

# **Research Report into Māori and Non-Māori Retention in Incredible Years Parent Programme**

Central North Region

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Executive Summary**

### ***The Study Question***

What can we do better with our programme delivery to ensure a higher rate of retention among participants of the Incredible Years Parent Programmes (IYP) we offer in the Central North Region? In particular, is there anything we can be doing more effectively that will enable Māori participants to complete the course?

### ***The Study***

This was a qualitative study designed to indicate issues affecting retention for participants via their own perceptions of IYP. Thirty-three participants from thirteen courses held across the Central North region were interviewed: nine Māori and eight non-Māori completers, eight Māori and eight non-Māori withdrawers. All Maori participants were interviewed by Maori staff.

### ***General Findings***

- The majority of participants in this study (28/33), Māori and non-Māori, completers and withdrawers, enjoyed attending IYP and said that they found it very valuable.
- Māori and non-Māori withdrawers described a cluster of issues impacting on their attendance at the course in addition to the reasons they gave to facilitators on exiting the course.

### ***Barriers***

- Unreported transport costs were a barrier, particularly for Māori parents.
- Three of the eight Māori withdrawers interviewed expressed feelings of isolation on their courses and difficulty connecting with non-Māori facilitators.
- Participants with children with disabilities, or whose children fell outside the optimal age for the course, reported needing more individual help and coaching to apply the course information to their particular situations.
- Some participants had difficulty understanding the homework and needed more individual coaching and help from facilitators.
- The buddy system was disliked by a number of completers and withdrawers, with one withdrawer leaving because of this. Closer oversight by facilitators was needed for some.

### ***Increase Retention Rates***

The solutions for similar difficulties for withdrawers already exist in the literature: the need for facilitators to be culturally responsive; the provision of financial aid for parents to attend; facilitators to spend more time between sessions in a coaching/modelling role.

The findings from this study indicate that to raise retention rates in New Zealand, especially for Māori participants, provision in these areas needs to be further intensified:

- The recommendations of the Incredible Years Parents Programme Practice Manual (Ministry of Education, 2011b) and from the Incredible Years Ngā Tau Miharo Hui, April 2011 (see p. 11) to be followed, particularly as regards to cultural supervision.

- More transport options for those living in communities with low socio-economic conditions.
- Where there are course participants who are Māori, and/or have children with disabilities, and/or have major literacy or social difficulties, additional time proportionately to be allocated to facilitators for individual work with these parents between sessions.

## Introduction

This research considered issues related to the retention of participants attending the Incredible Years Parent (IYP) programme in the Central North Region of the Ministry of Education (Central North).

The research asked “What can we do better with our programme delivery to ensure a higher rate of retention among participants of the programmes we offer in Central North? In particular, is there anything we can be doing more effectively that will enable Māori participants to complete the course?”

This report has five sections as follows:

1. background to the study: problem definition; overview of the Incredible Years programme; brief description of how sessions are organised.
2. review of the literature
3. procedures used in this study
4. findings: Responses to the course itself, aspects people enjoyed, and reasons for withdrawal
5. discussion, including participant suggestions on improvements to course delivery

## Background to the Study

### Problem definition

This research was designed to investigate New Zealand parents' reasons for remaining with or withdrawing from the Incredible years Parent (IYP) programme. The purpose of the study was to identify factors that could strengthen programme delivery, thereby increasing retention rates in the Central North region (**Central North**) of the New Zealand Ministry of Education

Central North is one of four Ministry of Education regions, and caters for 21.6% of New Zealand's school-age children. Of the four regions, Central North has the highest proportion of Māori students at 37%. The region comprises five districts spanning the central North Island of New Zealand: Waikato, Bay of Plenty East, Bay of Plenty West, Hawkes Bay, and Gisborne.

Central North has been running IYP programmes in since 2003. Preliminary findings by Fergusson, Stanley, and Horwood (2009) have shown that throughout New Zealand Māori and non-Māori parents who completed the programme found it beneficial.

Parenting programmes, however effective, tend to have low rates of retention (Watt & Dadds, 2007). The challenge for the Ministry of Education has been to ensure that the majority of parents who undertake IYP do in fact complete the programme. The Ministry of Education's target for programme completion is 65% of the parents who begin each course.

The Ministry of Education has defined IYP programme completion as attendance at 75% or more (ten out of fourteen) sessions. This is in line with the effective 'dosage' rate quoted in research by Baydar, Reid, and Webster-Stratton (2003).

Data from the thirteen<sup>1</sup> IYP programmes run in Central North in the first half of 2011, showed completion rates of 59%. Of the 185 parents attending the courses, 70 (38%) were Māori, and 115 (62%) were non-Māori. However, completing parents comprised 38/70 (54%) Māori, and 82/115 (71%) non-Māori. This difference in retention rates suggested the possibility that the programme and/or its delivery might not be meeting the needs of Māori parents sufficiently well to make them want to complete.

To tackle the issue of retention, Central North decided to investigate the programme experiences of Māori and non-Māori parents who had recently undertaken IYP. The research was designed to:

- capture the voices of parents who had withdrawn from the programme as well as those who had completed it
- learn more about the factors that kept some people attending the programme, and the barriers that resulted in other people withdrawing
- find out whether there were specific factors affecting the attendance or withdrawal of Māori parents

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<sup>1</sup> Eighteen courses were run in Central North during this period, but data was unavailable from three courses at the point when this study began (August 2011). A further two courses in Tauranga were excluded from the study because participating parents were involved in a national study.

## **The Incredible Years Parent Programme**

The Incredible Years Parent Programme (IYP) has been developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton over the past 30 years as part of a set of programmes for parents, teachers, and children. The programme is aimed at promoting social and emotional competence and reducing behavioural problems in young children (Webster-Stratton & Herman, 2010).

The parent training comprises four sections which build on one another as follows: 1- strengthening children's social skills, emotional regulation, and school readiness skills; 2- using praise and incentives to encourage co-operative behavior; 3- rules, routines, and limit setting; 4- positive discipline, handling misbehavior, and problem solving. A key aspect of this programme, particularly important for families from disadvantaged backgrounds, is that presenters work as facilitators rather than experts, to help parents take responsibility for setting their own goals, and finding solutions to their problems (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2010).

