in providing a varied range of play experiences within their settings.

Alongside the training childminders received a Play Booklet which aimed to reinforce the value and types of play discussed during the training and included practical play ideas for use in the home setting.
Play Workshops Overview

Play Workshop – ‘Children’s Play- more than just fun and games’

In total 55 childminders attended the five Play Workshops which were held in Derry, Limavady, Omagh, Enniskillen and Dromore.

The topics covered during the Play Workshop included:

- Identifying the stages and types of play
- Appreciating the value of active learning
- Understanding the importance of child initiated play
- Play activities that promote each area of development
- Creative activities
- Health and Safety

The workshops which were delivered using a range of methods including tutor input, group exercises, discussion and self reflection, offered the participants the opportunity to mix and share ideas with a group of other childminders and the benefits from this cannot be underestimated. The importance of play and its value within a childminding setting were discussed and childminders were able to share ideas and experiences. Childminders were encouraged to understand the importance of child – initiated play and to explore how play is an intrinsic part of children’s learning, growth and development.

The various types of play were highlighted and childminders were able to explore the holistic nature of play. Putting play into context ‘Article 31’ of the ‘United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’ was considered: “Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities”
Messy Play Sessions Overview

The Messy Play sessions which were enjoyed by children and adults alike, included resources and activities such as:

- Sand
- Water
- Clay/Peat
- Rice / Lentils
- Glup / Cornflour
- Jelly
- Shaving Foam
- Rabbit Bedding/Sawdust
- Play dough
- Junk Art and Painting
- shredded paper
- Pasta

A total of 114 children participated in the Messy Play sessions alongside 63 childminders.
Evaluation

The following gives an overview of NICMA’s Evaluation of the programme and includes comments and suggestions taken from formal evaluation sheets:

1. All the Childminders ticked that they found the Play Workshop and the Messy Play Session enjoyable. They found it interesting to learn about all the different types of play. *The Play Workshop was very enjoyable, good ideas shared. It was very informative with lots of information and practical tips and ideas. The messy play session was very enjoyable, the children loved it, lots of messy play activities for the children to experience. Great choice of activities at low prices and easy cleaned up.*

2. The Childminders reported thoroughly enjoying meeting other childminders. They learned how to cater for a range of children’s play activities using various materials from around the home. *The training provided lots of new ideas and we learned what children could gain from regular messy play sessions. Brilliant information and ideas from the Play Workshop. I learned how play is vital for learning for children. Messy play sessions are fun and it helps development. The children enjoyed playing with all the resources and mixing and playing with the other children. Lots of different ideas received when working with a child to promote his communication skills. Good tutor received various opportunities for messy play with the kids which I hope to carry out in my settings.* There was great interaction between the children and the childminders during the Messy Play sessions and the childminders reported that it was lovely to see how the children could get so much enjoyment from such simple ideas.

3. During the Play Workshops childminders were provided with a Play Booklet also funded through the Western Childcare Partnership. Childminders stated that they would find this resource invaluable. *It is interesting to see and learn new types of play that the children will enjoy. The benefit of using materials from around the home (i.e. rice and lentils) is something that I’ve never thought off before. There was lots of information shared, ideas discussed.* Following the workshops and Messy Play sessions the childminders stated that they now understand and value what the children can gain from messy play activities. Childminders also stated that they are now more encouraged to provide materials in their settings to enable children to have regular messy play activities – rice jelly play dough. Furthermore, childminders reported that the model of delivery (Play Workshops followed by Messy Play sessions) was excellent.

4. During the sessions the children enjoyed mixing with the other children. Childminders comments on this include: *One of my children really enjoyed the interaction with the other children, and getting her feet painted. One child who*
attended hadn’t stopped talking about it and children enjoyed the freedom to be “Messy” and there was lots of choice.

5. An outcome of the programme was that many childminders stated that following their attendance at the training they plan to use ‘trays’ in their settings for the children to mix materials in, and to use recycled materials for children to create with.

6. Many childminders reported that the programme was well delivered and that the tutor engaged effectively with both the adults and the children and that the methods used were excellent. Several requested further messy play sessions to be made available.

The Tutor was 1st class friendly and approachable and excellent at ensuring everyone was happy.

The Training and the Messy play sessions were very relaxed and well structured. There was a great choice of materials and everyone was made feel very welcome.

Great opportunities to meet other childminders and share information and ideas.

The resources used to deliver the sessions were excellent. The methods were explained really well.

Session was fantastic with a great venue, tutor and ideas.

Tutor was very busy during Messy play session making sure everyone was happy and children had enough materials.

Training was very enjoyable and easy to understand.

Both sessions were very worthwhile, thoroughly enjoyed by the childminder and the children.

 Lots of resources which were well laid out for the children to choose from.
Play is a tool for learning and practitioners who acknowledge and appreciate this can, through provision, interaction, and intervention in children’s play, ensure progression, differentiation and relevance in their development.

(Moyles J, 1996)