



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Ag Súgradh Le Chéile



Donegal Annual Report September 2009 – June 2010



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Introduction

Ag Súgradh le Chéile (ASLC) is a programme developed by the Health Service Executive to promote active play between parent and child. It is a joint initiative between the Health Promotion Department - Health Service Executive (West), Donegal Sports Partnership and Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership. The programme was first rolled out in counties Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim in 2002.

The ASLC workshop is targeted at children from infants to second class and is hosted by the school for a period of 90 minutes. ASLC is one of several parenting programmes under the umbrella of Fás le Chéile. Fás le Chéile is a parenting programme which aims to promote positive relationships between parents and children. It includes courses on Positive Parenting; Parents, Schoolchildren and Drugs; Living with Teens; Starting School and Under the Gooseberry Bush (relationship and sexuality education).

The aim of the ASLC programme is to promote active play as vital to children's healthy development – physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually.

The objectives include the following:

- To increase the active play levels of children through the promotion of active play with parents and their children.
- To support family based activity by promoting parents involvement in their children's development through active play.
- To revive many of the traditional games that are no longer played by children
- To support schools to work in partnership with parents.

Rationale

Research has shown the positive effects parental support can have on a child's activity levels and also the benefits both physically and psychologically for children engaging in active play from an early age.

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland state that all children and young people should be active at a moderate to vigorous level, for at least 60 minutes every day. (The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland, 2009). National health surveys show that there are still significant proportions of young people who are not reaching the recommended level of physical activity. The Health Behaviour of School Aged Children (HBSC) Middle Childhood Report (2009) found that 55% of boys and 51% of girls exercise 7 days a week, practising sport or playing actively for 60 minutes a day.

This report presents findings from children aged between 9 and 10 years old. (Kelly, C., Molcho, M. & Nic Gabhainn, S., 2009). It is worrying that these figures indicate high percentages of young people may be missing out on the benefits of physical activity. The 60 minutes every day message is highlighted during ASLC sessions.

Recommendations from the Report on the National Taskforce on Obesity 2005 – Obesity, the Policy Challenges, recommended that Home school-community coordinators should be encouraged to promote courses and classes for parents to promote active living and healthy eating. From attending and participating in the ASLC workshop, parents learn simple active games that can be played at home with their child /children to help their child to achieve the target 60 minutes of moderate activity per day.

In June 2008, the Health Service Executive and Safefood in collaboration with the Health Promotion Agency, Northern Ireland launched a major campaign aimed at tackling the serious problem of obesity across the island of Ireland. The campaign, titled “**Little Steps**” is the result of new research into children's eating habits and physical activity levels. Results of this research reported that children (aged 4-7 years) who have active fathers or mothers are 1.5 times more likely to be active than children of inactive fathers or mothers. However, if both parents are active, these children are 5.8 times more likely to be active, than children of two inactive parents.

“Play, recreation and cultural activities are essential childhood experiences which enrich the lives of children and provide them with experiences and competencies that will serve them well in later life”

(The National Children’s Strategy. Our Children - Their Lives, 2000, p.57).

The ASLC programme is an important vehicle in delivering the message of how important play and physical activity are in children’s lives. The National Children’s Strategy outlined the opportunities for play in a range of settings including local communities, playgrounds, childcare facilities, primary schools, libraries and hospitals. However, children play in the home more than any in other place, particularly in the early years of life. The home is generally the first play environment for young children and parents can facilitate their play through providing opportunities to explore, experiment, learn new skills and grow in competence. (The National Play Policy – Ready Steady Play! 2004). In a recent study to measure the contribution of active play to the physical activity of primary school children, Brockman, Jago and Fox (2010) concluded that active play makes a significant contribution and should therefore be a valuable focus for future interventions.