These programmes have been shown to be effective over time and across a range of cultures (Hutchings & Webster-Stratton, 2004). Fergusson, Stanley, and Horwood (2009) have found the programmes to be effective in the New Zealand context with participating parents reporting an improvement in their children's social and emotional competence.

The parent programme referred to in this study is the 'preventative level' 14-week basic programme for parents of young children aged 3-8, and school-age children, aged 6-12. The NZ Ministry of Education, Special Education is delivering this programme as a major part of its Positive Behaviour For Learning (PB4L) strategy.

## **Description of the Course Process and Organisation**

The following description of the course is provided as a context from which to understand parent comments quoted in the findings.

Facilitators meet individually with parents before the course starts to confirm their interest in attending, discuss issues of concern about their child's/ children's behaviour, assess levels of need for the parenting course, and identify with the parents any barriers that might stop them being able to complete the course. Financial support for childcare and/or transport may be offered at this stage, at the discretion of the facilitators.

At the start of the course parents introduce themselves and agree on 'rules' for the sessions such as confidentiality. The typical session starts with parents feeding back on the interactions they have had with their children during the past week, usually relating to the use of the skills they have been asked to practice for homework. The rest of the group helps solve problems that may have arisen. After this, the topic for the day is introduced and issues pertaining to this are discussed. Short video scenes (vignettes) are played to illustrate the points being made, and parents participate in role plays to practice skills. Finally, the homework for the following week is explained and discussed. Throughout the session facilitators praise and reward parent participation and contribution.

Parents have folders for their homework in which they can keep the tip-sheets and fridge magnets given out with the course. They are also provided with a book, "The Incredible Years: A Troubleshooting Guide for Parents of Children 2-8 Years Old"



that they are asked to read as part of their homework. Where parents may have reading difficulties they are offered audio CDs of the book.

During the week facilitators ring each parent to see how participants are going, particularly with the skills being worked on at that point in the course. Where a parent has missed a session they will be offered a make-up session. Facilitators may also visit parents who are having particular difficulty managing the work to discuss their individual issues with them. During the course parents will be paired up with a 'buddy' parent to contact each week for further support. The 'buddy' is changed at least once during the course.

## Literature

There is plenty of evidence that the IYP programme is effective in reducing behavioural problems and promoting social and emotional competence in young children here and overseas (Axeberg, Hansson & Broberg, 2007; Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006; Hutchings & Webster-Stratton, 2004; Letarte, Normandeau, & Allard, 2010; Scott, O'Connor, Futh, Matias, Price, & Doolan, 2010; Webster-Stratton, Rinaldi, & Reid, 2010). This study was concerned with retention of parents attending the IYP programmes. In particular the study was interested in finding out whether the comparatively high rate of attrition for Māori parents attending these programmes could be reduced by delivering the programmes more effectively. This section overviews research pertaining to retention with IYP programmes; recommended ways of ensuring retention; suitability of the IYP programme for different cultures.

### Reported Retention Rates

Attendance rates for parenting programmes in general, not specifically related to the IYP programmes, indicate retention rates of around 60%, when parent retention is defined as attending 75% of sessions (Watt & Dadds, 2007).

Most of the studies concerned with the IYP programmes commented on programme efficacy rather than retention. Studies of the IYP programmes that mentioned retention at all referred to 'completion' rates of 50 to 75% (Gardner et al., 2006; Hutchings, Bywater, & Daley, 2007; Kim, Cain, & Webster-Stratton, 2009; Scott, Sylva, Doolan, Price, Jacobs, et al., 2009; Taylor, Webster-Stratton, Feil, Broadbent, Widdop, & Severson, 2008). However, 'completion' in these studies was generally defined as attendance at 50% or more of the available sessions. Where retention rates were higher, the group size was very small, such as in the New Zealand-based study by Lees and Ronan (2008), where there was 100% retention, but the research group size was 4 participants.

An exception to this is a study by Larsson, Fossum, Clifford, Drugli, Bjørn, et al. (2008) with 51 participants (a clinical population), a completion rate of 88%, with a mean average attendance rate of 92%. Unfortunately the study did not discuss the possible reasons for these excellent retention figures.

### Supporting Retention

Hutchings & Webster-Stratton (2004), referring to a series of successful IYP programmes across the previous 20 years, described factors that supported retention. These included skilled leaders, the use of a self monitoring checklist; a focus on homework, the provision of childcare and transport, and a choice of attendance time between morning and afternoon. Webster-Stratton and Reid (2010) emphasized the need for transport support and home visiting for parents from low socio-economic groups. Some studies have used financial incentives to encourage retention. For example, Kim et al. (2009) paid \$100 to parents who completed a 12 week course, with \$7.50 deducted for each missed session.

Scott, O'Connor, and Futh (2006), reporting on the Primary Age Learning Study (PALS) in Britain, suggested that the importance of attendance should be stressed to parents, timing of courses should be kept flexible including the availability of Saturday morning courses, home visits should be available, teachers could deliver the programme in schools, programme delivery should be available in the workplace, and that certificates could be awarded at end of each section.

While most studies commenting on increasing retention rates have reported course facilitators' suggestions, three studies (two unpublished) have interviewed parents to find out their reasons for completing/ withdrawing from the IYP programme.

Levac, McCay, Merka, and Reddon-D'Arcy (2008) interviewed 37 parents who had completed one of six IYP courses to find out their views about it. Parents spoke of valuing working in a group, gaining awareness of their parenting practices, learning new behaviours, and becoming more confident. They described improved relationships with their children and their children's improved behaviour. They said that the most important factors for them had been the support of their group and of the facilitators.

An unpublished study by Guillen and Scott (2003), referred to in the PALS study in Britain (Scott et al., 2006) interviewed / surveyed 20 of 34 parents who had either withdrawn before starting from one of four IYP courses<sup>2</sup> in the previous six months, or had decided not to complete. The remaining 14 parents were either unable to be contacted, or unwilling to take part in the study. The majority of the parents contacted said that they had enjoyed the courses for as long as they had attended. The main reason given for withdrawing from the courses was lack of time because of multiple commitments, including jobs and study.

