

Sesame Street in Northern Ireland: A Media Project to Promote Respect and Understanding



Background

As Northern Ireland looks forward to a more optimistic future based on a shared vision, Sesame Workshop – the nonprofit organization behind *Sesame Street* – is proud to contribute to an atmosphere of renewed hope through a local version of its flagship series.

Goals

Designed for children ages 3-6, *Sesame Tree*, Northern Ireland's version of *Sesame Street*, will present engaging educational messages through stories and characters keyed to the new Northern Ireland National Curriculum. The series will help to develop children's self-esteem, love of learning, openness, and curiosity about others to better prepare them for a brighter future. The program will also serve as a valuable resource for children, parents and educators by:

- Presenting positive images to children of the self and others;
- Emphasizing a range of objectives including valuing diversity, developing problem solving skills, and becoming aware of our common humanity;
- Helping the early childhood community in Northern Ireland achieve its strategic goals.

About Sesame Workshop

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit organization of writers, artists, researchers, and educators. Best known for *Sesame Street*, we create innovative and engaging educational content for children from birth through age 12 in over 120 countries worldwide. Sesame Workshop initiatives encompass the entire range of children's developmental needs - from ABCs and 123s; to life lessons about health, safety and coping with loss; to social skills such as respect and sharing.

In countries across the globe, our unique approach brings together local experts to determine educational goals based on the specific needs of children in a particular country. This ensures that Sesame Workshop programs are both culturally relevant and educationally sound. Workshop programs and initiatives are delivered through a variety of media including television, home video, radio, film, books and magazines, the Internet, and community outreach programs.



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Unique Approach

Sesame Workshop's unique approach to educational media brings local educators, content specialists, producers, and creative talent to address children's needs in a culturally relevant context. As with all of the Workshop's local adaptations, *Sesame Tree* will be informed by and truly reflect the issues of the region. Along with the familiar faces of Elmo and Cookie Monster, *Sesame Tree* viewers will meet new Muppets created specifically for Northern Ireland. Children from different communities will be introduced to their peers through locally produced live action films which will explore the many places and faces of Northern Ireland.

Sesame Street programming has a successful history of addressing locally identified issues. In 2002, *Takalani Sesame*, South Africa's production of *Sesame Street*, introduced a character named Kami, a Muppet who is HIV positive, to help bring to light the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. In 2003, Germany's *Sesamstrasse* launched a new content area to foster respect and understanding among Germany's increasingly diverse population. In 2005, *Plaza Sésamo* in Mexico launched its Healthy Habits for Life initiative to encourage good nutrition and exercise in a country where obesity is becoming a health concern. In 2007, Sesame Workshop, together with local partners, will reintroduce *Vila Sésamo* in Brazil to help lay the foundation for school-readiness in a country where large numbers of children lack access to formal preschool education.



Sesame Tree Project Elements

■ Television

The first season launches in February 2008 with 20 original fifteen-minute episodes airing on the BBC-Northern Ireland. Targeted to children aged three to six, *Sesame Tree* will star the monster, Potto, and the Irish hare, Hilda, who live, work, and play inside the trunk of the Question Tree. In each episode Potto and Hilda, along with their friends the Bookworms, the Weatherberries, and the bird Claribelle, seek the answer to a question which a child has posted to the magical tree. Questions will be investigated through segments featuring a diverse range of children from across Northern Ireland, international live action segments from Sesame Workshop's extensive international library, and visits with beloved *Sesame Street* Muppets like Bert, Ernie, Cookie Monster, and Elmo.

■ Online

Sesame Workshop is working closely with the BBC-Northern Ireland online team to build an original *Sesame Tree* website. This site will help extend the engaging and educational messages from the TV program.

■ Educational Outreach

Sesame Workshop and NIPPA, a children's educational outreach organization, plan to work together to initiate community outreach and provide educational materials to be distributed in preschools throughout Northern Ireland. Targeted to parents, caregivers, teachers, and children, these initiatives will complement and deepen the project's educational messages.

Partnerships and Support

Sesame Tree enjoys a broad base of support across many sectors of society, which will play a critical role in the project's overall success. The BBC-Northern Ireland will broadcast the series and develop the website. SixteenSouth, part of The Inferno Group, a leading and award-winning creative television production and facilities house, has been selected to produce *Sesame Tree*. We also plan to partner with NIPPA to develop and distribute educational outreach materials supporting the project through their vast distribution networks.

Funding for the series is provided by the International Fund for Ireland, which promotes integration and reconciliation for Northern Ireland and the border counties; American Ireland Fund, which serves as the project's anchor sponsor; and the Northern Ireland Fund for Reconciliation, which provides support for projects that promote reconciliation through community development and education.



All children deserve a chance to learn and grow, to be prepared for school, to understand the world and their place in it, to dream, discover, and reach their highest potential.



Small Beginnings, Profound Possibilities

Sesame Workshop's experience over the better part of four decades teaches us that small things - a hand puppet, a kind word, a song - can make a big difference. It makes clear that small beginnings have profound possibilities, especially when their effects are multiplied by a global community committed to making meaningful, measurable, lasting differences in children's lives, now and for generations to come.

**For more information, contact:
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