



**Archways National Conference 2009:
Establishing an Evidence Base for the Incredible Years in Ireland**

Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin

21 September 2009

Conference Report
Prepared by Helen Cahill
29 September 2009

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Opening Address: Dr. Tony Crooks, Chairperson, Archways
3. Speaker: Margaret Maher, Former Director, Archways
4. Speaker: Aileen O'Donoghue, CEO Archways
5. Address: Barry Andrews, TD and Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
6. Speaker: Dr. Rosario Power, HSE
7. Keynote Speaker: Prof. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, University of Seattle, Washington
8. Research Panel: Dr. Sinead McGilloway, NUI, Maynooth
9. Research Panel: Prof. Donal O'Neill, NUI, Maynooth
10. Research Panel: Mairead Furlong, NUI, Maynooth
11. Workshop Review
12. Presentation: Archways RCT Delivery Team
13. Speaker: Prof. Judy Hutchings, IY Wales Centre, University of Bangor
14. Closing Address: Prof. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, University of Seattle, Washington

1. Introduction

This report presents a summary of the proceedings of the second national Archways conference, which was held at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on 21 September 2009. The theme for the conference was “Establishing an evidence base for the Incredible Years in Ireland”. The conference was attended by 220 delegates from education, health, community sector, academic and other backgrounds.

Archways is a national organisation involved in promoting and researching the use of evidence based programmes as an intervention for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties and also as a means to prevent such difficulties arising in the first place. Archways was established in early 2007 to promote the rollout and evaluation of the Incredible Years programme in Ireland.

The Incredible Years programme was designed by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton at the University of Seattle, Washington, to prevent and treat emotional and behavioural difficulties in children. It is delivered in group format at child, parent and teacher levels.

2. Opening Address: Dr. Tony Crooks, Chairperson, Archways

Dr. Tony Crooks, the newly appointed Chairperson of Archways opened the conference by welcoming the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, and delegates from Wales, Birmingham and all over Ireland. Particular welcome was given to the keynote speaker, Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton who travelled from the United States. Carolyn is the original developer of the Incredible Years (IY) programmes and Tony acknowledged the huge contribution that she has made to the understanding and treatment of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).

Tony acknowledged the importance of the day for Archways and the value of the day to delegates; the opportunities to listen to recognised speakers and to network with other sponsors and practitioners to exchange experiences. Tony provided an explanation of the concepts and practice behind randomised control trials (RCTs) used in the IY research and the rationale for following an evidence based approach in demonstrating the effectiveness of an intervention.

Tony then outlined the recent changes in the management at Archways, namely the departure of esteemed founding director Margaret Maher and the appointment of board member Aileen O'Donoghue as interim CEO for one year. Tony wished Margaret well in her new role as principal of Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School in Drimnagh and acknowledged her significant contribution to Archways. Tony thanked Aileen and acknowledged her instrumental role in supporting the foundation of Archways with Margaret from within Clondalkin Partnership.

Tony then handed over to Margaret to begin proceedings.

3. Speaker: Margaret Maher, Former Director, Archways

Margaret Maher began by acknowledging the large number of friends present in the hall from her time with Archways. Margaret then provided an overview of the beginnings and progress of IY work in Ireland over the past ten years. This traced the work that was begun by Margaret in her role as Education Coordinator back in the early 2000s in Clondalkin Partnership, efforts to understand why levels of anti-social and behaviour and school non-completion were so high among children and young people. A task group was formed and research was undertaken, resulting in the report: "In Trouble From Day One". The group recognised that many children and young people were experiencing SEBD and that an intervention was needed.

Dr. Sean McDonnell joined Margaret in this work, and was initially tasked with identifying a programme that operated within a community setting that would meet the needs of the children. Margaret discussed how the IY programme met all of the requirements, most particularly how it allowed cohesion between services. In explaining this, Margaret spoke of advice received from Dr. Ted Fleming, about how an effective intervention should place the child at the centre of a circle with all services around the circle providing the same message to the child.

