

# **Evaluation of the Incredible Beginnings® Programme delivered remotely in Powys (2021-2023)**

## **Introduction**

This summary paper reports on an evaluation of five Incredible Beginnings® (IB) courses delivered online via Microsoft Teams in Powys from 2021 to early 2023. Please refer to an earlier paper by Dr Jessica Crumpton (Crumpton, 2020) which evaluated three initial IB groups delivered at venues in the county, following its introduction in 2017. 'Very encouraging outcomes for the impact of the (IB) programme on children's emotional and behavioural difficulties and childcare workers practice in Powys', along with 'high levels of satisfaction' were reported.

The Incredible Years® (IY) suite of evidence-based programmes is highly regarded in Powys and there is a supportive infrastructure which enables collaborative staff training and supervision. Primary Stage Teachers across Powys have been trained in the IY Teacher Classroom Management (IY TCM) programme and the IY Classroom Dina programme over many years, and these have been very successful. IY TCM training is offered each year. The IB programme has more recently been rolled out to support early years setting staff working with pre-school children aged 1-5 years using Welsh Government funding for mitigating the effects of Covid 19.

The IB programme promotes staff awareness and skills to support younger children's social and emotional competence and learning opportunities. The importance of staff building positive relationships with children in a sensitive and responsive way and promoting child directed play interactions underpins the following topics: promoting early language development, social and emotion coaching and regulation, supporting learning and transitions, developing a proactive teaching approach and positive behaviour management strategies. Programme group leaders support staff to consider individual children's developmental stages and learning needs, to tailor opportunities and strategies accordingly.

## **Incredible Beginnings Training and Delivery**

Following a hiatus due to the impact of the pandemic, IB programme delivery resumed via online presentation in 2021. Over the next two years five courses were delivered to 39 staff from 23 different settings across Powys.

Training for group leaders was provided by Dr Caroline Webster Stratton, founder of the Incredible Years® suite of programmes. Supervision for group leaders was provided by a Consultant Child Psychologist and accredited IY Trainer. Training and supervision were delivered via online platforms.

The programme was delivered to early years setting staff by a Specialist Primary Mental Health Worker, Parenting and Children's Social Competence Officer, Foundation Learning Advisory Teachers and Senior Learning Advisory Teacher. The programme was delivered online over twelve half days. A rolling programme of future groups is planned with additional leaders from the Powys Childcare team.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Teacher/ Childcare Provider Practice Inventory Early Child Care Checklist (TCC) were used to evaluate the Incredible Beginnings courses. The IB Programme Workshop Satisfaction Questionnaire (IB WSQ) and weekly session evaluations were also completed by participants to gauge their experience of taking part and perceived efficacy of the programme. Childcare practitioners attending the training were asked to complete the SDQ at the beginning and after completion of the course for an anonymous child in their group who was requiring a high level of support with social and emotional skill development. Comparison of pre and post SDQ questionnaires measured change over time as perceived by the practitioner. The TCC was completed at programme beginning and completion and the IB WSQ at the end of the group.

