

**A Whole School Community
Resource for Sharing in
Education at Nursery
and Primary Levels**



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Welcome to *Buddy Up!*

This is a rationale and ‘how to’ guide for effectively nurturing and managing relationships between partner schools and communities at nursery and primary levels.

This resource was developed by Community Relations In Schools (CRIS) in partnership with Holy Cross Nursery School and Edenderry Nursery School. This model is based on the combined experience of the three organisations in designing a Buddy System, which has been the cornerstone of their Community Relations programme for more than a decade.

CRIS is a community education charity that has been in operation since 1982. Since its inception, CRIS has been at the forefront of Community Relations work within and between school communities. The organisation works towards its vision – “*to be a leading agent for change in shaping an inclusive, vibrant and safe society where everyone has the opportunity to learn and grow*”. Its core work involves supporting schools to engage children, young people, school staff, parents, other adults and the wider community in robust, meaningful Community Relations work

– through the provision of resources, training, facilitation and consultancy. Further information about CRIS’ approach can be found in the flagship publication, ‘*Engaging Whole School Communities: Good Practice in Shared Education*’, which is available on CRIS’ website.

The illustration work in this resource is the inspired creation of Patrick Sanders, who brings the spirit of ‘*Buddy Up!*’ to life with beautiful, child-like imagination.

Community Relations In Schools (CRIS)

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Introduction:

Context and Rationale



[Buddy Up!]...is not a model that confines itself to the walls of the schools, but one that utilises the school as a focal point for transformation within the community, in which everyone has a part to play



Baroness May Blood, April 2013

This resource has been developed by the education charity, Community Relations In Schools (CRIS). It outlines the work that has been taking place between two pioneering North Belfast schools – Holy Cross Nursery School (HCNS) and Edenderry Nursery School (ENS), in partnership with CRIS for more than a decade. Through a process of ‘*plan, do, review*’ the three organisations have designed ‘*Buddy Up!*’ – the cornerstone of their Community Relations programme.

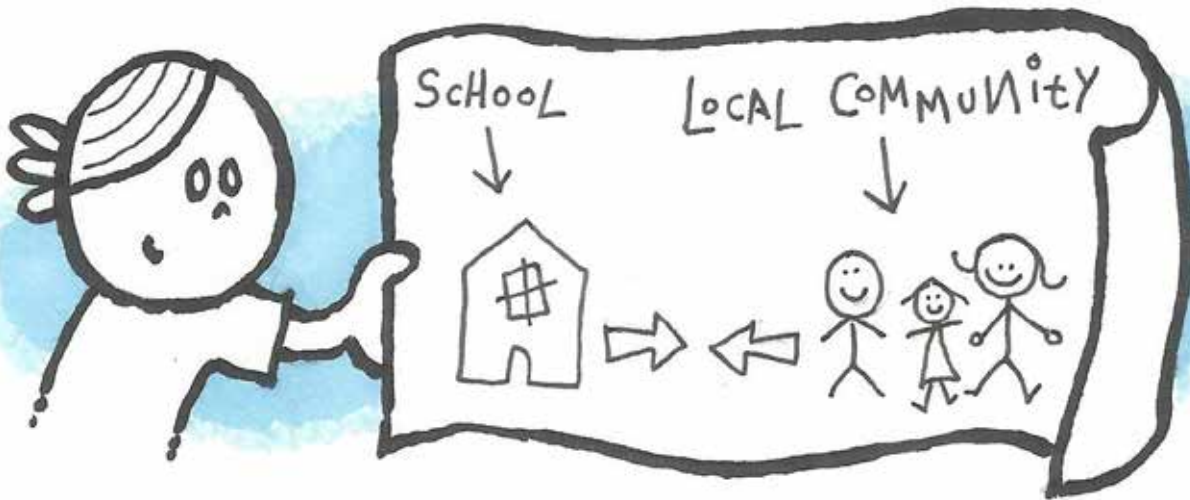
HCNS, ENS and CRIS have developed a system which actively engages children, school staff, parents and carers from two proximate school communities in meaningful cross-community Community Relations work. ‘*Buddy Up!*’ builds the confidence of the individuals involved; encourages creative working; strengthens inter-personal skills; extends the school curriculum; humanises ‘the other’; and actively promotes

peace-building by reducing fear and mistrust. It is also relatively inexpensive and straightforward to run but most importantly of all, it is life-giving, fosters hope and is fun for everyone involved!