Margaret acknowledged the tremendous help received from Dr. Judy Hutchings at the IY Wales Centre in the University of Bangor, Wales, Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Dr. Sinead McGilloway at NUI Maynooth and others. She gratefully acknowledged the support and funding received from the HSE and Atlantic Philanthropies, which allowed Archways to be established. Margaret spoke with pride about services and achievements within Archways and the work carried out in various locations including Galway, Limerick and others.

In closing, Margaret referenced a reflection made by President Mary McAleese on a visit to Archways in recent years: the great potential in each child in society and the loss of this being something we should be ashamed of as a society. In her handover to Aileen, Margaret described her successor as a great colleague and acknowledged their shared commitment to the potential of all children.

4. Speaker: Aileen O'Donoghue, CEO Archways

Aileen O'Donoghue began by paying tribute to Margaret and the staff of Archways for the considerable amount of work that has been done. Aileen then provided an overview of the work of Archways, ranging from service delivery to enabling other service providers in implementing IY, through training and quality assurance. She also spoke of Archways strong involvement in research and advocacy functions and drew attention to Archway's role in sponsoring the IY Ireland Forum, the ultimate goal of which is to lobby policy makers for change.

In closing, Aileen emphasised how IY provides an opportunity to intervene early with children with SEBD, and how existing resources directed towards early intervention and prevention can avoid later costs such as those associated with progression into the criminal justice system. Addressing the minister and all those present, Aileen called on policy makers to refocus existing resources towards early intervention and prevention.

5. Address: Barry Andrews, TD and Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

The chairperson, Dr. Tony Crooks then handed over to Barry Andrews, TD and Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, who formally opened the conference.

Minister Andrews stated his pleasure in attending the conference and paid tribute to the success of Archways. With some jest in his voice, he stated that he had declined an earlier photo request to pose with some Dina puppets owing to a childhood fear of Punch and Judy. He then revealed his true concerns about the potential out of context use of the picture in the hands of the media.

Acknowledging the key challenges ahead for the Government over the coming months in terms of NAMA, the European debate and Budget 2010, he went on to assure delegates of his commitment to early intervention and prevention. He stated that the McCarthy Report recommendation that the HSE children and families budget should not be touched was a heart-warming platform from which to protect the services that are there. He called for consideration of ways to achieve more for less; different ways of working. Minister Andrews reiterated Margaret Maher's earlier reference to "a stitch in time saves nine" and the positive experience he had in recent weeks meeting social workers around the country, committed to their work and enthusiastic about moving in this direction.

Minister Andrews repeated his congratulations to Archways and acknowledged the innovative work that Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton began thirty years ago and the significant fruits of her work. He spoke of how the research, specifically the RTCs of the IY programme, answer crucial questions such as how you can measure the success of intervention. He spoke of how the IY programme has stood the test of time, how positive it was to meet with parents who the programme had benefitted, the awareness he had of their previous isolation in managing a child with SEBD and his gratitude to Atlantic Philanthropies for their work with his department.

In closing, Minister Andrews clearly stated the importance the Government attaches to providing early interventions and how committed they are to going down this route.

6. Speaker: Dr. Rosario Power, HSE

Dr. Rosario Power is Principal Clinical Psychologist with the Linn Dara Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Kildare. Her extensive experience working with children and young people and her capacity to reflect on trends at a broader level was very evident in her comprehensive presentation: addressing problematic behaviour – a systemic approach. This presentation offered a refreshing perspective and numerous thought provoking questions.

Rosario spoke of how the term SEBD ‘jars’ with her as sometimes the presenting behaviour is more challenging for the others around the child, than the child himself / herself. She offered her own working definition of problematic behaviour, which is “behaviour that interferes with a child’s own ability to feel okay about himself / herself, to relate okay with others or to deal with the demands of life”.

