



Colleagues from 16 countries gather to create health

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'Where is health created?'

That was the question posed by Prof Margaret Barry in her opening address to the second Zippy's Friends International Workshop at Worcester College, Oxford.

'It's not created in hospital or clinics,' she said. 'It's created where we live, in our homes, in our communities, in our schools.'

The three-day workshop brought together 58 delegates from 16 countries, all of whom are creating health for children by running Zippy's Friends, a school-based programme that helps young children to develop coping and social skills. This was a rare opportunity for us to exchange ideas and experiences, meet colleagues from different countries and cultures,

and consider how we can work more effectively.

Prof Barry, Director of the Health Promotion Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway, highlighted the growing evidence of links between children's mental health and their academic performance, and said that promotion of wellbeing is now on the political agenda in many countries. She welcomed the focus on positive mental health, saying this meant much more than merely the absence of illness.



One of the workshop's themes was the diversity of settings in which Zippy's Friends is now helping children – from addressing the effects of the single

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

child policy in China, to helping small groups of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in Inner London, to helping children cope after a catastrophic flood in Brazil. One session looked at how it is being used with minority ethnic communities, such as Native communities in Canada, the Sami people in Norway, and an area of Rotterdam where most children are of African or Turkish descent.

Programme Director Caroline Egar said: 'We heard of some remarkable successes. For instance, the programme in Poland has grown incredibly quickly and now has more children enrolled (24,276) than any other country. In Lithuania, a nationwide festival is underway, to celebrate ten years of Zippy's Friends. Sunfield School in England described the effect on its children with severe and complex learning difficulties as 'truly stunning.' Most impressive of all, more than 300,000 young children have already been helped, and our enrolment grows every year.'

Delegates were briefed about ongoing evaluation studies in Canada, Ireland and Norway, all of which are showing positive results, and heard of plans to develop a similar programme for older children.

The workshop also identified some clear challenges: the need to reach out to a much wider audience by being more 'vocal and visible', to convince people of the importance of promoting children's mental health and emotional wellbeing; the need to involve the 'whole school' in Zippy's Friends; and the case for including mental health promotion in the basic training of all teachers.

We were also reminded that many partners face enormous challenges. Financial turmoil is causing problems in Lithuania, an extremely academic education system in Mauritius makes it difficult to squeeze Zippy's Friends into the curriculum, and children in Singapore are learning in English although their first language may be Chinese, Hindi or Malay.

The workshop was held in the timeless tranquillity of Worcester College, which is set in extensive grounds in the middle of Oxford and is now approaching its 300th



anniversary. The event was made possible by generous grants from GlaxoSmithKline, The Providence Foundation, The Todd Ouida Children's Foundation, and another foundation and a private donor who prefer to remain anonymous. We are very grateful to all of them.

On the final evening of the workshop, Simon Armson gave a short talk. Simon is a psychotherapist and was until recently Chair of the Mental Health Act

Commission, the body responsible for monitoring the care of people whose mental ill health is so severe that they have been detained against their will. He spoke movingly about his work with adults who have serious mental health problems, and said that the roots of those problems invariably lie in childhood. He saluted the importance of our partners' efforts to promote the mental health of young children, and described working on Zippy's Friends as 'a wonderful opportunity.'

Every delegate agreed.

- To see more photos of Worcester College and the workshop, go to <http://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/resources/zippy-s-friends-2/photo-album.html>
- To find out more about Zippy's Friends, go to www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/zippy-s-friends.html

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