Education and Government Policy Context

‘*Buddy Up!*’ aligns closely to a number of educational and government policies. The Northern Ireland Programme for Government states the Government’s commitment to “*ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes...*” and to “*substantially increase the number of children sharing facilities...*”². Importantly, ‘*Buddy Up!*’ is an example of ‘Shared Education’³ in practice as it promotes the mainstreaming of cross-sectoral

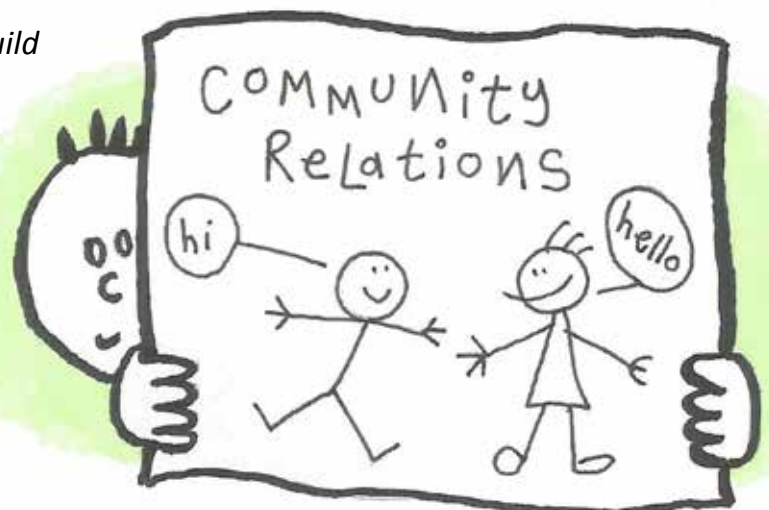




'Buddy Up!' Resource Rationale

The three organisations have created this resource in order to share their experience with other nursery and primary schools across Northern Ireland (and beyond). 'Buddy Up!' is transferable into a wide range of different contexts – it is flexible and adaptable in its very nature – something which can grow and change in different schools and communities. CRIS has supported numerous other nursery and primary schools to implement their own, bespoke 'Buddy Up!' programmes over the last five years.

collaboration and enhances the educational experience. The cross-community work of both HCNS and ENS has been recognised by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) who have praised the work, saying, *"the effective cross-community link developed over several years...is an example of excellent practice, benefitting the parents, children and the local communities"*⁶. 'Buddy Up!' is crucially about *"connecting a school to its local community"*, which is one of four characteristics identified in 'Every School a Good School'. It neatly matches the objectives of the Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) Policy⁴ of the Department of Education which works to provide *"children...with opportunities to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions"*. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)'s 'Together Building a United Community' Strategy⁵, published on 23rd May 2013 recognises the value of this 'Buddy System', which is referenced directly as a headline action under Priority One 'Our Children and Young People'.



It is important to note that ‘Buddy Up!’ can be tweaked to suit:

Different ages and stages of education

Through the use of appropriate activities and resources

Different geographical areas

More physically distant schools may elect to use digital technology or ‘pen pal’ letters to maintain relationships

Different school partnerships and clusters

Three schools may elect to work together. Whilst if no partner school is available, buddying could even take place between two partner classes in the same school