Citing references from research conducted by Brofenbrenner (1986), Carr (1999) and many others, Rosario went to give an in-depth review of the field of problematic behaviour including the risk factors to children in developing psychological difficulties, the maintaining factors and the protective factors.

Linking into this research, Rosario asked how well intentioned professionals could sometimes risk deskilling a child to cope in their own environment through provision of social skills training suited to other environments. She also raised some of the complex dilemmas faced by professionals working with children. For example, the compromise between giving a child a label such as ADHD in order to secure services for the child, balanced against the risks of inadvertently reinforcing behaviour through the use of the label or generating negative consequences later in the child’s life, relating to jobs, insurance, visas and other legal matters.

Rosario presented research relating to prevalence rates of problematic behaviour with figures demonstrating higher rates for boys than girls, particularly in western, urban environments. She spoke of the greater likelihood of boys engaging in acting out behaviour (known as conduct disorders) and girls engaging in acting in behaviour (known as emotional disorders). Referring to research carried out by Carr (1999), Rosario spoke of conduct disorders being the single most costly disorder of child and adolescence. She also spoke of the low rates of service provision and referred to the poor outcomes for children who do not receive interventions at an appropriate age. She listed higher rates of early school leaving, criminality, hospitalisation, unemployment, social adjustment difficulties, marital adjustment difficulties and other problems in this context.

In providing interventions, Rosario emphasised the need to ask if solutions are “fair, safe and if they lead to good feelings”.

7. Keynote Speaker: Prof. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, University of Seattle, Washington

Introducing Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, founder of the IY programmes, Chairperson Dr. Tony Crooks spoke of her enormous expertise, her experience across continents, her great support of Archways and how privileged the conference was to have her presence. Carolyn responded that she was delighted to attend and that she was delighted with the progress that Archways had made, most particularly with the outcomes of the RCT research.

Moving temporarily out of academic role and into practitioner mode, Carolyn then introduced Wally the problem solver who asked delegates to come up with solutions that would help him solve a problem at school involving his difficulties making friends and being excluded from party invitations. Carolyn then resumed her academic presentation and returned to this practical question later in the day in the closing address.

The theme of Carolyn's presentation was preventing and treating conduct problems in young children. She provided a comprehensive rationale for intervention, based on prevalence rates, definitions of emotional dysregulation (e.g. tantrums every two to three minutes throughout the day) and trajectories of physical aggression where the high levels observed at the age of three are continued into later childhood years and adolescence. She spoke of the disrupted developmental trajectory into young adulthood and the cascading risk factors.

Carolyn emphasised the need for early intervention, referring to Piaget's pre-operational stage of thinking between the ages of two and seven years, the opportunity to bring about change prior to the development of the child's concrete thinking structures. In addition, she spoke of the need to provide very young children with feeling words, as research has demonstrated that emotional literacy is the cornerstone of self-regulation. Further in her presentation, Carolyn spoke of the newer IY programmes, including the infant and toddler programmes and their components, including speaking 'parent-ese' and understanding the language of crying.

Carolyn provided a very comprehensive update of the IY research around the world, including a valuable longitudinal study that showed 8 to 12 year old children with SEBD prior to completing an IY programme, demonstrating typical 16 to 18 year old normative rates for involvement in drug abuse, at the follow up stage. Interestingly, she noted that negative interaction between a child and mother was the strongest predictor of later difficulties and that in these instances we need to continue to provide interventions.

In closing, Carolyn expressed her excitement at the progress being made in Ireland and the value of the Archways and NUI Maynooth RCT research.

8. Research Panel: Dr. Sinead McGilloway, NUI, Maynooth

Dr. Sinead McGilloway is the lead researcher on the Irish IY RTC work, known as the IY Ireland Study. Sinead delivered a very informative and comprehensive presentation which outlined how the research is structured, who is involved, how the study is being undertaken and what measures are being used.