In a small unpublished study in New Zealand by Philippa Collie in 2011, nine parents, five completers (non-Māori) and four withdrawers (three Māori and one Pasifika) were interviewed to find out reasons for not completing. She found that barriers included work or study commitments, sickness, childcare, and transport. She noted that while the barriers were common to both groups, parents who completed the course were more likely to overcome these barriers by planning around them.

### **Suitability of the Incredible Years Parent Programme for Different Cultures**

One of the underlying drivers behind this study was whether the lower retention rates for Māori attending the IYP Programme could be related to the possibility that the programme, originating as it did in the United States, was not meeting the needs of some Māori parents.

Webster-Stratton (2009) has argued that there is value in using existing evidence-based programmes such as the IYP programme with a proven record of success with diverse cultures around the world. She pointed out that the programme principles could be generalised across all cultures, and that the key to programme success was to have facilitators who lead the programme in a culturally sensitive way. She listed a set of principles to guide a culturally sensitive approach to programme delivery, including the employment of facilitators who represented the culture of the parents. She also wrote about the importance of allowing sufficient time in the delivery of the programme to explore potential belief differences such as the relevance of play and praise, and the place of discipline.

In New Zealand, an initial examination of the effectiveness of the IYP programme by Fergusson, Stanley, and Horwood (2009) found that pre and post measures of children's pro-social behaviour showed improvement for Māori as well as non-Māori families. Parent satisfaction for the programme was high, with positive responses of 80% across all groups. The writers believed that these initial findings suggested that

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<sup>2</sup> These 12 week courses were interleaved with a 6 week course on teaching parents to teach their children to read (Pause, Prompt, Praise), making it 18 weeks in total.

the IYP programme was probably culturally appropriate for Māori parents as well as non-Māori parents. However, as they pointed out, retention rates were not recorded, and there were no measures taken of results for people who had left the courses.

Altena and Herewini (2009), while accepting that the IYP programme was effective, suggested that if the programme was to fully meet the needs of Māori whānau<sup>3</sup> the programme should include key Māori processes and protocols, and ideally be delivered by Māori facilitators with cultural knowledge and understanding. Berryman, Woller, and Glynn (2009) considered implications for Māori from the delivery of the IYP Programme in New Zealand. They stressed the need for the programme to be culturally responsive, and not just culturally appropriate, and that the learning experience needed to be interactive, with Māori parents bringing their own cultural knowledge to the learning experience to share with others. Whānau in their study reported that the courses that they had attended had been culturally responsive. However, Māori facilitators reported tensions between meeting the priorities of their organization (Ministry of Education, Special Education), maintaining programme fidelity, and making the programme responsive to whānau needs. Facilitators wanted to have the freedom to present the IYP programme in a way that they judged was more appropriate to the needs of the Māori community.

At the Incredible Years Ngā Tau Miharo Hui (2011) there was discussion about the best ways “to weave together cultural and Incredible Years fidelity” (Incredible Years Ngā Tau Miharo Hui, 2011, p.7). Recommendations from the Hui were that while there should be more support for Māori facilitators seeking accreditation, the idea of ‘cultural accreditation’ should be explored, with a greater Māori input into the accreditation process. Hui participants recommended ongoing cultural supervision for Māori and non-Māori facilitators, and suggested that the cultural framework presented at the Hui by Sonya McFarlane and Beau Rewiti could be included in facilitator training. Acknowledgement by managers of the extra workload involved in working with some Māori whānau was included in their list of recommendations and suggestions arising from the Hui.

The Incredible Years Parents (IYP) Programme Practice Manual (Ministry of Education, 2011b) has since suggested a number of strategies to ensure cultural content for Māori parents. These include

- the use of Māori tikanga and metaphors, reo, waiata, karakia, and whakatauki
- embedding the principles of manaakitangi, tautoko, and whānaungatanga
- involving kaumatua and other cultural advisers in interactions with Māori parents/ caregivers
- Consulting with kaumatua and other cultural advisers on the delivery of cultural content cultural supervision (P. 24).

### **Literature Summary**

Studies of the IYP programme have indicated ‘completion’ rates of 50 to 75%. ‘Completion’ has generally been defined as attendance at 50% or more of the available sessions. Factors that are thought to enhance retention are the provision of skilled leaders, home visiting for parents from low socio-economic groups, the use of a self monitoring checklist for reflection, a focus on homework, the provision of childcare and transport, and a flexible attendance time. Most studies that have discussed ways of enhancing retention have reflected the views of course facilitators rather than those of participants.

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<sup>3</sup> Whānau – Māori word for extended family

To retain participants from different cultures, care to ensure a culturally sensitive approach to programme delivery, including the employment of facilitators who represent the culture of the parents, has been advised. In New Zealand, Māori parents are less likely to complete the IYP programme than non-Māori (see introduction, p. 7). There has been a call for the programme to be delivered in a culturally responsive manner. The recent New Zealand Incredible Years Parents (IYP) Programme practice manual has attempted to address some of these issues.

## Procedures

Participants were drawn from thirteen Incredible Years parenting programmes<sup>4</sup> run in Central North in the first half of 2011. Seven of these had been run by Ministry of Education, Special Education staff, and six jointly, by Ministry of Education staff and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

The addresses and phone numbers of 165<sup>5</sup> participants were copied from the Incredible Years data base per district, and divided into four groups, 30 Māori completers, 82 non-Māori completers, 26 Māori withdrawers, and 27 non-Māori withdrawers. Completers had attended ten or more of the fourteen sessions, and withdrawers nine or less. The average number of sessions attended by withdrawers was 5 sessions for Māori and 4.25 sessions for non-Māori participants. The range in the number of sessions attended for Māori participants was 3-6 sessions, while the spread for non-Māori was larger, at 2-9.