In a review of the literature, Gruber & Haldeman (2009) identified the family as a highly suitable target for health promotion intervention because it provides many options and opportunities to communicate positive health behaviour messages and to change family member attitudes and behaviour. The National Taskforce on Obesity in designing their “*Framework for Obesity Prevention*” identified any opportunity which accesses children and their families in promoting healthy eating and active living as a core element in the framework. In addition, the education setting was also recognised as being important in promoting healthier living. (The Report of the National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005).

The ASLC programme targets children with their families within the school setting.

The NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) public health guidance 17 – *“Promoting physical activity, active play and sport for pre-school and school aged children and young people in family, pre-school, school and community settings”* outlined in recommendation 15, *Helping families to be active*, the following actions:

- Ensure parents and carers are aware of government guidelines.
- Provide information and advice on the benefits of physical activity, emphasising how enjoyable it is.
- Encourage parents and carers to get involved in physical activities with their children.

It is hoped that through the ASLC workshops parents will learn the value of physical play with their children as well as encouraging children to play on their own.

Delivery of Ag Súgradh le Chéile

School promotional materials, including an information leaflet for parents, are distributed to schools at the start of the academic year. A school can request a workshop by completing a booking form; available tutors are then appointed to the workshop and teachers are asked to complete the workshop checklist.

During the workshop parents participate with their children in a variety of activities including ball games, music and rhyme and traditional games. It is enjoyable for both parents and children and there is an opportunity for discussion with tutors. At the end of the ASLC workshop a number of key health promotion messages are given to parents and literature is also disseminated. (The literature which is disseminated is listed in Appendix 2).

The workshop is facilitated by specially trained tutors who have experience in both working with children and parents and also active play or physical activity. Potential tutors must be capable of delivering an opening address to parents and adults, lead on games and control the group when needed. Good personality and good communication skills are also essential. Potential tutors must also have good organisational skills as they are required to set up the venue, maintain and return paperwork to the coordinator.

Training the Tutors

Continued support is provided for tutors and regular contact takes place between the tutors. Tutors attended refresher training in September 2009. (Appendix 1 – Report on Tutor Refresher Training 2009). This training consisted of a one day workshop during which the ethos of ASLC, workshop design and demonstration of the games were all covered.

Tutors got the chance to participate in the workshop and led a practical session. Part of the training was focused on adapting games to suit children with disabilities. This was facilitated by the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO), Thérèse Laverty, Donegal Sports Partnership. Newly trained tutors are accompanied by existing tutors for the first few months until they gain the experience required to lead a workshop alone. From September 2009 to June 2010, 10 tutors were involved in delivering the ASLC programme throughout the school year.

There has been significant support for the programme from parents, children and schools within the County. This document is a brief report on ASLC for the school year 09/10. A summary of feedback on the programme from schools and parents is included.



Summary Report on Ag S gradh Le Ch ile Workshops September 2009 – June 2010

Workshops

- Total number of workshops held during this period: **76**
- Total number of schools: **52**
- Total number of parents/guardians: **977**
- Total number of children: **1311**

Table 1 – School Name and Numbers of Parents/Guardians and Children attending ASLC Workshops

No. of Workshops	Name of School	No. of Parents / Guardians	No. of Children
1	Scoil Mh�n na M�narach, An Clochan Liath	5	9
1	Frosses NS, Frosses	15	15
1	Scoil Fion�in, Falcarragh	21	24
1	Scoil Treasa Naofa, Malin	17	20
1	Killian NS, Inver	8	12
1	Scoil Cholmcille, Newtowncunningham	22	22
1	Kilmacrennan NS, Kilmacrennan	20	20
1	Drumoghil NS, Manorcunningham	16	18
2	St.Patrick’s NS, Murlog, Lifford	13	19
1	St. Mary’s NS, Pettigo	7	18
2	St, Eunan’s NS Raphoe	21	32
1	St. Mary’s NS, Castlefinn	16	17
1	St. Aengus NS Bridgend	14	18
2	Scoil Mhuire Gan Smal, Lifford	25	33
2	Raphoe Central NS, Raphoe	37	46
3	St. Patrick’s Boys NS, Carndonagh	30	51
1	St. Safan's NS, Drumdoit, Castlefinn	12	12
2	St. Patrick’s NS, Lurgybrack, Letterkenny	43	53
1	Scoil Caitriona, Ballyshannon	15	17
4	Scoil �osagain, Buncrana	63	69
3	St. Patrick’s Girls NS, Carndonagh	29	50
2	Scoil Mhuire NS, Cresslough	14	24
2	Clonmany NS, Clonmany	21	28
1	St. Francis’s NS Barnesmore, Donegal Town	23	28
1	Taobhog NS, An Clochan	6	19
1	Scoil an Coimin, An Clochan	11	21
1	Scoil Naomh P�draig, Drumfries, Clonmany	14	19
1	Dunkineely NS, Dunkineely	15	23