Sinead explained about the multi-strand, multi-site, longitudinal nature of the work, the involvement of each of the psychology, education and economics departments of NUI, Maynooth, Bangor University in Wales, the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Trinity College Dublin and experts in public health and epidemiology in Queens University Belfast. She spoke of the Connors Rating Scale, the Eyberg Child Behaviour Inventory, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, the Parental Stress Inventory and the Becks Depression Index.

Most interestingly, she shared an overview of the child outcomes from these trials, where children with previous clinical or problem scores on some of the measures mentioned above had moved to normal or near normal ranges following the IY intervention. A further level of depth was added to the study with observational findings – which supported and

corroborated the measurement findings. Sinead emphasised the important long term implications of the findings, particularly the potential reductions in costs associated with juvenile delinquency. Delegates were provided with a research paper from the IY Ireland Study: Proving the Power of Positive Parenting. This covers the RTC outcomes, the qualitative feedback and the cost-benefit analysis, and strongly endorses the effectiveness of the IY programme.

Sinead drew numerous links with the research conducted by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton and spoke of the success of the IY programme and how early intervention is key. The opportunities are there; to use her opening words: “we can’t always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

9. Research Panel: Prof. Donal O’Neill, NUI, Maynooth

Dr. Donal O’Neill of the Economics Department at NUI, Maynooth provided a very focused presentation outlining the cost benefit analysis of the IY RCT trials. Referring to both the Irish and Welsh trials, Donal spoke with energy and enthusiasm about the certain cost-effectiveness of the IY programme.

Using accessible language about clinical cut-off points on a difficult behaviour index and presenting figures based on the cost of the programme per client in Ireland (average €1,520), Donal explained how on average, each child could move 1 point down on the behavioural index for a cost of €72. This he stated very clearly was evidence of a cost-effective intervention.

Donal also referenced three potential benefits arising from improvements in child behaviour: improvements in education, reduction in unemployment and reduction in crime. In summary, Donal stated that his analysis forecasted that the benefits arising from the IY programme over the lifetime of a child would exceed the programme costs by a considerable sum.

10. Research Panel: Mairead Furlong, NUI, Maynooth

Mairead Furlong has worked on the qualitative aspects of the IY research, carrying out interviews with parents and conducting observations of parent and child interactions in their home environment. Mairead spoke with great enthusiasm and empathy for the experience of parents.

She shared the difficulties and challenges that parents had overcome, such as overcoming a mindset of their child “just being bold”, the realisation of the enormous positive effect of praise, the negative attention seeking behaviour presented by previously manageable siblings and sometimes the conflict with partners as they struggled to introduce a new behaviour management system.

11. Workshop Review

Workshops on aspects of delivering and managing IY programmes were available to delegates. The purpose of the workshops was to bring together IY sponsors and practitioners to learn from each other and stimulate new ideas.

The topics offered were:

- The Incredible Years – A Whole School Approach
- The Dina Programme – Introducing Wally, Molly & Dina
- The Incredible Years and Foster Carers – Results from the IY Welsh Foster Carers’ Trial
- The Incredible Years in Ballymun – A Community Based Strategy
- The Added Value of Incredible Years to the School Completion Programme
- The Deansrath Family Centre – Reconfiguring a Service Using Incredible Years
- Implementing Incredible Years with Fidelity in a Difficult Economic Climate

This element of the conference was regarded as a huge success by all and the Chairperson expressed his gratitude to the facilitators for their valued contributions. The facilitators were:

- Ena Morley, St. Ultan’s Primary School, Ballyfermot, Dublin 22
- Aoife Slacke, St. Ultan’s Primary School, Ballyfermot, Dublin 22
- Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, University of Washington, Seattle
- Dr. Judy Hutchings, University of Bangor, Wales
- Breege Breheny, Young Ballymun
- Elaine Fahy, CAFTA
- Mary McHale, CAFTA
- Margaret McGlynn, School Completion Coordinator, Dublin 8
- Susan Naughton, IY Parent Group Leader, Dublin 8
- Siobhan Feehan, Deansrath Family Centre
- Kathrin Bayly, HSE

A report detailing the content of each of the workshops has been prepared and is available to all delegates.

