

Evidence for the Incredible Years (IY) Programmes in Wales

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Background

The Incredible Years (IY) programmes for Parents, Children and Teachers have been developed and researched in high quality randomised controlled trials (RCTs) for the last 30+ years by Professor Webster-Stratton at the University of Washington, Seattle (see appendix A for a diagrammatic representation of the programmes). There is extensive research with long-term follow-up, particularly for the Parent programmes, which were developed first, but also for the Child and Teacher programmes. The evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of the programmes both as early intervention, preventive, programmes and as treatment programmes for children with conduct disorder. The main IY website has hundreds of articles attesting to the effectiveness of the programmes across the world, including Canada, Norway, England, Ireland, Jamaica and New Zealand. All of our Welsh published work is also available on that website. www.incredibleyears.com

In the UK the IY Parent programme was identified by NICE as a treatment for conduct disorder and the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners in England (now incorporated into the Children's Workforce Development Council) included it in the evidence-based programmes that it has disseminated across England.

Local work in Wales

The work in Wales started ten years ago with the use of the Parenting programme in the North West Wales NHS CAMHS service. Its use quickly spread to early intervention Sure Start services and the Child and Teacher programmes were soon introduced. Within a couple of years we established in-house training and consultation for the programmes in Wales and since that time have undertaken an extensive range of research evaluations of the programmes, establishing a strong evidence base for them in Wales.

We have had research partners in services in ten of the 22 Local Authorities across Wales and the strength of our research is that, whilst the researchers have been based at Bangor University, the programmes have been delivered in health, education and social care services across Wales. We have therefore evaluated the effectiveness of the programmes in real world settings. Our results have been published in high impact journals, including the British Medical Journal, the British Journal of Psychiatry and Education and Child

Psychology as well as professional journals such as the Journal of Children's Services, the British Journal of Nursing and the Psychologist. Appendix B contains our recent publications list.

The summary of key findings that follows is not chronological, we have first summarised key findings from our parenting research (Section A) and then the findings from the Child and Teacher programme research (Section B). The final section describes on-going research (Section C). The relevant papers are in the appendices to this brief summary.

Section A: Bangor Parenting Research findings

i) The North Wales Intensive Treatment programme

Prior to working with the IY programmes the first author had developed and researched a Parenting programme based on similar principles and published data from a randomised controlled trial showing evidence of long term effectiveness (four years) in reducing conduct disorder and improving parental depression and competence by comparison with a treatment as usual control group (Hutchings, Appleton, Smith, Lane & Nash, 2002; Hutchings, Lane & Kelly, 2004). Significant reductions in service use for the intervention group over the four years and as the children became teenagers were published and this is one of the few health economic evaluations of interventions for conduct disorder. (Muntz, Hutchings, Edwards, Hounsome & Ó Céilleachair, 2004). Appendix C includes the short and long term outcomes from this programme and the economic evaluation.

ii) The IY Sure Start study

Our most important study was of the implementation of the IY Parent programme in eleven Sure Start services across North- and Mid-Wales with parents of identified high-risk children. This was the only RCT study of a parenting intervention in Sure Start services in the UK. The results were extraordinary, demonstrating significant improvements in child behaviour from both parent report and blind observation. There were also significant improvements in parental mental health and positive parenting behaviours and the child benefits generalised to the sibling nearest in age. The initial six-month follow-up data was published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ; Hutchings et al., 2007) and the 18-month follow-up in the British Journal of Psychiatry (Bywater et al., 2009). Benefits have been maintained four years post-intervention and are now being prepared for journal submission. Hutchings and colleagues also analysed whether locality and local levels of crime predicted programme effectiveness and demonstrated that the programme was equally effective across areas with different levels of crime (Hutchings, Bywater, Davies & Whitaker, 2006). We also undertook mediator and moderator analyses and have demonstrated that the change in parenting behaviour was a significant mediator of child behaviour change and that the programme was equally effective with the more disadvantaged families with low income, single parenthood, high levels of depression and young parents (Gardner, Hutchings, Bywater & Whitaker, 2010). Mediator analysis of change in adult depression was also a significant partial mediator of child behaviour change (Hutchings, Bywater, Williams & Whitaker, in press).

A paper analysing the cost effectiveness of the programme was published in the BMJ (Edwards, Ó Céilleachair, Bywater, Hughes & Hutchings, 2007) and further analyses of the children at risk of ADHD as well as CD demonstrated that the programme was equally effective in reducing inattentivity and hyperactivity in those high-risk children (Jones, Daley, Hutchings, Bywater, & Eames, 2007; Jones, Daley, Hutchings, Bywater & Eames, 2008).

An important paper by Eames et al. (2010) analysed the group leader behaviours that contributed to effective outcomes and found that leader levels of praise and reflective behaviours predicted change in parental praise and reflective behaviours for intervention families.

