

2019 WINNER OF THE FRED O'CONNELL – NPC INNOVATION AWARD

Kilshanroe National School Parents' Association, Kilshanroe, Enfield, Co. Kildare with their project

'To clarify the role and purpose of the Parents' Association to school staff, school children and to parents, to form a collective vision for the school, and utilise the Parents' Association to achieve that vision'

Purpose of the project:

Participation rates within the Parents' Association were low, interest was waning and the Parents' Association was seen only as a fundraiser. The PA's impact on children's day to day education and development at school was minimal. The Parents' Association decided it was time to change things by clarifying the role and purpose of the Parents' Association, by forming a collective vision for the school and by using the PA to achieve that vision.

Who needs to be involved?

The Parents' Association Committee, parents, children and the Principal and school staff.

How to implement in your school?

Kilshanroe National School Parents' Association used a 3 phased approach when developing their project, with a further ongoing 4th phase, this could be followed by other Parents' Associations.

Phase 1 – Information gathering & Communication:

- Members of the Parents' Association attended NPC talks and information sessions. They learned about initiatives other PAs had undertaken, especially other NPC Innovation Award winners. They learned of the benefits to children, staff and parents of collaboration, learning communities and listening to children themselves.
- The PA surveyed teachers and children in the school, and parents, on what they wanted the PA to be and do.
- The PA improved communication, by communicating often, on a dedicated PA section on the app, Facebook page and appointed a member to manage 'PR'.
- Noticeboards were erected for further communication especially for those not comfortable using the App. During this time frame the PA listened to new members' ideas and gave them support to implement them.
- An information flier was issued showing all the PA committee members, their interests and contact details to allow parents to contact the members.

Phase 2 – Analysing and addressing feedback

- The main feedback from students was simply they wanted parents to be more involved in school, especially to play games with them, and support new games. There were also some academic suggestions.
- Parents overwhelmingly stated the role of the PA should not be just fundraising, but also supporting the whole school community's academic and non-academic objectives. The results were shared at the AGM.

- Parents also wanted the PA to do more parent community events. The main event was a Fun Day in June. For this event the children were surveyed as to what suggestions they would like to see in the Obstacle Course.

Phase 3 – Outcomes

- A Parents' Association calendar was developed, to help parents plan more participation in PA and school activities. Events ranged from discos, to crafts, to baking etc.
- A Fun Day in June was organised.
- The PA contributed more to policy formation in the school. A parent initiated and is collaborating with the principal on an inclusion policy.
- Each year the PA produce an annual report of the PA's work throughout the previous year
- The PA along with the principal codified the purpose of the PA around four main themes:
 - Academic Support,
 - Health and Wellbeing,
 - Parents and Guardians Engagements, and
 - School Development Plan.

This put an overall shape and purpose to the role and purpose of the PA. It helped prioritise and explain activities to children, staff and parents. For example, it clarified why so much was being invested in the computer training programme. Children in secondary schools, who had received the computer training whilst in Kilshanroe NS, were asked how it helped them transition better into secondary school IT lessons. Through consultations the principal aligned the computer programme more with the national digital strategy for primary schools, and introduced more modern aspects i.e. coding.

The PA Developed a Health and Wellbeing programme and in 2018 the school collaborated to achieve the * Amber Flag Award.

- The PA sourced and supported a local yoga teacher do yoga in the school.
- The PA sponsored an Emotional Intelligence workshop for 6th class. This theme will develop as the PA learns what works and what is needed for parents, teachers and children. The parent's enthusiasm has to be matched with the practical implementation by staff in the school. Essentially the principal's main ask was for the PA to support the teachers to teach. For example the PA suggested more outdoor games and gym equipment. The teachers wanted more social play and support with teachers initiatives. From this arose the literacy programme. The children are given reading targets bespoke to their ability and age. The parents are informed of the targets and can log onto a software programme to see their children's progress, and support reading at home, asking questions on the books etc.

*The Amber Flag is a mental health initiative designed to help schools and clubs promote positive mental health within the educational system.

The three main goals for the Amber Flag are :

1. To promote mental health and well-being for all.
2. Preventing mental health problems through increased awareness, social support, reducing risk factors such as racism, bullying and isolation.
3. Improve the quality of life for students with mental health problems by promoting recovery through awareness and education.

