FAQs

Transforming the Lives of Children in East Belfast

GUIDANCE NOTES

What is the opportunity?

This opportunity is designed to support projects working to address or remove health inequities within communities and build on the previous work of the EastSide Early Learning Community.

Projects should look to:

- Improve parental mental health and wellbeing

AND / OR

- Promote attuned and responsive parent/child interactions

Project ideas will focus on strengthening the foundations and the early years system for children **0-5 years old** and/or their parents/caregivers living in **East Belfast**.

Each successful project will receive **£5,000** to develop and deliver their idea. Projects are to be delivered between January and December 2026.

Important Dates

- **ONLINE INFORMATION**- space to ask questions and hear more about this funding opportunity.
  Date: October 17th
  Time(s): 10am AND 3pm
  You only need to attend one of them
- **APPLICATIONS OPEN**- online Expression of Interest form (link to be shared)
  Date: October 17th
- **APPLICATION CLOSE**
  Date: November 11th
  Time: 4.00pm
- **PROJECT VOTING EVENT**- projects to showcase their idea and children & members of the community to vote on their favourite ideas!
  Date: November 27th (afternoon)
- **PROJECTS TO START!**
  Date: January 2026

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What should ideas focus on?

The two intended outcomes of the fund are part of the EastSide Early Learning Community Framework (see Background below). Projects can focus on one or both outcomes, paying attention to the one or more of the areas of focus beneath each:

Improve parental mental health and wellbeing

- Families are connected with and support each other through improved social support, awareness of resources and access to services
- Improved parental knowledge and ability to promote, protect positive mental health and well-being
- Parents are supported to become more resilient and better equipped to adapt to life challenges
- Families have access to appropriate support and services which allow them to be emotionally available parents; who are present, attuned and responsive to their children

Promote attuned and responsive parent/child interactions

- Improved attuned parental responses to child's initiations
- Increased parental understanding of the importance of parent/child interaction in relation to brain development and emotional security
- Parents have access to environments that model/coach/shine a light on attuned parent and child interactions

Your idea does not have to include all parts of the framework. You can choose to focus on one or more.

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Background

Save the Children has been collaborating with partners in East Belfast to explore ways of finding sustainable solutions to improve early years outcomes for children. In 2020 we collaborated to create the EastSide Early Learning Community (ELC) through looking at the evidence of what we know works best for children's outcomes, understanding of the local context for families living in East Belfast and a mapping of the local early years system.

In the last five years, the EastSide ELC have worked together to develop a framework that includes the ingredients we believe will give us the best chance to create a system that will improve outcomes for children. We have developed a way of working to find long-term solutions, share resources, integrates a culture of learning and work with a shared vision.

This fund builds on the opportunities we have tested and learnt from over the years. It is designed to continue furthering the implementation of the framework as the guiding principle of all work in East Belfast that is focused on supporting children in their earliest years.

Who can apply?

The fund is open to:

- Groups, organisations and individuals that:
  - Are registered as a constituted group or sponsored by a constituted group
  - Have an up to date safeguarding policy approved by their board
- Projects that will benefit children 0-5 year olds and/or the parents/caregivers living in East Belfast
- Projects that can be delivered between January-December 2026

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What is the application process?

STEP 1- Projects will be invited to register for an ONLINE information sessions.

STEP 2- There will then be a simple Expression of Interest form for interested parties to complete.

STEP 3- Projects that meet the eligibility criteria will be invited to showcase their idea at an event with the community. This is part of our consensus grant making approach to this fund.

STEP 4- After the event, we will let successful projects know of the outcome. Funds will be released in January for projects to begin their planning and delivery.

Projects will then be invited to join quarterly reflective learning events and a final celebration event in 2027.

What will happen at the online information sessions?

At the online information sessions we will explain the criteria for the funding and the application process. We will also describe the consensus grant-making approach to project selection. And finally, we will talk about who can apply and what will be expected from successful projects.

We will also have a space for questions. There are two options to accommodate people's busy diaries. Both sessions will be the same. We strongly encourage those considering to apply to attend these sessions. If you are unable to attend one of the sessions please reach out to us.

What is consensus grant-making?

Consensus grant-making gives members of the community a say on how funding is allocated. As a child-rights based organisation, we are keen on exploring ways of ensuring children and their families have the power to make decisions about their lives, services they access and their communities. This approach is to facilitate child and family participation in the selection process.

Everyone at the showcase event will have an opportunity to vote for their favourite ideas!

What will I need to organise for the showcasing event?

The showcasing event is an opportunity to show children, families and practitioners in East Belfast what you are hoping to do. You will have a stand and can include as many details and props as you want. Your audience includes children and young people, you will need to think how you design your info for them. Make it fun!

You are invited to prepare a short 2-3 minute video which we will showcase on the day. You can also play it at your stand.

When will I find out if I am successful?

After the event we will tally the votes and inform successful candidates. We will let you know on or just after 01/12/25.

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When am I meant to start and complete my project by?

Funds will be released for use at the beginning of **January 2026**, subject to our due diligence process. Projects can start once funds are received and are expected to finish by **December 2026.**

What are the reflective learning events? Are they mandatory?

Our quarterly reflective learning events are opportunities to come together in a facilitated space to share our experience of planning and delivering our projects. We hope these will be opportunities to encourage projects to think about what is working, what might not be working and what are the changes we can implement to get the best out of our projects.

We also hope these events encourage collaboration and relationship building amongst our various projects. Attending these events are part of the funding opportunity.

If you are not going to be able to join, you should let us know early and we can arrange an alternative option, like a one-to-one catch-up call. Dates and venues to be confirmed in January 2026.

How will I receive funds and when?

Funds will be released in two stages:

- At the start of the project January 2026
- Halfway through the life of the project- date to be agreed according to project timeline

What do Save the Children expect of my organisation if we are successful?

We want you to develop and deliver a creative idea that intentionally looks at making an impact on the lives of children and their families, particularly around parental mental health and attuned child/parent interactions. We believe these are vital to help our children thrive.

If you are successful, we would expect you to join us in several exciting events throughout the year:

- Launch event
- Three quarterly reflective learning events
- Celebration event

Dates for these will be confirmed at the end of 2025.

What can I spend the money on?

You can spend the money on things like:

- running costs for your project
- project activity costs
- one off events
- staff costs
- training and facilitator costs
- transport
- volunteer expenses
- impact and evaluation

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What will not be funded?

You cannot spend the money on the following items:

- costs you've already paid for
- alcohol
- contingency costs, loans, endowments or interest
- profit-making or fundraising activities
- VAT you can reclaim
- political or religious activities (we can fund religious organisations if the project benefits the wider community and does not include religious content)
- statutory services or activities
- overseas travel
- pre-school provision funded by government
- projects that take place outside of East Belfast
- activities that make a private profit
- giving cash directly to individuals

The online information sessions will be the opportunity to ask any questions regarding what we will fund or not.

ONLINE INFORMATION SESSIONS

ONLINE INFORMATION SESSION 1
Date: Friday, October 17th
Time: 10.00-11.00am

ONLINE INFORMATION SESSION 2
Date: Friday, October 17th
Time: 3.00-4.00pm

REGISTRATION HERE

Fund delivered in partnership with:

EastSide Early Learning Community — Transforming Children's Lives

Save the Children

For more information please email:
innovationfundni@savethechildren.org.uk