

A photograph of two young children with blonde hair, wearing white polo shirts, sitting at a table and playing small, round, hand-drummed instruments. They are smiling and looking at each other. Other children are visible in the background.

# A Decade of Learning

## 10 Year Impact Report | 2014-2024

### Introduction

EastSide Learning was established to tackle systemic issues linked to educational underachievement in east Belfast. Our aim is to support children and young people to develop their abilities; reach their potential and experience success; whatever their background.

We are part of EastSide Partnership, a charity leading the regeneration of the area with a vision to create, 'A Thriving, Connected and Welcoming' neighbourhood and we recognise the crucial role that strong educational outcomes has in achieving this vision.

Our activity is aligned to the aspirations outlined in several key strands of the Programme for Government, in particular the Department of Education Fair Start Report and the Reducing Educational Disadvantage Action Plan.

### The Story So Far

Over the past decade we have been serving as an independent voice for education, promoting partnership working between schools and communities; providing strategic support and coordinating interventions; to improve outcomes for children and their families in east Belfast.

We have been listening, learning and evolving over the years. Working with a whole community approach, we have engaged with early years, schools and community settings who have shared insights into the challenges faced by those involved in children's learning and by parents and children. We have used these insights and evidence-based assessments to implement effective, equitable, expert and informed interventions.

The Education Framework, developed in partnership with key stakeholders, has been guiding our place-based approach to education for the past 10 years. As we mark this milestone it is an opportunity to reflect on our achievements to date, focusing on our five cross-cutting priority areas.



## Building Aspiration & Improving Achievement

**Parent Participation** in children's education significantly impacts academic achievement. To improve parental involvement we coordinated a number of **Family Learning** activities where parents and children shared enriched learning experiences together. Evidence and needs-based **Parent Programmes** such as; Understanding the Teenage Brain & School Readiness have supported parents to better understand their children's developmental stages and specific learning needs.

**Shared training** to improve literacy, numeracy and social-emotional outcomes for children has been delivered to practitioners, teachers and parents from early years to post-primary stages. Expert training has included; Solihull, Better Reading Partnership, Incredible Years and Families Connect. This has enabled a deeper knowledge of how children learn and an improved and shared practice.

1010

pupils at GCSE  
revision classes

*There's growth in children's confidence levels which is boosting all round development, with clear improvements in skills including vocabulary*

**Improving literacy and numeracy** is important to help children achieve their full potential. We supported interventions with schools & communities including ABC Clubs, Bug Clubs and the Hearsay programme, for children identified as needing more support.

Attaining English and Maths at GCSE is significant for young people and their future opportunities. We coordinated the delivery of **GCSE revision classes** in community and school settings for children who were most in need of support. Intervention in this area has led to improved results from pupils.

*The Network has helped us make connections and work better together*

Early childhood is recognised as a critical period in a child's development, laying the foundation for their future. It was therefore imperative for us to prioritise early years development as a way to improve children's development and readiness to learn in formal education.

The **Early Years Network** has provided peer support, secured investment and resources, promoted collaboration, enhanced training opportunities for practitioners, delivered early years events and developed the Early Years Good Relations Charter.

24

early years settings in  
the Network



The **Early Learning Community** is an extended early years community committed to finding innovative ways of creating systems change so that children have a chance to thrive. It brings together nursery staff, speech & language therapists, health visitors, community workers, departmental representatives, teachers and other members of the community that are invested in ensuring children have the best possible future.

## Supporting Smoother Transitions

Children and parents can find transitioning through education challenging. There can be anxiety and uncertainty, especially in relation to adapting to new environments, social situations and increased academic demands. For parents, it can be difficult to make school choices and navigate the admissions process.

With our partners we have addressed these challenges at early years, primary and post-primary transition stages in the following ways:

- **Advice, guidance & practical support for parents**
- **Transition guides**
- **Virtual tours of schools/ settings**
- **Events to support choices & school readiness**
- **Standardised forms**

*The work on transitions including development of transition guides and admission forms has created a consistency across east Belfast*

3650

transition guides distributed



Our transitions work has received positive feedback from community settings, schools and parents who have reported that the process has been smoother to navigate, has reduced anxiety and provided clarity.

## Valuing All Educational Pathways & Enriching Learning

Providing opportunities for children to develop new skills and interests outside the classroom is important to encourage aspirations.

STEM and STEAM activities have widely-recognised benefits for children; they encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation and collaboration.

Engaging in these activities has provided children with opportunities to develop and learn new skills, increase their confidence, learn with their parents and gain knowledge on STEAM careers and pathways.

157  
children attended  
STEM Summer School

- **STEM Summer School including visits to Queens University Belfast & Ulster University**
- **Summer Learning Programme with STEAM based activities provided to local summer schemes**
- **Family Learning Visits to Belfast Zoo, W5 Ulster Museum & Castle Espie**



## Collaboration, Coordination & Working in Partnership

Our chief role has been to coordinate, bring people together and establish an environment for better partnership working amongst schools, communities and parents. As a result:

- **Relationships are improved**
- **Partners co-design and collaborate on initiatives, interventions and events**
- **Shared training and practice has developed relationships, reduced duplication and improved education journeys for children**
- **Resources have been provided enabling in-house delivery of programmes and training**
- **Additional funding has been secured**
- **There is more equity**
- **There is a coordinated voice advocating for education in east Belfast with policy makers, government departments and statutory agencies**

*ESL has created the conditions for better partnership working, collaboration and a whole community approach to learning*

**780**  
staff trained  
in various  
courses

**£75k**  
added value  
funding

These outcomes would not have been possible without the commitment of schools, communities and parents to engage with us in this process.



We recognise that it will take generational change to make the difference that is needed to deliver long term impacts to improving the educational experience of all our children and young people. We are however proud of the progress we have made in the last ten years.

We will continue to respond to the needs of the local community and support a culture of learning and partnership working in east Belfast. We want every child to have the best start in life, including access to a fair, good and an equitable standard of education.

Thank you to everyone who has been on this journey with us including funders, schools, communities, board of directors and partners. We look forward to continuing to work together, for the future of the children of east Belfast.

## The Future

*If you regenerate people you regenerate communities*