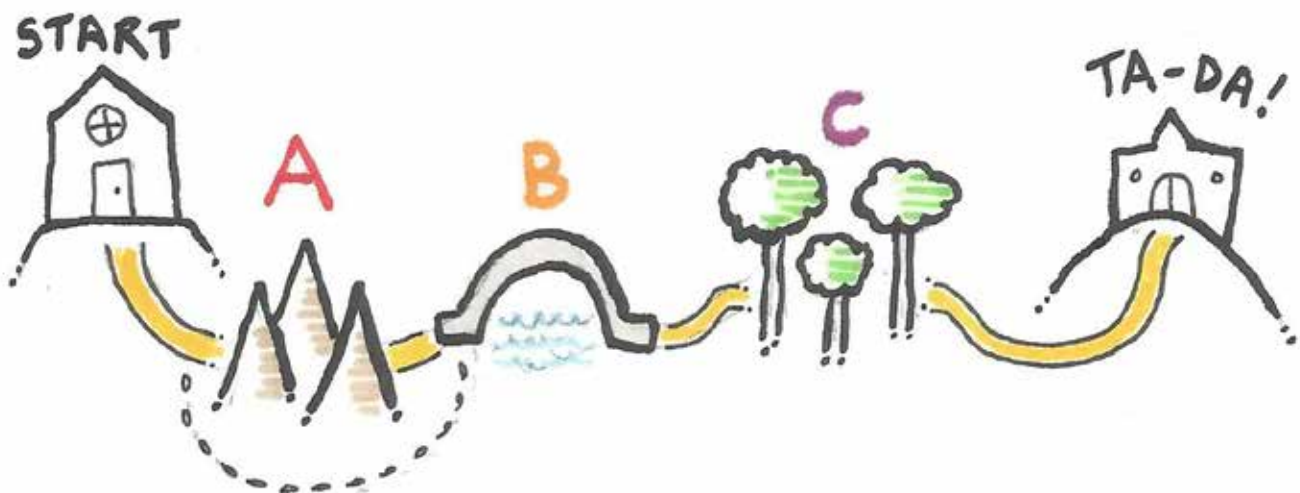
is frequently considered to be interchangeable with “Good Relations” and “United Community”. Importantly, the authors of this publication understand “Community Relations” as a medium for change. It is an expression that refers to all relationships within and between communities and draws particular reference to the groups identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act⁸.

It is critical to recognise that each school will start at a different ‘point in the journey’. This resource is split into three ‘How To’ sections. Schools at the early stages of the journey will wish to start at section ‘A’, whilst more established partnerships will start at ‘B’ and schools with long-established and embedded programmes may wish to move straight to ‘C’.

It is the hope of CRIS, HCNS and ENS that this resource will provide schools with accessible, useful information to support them in the implementation of their own ‘Buddy Up!’ systems (however they may look!)

Terminology and Navigating this Resource

“Community Relations” is a term used throughout this document. In Northern Ireland today, the expression “Community Relations”



History:

Where did '*Buddy Up!*' come from?

Holy Cross Nursery School (HCNS) is located in Ardoyne (a predominantly 'Catholic/ Nationalist/ Republican' area of North Belfast), whilst Edenderry Nursery School (ENS) is located off Tennant Street and serves the Shankill (predominantly 'Protestant/ Unionist/ Loyalist') community. The two schools are less than a mile apart (as the crow flies) but are separated by one of Northern Ireland's more turbulent interfaces – the Crumlin Road. The two communities measure very highly on a range of 'deprivation indicators' and are marked by the shadow of violent conflict and segregation. In spite of this, it has been the experience of CRIS and the two schools that the communities are far from deprived – indeed they are rich – in community networks as well as hope, will and desire to be part of change and investment in the future landscape for their children and themselves. Development of '*Buddy Up!*' came from a strong wish on the part of both schools and CRIS to provide children and their families with an alternative (and positive) experience of 'the other community' as part of a broad, holistic education journey.

The foundations of '*Buddy Up!*' were laid almost twenty years ago, when the Principals of both schools met and were struck with the desire to work together to provide their children with a richer nursery school experience. At the very outset, the schools agreed to spend a year 'laying the foundations' within their own schools, sharing their ideas with their Boards of

Governors and preparing their staff for a new challenge.

The following year, some 'contact activities' – including shared trips were arranged. Evaluation of this indicated that although the trips had been enjoyable, opportunities for real relationship building had been relatively limited due to the logistics of organisation. It was decided to divide the children and staff into four 'teams' (which at the time were named after the primary colours) so that they would be able to meet the same people for each contact event. The teams were later renamed the 'stars', 'rainbows', 'angels' and 'sunshines' and songs were written for each team. Later still, the staff decided to buddy themselves and the children up to allow more personal, one-to-one relationships to develop. In addition, 'play days' (or 'exchange days') – when children and staff would spend the day in the other school were

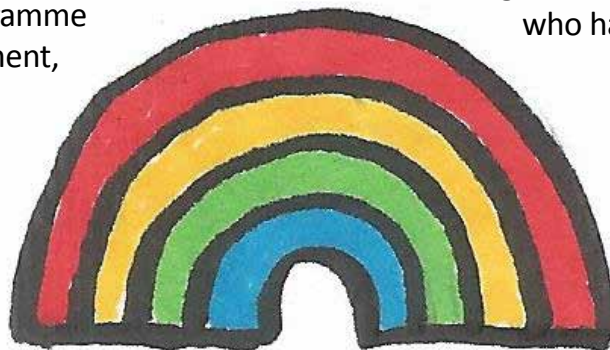


introduced. The parents and carers generally loved the programme and expressed a desire to be involved. It was at this stage in 2002 that CRIS entered the partnership. The two schools worked with CRIS to explore ethos, capacity, curriculum, resources and approaches which would 'tap into' parent enthusiasm and desire to engage. This included facilitation of adults programmes and the inception of the annual family Community Relations residential.

