This learning experience is an example of how one service supports one of the learning goals in Aistear's theme of Exploring and Thinking.

As we are based in a rural setting anything that is connected to animals and farming really grabs the children’s attention especially if it involves lots of action! As we were talking about Spring and reading books about what happens in Spring, we decided to bring a hen and her chicks to playschool to let the children see what they looked like up-close.

So after some organising, Mother Hen arrived with her two chicks! We brought them in in a cat-box. Immediately, the children were able to see how the hen protects her chicks by sitting on them. The children held the chicks and got to feel how small, warm and light they were.
Hello little chick

The hen wasn’t too happy to have her chicks taken from her and so we reunited mother and babies fairly quickly. This experience gave us an opportunity to talk about how she was protecting her babies and wanted them back. The children really seemed to understand this concept of a mother protecting her young. One little boy said that his Mummy misses him when he goes to playschool!

One of the practitioners then lifted the hen out of the cat-box and the children stroked her gently and looked at her feathers and her feet. We talked about where hens live and what they eat.

Petting Mother Hen

When we had finished, we decided to bring the hen on a visit to the junior and senior infant classroom beside us so the children there could have a look too. The playschool children were very proud to have something to show the older children and delighted in telling them everything they knew about hens and chicks!
This resource was developed through the Aistear in Action initiative.

www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit

Ideas to extend the children’s learning

■ Get factual books from the library on caring for hens. Learn about different types of eggs and hens.
■ Provide junk art materials for children to make hens, chicks and homes for them.
■ Make omelettes or pancakes to show how hens provide us with food.

This experience also links to:

Well-being, Aim 1, Learning goal 5
Identity and Belonging, Aim 2, Learning goal 5
The play leader’s reflections

The hen’s visit really brought the concept of spring to life and gave the children a tangible indicator that spring had arrived because as one child said everyone knows that baby animals are born in spring!

The visit to the infant classroom went really well. The teacher was very welcoming and the children were thrilled with the unexpected guests.

This experience really engaged the children and some of them asked if they could bring in their own pets and animals from home including lambs, calves, dogs, cats and hamsters!