- A teacher in the school formed a garden committee to design a garden plan. The PA formed a sub group of parents to advise and help construct the children's garden. Local community grants were availed of. This garden can be used by everyone in the local community. Local landscapers are being asked to give talks on plants, and involve the children in showing the community what they have achieved.
- Through surveys and engaging parents and children, the PA outlined some development aspirations to the board of management. A local parent produced outline plans for various schemes requested by parents, from an internal remodelling project to form a resource area, to community walkway, to an all-weather pitch, to a school hall. Some of these project may never materialise. But by forming the vision of what may be, the PA can focus the imagination and passion of the board and parents. By having plans in place the PA are best placed to avail of grants and investment if it arises. In 2018 the PA got a community grant for a community walkway around the school. There were extensive discussions with the principal, Chair of the Board, parents, teachers and children on the design and material of the walkway. It is funded by the grant, PA and the school board. The PA has scheduled all the NPC training sessions for 2020, and are inviting local primary schools to these sessions.

Phase 4 - Ongoing phase:

The PA will continue to work in partnership with the board, teachers, children and parents in building a school community.

The PA are discussing a plan to become involved in the NPC Partnership Schools Ireland initiative in the school.

The PA have commenced a process to review their constitution.

All initiatives will be aligned with the four main themes of the PA. The PA believe the health and wellbeing of children (and staff and parents) will become a major theme over the coming years.

Elements of the project which could be replicated in other schools:

- Survey template and concept, as a practical way to listen to children, school staff and parents
- Annual calendar is a practical way for PA committees to focus and plan their activities over the year, communicate to the wider school community.
- Articulating the role and purpose of the PA in a set of common objectives to prioritise the PAs activities. Setting an annual budget and plan based on these core objectives which is agreed at the AGM and sense checked throughout the year.
- A collective development plan, driven by the board & staff, parents, community and children
- Parent driven approach to generating policies i.e. a practical example of collaboration with the school principal.

2018 NPC INNOVATION AWARD WINNING PROJECTS

2018 Joint Winner - Scoil Nano Nagle Junior National School Parents' Association, Bawnogue, Clondalkin, Dublin 22 with their project

'Developing awareness of the importance of 'wellbeing' in the home and school'

Purpose of the project:

- To develop an awareness of the importance of wellbeing in the home and school
- To highlight the importance of wellbeing on learning
- To create and enhance the school environment to support the development of mental wellbeing and healthy lifestyles.

The rationale being that improving the school environment and provision of resources for wellbeing would positively impact on the learning and overall mental and physical health of the children, families and the community.

Who needs to be involved?

The Parents' Association adopted a whole-school approach to involve children, staff and parents, which could be sustained over time.

How to implement in your school?

Developing a Health Promoting School (HPS) Model involves establishing and maintaining policies, practices and programmes that promote health over a sustained period of time. The process of working towards becoming a HPS involves attention and focus on four key areas:

- Environment
- Curriculum and Learning
- Policy and Planning
- Partnerships

To find out more about a Health Promoting School click this link <https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPM00839.pdf>

Step 1: Decide on key areas of a HPS to concentrate on

The Parents' Association of Scoil Nano Nagle decided to concentrate on 3 key areas of a HPS.

- Environment
- Teaching and Learning
- Partnership.

Parents' Associations could focus on whatever areas work best for their children, parents and school staff.

Step 2: Engage with parent volunteers, teachers, HSCL and local agencies to further ideas.

Scoil Nano Nagle's endeavours under the chosen areas included doing the following:

Environment

- A parents room was created by removing partitions in a prefab, this was decorated and furnished.
- A play therapy room was creatively decorated by two artistic parents, who painted a mural on the wall; fluffy cushions and lots of creativity transformed this into a child-friendly space.

- A school garden was developed where children, parents and teachers could learn and develop a sense of wellbeing. Bright colours were used on outdoor furniture to be uplifting, fairy doors and a place for children to write their worries provided a simple way to meet the emotional needs of the children.

Teaching & Learning:

The Parents' Association provided funding for mindfulness CDs for the classrooms.