Letters were sent out to all participants explaining that the Ministry of Education, Special Education, wished to find out from them what they had liked/not liked about the IYP Programme they had attended, so that future courses could be run in ways that suit everyone. The letter said that they might be randomly selected to receive a phone-call from a Special Education staff member to see if they would be happy to be interviewed about their experiences of the programme, and that they were free to agree to this or not (see Appendix p. 33).

The plan was to interview 40 participants, ten in each of the four groups. Each district was asked to interview between one and four participants from each of the four groups, shared proportionately across each district, depending on how many courses had been run in that district. In some districts there were no participants for a particular group. The Waikato district, which had run five of the thirteen courses, made up the short-fall.

Interviewers were selected from each district across the region. There were two stipulations: that Māori participants should be interviewed by Māori staff, and that no participant should be interviewed by the person who had facilitated their course. Interviewers were asked to select their participants from across the different courses that had been run in their district wherever possible. Where there were partners who had attended, only one partner should be interviewed.

A questionnaire (see Appendix p. 34) for a semi-structured interview was designed and discussed with a colleague involved in the national study, and approved by the District Māori Advisor. A tele-conference was held with interviewers, to discuss the questionnaire, and go over the informed consent process.

It was particularly difficult for interviewers to get withdrawers to interview. In fact in the final number of withdrawers interviewed (sixteen) was very close to the total number who were actually available. This was from a starting list of 53. Phone numbers were missing from the data base or no longer viable, addresses were incorrect, people had moved or did not answer phone calls or texts. A proportion of withdrawers chose not to be interviewed. These issues, together with time constraints, reduced participant numbers to nine Māori completers, eight non-Māori

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<sup>4</sup> Eighteen courses were run in Central North during this period, but data was unavailable from four programmes at the point when this study began (August 2011). A further two courses in Tauranga were excluded from the study because participating parents were involved in a national study.

<sup>5</sup> Participants who according to the data base had moved, or who had attended only one session were excluded from this list

completers, and eight Māori withdrawers, and eight non-Maori withdrawers, a total of 33 participants.

Once their interviews had been transcribed, participants were sent their transcripts and asked to sign a release form and/or make any alterations to what was written. A number of the participants gave phoned consent, rather than returning the form.

## Findings

This section is divided into two parts: firstly, why most people liked the course and secondly, why some people withdrew.

### Why most people liked the Course

Nearly everyone spoke highly of the course, completers and withdrawers, Māori and non-Māori. The features that were more likely to keep people engaged included new learning and feeling successful, the course style, relationships with the facilitators, relationships with the other participants, and incentives. The length of the course was not a problem.

### New Learning and Feeling Successful

Participants talked about the new skills, techniques, and successful interventions they had learnt, particularly with regard to communicating better with their children and playing with them more. A lot of the participants also talked about learning how to keep calm.

*“It was really helpful, even though I never finished it, I still found it really helpful and it was good that we actually got to keep the books because you can always go back to it if you have a problem which is good because it still gives me ideas on how to calm my child down, or calm myself down so that I can talk to them like a proper person instead of getting frustrated” (Māori withdrawer).*

Participants said that they liked the course because it had a positive focus, and was fun. Several spoke of their pleasure in feeling that what they said was valued and that they could be successful.

*“It makes you, you know, overwhelmed, and your eyes are looking at the wall, every time you go in. [The facilitators] always put [things you say] on the wall and it makes you happy, well to me it does, you know, to see that you and everyone else is up there, and other people’s ideas up there, not just mine” (Māori withdrawer)*

### Style

Completers and withdrawers spoke of a relaxed and friendly atmosphere on the course, and that they weren’t put on the spot.

*“What I liked about the Incredible Years Course was it was relaxing. It wasn’t, like, it wasn’t regimented. You just go in there if you wanted to speak, but if you didn’t you just sat back. If you didn’t want to get involved like with the role play, you didn’t have to, nothing was forced upon you....that’s what I liked about it, it was real laid back...I don’t like class room things. You can put me in a class room and teacher in the front and phew, whereas if it’s a bit more relaxed and hands on stuff, yeah, way better, it was very good actually” (Māori completer).*

People spoke of the course being practical, not just being given information.

Parent: *“The parenting courses today are good, but I’ve never seen a parenting course like the Incredible Years.”*

Interviewer: *“What do you mean?”*

Parent: *“Just the dynamic and like that. Like you get ante natal classes but they just tell you a whole lot of stuff. They don’t have the role-play or anything like that. It’s the theory with the practical” (Māori withdrawer)*

Several participants spoke of the way they liked the logical presentation of the course.



*"[I liked] the succession about bringing in the key concepts, giving it with each session. Then we could go away with that understanding of what the next section is going to be like"* (Māori completer).

*"I only went for a few weeks but the stuff I learned was good – you know – the pyramid thing. The way it was set out so you learned more and more each week"* (non-Māori withdrawer).

### **Relationships with the Facilitators**

Most people, 28 of the 33 participants, spoke very highly of the facilitators. Qualities that were most appreciated were that the facilitators listened, were respectful and non judgmental. Presenters' helpfulness and availability to discuss issues of concern were noted, as well as them being knowledgeable but also clear and down to earth - not expert.

*"The wonderful thing I did make was friendship with the teachers, how they brought their level down even through the experience they had. They came in there with their normal daily stuff but they didn't come in there with a pen and a paper to say 'This is what I did that time'. They came in here and they joined in and that's why I enjoyed it most. Because they themselves were doing the course and then that opened up as well with the tears that were there"* (Māori completer)

*"They were down to earth, they listened to you, they responded to you like a normal person, not 'I have all this knowledge', so to speak 'and I'm telling you how to do it' - they were very real"* (non-Māori completer).

Home visits, although not as available as people would have liked, were much appreciated.

*"[The presenter] came. That in itself meant so much, that a person came to my home, took out of his time, to come and talk to me about the course. I thought that was wonderful"* (Māori completer)

### **Relationship with Other Participants**

The majority of statements made by both completers and withdrawers about their group experiences were positive, although, as will be discussed in the next section, there were a number of participants who did not like the buddy system.

Participants appreciated meeting people who were experiencing the same difficulties with their children that they were.