This is a story of organic growth and gradual implementation – of bravery, trial, error, honest evaluation and feedback. The two schools have developed a close bond and a shared interest in promoting interdependence and hope between their communities. CRIS is a 'critical friend' and facilitative partner – supporting the process as it has grown. Its support has included training, programme delivery, adult engagement, mentoring, facilitation, mediation, family residential delivery and assistance with funding applications. The Principals of both schools have

spoken about their work on both BBC and ESaGS TV – the clips provide a visual insight into the development of their work⁹. During 2011-13, both schools worked with CRIS to develop a 'Model of Collaboration in Education across an Interface in North Belfast', entitled, 'Its Not Just Something We Do, Its Who We Are'. The work was celebrated with the launch of the Model at CRIS' Gala Ball event at Belfast City Hall in April 2013. A DVD documentary about the work entitled, 'A Schools Based Peace-Building Approach: Ardoyne and Shankill in their Own Words' was produced and is available from CRIS. It showcases 'Buddy Up!' through the words of staff, parents and children who have taken part.

It is hoped that some of the learning from this organic process of development will be useful to other school communities as they move towards implementing their own 'Buddy Up!' activities.



"CRIS have been critical - they have brought personel, experience and skills. Without them, the programme would never have grown into what it has become."

– Nuala Gallagher,
Principal, Holy Cross
Nursery School

– Nancy Magrath
Principal, Edenderry
Nursery School

'How To' – Section A:

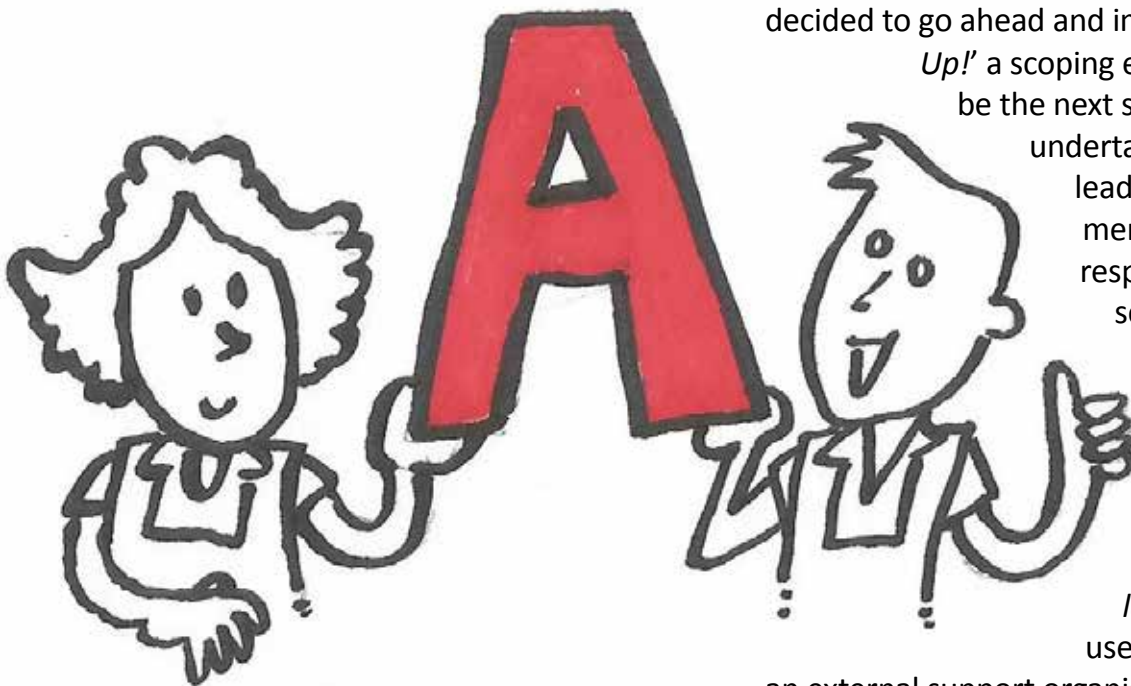
At the Outset

“

Before anything else, preparation is the key to success

”