No. of Workshops	Name of School	No. of Parents / Guardians	No. of Children
1	St. Baithin's NS, St. Johnston	7	17
1	Boyagh NS, Porthall Lifford	13	16
1	Monreagh NS, Carrigans	8	14
1	Scoil an Linbh Iosa, Carrigans	13	20
1	Sessiaghoneill NS, Ballybofey	23	23
1	Scoil an Chaisil. Glencolmcille	10	16
1	Meenaneary NS, Carrick	6	11
1	Scoil Cholmcille, Kerrykeel	13	18
2	Craigtown NS, Craigtown, Carndonagh	28	29
1	Magherabeg NS & Glenmaquin NS	21	22
1	Scoil Chartha Naofa, Kilcar	10	20
2	St. Josephs NS, Rathmullan	18	25
1	Carrick NS, Carrick	13	19
1	Moyle NS, Newtowncunningham	12	17
2	Scoil Cholmcille, Termon	14	32
2	Scoil Naomh Fionán, Whitecstle	28	32
2	St. Davaddogs NS, Tamney, Fanad	8	15
2	Niall Mór NS, Killybegs	45	45
2	St. Mary's NS, Ramelton	27	42
3	Scoil Cholmcille Drummon, Ramelton	24	36
1	Croaghross NS, Portsalon, Fanad	10	16
2	Scoil Bhríde, Convoy, Co. Donegal	34	35
1	Scoil Cholmcille Naofa Tory Island	4	9
1	"Dads, Lads and Lassies", St, Mary's NS Ramelton	20	30
1	St. Brigid's NS Glenmakee Carndonagh	15	15
Total		977	1311

As shown in Table 1, 19 schools hosted more than 1 workshop. Some schools requested a workshop to be offered to children in Junior Infants only while other schools requested that children in Junior, Senior, First and Second Class to be invited to the workshop. Depending on the size of the venue and the number of children in the class, in some schools it was necessary to split the class into separate workshops for safety reasons. Priority is given to DEIS designated schools. Towards the end of the school year, a number of schools (5) inquired if we could facilitate a workshop for their new entrants as part of the schools programme to introduce the pre-schoolers into the school environment. For these requests a shortened adapted version of the original workshop was run in each of the 5 schools.

In order to celebrate Men's Health Week and Fathers Day, the children from junior infants to third class in St. Mary's National School, Ramelton invited their Dads to come out and play with them as part of the Ag Súgradh le Chéile programme. This resulted in 25 families coming out to take part in the workshop. (Appendix 3 – Press Release for Dads, Lads and Lassies Workshop).

Report on Ag Súgradh Le Chéile Workshops

Year to Year Comparison

ASLC has been very successful in Donegal during the period from September 2009 to June 2010. Despite the fact that there was a reduction in the number of rural school co-ordinators (DEIS), the ASLC programme is viewed as a valued programme and in some schools the class teacher or principal organised the workshop. The number of parents and children participating in the programme has been increasing on a yearly basis over the past number of years.