- Hints and tips were sent out in a weekly newsletter to show simple ways to enhance physical and mental health in the home.
- Adult classes focusing on wellbeing were organised by the HSCL Coordinator, these included classes on healthy eating, gardening and crafts.
- Activities such as baking for a cake sale, helping in the garden, doing crafts in the classroom saw children working together with their parents and grandparents.
- Family Fun Day ideas were circulated to all families, highlighting free events with an educational focus.

Partnership:

The final part of the project was two-fold, it involved creating two directories to be available on the school website.

- A directory of extra-curricular activities for the children in the locality. In order to develop this list, parents were asked to complete a short questionnaire asking for basic information on the clubs their children attend. This directory provides information on clubs and services in the area to help promote, support and develop children's talents, skills and interests, which was deemed to be a huge factor in promoting their overall wellbeing.
- A directory of agencies for parents to access family support. Information for this directory was collected by liaising with the HSCL Coordinator and local agencies.

In addition to these directories, the Parents' Association is compiling a list of places for family trips. This information is being gathered using a suggestion box in the school reception area, a note in the newsletter and again by liaising with the HSCL Coordinator.

The school planned to host a 'Wellbeing Week' in June 2018 to which parents and community agencies were to be invited.

2018 NPC INNOVATION AWARD WINNING PROJECTS

2018 Joint Winner - St. Brigid's National School Parents' Association, Greystones, Co. Wicklow with their project

'Developing a student friendly ICT programme'

Purpose of the project:

To equip children with crucial technology skills, to proactively support the implementation of the Department of Education and Skills 'Digital Strategy for schools 2015-2020'.

Goals of the project, to:

- Enable all students to be equipped with essential computing skills to enable them to enhance their existing educational learning opportunities.
- Facilitate a smoother transition into post primary school for children by providing a child friendly ICT programmes to increase their IT knowledge and skills.
- Help develop a self-sustaining digital education programme in St. Brigid's to encompass digital audio-visual skills and basic programming in line with the Departments guidance and best practice.
- Encourage parents to engage with their children's learning through the use of digital technology.

Who needs to be involved?

The Parents' Association Committee, in partnership with the Principal and ICT coordinating teachers. The ICT programme decided upon in St. Brigid's National School was a result of agreed learning objectives between the Parents' Association and the teachers, with the children's interest at the core.

How to implement in your school?

Step 1: A pilot programme with 6th class pupils

In St. Brigid's National School a pilot programme was introduced to 6th class pupils (in the summer term 2017), providing them with exciting, creative and interesting content to use in their everyday learning.

Step 2: Trial the programme in junior classes

The programme was trialled in 3rd class to evaluate the best age to introduce the programme. Feedback received was very positive which resulted in the programme being adopted by 3rd and 4th class.

Step 3: Launch the full programme

The full programme was launched in February and March 2018, working with 3rd class. Led by a team of seven parents. Four intensive hour long sessions were run over two weeks.

In April 2018 a second set of sessions were delivered to 2 other classes, including 4th class. During this time the children were introduced to Desktop management, MS Word and PowerPoint.

Outcome:

St. Brigid's National School Digital and ICT Subcommittee created a self-sustaining programme, which can be replicated in other schools.

The children enjoyed working with new technologies and the opportunity these gave them to showcase their work/projects.

The ICT Subcommittee enhanced the presence of the Parents' Association with the students, which in turn made parents more aware of the role of the PA, resulting in greater parental participation and involvement. Parents are more aware of not just the technology that their children are learning about, but the curriculum as a whole.

The school received a 'Digital Schools of Distinction Award' – Digital Schools of Distinction is a flagship programme which aims to promote, recognise and encourage excellence in the use of technology in primary schools.

2017 WINNER OF THE NPC INNOVATION AWARD

The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's Junior and Senior Schools, Knocklyon, Dublin 16, with their project

'Our understanding of a Parents' Association'

Purpose of the project:

The Parents' Association wanted to find ways, other than running events and fundraising, to support the children, parents and the school and to engage more members. The Parents' Association wanted to make parents aware of the important role they play in their children's education.

Who needs to be involved?

The Parents' Association committee and parent volunteers.

How to implement in your school?

The Parents' Association used a 4 stage approach in their schools, this approach could be used in other schools.