Alexander Graham Bell, scientist, engineer, innovator, inventor



It is the experience of CRIS, Holy Cross Nursery School (HCNS) and Edenderry Nursery School (ENS) that prior to piloting 'Buddy Up!' exploration of the potential benefits and challenges is important. Once the school has decided to go ahead and implement 'Buddy

Up!' a scoping exercise should

be the next step. This may be

undertaken by the school

leader or by a designated

member of staff with

responsibility for the

school's partnership

and sharing. It can

be a formal or

informal process

that basically

involves asking

'how does the

land lie?' It may be

useful to contact CRIS as

an external support organisation at this time – or this may be a process that the school is confident to undertake alone.

It is important to recognise from the outset that implementation of 'Buddy Up!' will have some impact on personal and professional development for staff. It will also impact the school's relationship with parents and the wider community. Unless it has already taken place, it would be appropriate at this stage to invest some time in re-exploring the school values, ethos and mission statement, in preparation for taking the next step in sharing and collaboration. CRIS offers consultancy and advice with this.

Key aspects of the scoping exercise will include:

Discussion and exploration with the school leadership team around a number of key questions:

- o 'Is the school ready?'
- o 'Is the community ready?'
- o 'What do we see as the potential benefits of implementing 'Buddy Up!'
- o 'What will be the impact on educational attainment?'
- o 'How will this be cross-curricular?'
- o 'What skills will children develop?'
- o 'Where could the challenges lie?'



Communication with the teaching and non-teaching staff team

Investment of sufficient time in this process will be important as its likely some staff will have concerns and reservations about 'Buddy Up!'. Common concerns are that it'll mean extra work; that it'll be awkward or uncomfortable; that it'll take away from teaching time or that there's little value in it ('we're fine the way we are'). Time needs to be taken to hear these concerns and to explain the rationale behind the decision, with a focus on the potential benefits for the children. It will be important to recognise that some people need to see a process working before they can support it.

Contact with a partner school

Depending on the nature of the relationship between the schools to-date, varying degrees of relationship-building work may be necessary. If the relationship is newer, more time and energy will need to be invested in getting to know one another and building an understanding of the other school and community. If the two schools have worked together in the past, a planning meeting between school Principals may be all that's needed.

Incorporating 'Buddy Up!' into the life of the school

This may include detailing it in the school's development plan, gaining support from the Board of Governors and setting up a communication plan to inform people about the project.

Seeking further advice

It may be appropriate to contact other schools who have implemented 'Buddy Up!' and either arrange a visit to see it in practice or schedule a conversation.

'How To' – Section B:

'Buddying' in Action

“

'Buddy Up!' in action is shaped closely around each school year. Planning, delivering and evaluating the system on a year-on-year basis is fundamental to its impact and the enjoyment that everyone will get from being a part of it!

”

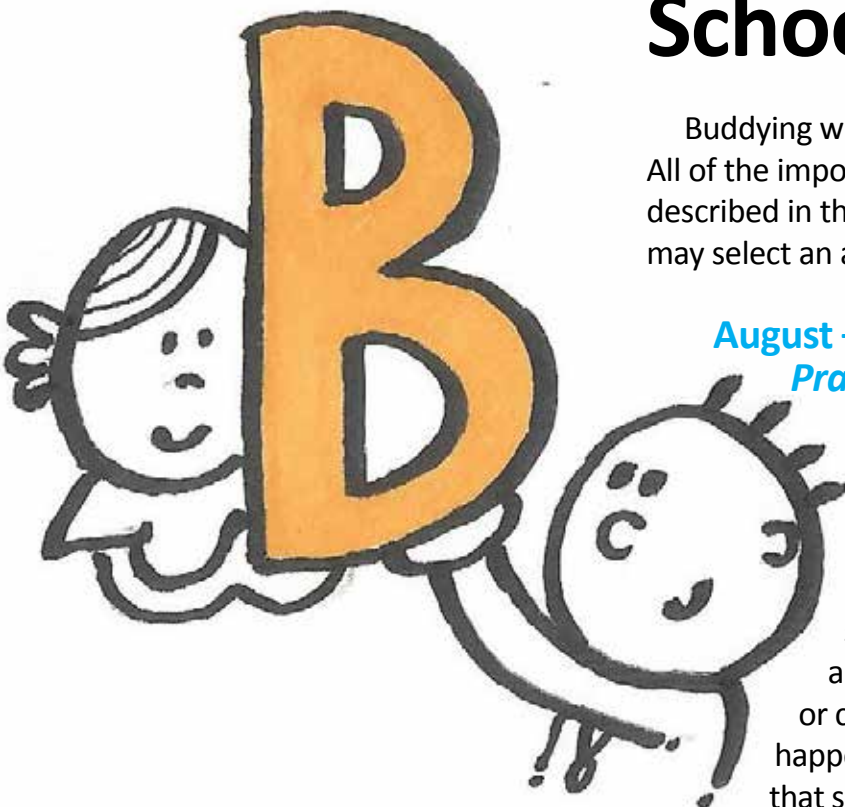
Nuala Gallagher and Nancy Magrath, Principals of Holy Cross and Edenderry Nursery Schools

