



# **“Our Generation”**

the path to emotional resilience,  
empathy and understanding  
Building peace through emotional resilience  
in post-conflict Ireland



**Northern Ireland - Ireland**

European Regional Development Fund

A project supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

**'Our Generation'** – the path to emotional resilience, empathy and understanding. Building peace through emotional resilience in post-conflict Ireland.

A partnership of seven cross-border organisations are to share €6.1M (£5.1M) of EU PEACE IV funding to support communities to tackle post-conflict resilience and peace building throughout Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

The partnership, led by Action Mental Health, has been awarded funding through the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), to build positive relations and emotional resilience in communities impacted by four decades of the Troubles/Conflict across the island of Ireland.

Match-funding for the project has been provided by The Executive Office in Northern Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland.

"Our Generation" is a cross-border partnership project which will be delivered through seven regional organisations, namely Action Mental Health, Donegal Youth Service, Co-Operation Ireland, Youth Action NI, Youthwork Ireland, PlayBoard NI and Ulster University.

It will reach 35,000 children, young people and adults who support them during the life of the project. Programmes provided will include accessible, age appropriate prevention, early intervention and recovery activities delivered on a cross-border and cross-community basis to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and young people within local communities.

Children and young people will engage in programme design and delivery, including provision of peer support, developing skills and confidence to improve well-being within their communities and act as agents of change, building peace for future generations.

David Babington, CEO of AMH and spokesperson for the project, said:

"The legacy of the conflict has left an impact on many communities in Northern Ireland and Ireland, which is still evident across generations of adults and young people. This innovative new project provides an unprecedented opportunity for communities, North and South of the Border, to come together to halt the intergenerational impact of the trauma and build emotional resilience and peace for generations to come".

**PlayBoard’s programme is focused on the critical role of play as a means of supporting both the development of childhood resilience and as a mechanism for positively addressing differences at individual, familial and cross-community level.**

In terms of resilience, research has highlighted the importance of play in offering children access to opportunities to build characteristics closely associated with high levels of resilience. These include the ability to adapt to distinct or changing circumstances/set-backs etc. and recover from same; the ability to learn and grow from mistakes, challenges and difficult situations enhancing both mental and physical capacity to cope with stress and adversity; the capacity to develop positive self-concept and high self-esteem.

From a cross-community perspective, despite perceived differences, the one unifying factor for all children and young people throughout childhood is play. Children and young people’s lives are full of play opportunities and it is through these play opportunities that children learn about others, explore difference and better understand the world around them. Through play they are able to develop the skills required for competence in cognitive, creative and social spheres. Critically, in play all children are equal, and it is through the act of play that children and young people’s learning in cooperation and conflict resolution begins.

The programme has been based on PlayBoard’s ‘Space’s to Be – Mapping Identity and Belonging’ toolkit. The toolkit was developed by PlayBoard through its Peace III Diversity in Play initiative and builds on PlayBoard’s many years of playwork and peace building experience and practice working with children, young people and communities across Northern Ireland. Through a range of practical and playful exercises the toolkit focuses on the creation of innovative ‘shared spaces’ and building reconciliation through play.

Working with School Age Childcare (SAC) groups within the five urban village areas and delivering 3 cross-border seminars the programme will deliver a range of play focused activities encompassing children, young people, parents/carers and key contacts (including staff within SAC settings) including:

- UV Areas (North, West and East Belfast): The establishment of 2 cross-community ‘Spaces to Be’ programmes per identified Urban Village area with 12 SAC groups participating in total. Each programme will involve 1 SAC group from a predominantly PUL and 1 from predominantly CNR background (4 groups in total per Urban Village equating to a total of 12 SAC groups – 6 PUL and 6 CNR - participating over the 3 years of the programme).
- UV Areas (South Belfast and Derry/Londonderry): The establishment of 1 cross-community ‘Spaces to Be’ programmes per identified Urban Village area with 4 SAC groups participating in total (reduced from other UV areas due to lower number of SAC providers who could potentially participate with South Belfast and Derry/Londonderry UV areas). Each programme will involve 1 SAC group

from a predominantly PUL and 1 from predominantly CNR background (4 groups in total per Urban Village equating to a total of 4 SAC groups – 2 PUL and 2 CNR - participating within the programme).