*"It was good to know other parents were having the same things ...make you realise as a parent you're not that bad. Well that's kind of what I liked about it. You do feel kind of isolated some times as a parent, so it was good to get together and be reminded of the simplest things, like praise and ignoring and patience which you tend to forget"* (non-Māori completer).

Most valued the opportunity to meet new people with similar issues, and a number said that it was the group contact that had kept them wanting to go back.

*"Our group did make a big difference. We were so relaxed. You felt you could talk in front of them. Our group were such good people, none of them were judgemental"* (non-Māori completer).

*"The group did make a difference to wanting to finish the course because you just got to hear all the different stories and it was almost like, can't wait for next week, I want to see what happens. Like a good soap like Coro Street you want to see what happens next week.... [It] ended up everyone staying in touch and so*

*you know you wanted to come back and see how they were doing” (Māori completer).*

*“you kind of feel you don’t want to let each other down and you kind of wanted to know how the others got on each week” (Māori completer).*

Several people spoke of group support.

*“When people were away, some groups members checked up to see if things were alright with that person” (Māori completer).*

*“They made you feel comfortable Sometimes we might see them in the supermarket, and we would stop and have a talk about things that were happening in the course. We would always support each other. We would show concern if people were away” (Māori withdrawer)*

Three Māori completers and two non-Māori completers said that they had maintained group contacts after the course. This didn’t happen for the withdrawers.

*“...because we had team um team ups, ring up and all that and if you had a problem and all that ring up, yeah ... So when we’re not at our course we can still communicate that way” (Māori completer).*

*“Our group got along quite well. There were about 10 of us that are still in contact and we actually get together once a month to see each other. We’ve all kept in contact and we’re still doing the buddy system” (non-Māori completer).*

Several participants spoke of feeling shy at the start of their course, but for most that that feeling faded.

*“It was like we were sort of shy to actually say what we wanted to say, but by a couple [of sessions] it was just our mouths were just rolling, we’re like experts, some of them round in the group, oh yeah we’ve done that” (Māori withdrawer)*

### **Incentives**

Almost everyone said that they enjoyed the incentives and praise. They said that the food and prizes made them feel good, some using the word ‘inspired’. Seven people thought that the incentives brought the group closer together, and a further two believed that it made things more relaxed.

*“There was always lots of prizes, chocolates and things. There was always a bowl of lollies and in the end it just kept on going around and around...but it was great, because I don’t know, it just helped bring you closer together too cause it like, broke the ice, yeah. As I say foods always the way to getting people to talk eh. Put food there, they’ll talk” (Māori completer).*

Five participants said that they took the prizes home to their children, and four said that they could see that this was a way of modeling what they could do for their children.

*“It was absolutely fantastic. Really, really good role-modelling. And it was cool too, that they put some little toys in there for the kids because I could then say to [to my son] perhaps if he didn’t want to let me go at kindy, To win you a prize [son], what colour pen would you like?” (Māori completer).*

The incentives made one participant want to return each week.

*“So you thought it was good to get incentives and things?” “I wanted to go back for more” (Māori completer).*

Two participants found the incentives reminded them of school – but they had different responses.

*“Oh yeah, the chocolate I went a bit hoha with the chocolates. Yeah well, it was like, oh, you know, you say something, la la la, and they go ‘Oh good girl’. I was like oh I don’t need this, gee you know, I’m not here for chocolates... like the teacher, you know, like the student thing going on”* (Māori completer).

*“It was good. It was like being a kid in a class room again but the treats were obtainable”* (non-Māori completer).

### **Length of the Course**

Participants were asked about whether the 14 week length was a challenge for them. Of the completers, most said that 14 weeks had not seemed too long, especially once they got started. Several said that they saw it as an outing to enjoy.

*“For some people on the course it was their only outing and so for them it was really special”* (Māori completer).

*“It was good. It was actually time out. I found it was good, and met people”* (non-Māori completer).

Withdrawers spoke of the length of the course as being something they had accepted when they started, and no-one said that they had found the course length too big a commitment and had therefore had to pull out.

*“Like I was sceptical when the school asked me about it .... and I was like oh man when am I going to fit all this in? And then I thought, nah, just bite the bullet and do it”* (Māori withdrawer).

### **Why People Withdrew**

The answer to this question, which is basic to the study, was not immediately apparent. As can be seen from the preceding sections, both completers and withdrawers enjoyed many aspects of the IYP Programme. Those withdrawers, who gave reasons when they left, often described events, such as illness in the family that had forced their withdrawal. However, there were also indicators that the withdrawers as a group had more problems with the course than the completers. For example, the completers gave eight suggestions when asked how to improve the course, compared with the eighteen changes suggested by withdrawers. Problems included the stated reasons for withdrawing, cultural dissonance, transport and child care difficulties, the lack of fit with individual needs, partners’ non-attendance, the buddy system, homework, and unsuccessful relationships with facilitators. There also appeared to be a difference in commitment levels between completers and withdrawers.

### **Reason Given for Withdrawal**

Reasons for withdrawing included health issues, a new baby, sickness in the family, and were listed by Māori and non-Māori participants. Several non-Māori withdrawers said that they were too busy to continue because of work/study commitments. Another reason given for leaving was that the course was not suited to their particular child, either because of age or disability. Not everyone stated a precise reason for leaving the course, but when interviewed, mentioned a cluster of difficulties. While one Māori withdrawer said directly that she had withdrawn because of a lack of sensitivity to cultural issues, two others raised many problems about cultural issues, but said that they left for family reasons. Only one person said that transport difficulties had forced her to pull out, but a number of the withdrawers described significant problems with this.

### **Cultural Dissonance**

Participants were asked whether the course suited their way of thinking and doing things, and/or their cultural beliefs. A number of people, Māori and non-Māori, completers and withdrawers, said that cultural differences were irrelevant.

*“Doesn’t really matter whether we’re Māori or pakeha but we have the same issues” (Māori completer).*

There were positive comments about the way some of the facilitators supported the Māori culture.