The 'Buddy Up' School Year Cycle

Buddying will look different in every school context. All of the important aspects of the approach are described in this section. Different school partnerships may select an alternative sequence.

August – Investing in Relationships and Practical Planning

Teaching staff whose classes will be involved in 'Buddy Up!' over the coming year meet for at least half a day's practical planning. This involves spending some time 'catching up' with each other and especially discussing any school or community changes which may have happened since they last met. It is important that school staff model the relationship and values that promote effective sharing and collaboration. This is also a time for practical planning – reviewing the budget, agreeing dates, booking transport and agreeing roles and responsibilities.



September and early October – *Settling the Children and Observation*

Children start their new schools or classes and are given time to get used to their surroundings, 'find their feet' and settle. Staff will tell the children about 'Buddy Up!' and build enthusiasm. Communication to parents (and other carers) takes place during this time. Notes, texts and web communication are useful as well as the opportunity to discuss face-to-face and allay any concerns or worries parents may have. School staff will observe the class, noting particularly any children who are introvert, those who are more extrovert, those with a nurturing nature and those who may need an extra helping hand. Other observations include the particular likes and dislikes of each child (which cartoons are they into? which team do they support?) in order to enable a good match with a buddy.

Late October – *Matching Personalities and Communication*

School staff meet up to match buddies together. This will involve looking through a class list and linking together two (or more) children with complimentary or similar interests and natures. If three schools are involved in the project, three children could be linked as buddies. At this stage, school staff will also divide the classes into 'teams'. These should be made up of several sets of buddies and include a range of differing personalities. This will mean that even if two buddies don't get along particularly well, they will have their other 'team mates' to build relationships with. This meeting should also be used to 'buddy up' staff – teachers and classroom assistants who will work together and meet up during the programme. It is often useful at this stage to provide the other teacher with a set of photos of each child – so that the buddies can see what their new buddy looks like before they

meet. Teachers will let children know who their buddy is and which team they are in, before the first shared activity takes place.

November to April – *Activities, Class-Sharing and Keeping in Touch*

Depending on practicalities and budget, any number of shared activities can take place during this period. Many schools choose to organise one or two 'play days' or 'class shares' per month. These are a chance for children and staff to travel to their partner school and spend the day learning, playing and having break/lunch in a different environment. Depending on the age and stage of the children, different Community Relations themes can be explored. Younger children will focus on 'friendship' whilst older children will undertake sessions around key Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) themes of the NI Curriculum including 'respect', 'conflict', 'culture', 'diversity' and 'symbols of identity'. If the budget allows, shared trips and learning days can be very effective, especially if they involve collaborative work between the buddies and within the teams.

It is important to:

Prepare the children before each day so that they know what to expect

Provide space for the buddies and the teams to interact naturally during the shared activity

Use 'circle time' after each shared activity to check out how children have found the experience and emphasise key learning points.





May/June – Celebrating and Sharing a Gift

As the school year draws to a close, it is appropriate to arrange the last ‘shared event’ as some sort of celebration. A shared sports event, musical event, party or a trip to a fun play-centre are all great ideas. The event will be a chance for the buddies to say ‘cheerio’. It is useful for the teachers to agree a gift that each buddy can make for his/ her partner to exchange at the celebration event.

