



# **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2022-25**

## **Introduction**

Early Years – the organisation for young children is committed to diversity and inclusion. Our Vision is that children are respectful of difference. Inclusion and diversity are key Values for the organisation.

### **Mission**

To lead and innovate to ensure high quality shared early education and care services that support resilience for children, families and communities.

### **Vision**

- Children are strong, competent and visible in their local communities.
- Parents, carers and families live in communities with healthy relationships that nurture good child development outcomes.
- Children and families are physically and emotionally well and resilient.
- Children are eager and able to learn and reach their full potential.
- Parents/carers, families and service providers are empowered and resilient.
- Children are respectful of difference and grow up in a peaceful and shared region.

### **Values**

We believe in:

- Childhood – in its own right
- Listening to children – and those who care for them
- A strong voice for children
- Play, fun and creativity
- Parents as first educators
- Participation of children and families
- Community involvement and development
- Partnership
- Inclusion and diversity
- Excellence and evidence-based innovation
- Effective stewardship and governance
- A professional, committed and recognised workforce
- Valuing staff, members and their commitment

The following Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (D & I Strategy) aims to refocus and widen our activity to address our imbalance, via active measures, enabling our people to continue to contribute to the success of Early Years and ensure that we build a strong and sustainable future.

We have made significant progress in developing our reputation as a diverse and inclusive place to work in recent years, as evidenced by our achievement of the Bronze Diversity Mark and Platinum IiP Accreditation in June 2021. This Strategy seeks to build on our work to date and to anticipate future employment challenges and needs.

## **Purpose**

This Strategy is a three-year plan to help us as an organisation deliver upon our business and people goals. It provides a shared direction and commitment for the organisation so we can work together to respect and value our diverse workforce and build a more inclusive workplace.

This Strategy identifies 3 gender goals and 3 creating sustainable success goals, priorities and actions we will take over the next three years, linked to the 2022 – 2025 Organisational Strategy, Goal 2 Pedagogy and People. Following year 1 of the strategy we will consider the goals required to achieve a workforce that reflects the communities within which we work.

### **Goal 2 – Pedagogy and People**

- Lead the understanding of the value of early childhood learning and care services and the associated pedagogy and profession.
- Lead the generation of knowledge and promote practices that support diverse children and families from pre-birth upwards achieve their full potential.
- Promote and support universal access to multisectoral quality early childhood services that reach the most vulnerable children and their caregivers.
- Ensure the recognition of all voices, needs and identities in the provision of services for children and families.
- Implement a Human talent recruitment and retention process that is competency based and embraces the principles and approaches of a social pedagogue model.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The overall aim of the D & I Strategy is to ensure the effective recruitment and retention of a high calibre, diverse and engaged workforce that can deliver on the commitments set out in our Strategic Plan through an effective range of employment policies and practices.

In particular, we are committed to:

- A culture so that everyone in our organisation (from entry level to board) understands and values the importance of Diversity and Inclusion
- A positive gender balance across our organisation and the wider sector
- A workforce that reflects the communities within which we work

These areas are supported by key performance indicators which define how we can assess our progress and the impact of our practices:

**Gender targets (based on data from Oct 2020 Equality Return):**

- to significantly increase the number of male applicants from 10% of total applicants, with incremental improvement year on year, resulting in 15% of applicants by the end of the strategy

- to significantly improve on 6% male representation within the workforce with incremental improvement year on year, resulting in 10% representation by the end of the strategy

- to significantly improve the retention of males from 30% leaving with incremental improvement year on year, resulting in a significant reduction to 20% by the end of the strategy

In terms of **Creating Sustainable Success**, we will maintain and improve on the benchmark scores obtained in the 2021 liP Survey, in relation to internal attitudes and perceptions:

1. We asked people if they believe the organisation is committed to diversity. From all responses, 97.5% registered agreement.
2. We then asked them to consider if staff in the organisation reflect the communities and markets served; 95% agreed that they do.
3. Lastly, we asked if the organisation is truly an equal opportunities employer; 94.9% of respondents agreed that it is.