*“I must commend the tutors they are very culturally aware. There were some things I struggled with when they were teaching us how to play with our babies.... You had to play with things, they said, not to ask questions. [The facilitators] encouraged you to use Māori words as well” (Māori completer)*

However, there were also four Māori participants who stated their preference for Māori facilitators and a need for a more Māori-focused course delivery, three of whom were withdrawers. They said that they felt/ would have been able to feel more relaxed with a Māori facilitator.

*“I felt towards the Māori lady, and I went to her a couple of times and it just made it even more beautiful because I needed someone that understood my level. Even though I was being judgemental I could have went to [the pakeha facilitator] but didn’t. But the Māori lady....”“That made a difference for you didn’t it?” “Huge” (Māori completer).*

*“I found that [the facilitators] knew what they were talking about but I feel we need some couple of more Māoris in there.... The presenters. I’ve been through counselling and all that and you always feel comfortable, or I do anyway, with the Māori. I can relax and talk and speak from my heart” (Māori withdrawer).*

*“It would be good to have someone like a Māori [presenter]. I reckon Māori because there are a lot of Māori women there and they didn’t open up and I felt like we all opened up to each other outside the course” (Māori withdrawer).*

Two of the Māori withdrawers quoted above found that the course lacked a Māori focus.

*“It’s more pakeha than Māori. ... Yes the programme. When I listened to the tutors, to me it doesn’t fit right. To me it’s like you don’t know our kids. You know what I mean? Only the Māori people know their own children” (Māori withdrawer).*

*“Some of our pakeha friends that were in the group couldn’t understand our Māori ways, unless two or three people explained to them how it was so” (Māori withdrawer).*

One of these two Māori withdrawers, who was not comfortable with cultural aspects of the course, also found mixing with non-Māori in the group was difficult.

*“I felt uncomfortable but I started to give my shyness out ‘cause most of them were all pakehas... Some people that are really hard to get on because they judge other people... but I’m kind of a bit wary ‘cause .... I’ve got to be careful ... I want to stick to myself” (Māori withdrawer)*

### **Transport and Child Care**

While difficulties with child care and transport were not given as direct reasons for pulling out of the course, they almost certainly impacted on participants will to keep going.

It is interesting that none of the people who completed the course, Māori or non-Māori, had transport difficulties. They were either living close enough to the venue to walk, had their own car, or were picked up by a friend, or others on the course. In contrast, seven of the 16 withdrawers who were interviewed did have transport difficulties, and of these, six were Māori. The main problem was not being able to afford petrol, for some especially if the course did not fall on a pay/benefit day.

Parent: *"I got to keep finding gas money, or find a ride to get there and home again".*

Interviewer: *"So were you supported with child care costs or gas money?"*

Parent: *"Not with the gas money. I could have been for child care costs but I usually just get family to do it so it doesn't cost"* (Māori withdrawer).

*"I had to pay my own petrol. It was hard. Because we got family too, you know. We've got children and the parents haven't got much money in their hand, kai to put on table"* (Māori withdrawer).

Only one person said that she had had to leave the course because of transport problems. She had had her car impounded, and couldn't remember whether she had told the facilitator of this.

*"I just rang up and said I can't finish the course"* (non-Māori withdrawer).

Where courses were held in the morning and children were of an age to be at school or in an early childhood centre, participants had no problem with child care. Not surprisingly, these participants advocated morning courses. However, nine participants, either with very young children or attending an evening course, did have difficulty with organising child care. Six of these people were withdrawers, three Māori and three non-Māori. Although none of them said that they had left the course because of this, they did say it made things difficult. Some were offered money for baby-sitting, but said that they would not leave their child with a stranger. Three participants who left their children with family members had difficulties with the family member becoming sick or not turning up on time. Two of the non-Māori withdrawers suggested that they should have the very young children in the room where the course was being held.

### ***The Lack of Fit with Individual Needs***

Four of the withdrawers said that the course did not meet their individual needs. Three participants, who had children with specific disabilities, said that they found the course did not deal with their issues.

*"I thought it was a good idea, a good course for some parents. For myself, maybe not. I found that course was for behaviour children. I was the only one with a Down Syndrome child so just wasn't really what me and my partner were looking for"* (non-Māori withdrawer).

*"They never had anything in there about handicapped children like ADHD children because they're hyper-active. That would have been a bonus. It was all how to deal with children but not hyper-active children. That would have been a help"* (non-Māori non completer)

The participants said that they needed help to see how to adapt the programme for their particular situation. Two of them thought this might have helped them continue with the course.

*"I think [a home visit] would have [helped] in some ways, especially if they could have given other tips on where you might have been going wrong or things."*

*Especially when you're trying to convert what's been done to a younger child into an older child [with ADHD]" (non-Māori withdrawer).*

### **Partners Non-Attendance**

Another issue that was a problem for some withdrawers was that their partners did not attend/ continue attending the course. A number of the completers also commented on this – that it was difficult to have a consistent approach when only one partner was attending. They found it difficult to explain what had been learnt when the other was not there.

*Interviewer: "What difference do you think could have been made that would have helped you to continue on the course?"*

*Parent: "For me, I think help from the partner. That would have made me motivated, but it's like, for me I like two working at it, 'cause usually I might have a little bit of problem with my children, but then he could have, and I want, you know, I want my partner to be there and share the things that will teach us so we know and can work together" (Māori withdrawer)*

One withdrawer said that she had advised her friend not to join an IYP programme unless she could bring her partner. Another suggested that it would be helpful for the facilitators and the group to suggest ways of dealing with the issue of partners not attending.

### **The Buddy System**

While there were plenty of positive comments about the support and friendship offered in the group, an aspect of group contact that attracted negative comments among both completers and withdrawers was the buddy system. Three people said that they liked the buddy system, nine did not, and the rest, if they commented at all, were neutral. Whether the buddy could be expected to provide support was queried:

*"I think it's just a big ask of people to pour their complaints out on strangers ...we probably all have sisters and that we can say 'my kid was being a bugger today....I don't think any of us would have felt comfortable ringing up somebody we had just met and saying - especially when we are all learning- I have this problem and do you know what to do?...well you would assume that they would know all you know because you are at the same course" (non-Māori completer).*

One person said that the whole group she was with had said that they did not want a buddy.