Table 2: No. of Workshops held and No. of Parents/Guardians and Children Attending since September 2005

Year	No. of Workshops	No. of Schools Visited	No of Parents/Guardians	No of Children
05/06	41	36	496	600
06/07	43	36	556	677
07/08	68	51	752	1079
08/09	75	57	868	1127
09/10	76	52	977	1311

From the School Feedback forms, teachers view the ASLC workshop as a great opportunity to involve parents/guardians in children's education in a non-threatening fun way. Schools consider ASLC to be an alternative means of welcoming parents into the schools.

Information on the programme was sent out to all schools in September 2009. All requests for ASLC workshops in the past year were facilitated.

Parent Feedback on Ag Súgradh Le Chéile

Of the 977 parents/guardians who attended the ASLC workshops throughout the period from September 2009 to June 2010, 919 (94%) Parent Feedback forms were returned. (Appendix 3) All of the parents/guardians who returned a feedback form felt that the workshop met their expectations. 81% of parents/guardians reported the workshop as “Better than expected”, with 19% reporting the workshop “as expected”.

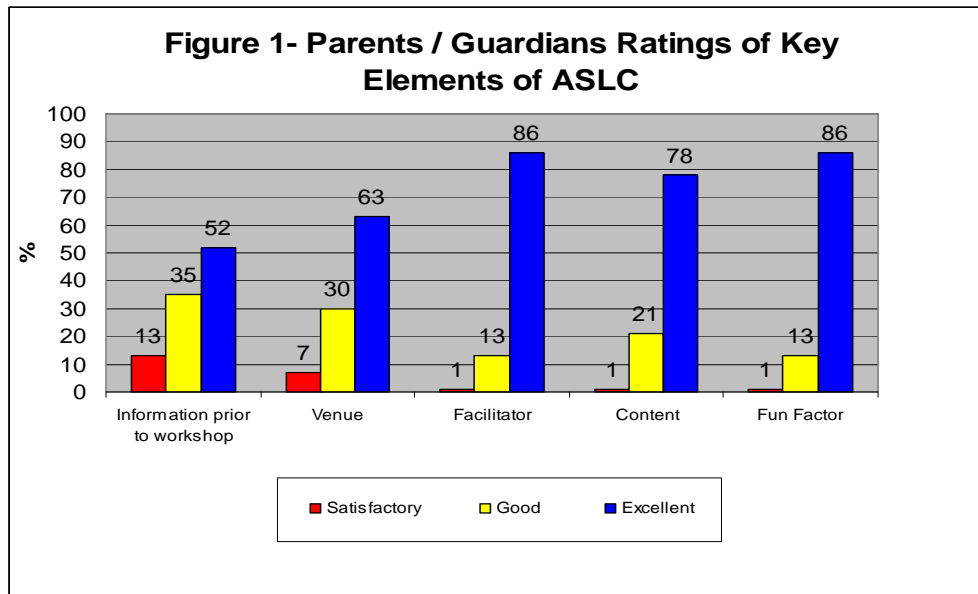


Figure 1 shows the parents' ratings of the following:

- Information they receive prior to workshop
- Venue
- Facilitator
- Content
- Fun factor

The analysis of the results shows that 52% of parents felt that the information received prior to workshops was excellent while 35% of parents felt that it was good. 13% of parents rated it satisfactory.

The venue was excellent in 63% of the workshops, good in 30% of the workshops and satisfactory in 7% of the workshops. The facilities to host the workshops differed greatly from school to school within the county.

Some schools were able to host the workshop on the school premises in the school Sports Hall, General Purpose Room or the class room itself. Unfortunately, some schools had to hire the local community or parish hall in order to host the workshop. This creates the problem of transporting the children to the particular venue. In some cases, the parents collected the children from the school and brought them to the hall;

in other schools a bus was hired. 86% of parents/guardians felt that the facilitators were excellent and 13% felt that they were good.