Ideas for the gift could include a calendar, a picture of the buddy or a card with a photo of the two buddies having fun together. It is important to let the children know that this will be the last event well in advance so that they can prepare to say goodbye. If further school partnership work is planned for the following year, they may get to work together again. If the two schools are close by, stress that they may well see each other at the shops or out and about in the community. Use circle time to discuss ways that contact could continue.



Communication and Relationship Development (Ongoing throughout year)

It is critical for schools to create time and space for the development of organic relationships between the staff and Boards of Governors of both school communities. This will embed appreciation and understanding for the rationale and intention behind ‘Buddy Up!’. Informal meet-ups / phone calls will happen naturally and are complemented by the intentional creation of opportunities to spend time together through shared planning meetings and perhaps shared social events.

Clear, open lines of communication between the schools will be important to the success of this programme. Unforeseen events may present challenges as the year progresses – it will be crucial that staff from both partner schools know that they can contact their counterpart and discuss concerns or obstacles freely.

Promotion of the programme should be ongoing throughout the year. The school website, notice boards and newsletters should explain and describe ‘Buddy Up!’.

Late June or August – Staff Review and Evaluation

School staff get together to evaluate the year. Key questions will be, ‘what has worked well?’ and ‘what could we change?’ It may also be a chance to complete evaluation forms for funders and look toward applying for further monies (if appropriate). The notes and creative ideas from this meeting will feed into planning for the following year.

“My son is still friends with his nursery school buddy, 8 years on. They now attend the same secondary school”.

– Katrina, parent from North Belfast

'How To' – Section C:

Involving the Wider Community

“

Its hard to put it down in words. For us, the Buddy System is inspiring. It built our children's confidence and it built our confidence. It allowed us to open up to who we are. It has given us great hope for our children's future.

”

Maureen and Eamonn, parents of two buddies during school year 2013/14



Once 'Buddy Up!' has been embedded into the life of the school over a period of at least one year, it may be appropriate to begin to explore methods of involving the wider community – particularly parents (and other carers). The ground-breaking research report, 'Too Young to Notice'¹⁰ (2002) explored the cultural and political awareness of 3 – 6 year olds in Northern Ireland, through interviews with 352 children representing a cross-section of society. The report concludes by highlighting 'three clear implications', one of which is that:

“for such strategies [programmes supporting children to learn about different cultural identities etc] to be successful, nurseries and schools need to find ways of engaging and working closely with parents and the local community...”





The Adults 'Buddy Up' School Year Cycle – Term One

Through the active involvement of the wider community, 'Buddy Up!' is an intergenerational community development model in its own right. For it to be effective, parents and carers need to be informed and involved. Crucially, they need to understand **why** the school has chosen to run it.

It has been CRIS' experience that adults are most likely to engage when their participation has a direct impact on their child's learning experience. In order to maximise adult engagement, days and times that coincide with the children's programme should be leveraged for adult activities. Incremental steps are important, as each school partnership is at a different point in their own journey.

CRIS has unique and proven practice over a decade in the area of family and parental engagement. The following programme structure is an example of CRIS' approach.

Auditing interests and needs
(questionnaires, informal conversations with parents /guardians)

Hosting information sessions and coffee mornings

Providing relationship building opportunities and shared interest programmes (for example, essential skills or parenting courses) creating spaces for natural interactions



The Adults 'Buddy Up' School Year Cycle – Term Two:

Continuing to provide intentional spaces for relationships to develop – including further shared interest programmes

Facilitating community building activities

Exploring core Community Relations themes

The Adults 'Buddy Up' School Year Cycle – Term Three:

Continuing to explore community building and Community Relations

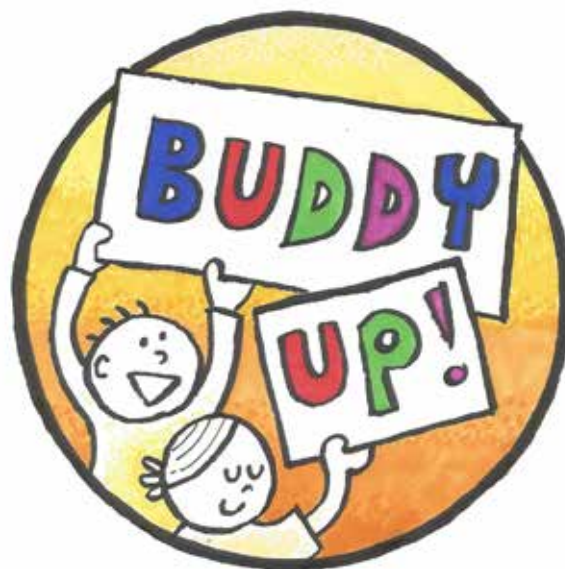
Celebrating and evaluating the programme