In order to achieve the targets, actions will focus on key strands.

## **Strand 1 – Recruitment and Resourcing**

It is vital that we employ a diverse workforce that is equipped with the skills and capabilities that we need now and for the future. We can ensure that we achieve this through effective external recruitment, appropriate internal progression and promotion practices, and through the flexible deployment of our people to support the organisational priorities that emerge through our planning processes.

We aim to ensure that we attract and recruit high calibre candidates with the right value base from diverse backgrounds across the range of job roles that make up Early Years.

We aim to significantly increase the number of male applicants from 10% of total applicants, with incremental improvement year on year, resulting in 15% of applicants by the end of the strategy

### ***Specific actions over the period of this Strategy include:***

<b><i>Specific actions</i></b>	<b><i>Key targets and performance indicators</i></b>
We will review all wording of recruitment advertisements and documentation to	Commencing April 2022 lead by HR

<b><i>Specific actions</i></b>	<b><i>Key targets and performance indicators</i></b>
ensure the removal of any feminine connotation	
We will continue to implement our Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures to ensure a consistent approach to recruitment including recruitment panels which have as diverse membership to include gender.	On-going with escalation of noncompliance
We will raise the profile of males within the workforce through articulation of journeys (which will be available on our website) and promotion across education and any other suitable channels, linking with the MICC organisation.	The D & I Champion will create links with the Men in Childcare Organisation. Each SureStart setting will nominate 1 male who will link with local educational settings and form part of a working group lead by the D & I Champion, supported by the Digital Learning Co-ordinator.
Within teams we will explore actions that can be taken to make teams reflective of the communities within which we work and specific advertising to attract people from underrepresented communities	Gender statistics to be shared by SureStart/Department March 2022. Individual teams to consider actions required to feed into year 2 goals linked to a workforce that reflects the communities within which we work

## **Strand 2 – Performance and Development**

Our reputation as an organisation that delivers excellence and innovation depends on the contribution of staff who are committed to high levels of performance and their own continuous development. As a Platinum Investors in People (IiP) employer we will continue to build on our strong record in providing a range of development opportunities that are aligned with the needs of our organisation and of our members and people. Our performance management processes ensure that our employees have the opportunity to receive clear feedback on their performance and to agree work objectives and development needs that contribute to the achievement of individual, team and organisational objectives.

We will continue to review the range of people development activities/programmes that we deliver and seek feedback to ensure that they are relevant and appropriate. In particular, we want to focus on the needs of

our male staff and members enabling collaboration and a culture of continuous development whereby staff will engage in a range of fora with the purpose of sharing ideas, innovation and good practice.

**Specific actions over the period of this Strategy include:**

<b>Specific actions</b>	<b>Key targets and performance indicators</b>
1. We will work with individual managers and leadership teams to identify the development needs of the men within our workforce ensuring support and processes fit the needs of this demographic (including our probation, performance management, absence management, disciplinary and PDR procedures)	The D & I Working Group will serve as a consultation forum to explore support and process requirements
2. We will arrange an event to enable collaboration between males across the sector	D & I Champion and Director of Services to lead
3. We will develop and implement a talent management and succession planning strategy to retain key skills, to promote internal career progression and to increase our current/future leadership capability and organisational agility. Within this strategy we will have a stream specifically focused on males	A talent management and succession planning strategy will be developed. HR to lead.
4. We will create development pathways targeted at males and underrepresented groups to increase the key skills within Early Years (e.g. placement, apprenticeship/ volunteering opportunities where appropriate).	Training Group to take forward

**Strand 3 – Engagement and Well-being**

It has been proven in numerous studies that there is a close correlation between levels of employee motivation, organisational performance and the provision of a safe and healthy workplace. We aim to continue to provide a high quality work experience for all of our male staff to ensure that they feel supported, valued and involved in the work of their team. Most importantly we want employees to feel proud to be a part of Early Years and to be contributing to our success through the delivery of excellent customer service.

