A brief history of St. Brigids childcare services

A pre-school nursery service was established in 1974 catering for children living in Hawley Park, Kevin Barry’s Villas and the Mitchels housing area. The aim was to prepare children aged 3 and 4 years for entry to national school with an emphasis on learning through play. Support for the nursery was widespread and funding was raised from the local community, political parties, public and private groups.

A Montessori teacher and assistant were employed in the school in 1974. The school was held in the GAA Pavilion. In September 1974 there were 11 pupils on the register and they attended the morning session from 9.30 to 12.00 (Kerryman Friday September 27th 1974)

From day one, the nursery was recognised as a valuable opportunity for integration between the traveller and settled communities within the area. This ethos has continued as St. Brigids strives to ‘respect the rights of all individuals to develop to their full potential and to celebrate their diversity and culture.’

Originally, the preschool operated from a large dressing room made available by the County Board in Austin Stack Park Pavilion. In 1977 it moved to its current home, in the newly constructed St. Brigids Community Centre.

The service was managed by the ‘Tralee Pre-School Nursery Committee’ - a sub-committee of the co-ordinating committee of various voluntary groups in Tralee. In 1974, one Montessori teacher and one assistant were employed and by September there were 11 pupils on the register. Initially, one session per day was offered. Demand grew however, and while based in St. Brigids, a second (afternoon) session was provided.
Interview with Catherine Healy Community Representative

1. How did the need for a pre-school come about?
CH: The community saw the need at the time. Pre-school was a very new concept and the community succeeded to get one set up in the area.

2. How did you get involved?
CH: I was asked by Sylvia Mason and other members of the committee to represent Kevin Barry's - they wanted a community representative from each the 3 areas, Hawley, Park, Kevin Barrys and the Mitchels.

3. Where did the funding come from?
CH: Mostly from the H.S.E. under Section 65 with partial funding from the St Vincent de Paul. Both Emmett Kennelly and Sean Kelly were involved in the St Vincent de Paul and helped with the pre-school.

4. Were there volunteers involved?
CH: Yes - volunteers from the communities and a lot of volunteers involved in the fund raising aspect.

5. Who managed the pre-school?
CH: It was managed by a local board with Emmet Kennelly as chairman at the time.

6. What were the benefits of the pre-school?
CH: In the 70's there was only private pre schools available and no option if you couldn't afford to go private. The nursery allowed all children to experience preschool which helped prepare them for primary school.

Noreen White; a former Principal Community Worker with the HSE (formerly Southern Health Board) who was involved with St Brigids

"the pre-school was run by the management Committee with the support of the Social Worker for Travellers employed by the HSE initially and then the HSE Community Worker... it was one of the first Montessori preschools in Tralee, it provided a very good Montessori pre-school education to children who attended it"

Bernadette Fitzgerald, a parent who sent her children to the pre-school told us the impact of the pre-school to the parents and children

"Being at the pre-school prepared her for school, it helped make her more independent and she was used to Mommy leaving and coming back again so she settled easily at primary school... and indeed my daughter continued the connect on with St Brigids sending her son to the crèche and to the summer camps."

Community Regeneration
The childcare service has always been a valuable support to families and is an integral part of the programme of supports offered to families. We currently provide one to one parenting support, parenting courses, support groups, supports for the unemployed, adult education courses and classes, recreation/social groups.

In line with other community childcare services we face many challenges. However, St. Brigid’s would never have become the highly respected community facility it is today without the support of local agencies, the local community, staff, CE workers, students, volunteers, families, parents and children and most importantly the volunteers who made up the Boards of Management over the years. Parents who used the service when it first started are returning to bring their grandchildren – you can’t get a better vote of confidence than that!

In response to changing needs within the community, the childcare service continued to develop and grow over the years and now provides two pre-school sessions per day (one morning and one afternoon), a full day-care crèche service and after-schools provision for primary school children. In order to continue to respond to emerging needs, we now offer a second morning preschool session.

The childcare service has always been a valuable support to families and is an integral part of the programme of supports offered to families. We currently provide one to one parenting support, parenting courses, support groups, supports for the unemployed, adult education courses and classes, recreation/social groups.

In line with other community childcare services we face many challenges. However, St. Brigid’s would never have become the highly respected community facility it is today without the support of local agencies, the local community, staff, CE workers, students, volunteers, families, parents and children and most importantly the volunteers who made up the Boards of Management over the years. Parents who used the service when it first started are returning to bring their grandchildren – you can’t get a better vote of confidence than that!

For further information please contact the centre at 066-7128521 or just pop in.

Mitchels Boherbee Historical and Heritage group would like to thank those who contributed; the staff of St. Brigid’s especially Annette O’Sullivan - Preschool Leader and Maureen O’Sullivan - Project Coordinator and the community members past and present. We would also like to thank Paul Johnson who designed the newsletter.

---

Did you know in the 70’s women in Ireland could not

1. Collect their Children’s Allowance
2. Own their own house outright (Before 1976)
3. Sit on a jury (you had to be a property owner)
4. Get the same pay for jobs as men
5. Keep their jobs in the public service or in a bank once they were married (marriage bar lifted December 1973)

(IrishCentral.com Wednesday May 10th, 2017)