Planning for future work together

It has been CRIS' experience that adults are keen to engage with Community Relations topics directly and that when these are facilitated appropriately, they can be life-giving and energising. In particular, a welcoming environment, the creation of a safe learning space, and a culture of positive affirmation are fundamental. It is important to use the school buildings and resources for as much of the work as possible. This re-enforces the concept that the school buildings are shared community resources

and builds confidence in travelling to unfamiliar areas. In addition, staff (as the greatest resource) can contribute to adults programmes in a shared way – bringing their own strengths and experiences to the activities.

Adult engagement programmes will grow incrementally and gain energy and momentum through the passion of the parents who have elected to be part of them. Over a period of several years, cross-community adults Community Relations programmes through schools have the potential to substantially impact on the fabric and culture of communities. Undoubtedly, they boost the confidence and resilience of individual people and reduce isolation. In turn, the individuals go on to boost the confidence of their children, wider families and ultimately the communities to which they belong. In this respect, schools really can become 'hubs' for adult engagement and genuinely contribute to greater social cohesion and peace-building.



Conclusion:

Summary and Further Support

There are powerful reasons for schools to engage in a *'Buddy Up!'* programme. *'Buddy Up!'* is low in cost and high in impact. The enthusiasm of school staff is the main key to its success. When children see their teachers and classroom assistants warmly greeting their own 'buddy', it instils confidence and normalises the experience of engaging with the 'other community'. *'Buddy Up!'* is energy-giving as it encourages both children and school staff to reach outside of their comfort 'zone' and try something new. It may be that in one school, there is a strong focus on art, music or creative work whilst in the other, the strength lies in using technology, numeracy or science. *'Buddy Up!'* provides both school staff and children with the chance to share their skills and learn from each other.

CRIS, Holy Cross Nursery School and Edenderry Nursery School recognise that this is challenging work. The three organisations invite anybody who may wish to learn more about their approach to get in touch – it is through the opening of dialogue with others that they shall also have the chance to grow. In particular, CRIS is able to offer specialised consultancy and advice to schools as well as tailored accredited and non-accredited Community Relations programmes.

If you choose *'Buddy Up!'* can be used as a single, stand alone programme. Further it can be used to create the opportunity for real meaningful change. CRIS knows that this is a genuine, workable and sustainable model that can be grown and developed within all schools, year in, year out.

Plan - do - review - do again!



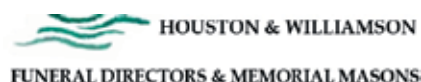
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Print Runs

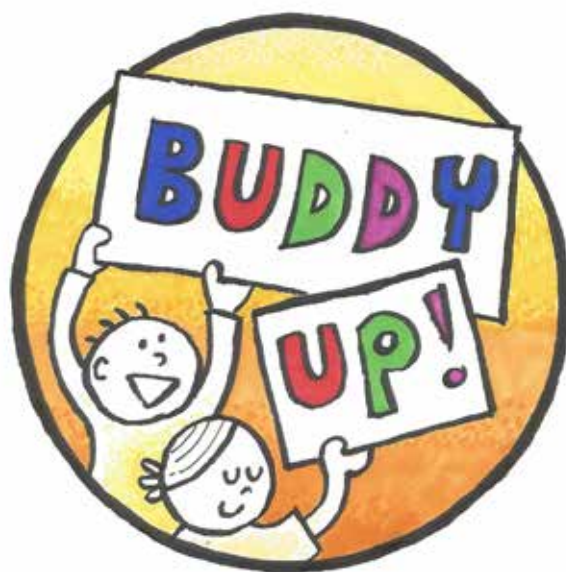
The first print of this resource was generously supported by Houston and Williamson Funeral Directors, Crumlin Road, Belfast (2014)

This current print run has been generously supported by The Community Relations Council (CRC) (2015)



Community Relations Council





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