

Partnership for Children



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Beijing programme helps China's single children

Zippy's Friends has just started in the Chinese capital, Beijing. Teachers have been trained in the usual way and the programme is the same as everywhere else, but there is one major difference between these classes and those in other countries. Almost none of the 1,080 children enrolled in Beijing has a brother or sister.

The Chinese government introduced the 'single child policy' in 1980, to limit population growth. Thirty years on, most of today's five and six year olds are the single children of parents who themselves were single children. Chinese educationalists talk about the 'six adult syndrome', children who are cared for and protected not only by their parents but also by two sets of doting grandparents.

Partnership for Children's Director Chris Bale was in Beijing in October for the launch of Zippy's Friends, and visited two of the 30 kindergartens that are taking part.



Children at the launch of Zippy's Friends in Beijing



Partnership for Children's Director, Chris Bale

'In one class, the children lined up with their teachers and I took a photo,' he said. 'It was only later that the head teacher told me that not one of those children had a brother or sister.'

'I asked a number of teachers about the benefits of the single child policy, and they said that children's physical health has improved, and their

MISSION

To help children and young people, throughout the world, develop skills which will enhance their present and future emotional wellbeing.



Teachers at the first Zippy's Friends training course

academic performance is better because parents are happy to take them on trips, enrol them in extra classes, and pay for extra tuition.

'But the teachers also talked about less positive outcomes - children feeling lonely at home, not knowing how to make friends, and having poor communication skills. One head teacher said that these children have so many adults giving them love and attention, but they're not good at thinking about other people.

'Zippy's Friends is specifically designed to help children develop coping and social skills, and so it will be very interesting to see how the programme is received in Beijing. Certainly, the feedback from teachers and parents in Shanghai, where it has been running for the past couple of years, is encouraging.'

Zippy's Friends is being run in Beijing under a three-way agreement between Partnership for Children, the China National Institute for Educational Research (CNIER), and the Hong Kong Institute for Education. The Hongkong Bank Foundation, which also supports Zippy's Friends in Hong Kong and Shanghai, has agreed to fund the programme in Beijing for three years.

Prof Liu Zhan Lan of CNIER said: 'In recent years, Chinese people have felt that academic knowledge, in maths and languages, for example, is important, but they have neglected social and mental health. This is especially true of parents and teachers - so that's the first reason why Zippy's Friends appeals.



Prof Liu Zhan Lan of CNIER

'Secondly, most of our teachers are young, born after 1980, and they themselves need to learn how to cope with difficulties and problems.

'There is usually only one child in the family. Parents and grandparents don't let children face difficulties, so they don't learn how to cope with them. The boy or girl may be spoiled by parents and grandparents, and the teacher always encourages and congratulates them.

That is not very good for them. Children sometimes need to know that they have done wrong. Many of our children don't know which ways of coping are suitable and which are unsuitable, and they really need to learn this.'

But Prof Liu says that times are changing, and parents recognise the need for a programme such as Zippy's Friends that helps children to develop appropriate coping skills and also teaches them to offer help to other people.

Zippy's Friends is running in kindergartens, rather than primary schools, and 60 teachers from 30 leading kindergartens have been trained so far. The training course was held in the beautiful Temple of the Silkworm God, a 250 year old complex of buildings in Beihai Park and now home to the Beihai kindergarten.

The expansion of Zippy's Friends will continue early in 2009, when classes start in Mauritius and the Netherlands. A small pilot study will also be launched in France.

To find out more about CNIER go to <http://219.234.174.136/english/>

To read more about Zippy's Friends in China go to www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/china-2

To read about the Hongkong Bank Foundation go to <http://www.hongkongbankfoundation.org/1/2/foundation/home>



Temple of the Silkworm God, Beihai Park, Beijing

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