12. Presentation: Archways RCT Delivery Team

Dr. Sean McDonnell and Jacqui Guiry of the Archways management team lead the presentation from the RCT delivery team which was titled “IY on the ground – working together”. The presentation involved filmed interviews with five of the group facilitators during which they spoke of how IY had influenced their work, the relationships they had developed with parents, their experiences working with Archways, the supervisory process and the research process.

The participating facilitators were: Michelle Frawley of Tallaght Family Resource Centre, Dolores Lee of Deansrath Family Centre, Margaret McGlynn, School Completion for Dublin 8, Susan Naughton, IY parent group leader, counsellor and former teacher and Peadar McKenna, Development Manager, Archways.

Michelle talked about how the IY programme allowed her centre to reach a large number of people and how it was great to be part of something so big. Dolores emphasised the need for a sense of humour and also the necessity to focus on the individual and build trust.

Margaret described the IY programme as “powerful” and spoke about the importance of the facilitator relationships with parents, which grew as the weeks progressed. She mentioned the great deal of fun experienced but also the tears and the sadness that are experienced along the way. Susan detailed the extent of ground work required in advance of the programme to build up relationships and expressed her gratitude to Archways for the peer support provided.

Peadar acknowledged the valuable guidance provided by Dr. Judy Hutchings of the IY Wales Centre and Dr. Dermot O’Reilly of the Lucena Clinic, Bray. He described them as wonderful mentors who provided clarification on everything and ensured a positive experience for all the facilitators by setting the ground rule “it’s got to be fun”. The fun continued from the research team to the conference hall as delegates watched snippets of the early interview tape with Peadar: his favourite food “kippers”!

In closing this presentation, Jacqui expressed her thanks to all involved in the RCT trials, the centres and the facilitators already listed above, and also the other RCT facilitators including Orla Brady, Kathrin Bayly, Patricia Fitzpatrick and Paula Byrne.

12. Speaker: Prof. Judy Hutchings, IY Wales Centre, University of Bangor

Dr. Judy Hutchings delivered a brief yet very informative presentation summarising the recent findings from the Wales research team. Her focus was on the IY toddler programme and the IY school age programme both of which have been very successful, based on very positive outcomes on several measures for intervention groups when compared with control groups.

Judy’s involvement in IY research goes back over eight years and has covered many strands of the programme. The considerable contribution that she has made to the field was apparent to all present, particularly when she spoke of the 25 year plan that she had secured with the Welsh Assembly to fund IY programmes.

3. Closing Address: Prof. Carolyn Webster-Stratton

Carolyn provided the closing address to the conference and began this by congratulating the delegates for “what an incredible job Ireland is doing”.

Carolyn then picked up the practical theme and Wally restated his request for solutions to his problem about making friends and being excluded from party invitations. Carolyn summarised the key solutions, the first of which is to provide parent training, as parents are the most powerful agent in a child’s life. The second solution is to provide teacher training as part of the intervention strategy. Carolyn explained how the research demonstrated the very positive impact of teacher training with reductions in harsh discipline and sharp decreases in children’s aggressive classroom behaviour. The third solution is to provide both parent and child training.

In conclusion, Carolyn offered her recognition to Archways for the application of a number of critical strategies that underlined success. These included ensuring standardised quality training, monitoring programme delivery fidelity, researching programme effects and providing group leaders with ongoing consultation and support.

Conference Close

The chairperson Dr. Tony Crooks formally closed the conference by thanking all of the board members of Archways, staff member Anne O'Brien for her skill and commitment in organising the event, Atlantic Philanthropies and Dormant Accounts for funding, the staff of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, all of the speakers and all of the delegates. A presentation was made to the founder and former director of Archways, Margaret Maher, who received a standing ovation from delegates throughout the hall.