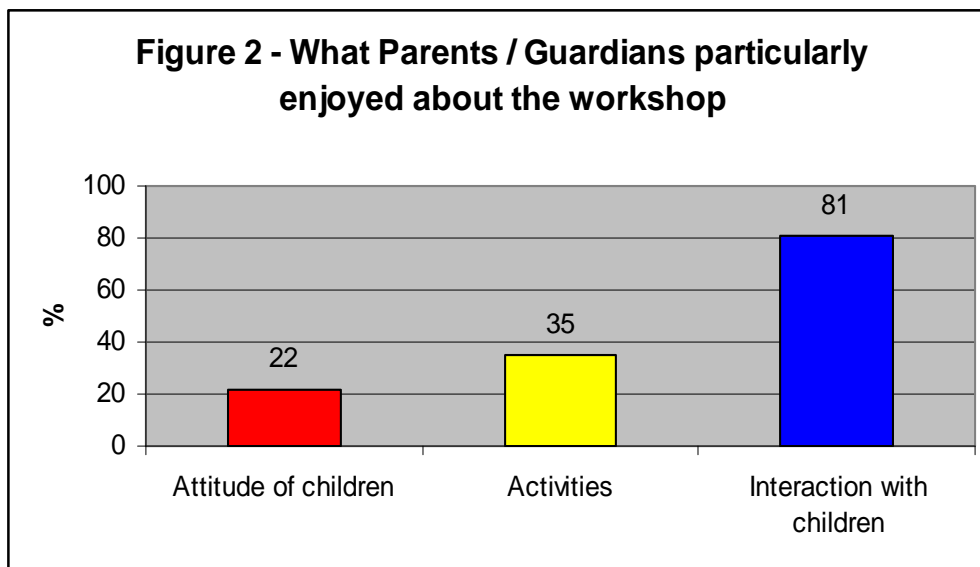
78% of parents/guardians reported that the content within the workshop was excellent. According to the parents/guardians, 86% felt that the fun factor during the workshop was excellent while 13% felt that it was good.

In highlighting what the parents/guardians particularly enjoyed about the workshop, they could select one or more of the following options:

- Attitude of children
- Activities
- Interaction with children.



Figure 2 presents the results.

