



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

Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin  
21 September 2009

Workshop Review  
Prepared by Helen Cahill  
28 September 2009

## Contents

1. Introduction
2. Workshop: The Incredible Years – A Whole School Approach
3. Workshop: The Dina Programme – Introducing Wally, Molly & Dina
4. Workshop: The Incredible Years and Foster Carers – Results from the Welsh Foster Carers’ Trial
5. Workshop: The Incredible Years in Ballymun – A Community Based Strategy
6. Workshop: The Added Value of Incredible Years to the School Completion Programme
7. Workshop: The Deansrath Family Centre – Reconfiguring a Service Using Incredible Years
8. Workshop: Implementing Incredible Years with Fidelity in a Difficult Economic Climate
9. Displays
10. Conclusion

## 1. Introduction

A choice of seven workshops on aspects of delivering and managing Incredible Years (IY) programmes were available to delegates at the Archways National Conference on 21 September 2009. 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

Notes from each of the workshop are presented in this report.

## 2. Workshop: The Incredible Years – A Whole School Approach

This workshop was presented by Ena Morley, Principal and Aoife Slacke, Assistant Principal, St. Ultan’s Primary School, Ballyfermot, Dublin 22.

Ena provided an overview of the background to the relatively new St. Ultan’s Primary School (which opened as recently as 2006) and the multi-strand approach, which has included the Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) programme and the child Dina programme. Ena also explained how the school has successfully linked with other local services for parent programmes, providing a comprehensive and integrated whole school approach.

Aoife then provided a refreshingly honest account of her initial experiences as a teacher and the stress that inevitably results from challenging behaviour in the classroom. She shared details of the enormously positive impact that the IY programmes have had to the well being of all in the school.

This was the most highly subscribed of the choice of workshops with an attendance of 40 delegates. The screen pictures of young children in red and grey uniforms enjoying Dina School was hugely uplifting and testament to the success of St. Ultan's.

### **3. Workshop: The Dina Programme – Introducing Wally, Molly & Dina**

This workshop was presented by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, University of Washington, Seattle. It was also very well attended with a group of 35 delegates keen to learn more about the Dina puppets and Carolyn's use of them in delivery contexts.

The atmosphere in this workshop was very positive with an interactive question and answer session following a short video presentation. In a response to a question about teacher's interest in the Dina programme, Carolyn explained how she regularly invited teachers to attend sessions and how surprised they were at how often the children received praise and how well behaved they were in group.

In response to another question, Carolyn shared the story of how she first found Wally. Amazingly, Carolyn had happened upon Wally at an end of stock clearance sale while on a trip to Canada some years back. She spoke of experiencing an immediate attraction and purchased all available puppets. She then began the surprisingly difficult task of locating Wally's 'mother'. After some years, she succeeded in meeting up with the former puppeteer in Florida and successfully persuaded her to take a break from sailing around the world and reopen manufacturing to supply Wally and his friends to the IY programme.

Carolyn's genuine attachment to Wally was evident to all as she shared how she brought him to Oxford in England during a sabbatical year there. She spoke with great enthusiasm of the wonderful magic of the childhood years, the richness of the fantasy worlds created by children and the extraordinary insights available to adults who enter a make believe world with a child.

Participation in this group, particularly hearing the anecdotal stories about the origins of Wally, provided delegates with a unique opportunity to develop a personal connection with the founder of the IY programmes, something each valued greatly.

### **4. Workshop: The Incredible Years and Foster Carers – Results from the Welsh Foster Carers' Trial**

Working with foster carers was the subject of this greatly informative workshop lead by Dr. Judy Hutchings of the University of Bangor in Wales. In addition to outlining the benefits of the programme to foster families, Judy spoke of the different challenges presented by this population, for example the considerably greater effort required of carers to build the base of the IY pyramid with children. Judy explained how children in foster care had often experienced break down of relationships and loss of trust and the difficulty they then experienced in accepting praise and building trust.

Delegates at this group valued the opportunity to learn from the great experience and knowledge held by Judy, gained from the vast body of research into the IY programmes that she has undertaken. The wider conference group also benefitted from a comprehensive poster display summarising much of this valued research.

## **5. Workshop: The Incredible Years in Ballymun – A Community Based Strategy**

Breege Breheny of Young Ballymun together with Elaine Fahy and Mary McHale of CAFTA presented this hugely interesting story of the value of the IY programme to the Ballymun Community in Dublin.

The IY programme is one of six programmes underway in Ballymun and the experience has been very positive for all. Breege shared the experiences of a group of four schools who initially implemented the small group Dina programme but found that the limited reach of small groups was not meeting the extent of behavioural problems across the schools. Issues of teacher burnout and turnover still prevailed. The Dina classroom programme is now underway, challenging behaviour in classrooms has reduced and teacher stress and turnover levels have alleviated greatly.