## **Outcomes of an evaluation of five cohorts of training delivered online**

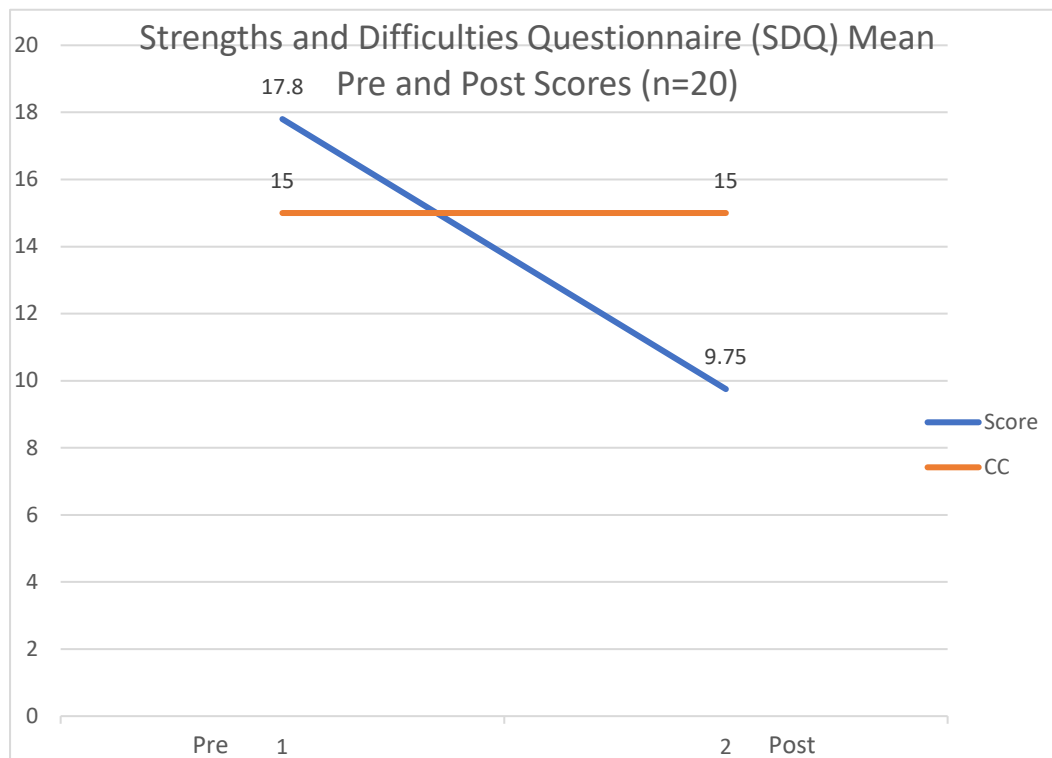
### Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) – A measure of behavioural and emotional wellbeing for children

The SDQ has been widely used in studies evaluating IY outcomes. It is considered to have validity and reliability as a measure of behaviour and emotional wellbeing for children aged 2-17 years. A total outcome score can be computed based on 25 questions under four domain subscale scores

regarding emotional problems, hyperactivity, conduct problems, and peer problems. There is a fifth subscale score measuring prosocial behaviour.

For the setting staff who completed both pre and post SDQ measures (n=20), there was a reduction in the total outcome score which was significant (at 0.01 level of significance) using a paired samples t test (see Figure 1 below). The response rate for completion of full sets of pre and post measures was 51%. In addition, all SDQ scores which were in the range where there may be a 'cause for concern' (CC; scoring 15 or above) which was 15 out of 20 (75%) of participants' scores at the beginning, reduced to 4 out of 20 (20%) at completion of the group. This demonstrates that practitioner's perceptions of difficulties for an anonymous child in their setting improved considerably over the course of the IB programme.