Step 1: Create a new mission statement for the Parents' Association

To highlight the objective of the Parents' Association and to ensure parents know what the objective is – the new mission statement of St. Colmcille's PA is:

St. Colmcille's Parents' Association supports the Junior and Senior schools' mission and strategic direction and builds community through active parent engagement, ongoing communication and strong partnerships.

Step 2: Develop a new logo

Create a strong visual of what the Parents' Association represents. The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's created a new logo comprised of the school colours and in the shape of a shamrock representing three intertwined groups; a) the parents b) the children and c) the school. The groups are intertwined working together to achieve one goal. The goal is to help each and every child to achieve his/her full potential.



Step 3: Set up a Facebook page

In order to engage more members and to make it easier for parents to connect with one another and to share information.

Step 4: Develop a new website

The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's were in the lucky position to have a parent who works in IT create a new website for the Parents' Association www.stcolmcillespa.com which

includes a resource page, split into different categories such as sports, music, etc and in each category are links to websites of local clubs and activities. Other local Parents' Associations also share information on their events on this website and reciprocate by sharing St. Colmcille's events on their sites.

The Parents' Association put a lot of time and effort into the new website as they wanted to show parents that they are committed to building a strong community within the school and they realise how valuable the parent role is within a child's education.

Step 5: Share information with all parents

All the new endeavours by the Parents' Association were shared with parents via the PA's newsletter sent out by the school.

SPRING NEWSLETTER ST. COLMCILLE'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION



Spring is in the air and with it brings change and new beginnings. There has been a lot of work going on in the background over the last few months to revamp the Parents' Association's image. We hope you like the end result as much as we do!



2016 FRED O'CONNELL AWARD WINNING PROJECTS

2016 Joint Winner - The Parents' Association of St. Kevin's National School, Greystones, Co. Wicklow with their project

'Healthy Mind Healthy Body Week'

Purpose of the project:

Reinforce the positive benefits to children of healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle for their overall mental wellbeing in a fun and practical way.

Who needs to be involved:

The Parents' Association Committee, parent volunteers, teachers and children in the school.

How to implement in your school?

Step 1: The Parents' Association Committee or a Parents' Association subcommittee plans a schedule for a 'Healthy Mind Healthy Body' week.

In St. Kevin's National School the week was broken down into 5 elements:

- Mindfulness and Krav workshops
- Food day
- A recipe book
- Sponsored walk
- A talk for parents on children's mental health

Step 2: Two weeks before the chosen week, the Parents' Association to send a notice out to all parents and school staff with information on the planned week and looking for parents to volunteer their time to help out during the week.

Ideas from St. Kevin's 'Healthy Mind Healthy Body' week

Mindfulness and Krav workshops

An experienced yoga teacher conducted workshops for parents, teachers and the children in the school. The yoga teacher's philosophy combined breathing exercises, postures, creative play and relaxation to sow the seeds of a lifetime of health and wellness.

A qualified Krav Maga Global Kids Instructor held workshops for children, where they learned self-defence, self-awareness and confidence-building skills in a safe and fun environment. The main objective of the class was to empower children to use their voices to defend and not to attack.

Food day

Food day was split into two elements a) Food tasting and b) the story of sugar. The main objective of this day was that it would be fun, educational and interactive.

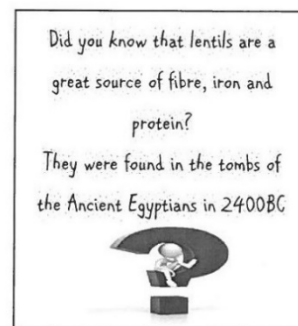
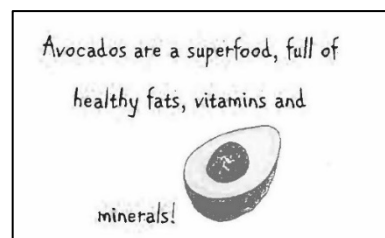
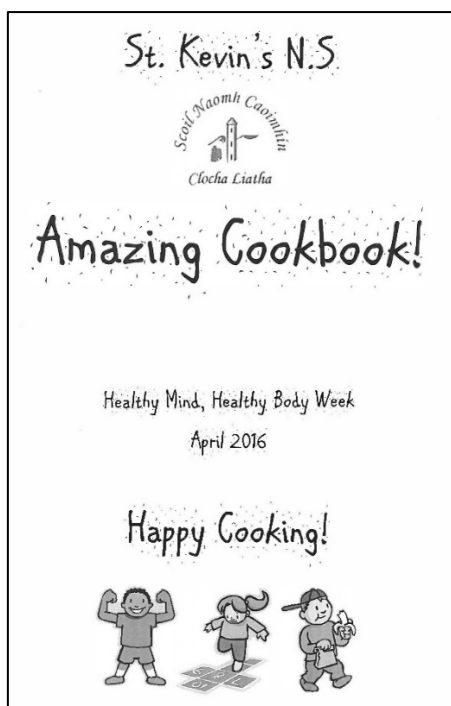
Children were given the opportunity to sample healthy food provided by the parents, including rice cakes, vegetable crisps, organic yogurts, fresh fruit and veg and a number of parents made home-