*"No-one in our group was really interested in doing the buddy thing and none of us really did it. But yes I did make friends. But no-one got into the idea [of having buddies]. It didn't appeal to anyone" (non-Māori completer)*

Some people felt shy or uncomfortable with the buddy they had been allocated, and among the withdrawer's four people, two Māori and two non-Māori did not get a buddy despite having given out their phone numbers. This was given as a direct reason by one person for pulling out of the course.

*Parent: "I didn't actually [get a buddy]. I left my phone number there but nobody bothered"*

*Interviewer: "In terms of the group do you think that made a difference to you wanting to finish?"*

*Parent: "Yes it did. Because I'd only see them in the street and they would ask me how I was and I thought well if they are going to do that in the street why didn't they take my phone number or anything" (non- Māori withdrawer).*

## **Homework**

Only ten of the thirty participants who commented on the homework complained about it. However, of these, eight were withdrawers, three Māori and five non-Māori. The main issue for most was that the written work was time consuming, and the language used was confusing.

Interviewer: *“How did you find the homework? I think you’ve already mentioned that it was hard to fit it in?”*

Parent: *“Hard to fit in and sometimes hard to understand what they are on about. I remember several times sitting there and going, what did you mean by that.”*

Interviewer: *“So you didn’t come away from the session with a really clear understanding of what you were going to do that week?”*

Parent: *“No, not all the time”* (non-Māori withdrawer)

*“Some times I found the homework, that was awesome...but like I have a problem with big words and understanding them, other words I’m primo. If someone explained to me the big words, oh, they could have put it in there easier, you know?”* (Māori withdrawer).

Several people who didn’t like the written homework said that it made them feel as if they were at school.

*“You’d see everybody come back in and they’ve got all their [homework] filled out and they’d get 10 out of 10. I just didn’t want to be doing any of that. I wanted to come to the course, take away what was really necessary and put that into the home environment and then go back for more... Not having to recap and go back over our home work, I felt like I was too much back at school”* (non-Māori withdrawer).

## **Unsuccessful relationships with the facilitator**

For the programme to be successful it is essential that contact with the facilitators is an empowering experience. For a few withdrawers this was not the case, and they talked of feeling they were not listened to.

Interviewer: *“Did you feel you could connect with the course presenters?”*

Parent: *“No, sorry no.”*

Interviewer: *“And why?”*

Parent: *“Just like the answers, you know, the questions, what can you do, what can you do, the personal stuff.”*

Interviewer: *“So when you are asking questions for you personally you felt that the presenters- did they not understand, or they couldn’t understand?”*

Parent: *“Maybe they didn’t understand what I’m trying to say. Maybe because they had their own understanding which that’s not what I wanted. It’s like when I talk, they cut me off. Not all the time. They just keep going whatever topic they were giving”* (Māori withdrawer).

Interviewer: *“How did you feel about the course presenters, did you feel you could connect?”*

Parent: *“A little bit, but I just sort of think, ‘but you’re too old’. Nothing on them personally but when you’re younger as a mum it’s harder to mesh with someone that’s done their parenting.”*

Interviewer: *“Did you feel like you were listened to?”*

Parent: *“Sometimes. Other times it kind of felt like they talked over what you were saying, but generally it wasn’t too bad.”* (Non-Māori withdrawer)

*“[The first facilitator] was awesome and [the other facilitator] was great too. She was great but I found her a little bit more judgemental in that it is supposed to be*

*an environment where you feel comfortable to say anything....every now and again I did find that, not to me though, she was great to me, but I did see her sort of snap at people when they said something she didn't quite like" (non-Māori completer).*

Two of the Māori withdrawers found role-plays stressful, and this person sounded as if she had coerced rather than supported to become involved.

*"I always avoided [the role plays] but with [the one presenter] you couldn't really avoid it, she made sure everyone had a turn, uh dumb... I hated it" (Māori withdrawer).*

### **A different level of determination**

When analyzing the interviews of the completers and withdrawers, it became apparent that many completers, Māori and non-Māori, expressed determination to complete the course despite barriers. Withdrawers, in contrast, did not verbalise the same level of commitment in that way, even though a number said that they would have completed the course if events had not overtaken them.

For example, from a mother who had difficulty organising family members to baby-sit:

*"Yes I did get there, every session. They said it was really vital we commit and make every session so I thought I've got to show my commitment I've got to make and even when I was running late or whatever I would chase people down and make sure it would happen so I could go.... because it was a commitment of mine so amongst my friends I'd say well I've got this and I'm going to my parenting course" (Māori completer).*

From a person with other work commitments:

*"I wanted to do the course and was committed to do the course and I just let playgroup slide for 3 months because I wanted to do the course and the homework was good because it makes you set aside time. It was just a matter of prioritising" (non-Māori completer).*

From a person who didn't like role playing:

*"Oh so difficult, I was there with an open mind and say 'oh I need to do this and give it my best', and in spite of what did happen I actually found out a lot about myself...it's quite scary, because when you role play with adults it's totally different, and I got so much out of that role play" (Māori completer).*

From a person talking about the course length:

*"The 14 weeks. I'm stubborn anyway so I just decided I was going to do it so I did it. I saw a lot of people pull out but I decided to finish it." (Non-Māori completer).*



## Discussion

The majority of participants in this study, Māori and non-Māori, enjoyed attending the IYP Programme and said that they found it valuable. This included many of the people who did not complete the course. Retention losses, therefore, are unlikely to be attributable to fundamental problems with the programme itself. In addition to personal reasons, programme delivery was a factor in some participants leaving the course.

The question was “What can we do better with our programme delivery to ensure a higher rate of retention among participants of the programmes we offer in Central North? In particular, is there anything we can be doing more effectively that will enable Māori participants to complete the course?”