Figure 1



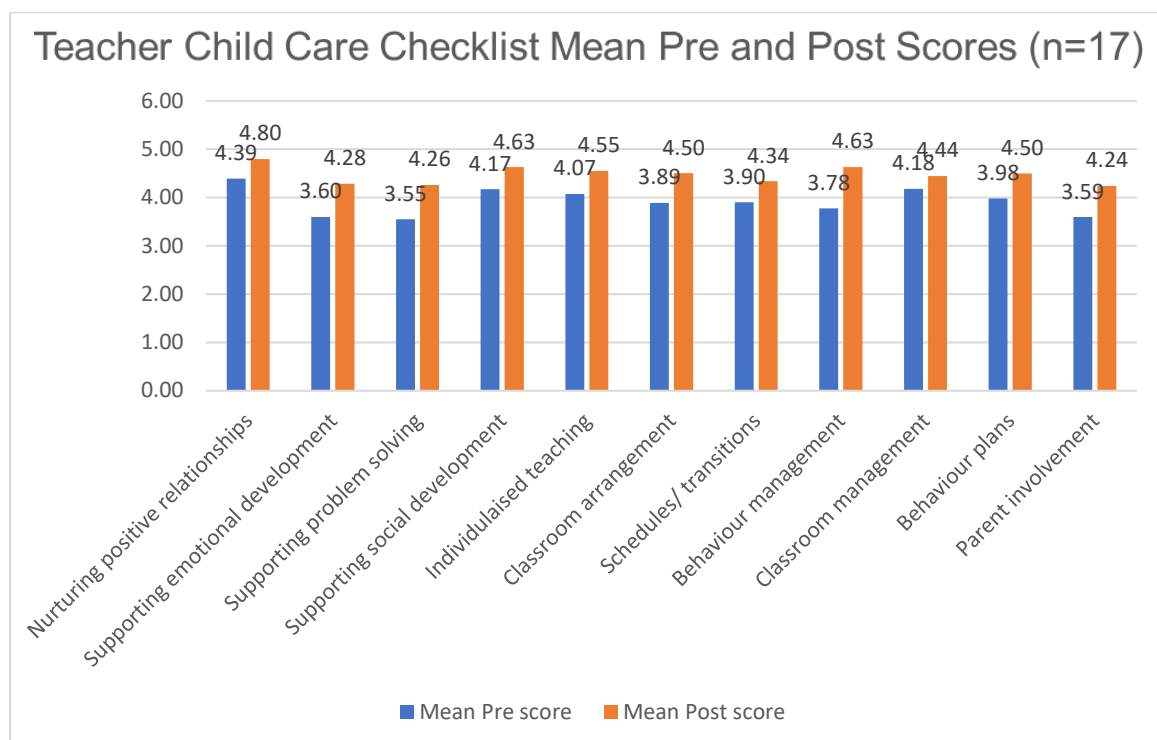
### Teacher/ Child Care Checklist – A practice inventory for early childcare providers

The Teacher/ Child Care Provider Early Childhood Checklist (TCC) is a new Practice Inventory developed by Dr Caroline Webster-Stratton specifically for IB, to be completed by practitioners who look after children aged 1 to 5 years.

It gauges the extent of practitioner’s use of specific approaches covered in the programme and invites reflection of current practice and frequency of using particular teaching skills, strategies, and planning. The following 11 domains are included: (1) Nurturing Positive Relationships with Children; (2) Supporting Children’s Emotional Development, (3) Social Development, and (4) Problem Solving; (5) Individualised Teaching; (6) Planned Classroom Arrangement; (7) Schedules and Transitions; (8) Behaviour Management; (9) Classroom Activities; (10) Behaviour Plans; and (11) Parent Involvement. Domain scores are averaged to give a score between 1 and 5 and pre and post scores are compared for each domain.

Seventeen participants completed both pre and post measures, giving a response rate of 44%, and the mean scores on each of the domains is shown in Figure 2 below. For two domains ‘Schedules and transitions’ and ‘Classroom Management’ there was a significant improvement (at 0.05 level or below) using a paired samples t test and for all other domains this was a highly significant result (at 0.01 level or below). This indicates that setting staff reported an improvement on all domains of the TCC at completion of the group. They felt they were using more of the positive management approaches, teaching skills, techniques and resources covered in the programme.

Figure 2



## Workshop Satisfaction Questionnaire – Outcomes from the Workshop Satisfaction final Questionnaire and Session evaluation sheets

The Incredible Beginnings Workshop Satisfaction Questionnaire consists of 36 questions (and a 7-point response scale) for staff about the IB programme, the usefulness of approach, teaching strategies and techniques learnt, and the delivery by group leaders. Session evaluation forms ask for feedback about content, vignettes, leader skills and discussion.

There was a response rate of 72% for the WSQ. Of the 28 staff who completed WSQ questionnaires, all rated the programme as improving behaviour and developmental issues for children in their care. All respondents who answered a question about the information presented in the programme said it was 'useful' or 'extremely useful'. All participants felt the approach used in the programme was appropriate, and 22 out of 28 staff said the programme was 'greatly appropriate'.