made healthy dips, carrot muffins and smoothies. Most of the food tastings included allergen free items to cater for children with allergies.

The story of sugar saw children being able to guess the amount of sugar in familiar products, in a hands-on workshop. They were also informed about their recommended daily intake of added sugar and how to calculate this.

Recipe book

Parents in the school were asked to submit healthy, easy to make, tried and tested recipes for inclusion in a recipe book. The recipes were discussed in the classrooms by teachers with the children. Over 40 recipes were submitted and compiled into a book, broken into four chapters, breakfast, lunch, dinner and baking & sweet treats. Pictures, graphics and insights into ingredients were included in the book to make it visually appealing to parents and children.



Sponsored walk

The annual sponsored school walk was linked with the 'Healthy Mind Healthy Body Week' to raise funds to upgrade the outdoor playing fields. 550 children, all the teaching staff and 45 parents took part. The walk had a theme of 'Tremendous Ties' where each child created a tie to wear.

A talk for Parents on Children's Mental Health

The PA committee organised a National Parents Council Primary information session for parents 'Supporting Parents to Support their Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing' which took place during the Healthy Mind Healthy Body week.

Outcome

This was a very positive week for parents, children and teachers; children learned new skills, tasted and enjoyed new foods and parents became more aware of their children's mental health.

The school will continue to use this formula for a Healthy Mind Healthy Body week for the foreseeable future.

AWARD WINNING PROJECTS

2016 Joint Winner - The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's Junior and Senior National Schools, Knocklyon, Dublin 16 with their project

'Connecting with Parents and Helping Parents Connect'

Purpose of the project:

Their project centred around improving the way the Parents' Association keeps in touch with parents. Having a combined enrolment of 1584 pupils, the Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's Junior and Senior National Schools in Knocklyon found that communication with all the parents can be challenging.

Who needs to be involved?

The Parents' Association Committee and parent volunteers.

How to implement in your school?

The Parents' Association of St. Colmcille's National Schools followed a number of steps, which could be replicated in other schools, or could be used as guidelines by other Parents' Associations to do similar things.

Step 1: Highlight PA Committee members

Their first action was to include photos and brief details of committee members on their website and in a professionally printed newsletter. This gave parents the opportunity to recognise the committee and get to know the committee members who had children in their child's class or year. The increased visibility of the committee meant greater interaction with parents in the school yard, allowing parents to ask questions and find out about the PA events etc.

Step 2: Provide information about School and Parents' Association events

The PA committee went to school events and put information, photos and videos of these events on their website. This allowed parents who could not attend events, due to work and other commitments, to gain a greater insight into the wide range of activities which are often the highlight of the school year for their children.

In St. Colmcille's this led to a greater number of parents signing up to the PA website, once registered parents receive updates on events posted on the website via an email, making parents more aware of landmark events of the school, which they are then more likely to attend if they can.

Step 3: Organise Coffee Mornings for different groups of parents

A coffee morning was organised for the parents of incoming Junior Infant pupils. The coffee morning took place on the first day of school, when most parents have taken the day off work and have the opportunity to meet parents of other children in their child's class. A contact form was circulated and parents who wished to do so added their contact details and a volunteer from each class set up a WhatsApp group for the parents.

A coffee morning was arranged in June for the parents of the soon to be departing Sixth Class parents. This gave parents the chance to reminisce about the last 8 years of their children's school life.

