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

We asked the children what they would like to do and learn about for Christmas. Various answers came back like decorating the room and having their own Christmas tree that they could decorate themselves. One child shouted, I want to see Rudolph. We explored this and thought he meant a picture or book about Santa’s reindeer but he didn’t! He meant he wanted to see a real deer! The rest of the children got really excited by the idea and all began to shout, we want to see Rudolph. The more we discussed it the more excited the children became. One child asked, will Rudolph come to see us? Maureen, our play leader replied, would you like that? And all screamed, yes! We explained we would see what we could do.

As a staff we try to ensure that we follow up on children’s interests and requests as much as we can but arranging to meet Rudolph was one of the trickiest requests we had ever received. We searched the internet and made phone calls but were having no luck. Then a parent approached us and said he worked on a deer farm and that maybe we could visit it. We kept our fingers crossed that we would be able to fulfil the children’s wish.

Learning Experience: Meeting Rudolph

Setting: Happy Days Childcare Centre, Ballyporeen, Co Tipperary

Setting type: Full and part-time daycare

Age group: Young children

Theme: Exploring and Thinking

Aim 4: Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.

Learning goal 4: In partnership with the adult, children will feel confident that their ideas, thoughts and questions will be listened to and taken seriously.

Feeding time for the reindeer

This resource was developed through the Aistear in Action initiative.
Within two weeks and with the help of parents, we organised a trip to the deer farm which was about twelve kilometres away. There was great excitement on the bus and on arrival we were met by the owners of the farm, Pat and Miriam. Pat explained that we needed to be very quiet so that we didn’t scare the deer. This was hard for the children when they were so excited but they did their best. Pat and Miriam showed us around the farm and pointed out the deer and other animals including wild boar.

When we were near the deer area Pat explained that the big deer with the antlers was called the stag and he was the boss. The children were quick to decide that he was Rudolph because of his antlers. The children asked lots of questions, including, why was Rudolph’s nose not red? Pat quickly replied, because it only glows in the dark! The children were happy with this answer and repeated it to the parents later. At the end of the visit Pat and Miriam invited us into their home where we had juice and freshly baked buns.

Every day the children were asking, will we see Rudolph? Will Santa be there? How will we get there?
Ideas to extend the children’s learning

- Provide materials to make thank-you cards for Pat and Miriam.
- Provide fictional and factual books about deer.
- Add materials to the art table that could be used to make deer, sleighs, santas.

This experience also links to:
Well-being, Aim 1, Learning goal 1
Identity and Belonging, Aim 1, Learning goal 6;
Aim 2, Learning goals 2 and 5

This resource was developed through the Aistear in Action initiative.
The play leader’s reflections

Through the experience the children learned lots of new vocabulary like antlers, stag, doe, boar, fawn.

It was great to see so many of the children saying please and thank you (unprompted) when we were treated to the buns and juice.

The little boy whose dad helped organise the trip was bursting with joy when Miriam asked us to point him out and was even prouder when she told the other children that his dad worked with them on the farm.