



4th Birthday Celebrations for Irish Children

25th August 2005

The AIB Better Ireland Programme is celebrating its 4th birthday this month (August) with the announcement of a further commitment to the successful Schoolmate Programme, maintaining the partnership until the end of 2007. The traditional four-year anniversary symbols of flowers & fruit are particularly apt for this 4th birthday representing the growth, nurturing and natural development of Irish children benefiting from the AIB Better Ireland Programme.

The AIB Schoolmate project is a joint Barnardos, Focus Ireland and ISPCC initiative supported by the AIB Better Ireland Programme and it strives to support a range of measures aimed at helping to prevent school failure and educational disadvantage. The overall objective of Schoolmate is to touch and significantly improve the lives of Irish children most at risk of missing school.

Schoolmate makes a real difference to the lives of Irish children and has impacted positively on numerous school issues. Schoolmate activities include breakfast clubs, after school clubs, toy libraries, parenting programmes and self esteem classes. According to the TCD Research, the improvements that were observed include the following:

- Improved school attendance and punctuality
- Completion of homework in a satisfactory way
- Increased ability to cope in the school context (e.g. increased concentration, ability to share, to take turns, to follow directions, to stick with a task, to sit still)
- Increased ability to cope with a difficult situation in the school context (e.g. with bullying, fighting)
- Increased academic ability (improvements in reading, writing, understanding concepts)
- Improved school-parent relationships
- Improved presentation at school

Since its inception in 2001, the AIB Better Ireland Programme has provided funding of over ?10 million to more than 1000 projects countrywide that make a difference to the lives of children affected by three of the leading causes of vulnerability: lack of education through poverty, exposure to drug/alcohol abuse and homelessness. The success of the AIB Better Ireland Programme over the past four years has ensured that ?81% of participants have benefited or greatly benefited from the intervention? and ?the children appear to be those whom the programme was intended to target?. (Children?s Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, Nov 2004).

Anne-Maria O'Reilly, co-ordinator of the AIB Better Ireland Programme commented: "We are delighted to be celebrating the fourth birthday of the AIB Better Ireland Programme and are

extremely pleased with its success to this point. By renewing our commitment to the Schoolmate Programme until 2008, AIB hope to guarantee a better future for Irish children and enable them to fulfil their full potential in life."

Further details of the AIB Better Ireland Programme, the causes being addressed and details on how to apply for funding can be obtained by contacting your local AIB branch or visit the website www.aib.ie/betterireland.

For further information please contact:

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