This study found that to retain those participants who were currently leaving there were three aspects of programme delivery which could be provided more effectively: i) facilitator home visits and individual coaching between sessions, ii) culturally responsive programmes for Māori, iii) transport support. These strategies which are designed to retain participants from other cultures, from communities with socio-economic needs, or who have children with disabilities have already been described and advocated for (Webster-Stratton, 2009; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2010). Ways of supporting Māori participants more fully and ensuring that programmes are culturally responsive have also been advised on by Māori facilitators in New Zealand (Altena & Herewini, 2009; Berryman et al., 2009; Incredible Years Ngā Tau Miharō Hui proceedings, 2011).

Ongoing professional supervision and the work towards accreditation and the maintaining of programme fidelity is well in train, with new guidelines in the Incredible Years Parents (IYP) Programme Practice Manual (Ministry of Education, 2011b) provided for New Zealand facilitators.

The section ends by listing the suggestions made by the participants in this study themselves for improvements to the IYP Programme (iv).

### **i) Increased levels of home visiting and individual coaching between sessions**

Six non-Māori withdrawers said that they would have liked, but were not offered a home-visit. They wanted the visits so that the facilitators could see their children in situ and demonstrate what to do. One Māori completer said that her facilitator had indeed done this, showing her how to manage her children in the supermarket. Another completer said that while she personally had not needed a home visit, she thought that this would have been helpful for some of the people who did drop out of her course. Coaching could address issues raised by withdrawers in this study such as how to apply the course content where children were felt to be ‘different’, homework difficulties, and ways of approaching a non-attending partner. Facilitator visits would also provide an opportunity to hear about, and together problem-solve, practical issues such as transport and childcare, and social difficulties with the group such as not having a supportive buddy.

A number of successful completers spoke of determination to complete the course. Collie’s study (2011) also found that completers were more likely to plan around potential barriers. It could be argued that this may have indicated a difference in personality between completers and withdrawers. However, some completing participants mentioned that they had been told that it was crucial to commit to it – a

message that facilitators need to ensure everyone has. This may be a message that for some needs individualizing.

Home visiting is now being recommended as best practice for New Zealand facilitators, and the findings in this study endorse this recommendation. What is also apparent is that increased levels of home visiting will require managers to allocate more time to facilitators to run courses. However, if the 2015 goal of a 65% retention rate for the IYP Programme is to be achieved, this may be a necessary cost.

## **ii) Cultural Responsive Programmes for Māori**

The fact that in this study there were a minority of Māori participants who said that they needed Māori facilitators does not mean that this voice is not important. Four people said that they could relax far better when talking with a Māori facilitator. Having parents feeling confident to express themselves from their own cultural base and feel that their views are listened to and valued is a key factor in ensuring cultural responsiveness (Webster-Stratton, 2009). Parents can only lead the discussions and problem-solve for themselves if this culturally responsive environment is provided (Berryman et al., 2009). It was clear from this study that for some Māori parents this was not their experience.

It should be pointed out that this study reflected the experiences of participants who attended courses in the first half of 2011. The Incredible Years Parents (IYP) Programme Practice Manual (Ministry of Education, 2011b) was not available to course facilitators until the second half of 2011. In this document strategies for promoting a culturally responsive programme were provided which accorded with recommendations made at the Incredible Years Ngā Tau Miharo Hui (2011). These strategies included the use of the cultural framework advised by Beau Rewiti and Sonya McFarlane as a tool for planning and reviewing programme delivery. The extent to which these strategies will impact on Māori retention rates should become apparent from programme data from the July/ June 2011/2012 year.

## **iii) Transport**

It is surely significant that none of the people who completed the IYP Programme had transport difficulties, while seven of the sixteen withdrawers who were interviewed did have problems. Six of these were Māori. The main comment made was about the cost of petrol. This did not necessarily relate to them being out of town and needing to drive very far. It was apparent that for some families, use of the car was a struggle some weeks. Help with petrol vouchers is usually provided for people having to drive in from a distance. What was apparent was that these were local people who needed to drive to the course, but found cost a barrier. It should also be noted that difficulty with transport was not given to facilitators as a 'reason' for leaving the course, but was nevertheless likely to be a contributing factor towards non-attendance.

The difficulties that the withdrawers had with transport may be an indicator of wider socio-economic issues for a proportion of the people who attend the IYP programmes. The findings, particularly as related to transport issues, fit with those reported by Webster-Stratton and Reid (2010). The present study was unable to access many withdrawers because they had moved or their phones were not working. This is typical of groups in the community with a poor standard of living, and it is reasonable to speculate that cost barriers such as transport may also have affected a significant number of the withdrawers who were not available for interview, particularly Māori.

## **iv) Participant Suggestions for Improvement**

I have listed the suggestions that participants made when they were asked at the end of their interview, "If you could make one change to the course, what would it be?" When asked the question most people prefaced their answer by saying that they thought the course was great. Here are their suggestions.

- Specific to three of the Māori withdrawers: provide Māori facilitators; Marae based; more Māori to attend; course related to a Māori approach and focus.
- Specific to parents with children with disabilities: provide explanations about in how to adapt course items for specific situations.
- Transport: help with petrol; a vehicle to collect people; money given for one person to collect others; fund raise.
- Childcare: have the room large enough to have space for babies and toddlers with their pushchairs to come in with their parents.
- Buddies: change regularly; have a choice; instead of being linked up with one buddy, people to meet together outside the course in a group in the community to practice what they are learning
- Homework: make the language used in the homework clearer and easier to understand; give less written homework; show how to focus homework for older children and teenagers; show how to do homework for children with disabilities; demonstrate at home.
- Sessions: allow more time for talking and discussion; fewer vignettes and role plays; vignettes adapted to New Zealand situations; answer questions at the time rather than putting them on hold.
- Participants: get more men to attend; group discussion about ways of explaining the course to partners who are not present; help to get partner to course; more discussion about how to deal with separate households where the partner is not following the course ideals.
- Encouragement to attend: phone call to encourage people to come made the night before
- Timing: have fewer weeks and longer sessions; finish by 8pm; start after 9am, to give parents time drop their children at school/ day-care; baby-sitters.
- Group: smaller size; ice-breakers at start, not just introductions.

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## **Appendices**

**Letter to Participants**

**Questionnaire**

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