Appendix D includes the published and submitted Sure Start research papers

iii) Foster-carer LAC study (quasi RCT)

This was a 12-month WORD funded trial platform study in which three Authorities in Wales, Wrecsam, Powys and Flintshire, delivered the 12-week IY BASIC Parent Programme to 46 foster carers, randomised on a 2:1 intervention to waiting list control basis. Six could not be randomised due to other commitments, so were included in this study in whichever group was most acceptable to them. Outcomes were compared six-months post-baseline, just before the waiting list group were offered the programme.

There were significant findings that favoured the intervention groups including significant reduction in child problem behaviour, assessed with the ECBI and the SDQ, and improvement in carers' depression levels assessed with the BDI (Bywater et al., 2010). In addition very positive feedback was given by the foster carers as to the usefulness and supportiveness of the programme, especially for individuals fairly new to the profession.

Costs of looked after children and services accessed by the child were also reported in the Bywater et al. (2010) paper. The total cost of services accessed and fees and allowances paid in respect of the 42 children in the study was £553,726, mean per looked after child £13,184 (SD = £3,998) over a six-month period. Special education was the greatest service cost for Looked After Children, with a total cost of £63,667, mean cost per child £1,516 (SD = £3,234).

Conclusions:

Initial foster carer training could incorporate the IY programme to support carers in establishing positive relationships and managing difficult child behaviour. Programme participation may lead to reduced service use and improved placement stability.

A further paper describing the specific issues that were addressed in the foster carer groups has just been submitted (Hutchings, Bywater & Lane, submitted).

Appendix E includes the Bywater et al. paper on the LAC project and the Hutchings et al. submitted paper.

iv) Flying Start Toddler Parenting study (data analysis ongoing)

This RCT study targeted parents of one- and two-year-olds in Flying Start areas across Wales. The Parenting programme is one component of the Flying Start programme, which also includes increased health visiting provision, language and play and nursery provision for children. We had set ourselves a difficult task in demonstrating the benefits of the parenting component of this programme since the control families were, in all probability, accessing some of these other services. There were some general improvements for the whole sample however there were several significant results that applied only to the intervention group by comparison with the control group. These were reduced negative parenting and specifically reduced physical negative parenting and increased parental wellbeing (Griffith 2010) (see poster of preliminary results in appendix F). At second follow-up the results of the developmental assessments for the intervention groups are showing significant gains although, without a comparison control group, these are difficult to interpret. Further analysis of this enormous data set is ongoing.

v) The effectiveness of the older School Age Parent programme

An 18 session version of the older School Age and Advance programmes for parents of 8 – 13 year olds was included in the Pathfinder Early Intervention Project funded by the English DCSF Government Department. The work of staff in the six Authorities in England was overseen by the first author and the group leaders collected data. The results are in press and provided the first evidence of the benefits of the older School Age programme. Results included significant improvements in child behaviour and in parenting and significant reductions in maternal depression. (Hutchings, Bywater, Williams, Whitaker & Lane, 2010). The paper describing these results is included in Appendix G.

vi) A small project to train nursery staff using the Toddler parenting programme

This was run in Caernarfon with staff from two Flying Start nurseries who have also completed OCN level two credits using their course assignments. Pre- and post-course data has been analysed and shown significant benefits to both children and staff, attendance was virtually 100% and there was enormous enthusiasm for the programme. A paper reporting these results has been submitted (Bywater, Hutchings, Gridley & Jones, submitted).

Section B The Child and Teacher programmes

When we first introducing the IY child Dinosaur School programmes we published brief reports on both the Classroom and Therapeutic Dinosaur School programmes. The results from both were positive and as a result the programmes have continued to be used in Wales. The relevant papers are included in Appendix H.

i) Preliminary evaluation of the Small Group Dina Therapy programme delivered in NWW NHS CAMHS service

Results from the Dina Therapy programme with CAMHS referred children with Conduct Disorder and/or ADHD demonstrated reduced inappropriate behaviours that generalised to both home and school settings.

This included significant reductions in inattentiveness for the children with an ADHD diagnosis (Hutchings, Bywater, Daley & Lane, 2007).

ii) Preliminary evaluation of the Classroom Dina curriculum

Results demonstrated positive effects on academic performance, social and emotional development and reductions in behavioural problems. There was evidence that improvements had generalised to other settings, including the playground and home, and to other children in the school. The success of the programme in the first year helped to ensure the continuation of the programme, which is now in all 102 primary schools in Gwynedd (Hutchings, Lane, Owen & Gwyn, 2004).

iii) The Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) programme

Having established the benefits of the Classroom Dinosaur School social skills and problem-solving curriculum we began to train local teachers in the principles of the TCM programme.

