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The Rural Development Council (RDC) in partnership with Early Years - the organisation for young children and the National Childhood Network are jointly implementing the Rural Respecting Difference Programme (RRDP).

The programme has been funded under the PEACE IV Programme and is specifically aimed at rural preschool, daycare and afterschools settings (referred to as settings hereafter) across Northern Ireland and the 6 border counties of Ireland. Eligible settings must not be benefiting from any other Shared Education Programme or the Sharing from the Start Programme.

The Programme is aimed at young children aged between 2 and 12 years of age, their parents/carers, staff, leaders and management committees. The Programme is based on the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC)™.

## What is the Rural Respecting Difference Programme?

Children need opportunities to discuss and acknowledge the similarities and differences between themselves and others. They also need to be able to express more effectively feelings associated with similarities and differences, including those of feeling left out.

The Programme is based on the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC)<sup>TM</sup> which helps children to understand the meaning of acceptance and respect for others. Major research\* has found strong and robust evidence that the programme is effective in improving outcomes in young children in relation to their social and emotional development and awareness of and attitudes towards cultural difference. Moreover, these effects represent the added value to settings that the programme provides in enhancing social and emotional learning and promoting understanding of, and respect for differences.

*\*For further information on the research go to: [www.early-years.org/coral](http://www.early-years.org/coral)*

## What are the aims of the Rural Respecting Difference Programme?

- Increase awareness of diversity and difference issues among children, their staff/leaders, parents/carers and management committees;
- Help children to understand what it feels like to be excluded and encourage them to be more willing to include children who are different from themselves;
- Encourage young children to demonstrate respect and actively include others who are different;
- Make respecting difference a very real experience for children and something that can be shared with their families.

## What is the Media Initiative for Children?

The Media Initiative for Children (MIFC)<sup>TM</sup> was developed by Early Years – the organisation for young children (Northern Ireland) and the Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii, USA). It combines cartoon messages with a curriculum. Together they aim to build a better understanding among children, parents, teachers, leaders and management committees of physical, social, ethnic and cultural differences.

The cartoons are set in a play park and feature characters children can easily identify with. The messages in the cartoons are reinforced in early years settings through the use of resources and interactive activities that prompt children to talk about their feelings and attitudes towards the issues explored in the cartoons.

## What are the benefits to participating in the Rural Respecting Difference Programme?

- Free staff training. Cover for costs associated with substitute staff is available to cover staff attendance at training and other relevant events;
- Free comprehensive resource packs;
- On-going on-site support from an Early Years Specialist;
- Support for settings to meet their regulatory and quality frameworks;
- Support for Management Committees in the practical delivery of the Programme;
- Opportunity to participate in good relations workshops and develop a good relations action plan;
- Opportunities to enable parents to support the Programme in their own home;
- Potential opportunity to participate in a shared project with another setting on the Programme.

**For further information on how to apply to the programme and the commitment required please contact:**

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