*'I found this training very relevant to my teaching and setting and to what we want to achieve.'*

Every staff member who completed the IB WSQ said they would recommend the programme to colleagues, fellow teachers, and childcare providers, and 24 out of 28 participants stated they would 'strongly recommend' the programme to colleagues. This was corroborated by feedback from session evaluations (n=56 forms). Staff gave appreciative comments about the programme content and group leader's input: *'The content was engaging and the leaders were welcoming and friendly, which made contributing to the session easy.'* *'I can't praise the tutors highly enough for teaching us online and keeping everybody motivated and on track.'*

*'Fantastic course. It's getting me to think and improve my teaching and supporting the children. Thank you.'*

*'Very helpful course looking forward to trying new things. Thank you to both of you as I asked for help and advice at the end of the course. See you on the next date.'*

Staff found it an enjoyable course: *'An overall feel good, programme ...'* *'This is such an engaging course very enjoyable which can easily be put into practice to help our children and staff succeed together. Thank you.'*

All staff reported that the teaching strategies and the techniques they had learned and put into practice were useful or extremely useful: *'Some fantastic strategies and ideas to feed back to our setting and already have put in place.'*

A positive impact was noted: *'Clear guidance to develop my setting. I'm/ my team and the children seem to be much calmer'* and *'I have noticed a big improvement in (child's) behaviour.'*

When asked what was most helpful, many staff referred to the programme overall with its range of topics and strategies: *'I honestly felt it was all extremely helpful'*.

*'Overall every part of the programme was very useful and helpful. From helping children to settle into the setting, involving and supporting parents to teaching children coping strategies and calm down strategies.'*

Those areas of the programme endorsed as 'extremely useful' most were: Building Positive Relationships with Children, Emotion Coaching and Managing Separation Anxiety, and Distraction, Ignoring and Redirection as helpful management strategies.

*'In my setting I found the managing separation anxiety, emotional coaching and use of distraction and ignoring most useful ...'*

*'One of the things that have been a huge help to myself is the distraction and ignoring technique.'*

*'The most important part for me was definitely the strategies of how to get a child to calm and cool down as that is a big problem ... that was very useful to me'* and *'The calm down strategies have really helped in the setting and will make a massive difference for years to come.'* The *'use of puppets to support emotional development'* was also mentioned by one participant.

Participants valued the focus on building positive relationships: *'I think it's helped me approach a child whose behaviour has been challenging in a different way. Giving a child the opportunity to talk through a problem.'*

*'I also have used the building positive relationships with parents very helpful.'* *'I feel I have been able to use the tools provided in these sessions to build better*

*relationships with the children but also the parents and have ... a new found confidence ...'*

The programme was very helpful for new members of staff: *'The programme was a huge success, from starting this course back in November with having not a huge amount of experience in childcare and not being qualified I have been able to take away a large amount of what I have learned.'*

Respondents also rated highly the opportunities afforded to reflect, listen to, and speak with colleagues. Overwhelmingly, (24 of 28 participants) found the opportunities for group discussion 'extremely useful'. *'Something else ... I thought was very helpful was just listening to the other members in the group and hearing their stories and what works best for them in their settings.'*

*'It was lovely to reflect on practice with others and hold group discussions and gain ideas too ... There was no pressure it was all made easy for us all to interact and discuss throughout ...'* *'I really enjoyed this course learning with others and being a part of this interactive way of learning ... getting to know others and develop my own knowledge ... Thank you so much.'*

### Suggestions for future groups

Eight participants commented that leaders couldn't have improved the course: *'They couldn't! they've been amazing.'* Constructive feedback and ideas to benefit future groups were welcomed; comments are summarised below.

*Timing* - Six out of 28 participants gave suggestions for future groups about timing and duration of sessions to accommodate childcare and school commitments. These included: *'... earlier day sessions ...'*; *'a morning session start such as 9:00am -12:00pm ...'* and *'more breaks ... so I could concentrate better'* were individual comments. Two respondents wondered whether a shorter programme over 6 days could be of benefit, and *'enable more staff to be released to attend'* for continuity and consistency across the staff group. Recapping group rules at alternating sessions was mentioned by one participant, to maximise time for discussion.