Initially we undertook a survey of teachers to establish that the programme was acceptable to them and then an observational comparison. Teachers who implemented the training in their classrooms reported satisfaction with the programme and believed that the strategies taught were effective and improved pupils' conduct. In the second study blind observation of teacher classroom behaviour was undertaken in 21 classes, ten teachers had received the TCM training and eleven had not. Teachers who received TCM training gave clearer instructions to children and allowed more time for compliance before repeating instructions. The children in their classes were more compliant than children in the classes of untrained teachers (Hutchings, Daley, Jones et al., 2007).

In a subsequent study we undertook an RCT of the TCM programme for which a PhD has been awarded (Martin 2010). Key findings from this study, which are currently being written up for publication, were that TCM trained teachers were more positive and gave clearer commands and their pupils were significantly more on task, more compliant and less negative in general and less negative to their teachers. Identified high challenge children were also significantly more on task and less negative towards their teachers. The TCM course changed teacher behaviour and resulted in benefits for both pupils in general and for high-risk children. (Hutchings, Martin, Daley et al., in preparation).

We have also published results of a survey of levels of behavioural difficulties in young Gwynedd school children showing increasing levels of difficulties among young children (Hutchings, Williams, Martin & Pritchard, in press).

iv) Small Group Dina Therapy in schools

As a result of the collaboration with Gwynedd who implemented the TCM and Classroom Dina School curriculum across the County we were able to run a small project to evaluate the added benefit to high-risk children of the Small Group Therapeutic Dino programme (Hutchings, Bywater, Gridley, Whitaker, & Griffiths, in press). This was run in one school with two groups of six pupils of whom half were deemed at high risk of school failure by their teachers. A comparison group of twelve children who were effectively a waiting list control had five high-risk children. Comparisons between the high-risk children that did and did not receive the programme produced statistically significant benefits for intervention children in teacher rated behaviour and increased ability to produce positive solutions to problems. (Hutchings, Bywater, Gridley et al., in press). Blind observation of child behaviour showed that intervention children were more positive towards their teachers and their teachers were more positive to them whereas control children had reduced levels of positive behaviours towards teachers over the four-month period and their teachers had reduced their positive behaviour towards the children. Due to variability in the sample these latter findings were not statistically significant but the trial provided the preliminary evidence for the benefits of additional coaching for high-risk children who were already receiving the Classroom curriculum programme and this provided the basis for the successful lottery bid for £400k to further explore this within schools in Gwynedd that we are currently undertaking (Bywater, Hutchings, Evans & Parry, submitted; ISCRTN; NISCHR UK).

Section C. Studies ongoing/currently funded

In addition to the ongoing analysis of the long-term Toddler data we also have four further research programmes in operation.

ii) Baby Parent programme RCT evaluation

This is a PhD project being undertaken by Catrin Hedd Jones in which we are running an RCT trial of the Baby Parent programme in six centres across North Wales. There is enormous enthusiasm for the Baby programme across Wales with 170 staff from Flying Start services already trained.

iii) School Readiness programme RCT evaluation

This is a PhD project being undertaken by Kirstie Cooper in which we are running the four session Parent School Readiness programme in six schools in Gwynedd. The aim will be to see whether the programme improves home school links and enhances children's school readiness.

iv) An evaluation of how to score the Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGS) and its utility by comparison with the Griffiths Mental Developmental Scales.

This was an M.Res. project undertaken by Margiad Williams who assessed 30 children using the SOGS and the Griffiths Mental Development Scales to test a number of ways of interpreting the SOGS. The Hutchings method involving the production of a developmental quotient demonstrated increased sensitivity in identifying children with developmental delay relative to the published scoring system. This is important because the SOGS was selected by the Welsh Assembly Government as the assessment tool for the Flying Start project. (Williams, Hutchings, Daley, Bywater & Whitaker, in preparation).

v) The Lottery funded Small Group Dina project.

This is an RCT study funded for three years to work with twenty schools in Gwynedd to establish the benefit of additional Small Group Therapeutic Dino social skills and problem solving sessions for high-risk Key Stage one pupils in schools where the Classroom Dina and TCM programmes have already been established (Bywater, Hutchings, Evans & Parry, submitted; ISCRTN; NISCHR UK).

Conclusion

In introducing the IY programmes to Wales we have worked hard to ensure that they are delivered with fidelity and that services can achieve high quality delivery. This has produced results in these effectiveness trials that match those of the original efficacy trials. We have published two papers (Hutchings, Bywater, & Daley, 2007; Hutchings, Bywater, Eames & Martin, 2008) describing both what is needed to deliver programmes effectively and how we have achieved this in Wales (appendix I)

The Welsh Assembly Government funding for training, resources, supervision and dissemination through our conference and newsletter have helped to put Wales at the forefront in demonstrating good outcomes for the IY programmes. This work is disseminated internationally and we have spoken about it in Poland, Finland, Canada, Australia, USA, Portugal, Ireland and Jamaica as well as in numerous settings in England.

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