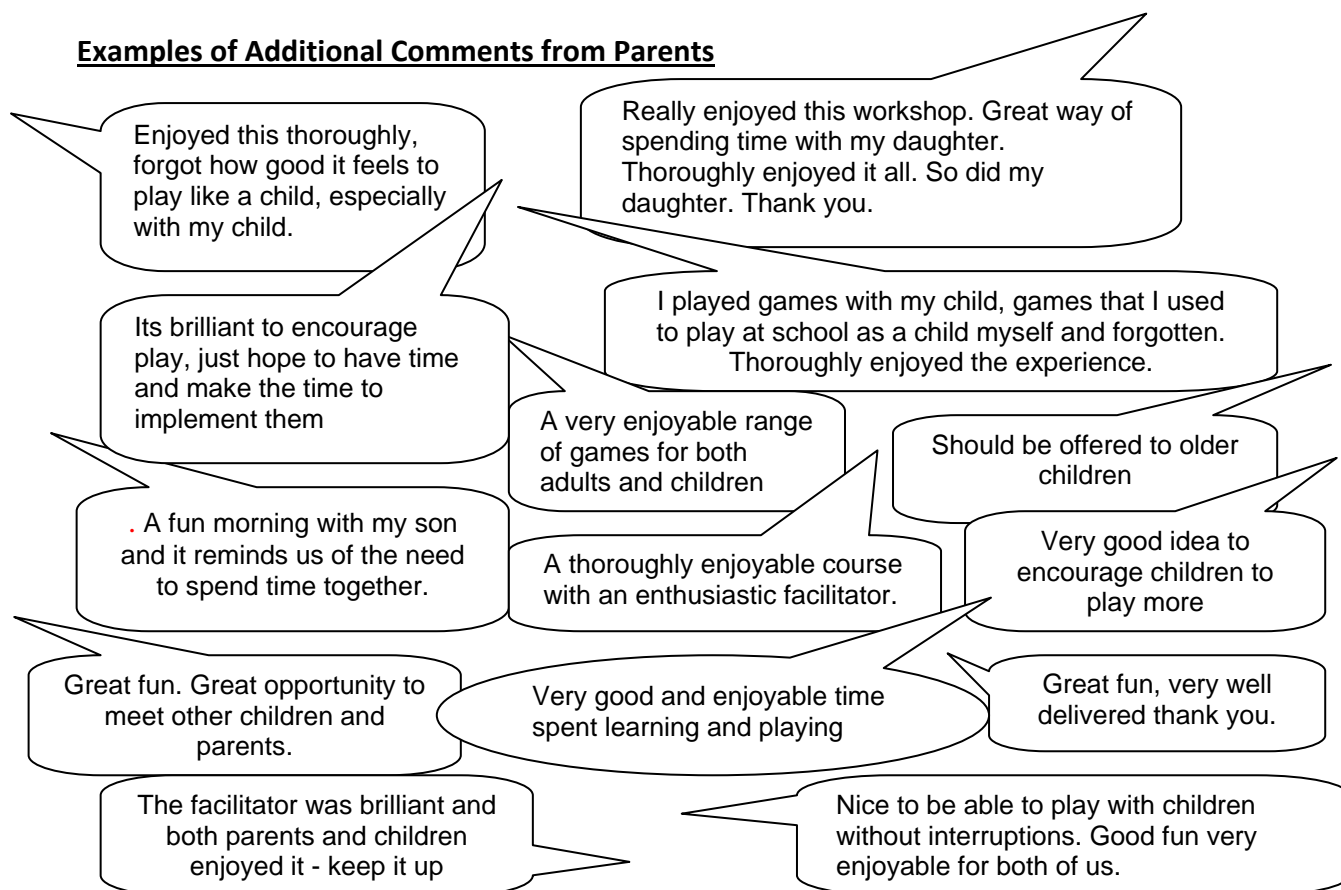


As can be seen from Figure 2, 81% of parents/guardians particularly enjoyed the interaction with their children, 35% enjoyed the activities and 22% noted the attitude of the children.

When asked if they would be interested in a follow up workshop on active play, 83% of parents/guardians expressed an interest in attending a follow up workshop.

The final part of the Parent Feedback form allowed for any additional comments that parents/guardians wished to make on the ASLC workshop.

Examples of Additional Comments from Parents



School Feedback on Ag Súgradh Le Chéile

School feedback forms were returned for 71 workshops. When teachers were asked to express if they felt that the workshop met their expectations, 75% indicated that it was better than expected and 25% found the workshops to be as expected. Following from this, teachers were asked if they would be interested in hosting a follow up workshop. All of the teachers (100%) surveyed indicated that they would be interested in doing so.

Additional Comments from Schools

- I enjoyed all of the games and look forward to a follow up.
- All that was covered was practical and useful
- Children had a great time, parents and grandparents had a great time and class teachers were happy.
- Excellent workshop as it is. Parachute games particularly good
- Great fun. It really needs parents to participate; it makes it more meaningful for children.
- Even better than before-didn't think that it was possible
- Up to the usual high standards. Some parents were here for their 2nd or 3rd time and still enjoyed it
- Well done to all those involved. An interesting and educational experience for the children and parents.

Recommendations for Ag Súgradh Le Chéile

The success of the ASLC programme has been built by continuously responding to feedback from tutors, schools, parents and children. Below are a number of suggestions as to how ASLC could further develop and encourage parents to promote active play with their children and deliver on the objectives outlined.

Evaluation of the Programme:

In order to validate the programme and determine the extent to which the wider health objectives are being met an external evaluation of the programme is needed. Evaluating the ASLC programme will contribute to the building up of a knowledge base for future health promotion programme's similar to ASLC. A follow-up questionnaire could be designed for parents / guardians who have already attended and participated in an ASLC workshop in the past. The questionnaire would be designed to determine whether attendance and participation at the ASLC workshops has resulted in its objectives being met and the extent to which they are being attained. Questions could also be focused on seeking constructive feedback that may assist in determining advancements in the approach or delivery of the programme that may improve its effectiveness.