*Time Out and resources* - Two respondents out of 28 found Time Out the least helpful of the topics. *'I believe the only thing that wasn't really helpful was the*

*section on time out but that's mainly due to me not agreeing with the time out rule. Since the session I have learnt that this should only be used very occasionally so although I didn't find it helpful, it did help me understand the reasons behind it a little more.' 'The information for Time out strategies was interesting but I did not like the way it looked when watching the video vignettes.'*

Overwhelmingly, (24 out of 28) respondents found the vignettes helpful or very helpful from session evaluations. One participant commented on relating some vignettes to current practice in Wales being harder. Another participant said although there were differences to their own setting *'ideas and principles are completely transferable.* 'A chance to see vignettes again, to be able to recap on content, was mentioned by one participant.

In regard to finding time to read the course book, one participant commented- It was *'helpful to have the bullet point summary'* to help gain information from the comprehensive Incredible Teacher reference book.

One respondent thanked Group Leaders for making Welsh medium resources available: *'I feel coming from a Welsh setting that the only improvement could be that there was more readily available resources in the Welsh language but ... (group leaders) did an amazing job at creating these.'*

*Remote and 'face to face' delivery* - Eight participants said they would prefer 'face to face' delivery when it is possible and available. *'Teams was fine but it's lovely to be with people in person.'* *'I liked that it could be accessed online so everybody can partake but in some situations it would be nice to have been able to meet in person ...'*

The value was acknowledged of online groups in the meantime: *'Obviously if COVID wasn't around then face to face sessions would have been better off but no one could help that, so the alternative online sessions did work well.'* One person suggested *'maybe more breakout rooms to practice strategies.'*



## Conclusions and recommendations

The outcomes indicate very high satisfaction and very positive outcomes for the Incredible Beginnings programmes delivered remotely via Microsoft Teams from 2021 to early 2023 and demonstrate the value of continuing to make the Incredible Beginnings programme available widely for early years staff in Powys.

The results echo and are similarly positive to those in the earlier evaluation for 'in person' groups in Powys. Online group delivery enables easier access across a wide geographical area like Powys, saving time and travel, but does impact on collection of full sets of pre and post evaluation measures as there are less opportunities to support colleagues with completion. This evaluation was completed as part of routine delivery of the programme, with no specific allocation of time to support collection of measures. Nevertheless the response rates provide robust data to inform the evaluation.

Data gained showed statistically significant reductions in perceptions of difficulties in regard to child mental health and emotional wellbeing reported by staff for children in their settings. There was a statistically significant increase in the use of positive approaches, strategies and techniques promoted by the programme. This provides evidence that the programme is meeting the goals of promoting staff awareness and skills to support younger children's social and emotional competence and learning opportunities. Group leaders are commended for their expertise, style, attention to detail and the support they have offered.

Plans for return to face to face delivery are reviewed regularly and further online groups are planned in the meantime. Delivery is continually strengthened with consideration of participant's feedback. Discussion about timing, choice of vignettes, other resources, and Calm Down strategies, take place between group leaders when carefully tailoring each group. Group leaders engage and involve each participant so that the content and principles generated are applicable for them in their own setting. A number of leaders are working towards accreditation in this evidence-based programme to ensure fidelity of delivery and achieve optimum outcomes for staff.

The importance of the supportive infrastructure and strategic planning in Powys, backed by management, is emphasised. This means that childcare staff

are able to attend the IB course free of charge with appropriate cover in place in their setting. Child Development Fund (CDF) monies have supported staff cover and resources. The programme enables the early years workforce to increase their skills and confidence in using the range of strategies and techniques covered, to gain support from group leaders and colleagues, and to extend their network, which benefits children and families in Powys.

***Many thanks to participants for their input, feedback and comments, and to group leaders:***

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Reference:

Crumpton, J. (2020). *Programme Evaluation: Implementing the Incredible the Incredible Beginnings® Programme in Powys*. Powys Teaching Health Board  
<https://incredibleyears.com/article/programme-evaluation-implementing-the-incredible-the-incredible-beginnings-programme-in-powys/>