We are committed to asking employees about their employment experience and to addressing areas where they would like to see improvements through our annual staff survey, focus groups and a range of feedback and consultation mechanisms. The feedback that we receive informs our action plans and strategies for enhancing the working experience that we provide.

We consider ourselves to be a caring employer, but acknowledge that there is always more that we can do.

It is important that we acknowledge and celebrate the successes and contribution of our male staff. We provide opportunities for staff and teams to be recognised at annual Staff Days, as well as acknowledging contribution both personally and in the Staff Newsletter.

**Specific actions over the period of this Strategy include:**

<b>Specific actions</b>	<b>Key targets and performance indicators</b>
1. We will consider the mental health and well being of all of our staff and the actions necessary to support this including the development of champions across the organisation	Health and wellbeing committee
2. We will consider the mental health and well being of our male employees and the actions necessary to support.	Health and wellbeing committee.
3. We will continue to conduct our annual Staff Survey with the inclusion of the D & I benchmark questions.	Scores Maintained
4. Each of the working groups will have at least one male as part of the group, to ensure engagement with males	Chairs of working groups to ensure
5. The D & I Group will provide a forum for direct engagement with males.	The D & I Champion will develop ToR for the group.

**Strand 4 – Equality and Diversity**

Early Years employs a broad range of staff and is committed to ensuring that our employment practices are equitable and progressive; furthermore we actively promote a culture of respecting difference where we all can learn to embrace and understand what makes us different.

As part of our legal requirements, we monitor our fair employment practices annually and complete the Equality Commission's Article 55 every three years. Our most recent Article 55 was completed in July 2020. As a result of this exercise, the organisation has committed to improving application from and participation within the workforce of the Protestant community, and participation in the workforce by males.

As part of our commitment to maintaining our culture of diversity, we will continue to deliver both recruitment and selection training which will encompass equality and our Media Initiative for Children Respecting

Difference programme. This latter programme has been delivered to all Early Years Specialist staff and will be delivered in the form of an one-day course to all new employees which will be refreshed every 3 years.

**Specific actions over the period of this Strategy include:**

<b>Specific actions</b>	<b>Key targets and performance indicators</b>
1. We will implement the action plan arising from our 2020 Article 55 Review to increase applications from and participation by the Protestant community, and participation by males.	An increase of 5% in applicants/appointees from the Protestant community by 2023. An increase of 5% in the Protestant proportion of the workforce in Soc Groups 1-3 and 6-8 by 2023. An increase from 6% to 10% in the proportion of male employees.
2. We will continue to develop and revise our programme of equality and diversity training to ensure employees' behaviours reflect the principle of 'respecting difference'.	100% of new staff trained in one-day session of MIFC training. Programme of education to be part of three-year training plan
3. We will ensure that all policies and procedures are developed/reviewed with equality impact assessment in mind.	100% of policies reviewed.
4. We will work with our members to increase male participation within the early years workforce.	An increase from 15%* to 20% of facilities employing male staff  *From the Early Years publication 'Contribution of the Voluntary, Community and Independent Early Years Sector in Northern Ireland'



## Strand 5 – HR Service Delivery

Our Human Resources Team is committed to the delivery of a high quality, professional and customer-focused advisory service. The Team aims to work with managers to provide practical, flexible and user friendly guidance and solutions to people management issues.

Over the period of this Strategy the HR team will provide information, support and guidance to support the delivery of this strategy.

### ***Specific actions over the period of this Strategy include:***

<b><i>Specific actions</i></b>	<b><i>Key targets and performance indicators</i></b>
1. We will provide detailed analyses producing a meaningful and accessible range of data in relation to men.	Regular reports available for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Sickness absence</li><li>- Recruitment</li><li>- Training</li><li>- Employee turnover</li><li>.</li></ul>
2. We will review policies to minimise any unintended impact upon men.	

### **Review**

This strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis. The KPIs will be incorporated within the balanced scorecard, which will be reviewed quarterly.