This learning experience is an example of how one service supports one of the learning goals in Aistear’s theme of *Identity and Belonging*.

Our topic of interest was ‘People and their jobs’. The parents were happy to help in whatever way they could and a number of them volunteered to come in to talk to the children. Through observing the children in play and in their discussions we noticed that many of the boys in the group felt certain jobs were only for boys like doctors and guards and that girls were good at taking care of the house (and babies) and being nurses! These observations influenced our decision about which parents to invite. We invited two mums to talk about their jobs - one a Garda and the other an army reservist. Both women had, as the children called them, ‘boys’ jobs’.

In preparation for the visit, we had a discussion about various jobs. As part of this, we showed the children pictures of women/men doing various jobs including some non-stereotypical ones. The Garda visit happened first and the children really enjoyed the visit and learned a lot. This learning experience focuses on the visit of the army reservist which occurred about two weeks later.

**Learning Experience:**
**The army reservist’s visit**

**Setting:** Happy Days Childcare Centre, Ballyporeen, Co Tipperary

**Setting type:** Full and part-time daycare

**Age group:** Young children

**Theme:** *Identity and Belonging*

**Aim 2:** Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.

**Learning goal 6:** In partnership with the adult, children will understand the different roles of people in the community.

**The army reservist visits**
The mum who was in full uniform spent a lot of time talking to the children and answering their questions. She explained that boys and girls could both join the army. You just needed to be very fit and good at solving problems! She explained to the children that she was part of the Southern Brigade and that she had to dress in camouflaged clothes on military manoeuvres with other people in the army. She had pictures of tanks and helicopters to share with the children. She also explained that when there was a crisis she had to help out.

For example, when Clonmel was flooded she delivered sand bags and helped evacuate people in the jeep from their homes. The mum also taught the children how to salute which they really enjoyed. At the end she handed out leaflets on becoming an army reservist.

We followed the visit up with a discussion the next day when the children conceded that sometimes boys and girls could do the same jobs! The talks from the parents helped to show the children this. The experience also provided good opportunities for learning new vocabulary like soldier, troops, flood, crisis, camouflage, helicopter, military manoeuvres, salute.
Ideas to extend the children’s learning

- Provide books that show males and females in non-stereotypical roles including books like *Prince Cinders* or *William’s Doll*.

- Add props to the outdoor area so the children can take part in military manoeuvres in camouflage - face paints, balaclavas, large pieces of wood and cloth so that children can make areas to hide.

- Organise small group activities where children get the opportunity to use the new vocabulary again, for example, small world play or make books about the army.

- Note some of the comments children make about the experience and add these to photos to make a display and encourage the children to show them to their parents.

This experience also links to

*Well-being*, Aim 1, Learning goal 1

*Identity and Belonging*, Aim 2, Learning goal 2

*Communicating*, Aim 2, Learning goal 1

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

We felt this was a really worthwhile learning experience for the children and for us as practitioners as we became much more conscious of addressing stereo-typing. It was something that we didn’t even realise was happening until one day we saw a scenario in the home area that alerted us to it.

Having parents actively involved supporting the children’s learning and development was such a positive thing for us and for the children. They loved to see their mams coming in to work with us. It would be great if we could get a few more dads to participate!