

10/05/2023



Department of
Education
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AN ROINN
Oideachais
MANNYSTRE O
Lear

Dear Stakeholder,

The Toybox programme is working regionally across Northern Ireland, with the most vulnerable Traveller and Roma children and families, to improve the long-term educational outcomes.

Since 2003, the programme has provided a home visiting service with an emphasis on inclusion as well as the development of early childhood practices and advocacy strategies. This ensures that young Traveller and Roma children aged 0-4 years and their families have access to high-quality education, formal schooling, and family support.

The Department of Education recently informed Toybox that should the interim budget position remain unchanged, **the Toybox programme will have to cease at the end of June 2023 if additional funding is not made available.**

The Toybox staff team are highly experienced and skilled in supporting inclusive practice and are focussed on addressing challenging diversity and inclusion related issues. Trusting relationships have been formed with families and the young children engaged in the programme over a period of time.

Losing this service provision and expertise for these hard-to-reach families, who already have limited targeted supports and interventions will have a devastating impact and further compound the challenges which they face on a daily basis.

Cessation of this funding will mean:

- **215 Traveller and Roma children annually aged 0 to 4 years will not have access to Toybox outreach services.**
- **158 Traveller and Roma families annually will immediately have no home-based intervention support in place.**
- **25 Traveller and Roma fathers will not have access to family support with their children's learning and development.**

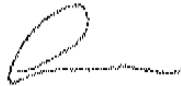
We would call upon you to support the Toybox Programme in challenging this and to request that it is reviewed carefully, as these cuts will lead to a new missed generation of children and their families who have been failed by a system that does not value their needs adequately.

We need your help to:

- Support the continuation of the Toybox programme beyond June 2023.
- Distribute this information and leaflet to highlight the programme's impending closure in June 2023 if additional funding is not made available, as well as the impact this will have on these vulnerable families.
- Speak to your local and regional electoral representatives during this period of canvassing to highlight the importance of Toybox and other voluntary services.
- Write/email the Department for Education Permanent Secretary and your elected representatives to express your support for the continuation of the Toybox programme.

Yours Sincerely

Louise McLaughlin
Operations Manager



Shirley Gillespie
Toybox Manager