Feedback from the children:

At the moment, feedback is gathered from the parents, school and tutors. If the group is small, the tutor may ask the children at the end of the workshop what game did they enjoy? However, a more structured form of feedback could be built into each workshop.

Tutor Training:

If play provision is to offer children the range and types of play opportunities they need, staff must be properly valued, well trained and enthusiastic about their work (Cole-Hamilton & Gill, 2002).

Further training for ASLC tutors to develop ideas for facilitation of games and play activities for older children.

Children, by nature bore easily. This characteristic of children will challenge ASLC tutors who will need to have a wealth of games and activities to hold a child's attention for the duration of a workshop. Tutor training will be developed to provide tutors with novel ideas to facilitate responsive, innovative and dynamic variations of play to ensure a fun filled workshop for both parent and child. The best toy a young child has is their imagination.

Community Groups:

Currently all national schools in Donegal listed are invited to host an ASLC workshop. The invitation could be extended to any community setting such as a Community Playgroup or pre-school setting as interest by such groups has been expressed during and at the end of the current workshops.

National Physical Activity Guidelines:

A lack of awareness of the 60 minutes a day physical activity guideline among parents could be one contributing factor to low activity levels among young people. The ASLC programme presents an opportunity to highlight the need to lead a physical active lifestyle.

Expansion of the programme:

The impact of the programme could be strengthened through provision of follow on workshops for the junior to 2nd class children and also the development of workshops for older children. The programme could also be promoted in schools during “Active School Week”.

Taking into account the impact of healthy eating in encouraging healthy living, the ASLC workshops provide an opportunity to reinforce this message to parents of school-aged children. Although a healthy snack is provided by the school at the end of each workshop and Healthy Eating Publications for school aged children are also disseminated, more could be done. There exists an opportunity at these workshops to emphasise the importance of the role of parents in ensuring that their children continue to engage in physical activity and healthy eating and that the combination of these key elements will help to ensure that their children will grow into healthy adults.

Promotion of the Programme:

Develop and organize an event to celebrate the start of the Summer School Holidays and one which engages with community groups by hosting a “Party in the Park” or, “Family Fun” day held in conjunction with National Play Day – held on the first weekend in July. This will present an opportunity to encourage parents / guardians to play with their children over the summer months to ensure children are closer to reaching their physical activity target of 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

Conclusion:

The yearly increase in the requests for ASLC workshops in recent years reflect the fact that increasing numbers of schools view the ASLC programme as an integral part of their school calendar. Children will play; it’s the adults that need encouraging!

The attitude of the parent has been identified as “the single most important factor in determining the quality and quantity of children’s play activities in the early years” (Canadian Parks & Recreation Association 2003 p.3). The ASLC programme attempts to educate parents and adults in the importance of play for children which is noted as a critical element of the National Play Policy – Ready Steady Play! (2004).

Building the capacity within parents / guardians to play actively with their child / children will raise parental awareness regarding children’s physical activity needs and assist children reaching their 60 minutes of physical activity a day. The programme also offers guidance on how parents and guardians can include physical activity in the daily lives of children. Parents are ideal teachers.