Further Additional Educational Needs (AEN) coffee mornings were organised for parents and toddlers. Speakers were provided for every second coffee morning and parents were given the opportunity to meet other parents and exchange information regarding doctors, activities or to just chat and tell their stories.

Step 4: Set up a Volunteer Database

A volunteer database was set up on the website, which allowed parents to volunteer for various events, primarily the tea/coffee receptions which take place after the Communion and Confirmation masses. Being such big schools, providing refreshments at these events is a huge task and finding volunteers wasn't always easy, but by giving parents an easy mechanism to volunteer meant that more parents got involved and were given front line jobs, serving the tea/coffee etc and meeting with the parents, the more mundane tasks were left to the PA committee.

Outcome

Parents' responses have been very positive and parents are now contacting the Parents' Association Committee. Parents feel more included and are more informed. The PA went from "Do we have a Parents' Association?" and "What do they do?" to "What are the PA doing this month and do they need my help?".

AWARD WINNING PROJECTS

2015 Winner - The Parents' Association of Gurraneasig National School, Kilbritten, Co. Cork with their project

'What Parents know that Kids would love to learn'

Purpose of the project:

To open children's worlds and minds to different interests and professions. For children to learn extracurricular skills and have access to a big group of parents who can and want to teach children fun stuff.

Parents get the opportunity to connect with a group of children who are genuinely interested in learning from them.

Workshops were organised to take place during the last week before the school summer holidays.

Who needs to be involved?

Children, parents and teachers.

How to implement in your school?

Step 1: The Student Council or if there isn't a Student Council, children in the school invite parents to submit workshop ideas, based on their individual expertise, passions and physical resources.

Gurraneasig National School Student Council did this by sending out a **Flier**



Attention all mums and dads!

We're on a mission: to have even more fun at school during the last week before our summer break.

That week, we want to learn from you!

There are lots of things that you (hopefully) know that we would love to learn.

If you want to teach us: great! You can fill in the form and pass it back to one of us. We will then organise a programme with lots of fun activities that all of us can choose from.

To the right is our wish list. They're not the only things we like, so if you have any ideas that are not on the list: we're interested!

The eventual activities will need to be approved by the school and parents for safety. We may ask some parents to help with transport and supervising some activities. We hope that's ok.

Thanks for reading, and hopefully we'll hear from you by Friday May 25.

Best wishes, team Phoenix

Class 1: Harry, Thomas and Arlen

Class 4: Ryan and Olivia

Class 5: Calum and Abi

Class 6: Nico and Jasmine


Our wish list

Making a video	Science/experiments
Drama	Orienteering/map reading
Music	Dress design
Photography	Archeology/digging/exploring
Drawing skills	How (race) horses are trained
Wood work	Computer skills
Soccer	Baking
Hair styling	How planes work
How boats are built	How electronics work
How to save a life	Make up skills
Recording music	Making a nice picnic
How an engine works	

This flier stated the children’s mission: **To have even more fun at school during the last week before our summer break.** ‘That week, we want to learn from you! There are lots of things that you (hopefully) know that we would love to learn’.

The flier included a wish list of the things the children would like to learn, but they also wanted the parents to come up with other ideas.

Step 2: Parents are given an **Activities Form** with which to volunteer their skills and knowledge and describe the activity they would be willing to teach to children.



Activities form

Name:	
Mum/dad of:	
Contact number	
Short description of activity:	
Preferred days between June 20 and 28:	
Where would the activity take place?	
How long will it take?	
Maximum number of kids	
Anything else we need to know?	

Please return by Friday May 25.

Thank you!!!!

Team Phoenix

Step 3: Children chose the subjects they were most interested in for workshops.

Step 4: The activities agreed upon for the workshops must be approved by the school and parents for safety.

Workshops which were offered by the parents of children in Gurraneasig National School included:

- How to make a curragh
- Carpentry skills

- Screen printing T-shirts
- How to make a movie from scratch
- Petrol heads i.e. how engines work

Step 5: The workshops need to be scheduled, in Gurraneasig National School the schedule was drawn up by the Student Council with the help of a parent, these workshops took place both on and off the school site and lasted for from 1 to 4 hours.

Step 6: Written consent must be given by parents for their children to take part in a workshop.

A teacher must always be present at the workshops.