Breege attributed their success to a combination of a proven model and local innovation. At the close of the workshop, delegates agreed that Ballymun is very definitely a great example of positive community regeneration.

## **6. Workshop: The Added Value of Incredible Years to the School Completion Programme**

Margaret McGlynn, School Completion Coordinator in the Dublin 8 area and experienced IY parent group leader and former teacher Susan Naughton delivered this workshop in a facilitated style to the genuine enjoyment of delegates present.

The workshop opened with the group seated in a circle, holding hands and singing along with Wally to a song from Dina School. Judging by the open smiling faces, participants welcomed this opportunity to move out of formal conference mode and into a more experiential state.

Margaret shared how she had found it to be the most satisfying programme that she had worked with and how it had greatly advanced her goals to achieve higher levels of school completion in the Dublin 8 area.

Margaret also spoke of the positive atmosphere in the schools that had adopted the IY programme and how the complement of IY trained teachers had extended from school completion and classroom teachers to special needs assistants, home school liaison staff and learning resource professionals.

## **7. Workshop: The Deansrath Family Centre – Reconfiguring a Service Using Incredible Years**

This was another uplifting workshop lead by Siobhan Feehan, Delores Lee and Mary Beuno of Deansrath Family Centre in Clondalkin, Dublin 22. It began with a DVD film of a typical day in the busy centre with children deeply engaged with Alison O’Flaherty and Leah McDonald (of Archways) and the Dina School puppets in the preschool room.

We also saw footage of young children lying quietly on bean bags enjoying calm time in the relaxation room, each set of young eyes entranced in following lights in moving patterns along the ceiling of the softly lit room.

There were also excerpts from interviews with Delores, Mary and other staff of the centre and references to the IY parent training programmes for which there are now multiple referral sources and applicant waiting lists. It was very evident to all that the Deansrath Family Centre is a very positive model of a holistic and comprehensive social service that is very much geared towards the needs of the families of Deansrath and around.

Siobhan spoke about the development of the services in the centre and their experiences when they first introduced the IY programme. She explained how one piece lead to the next, which then lead to more pieces. With the support of staff they have been able to provide an array of new services over recent years of which IY is the supporting 'glue'. Siobhan attributed the success of the centre (which has HSE recognition as a centre of excellence) to the flexibility of staff, of which there are about 13 or 14, many working part-time and supported by FAS employment structures.

Siobhan emphasised that all of the staff of the centre are committed to delivering services that keep the parents and children coming back to the centre and benefitting in positive ways.

## **8. Workshop: Implementing Incredible Years with Fidelity in a Difficult Economic Climate**

Kathrin Bayly of the Parent Training Unit in the HSE delivered this most topical workshop, which focused on the practicalities of implementing IY with fidelity in difficult economic times. Delegates listened attentively to pick up ideas for how they may continue to deliver and expand services despite the current budgetary constraints.

Kathrin offered suggestions from her experience relating to cost management, most based around working with other community services to achieve joint goals and share overheads. Ideas included passing on the cost of the venue to the parents, for example a community centre charging a nominal fee of €25 per course with some free places for those unable to pay, thereby generating an income of around €250 or more. This Kathrin suggested would be more than sufficient to cover the cost of photocopying, refreshments and parent achievement gifts for the duration of a course.

Kathrin also spoke of the scope to share the costs of supervision, which is very necessary in ensuring programmes are delivered with fidelity. The challenge of providing childcare for parents attending programmes was also raised.

## **9. Displays**

Most of the case-study workshops were supplemented by visual poster displays at the back of the conference hall, which allowed delegates to learn more about the range of positive IY implementation experiences.

The poster display included contributions from other services including the Louth Leader Partnership, Paul Partnership in Limerick, the Tallaght Family Resource Centre, EdStart and IY in Galway and IY services in Clare supported by Clare Care Family Support Services, the HSE Clinical Psychology Service and NEPS.

A visual summary of the pilot meeting of the IY Ireland Forum hosted by Louth Leader Partnership in collaboration with Archways in June of this year was also displayed in the conference hall and copies of the meeting report were available to delegates. Regional meetings will be held in Tallaght and Newry in early November of this year.

## **10. Conclusion**

In conclusion, seven very different and very useful workshops were provided. Each workshop focused on sharing a case study or exploring the practical aspects of IY programme delivery, topics that greatly appealed to both IY sponsors and practitioners alike.

Delegates emerged from the groups with new learnings and ideas for consideration in their home locations, which ranged from schools to family centres, health services, child psychology services, community partnerships, universities and other environments.