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Appendix 1: Report on Tutor Refresher Training 2009

ASLC Refresher Tutor Training was held on Saturday 3rd October 2009 in St. Conal's Education Centre, Letterkenny and the Cairde le Cheile Hall, Letterkenny. The following tutors attended the training:

No	Name	New /Current Tutor	County
1	Lynda Mc Guinness	Current	Donegal
2	Jane Doherty	Current	Donegal
3	Julie Voss	Current	Donegal
4	Lisa Gallagher	Current	Donegal
5	Katy Mc Shane	Current	Donegal
6	Anne McLoone	Current	Donegal
7	Seamus McNulty	Current	Donegal
8	Jeanette McGuire	New	Donegal
9	Rachel Rhatigan	Current	Sligo
10	Esther Mooney	Current	Sligo
11	Theresa Kilgannon	New	Sligo

The day started with an icebreaker so that all participants were introduced to each other. Following this, a practical session with Thérèse Laverty (Sports Inclusion Disability Officer in the Donegal Sports Partnership) was held in the Cairde le Cheile hall. Thérèse lead tutors through a range of games that could be included in a typical ASLC workshop to include children with varying levels of ability. All the games were very simple and included little or no equipment, in keeping with the ethos of the ASLC workshop.

Following the practical element, a short presentation that re-visited the aims and objectives of the ASLC programme and a review of ASLC in the school year 2008/2009 was presented.

After lunch, participants were divided into three groups. Each group was asked to facilitate either the Warm Up, Main Phase or Cool Down element of a general ASLC Workshop. Each group was asked to try to include games / activities that they would generally not have included in an ASLC workshop in the past. The tutors in Sligo demonstrated a simple game involving hide and seek type game of familiar fairy tale characters. Jane demonstrated a series of closing games which could be included to help children to wind down after the main activities. All tutors were thanked for travelling to and attending the training day. All tutors completed an Availability Form for the school year ahead and an Evaluation Form. To end the afternoon, all tutors were invited to take a supply of resources and Health Promotion leaflets to be disseminated at the end of each workshop that they would facilitate.

Appendix 2: Literature disseminated at the end of the workshop

- Get Kids on the Go- Booklet by the Irish Heart Foundation
- Your Child's Heart for Life- with Healthy Eating and Active Living – Magazine by Irish Heart Foundation
- ASLC Games Pack- Booklet by HSE, Donegal Sports Partnership, Sligo Sport & Recreation Partnership and Youth Sport West
- Little Steps for Healthy Living (2008). Health Service Executive, Safefood and The Health Promotion Agency Northern Ireland.
- Healthy Eating for Children (2007). Health Service Executive.

Appendix 3: *Lassies bring Lads "out to play" in Ramelton*

A unique and healthy way to celebrate Men's Health Week and Fathers Day got underway at St. Mary's National School, Ramelton on Tuesday 15th June 2010. In honour of Fathers Day the children from Junior Infants to Third class invited their Dads to come out and play with them. This resulted in an evening of fun in the sun for 25 families including boys, girls, mums and of course dads!!!

This event was organised by the Health Promotion Department, HSE West as part of the Ag Sùgradh le Chéile Programme. Ag Sùgradh le Chéile (ASLC) is a joint initiative between the Health Promotion Department and Donegal Sports Partnership. Lynda Mc Guinness, Physical Activity Project Officer of the Health Promotion Department in HSE West Donegal, says *"It was fantastic to see such a positive response from the Dads. We know that children are less active now than in the past and we also know that parents can positively influence children's activity levels. What better way to encourage physical activity for Dads than to get out and play together with their children"*. She also extended her thanks to the principal in the school, Mrs. Phil Friel.

The World Cup was a big feature as the event focused on Dads. The session included a penalty kick out with Dads in goals and the boys and girls taking up position at the penalty spot. Those who were not football fanatics however, were not left out as the fun session also included a series of warm up activities and co-operative games.

Ita McGettigan, DEIS Co-ordinator at the school, commented that it was a fantastic evening and great to see so many Dads coming out to play with their children especially on a World Cup evening. *"The enthusiasm of the Dads on the evening led to a great evening of fun and laughter as they played with their sons and daughters"*.

If your school is interested in hosting an Ag Sùgradh le Chéile workshop in the new school year, please contact Lynda Mc Guinness, Physical Activity Project Officer, Health Promotion Department, HSE West, Tel – 074 9168003 / 074 9178539. She will be delighted to hear from you.