SAC groups will be partnered on a cross-community basis and will together explore the role of play in supporting resilience and enhancing community relations. Key elements of delivery will include delivery of focused cross-community play sessions exploring similarity and difference in line with the 'Spaces to Be' toolkit; training for staff within each participating SAC group, parent's sessions focused on the importance of play as a means of supporting children to develop resilience etc.

key aspects of the programme will include:

1. Delivery of training for staff within participating SAC groups on the 'Spaces to Be' resource, supporting the exploration of difference and promotion of cross-community understanding, alongside play based approaches to developing resilience in childhood
2. The running of joint, cross-community play sessions between partner SAC's within each Urban Village based on the approaches outlined in the 'Spaces to Be' toolkit helping to address childhood perceptions of difference in a positive manner through play based activities and helping to establish cross-community social connections and friendships
3. Joint parent/carer sessions will be delivered aimed at supporting parents attached to participating SAC's to gain a greater understanding of the importance of play from the perspective of developing resilience and exploring wider aspects of diversity and cross-community connection.

Sessions will include the provision of practical play skills and activities which have been shown to support the development of childhood reliance from age 3 and upwards

4. Border Counties: The delivery of 3 seminars aimed at staff/volunteers associated with cross-border SAC delivery groups (including the National Childhood Network based in Republic of Ireland). Seminars will to explore plays role in building resilience, exploring difference and introducing the 'Spaces to be' toolkit.

## **Programme Delivery & Targets**

A suite of programmes will be developed which meet the needs of key contacts of children and young people. Underpinning all aspects of delivery will be PlayBoard's existing 'Spaces to Be' programme and toolkit.

The 'Spaces to Be' programme toolkit was developed through PlayBoard's PEACE 3 initiative 'Diversity in Play' and has been shown through subsequent delivery to be an

effective way of developing and enhancing cross-community relations through play; whilst supporting the development of resilience in children and young people

**1. key contacts will be equipped with the skills and ability to support the emotional resilience of children and young people in their communities**

- Total 64 staff across 16 participating School Age Childcare settings undertake 'Spaces to be' training, enhancing knowledge and understanding of play's role and impact in building resilience and developing cross-community understanding
- Total of 160 parents/carers participating in training aimed at enhancing understanding, skills and knowledge regarding plays role in developing childhood resilience and supporting social connection across community boundaries.
- Total of 288 children and young people (18 per SAC group) actively engaged in 'Spaces to Be' programme building resilience through play based activities and coming together through play on a cross-community basis. In line with the 'Spaces to Be' approach, children will take part in a series of intensive, play based cross-community sessions maximising level of cross-community contact and promoting peace building
- 135 staff/volunteers attending cross-border seminars gaining knowledge, skills and enhanced capacity to support the development of resilience through play based approaches

The programme element is premised on PlayBoard's 'Space's to Be – Mapping Identity and Belonging' toolkit. The toolkit was developed by PlayBoard through its Peace III Diversity in Play initiative and builds on PlayBoard's many years of playwork and peace building experience and practice working with children, young people and communities across Northern Ireland.

'Space's to Be' is a practice based resource developed with and for children and young people to support them to explore issues of identity and belonging through a play based methodology. Through practical and playful exercises children and young people are encouraged to explore their understanding of difference and similarity. The 'Spaces to be' toolkit further helps to promote the creation of innovative shared space and peace building and reconciliation through play.

The toolkit supports the development of childhood resilience through a range of playful activities which aim to support children and young people to enhance their knowledge of self and wider self-esteem whilst developing new and existing skills, developing new social connections and overcoming adversity through play based approaches.

Through a combination of direct training for staff within SAC settings and supported delivery of 'Spaces to Be' play activities on a cross-community basis, key contacts will

develop their capacity to support and develop children and young people's resilience through targeted play approaches.

## **2. Workers/volunteers receive training appropriate to their work context which builds their capacity to better support children and young people's emotional resilience and good relations**

Staff/volunteers within After Schools Settings will receive focused PlayBoard training on the 'Spaces to Be' resource. This will encompass a number of areas including:

- The role of play and play based activities in developing emotional resilience in childhood
- The role of play and play based practice in creating shared space environments that support the development of good relations
- Enhanced play facilitation skills based around the 'Spaces to Be' toolkit supporting the development of cross-community social connections and

## **3. Parents/carers receive training appropriate to their personal context which builds their capacity to better support children and young people**

Parents and carers attached to participating After Schools Settings will receive focused Parent/carers training sessions encompassing a number of key areas including:

- The importance of play in supporting positive physical and mental childhood development
- The role of play in developing physical, mental and emotional resilience in childhood and practical approaches to building resilience
- The role of the parent in supporting enhanced play opportunities within the home and wider community

## **4. Shared Learning**

- 3 seminars to be held to promote understanding of play as a means of enhancing resilience, supporting broader childhood development and as a means of creating social connections across community boundaries