

Report to the Funding Network

Grant to fund a pilot programme to teach coping skills to Indian children

Introduction

The grant received from The Funding Network in July 2003 contributed to the costs of running and evaluating the first year of a pilot programme to teach coping and social skills to six to eight year old primary school children in Goa.

Zippy's Friends is a school-based programme that is delivered by local organisations around the world, with Partnership for Children providing materials, training and support. The Sangath Society for Child Development and Family Guidance was keen to run a two-year pilot of *Zippy's Friends* in Goa, to see whether it was effective and appropriate for Indian schoolchildren. The programme had been rigorously evaluated in two European countries and found to increase significantly children's social and coping skills, but it had not previously been run outside Europe.

How the grant was spent

The Funding Network's grant contributed to the costs of the first year's pilot. These included the Programme Coordinator's salary, office administrative costs, costs of holding teachers' support meetings, travel to schools, translation of the teaching materials into Konkani and printing of 200 sets of materials.

Results

In the first year (June 2003 – April 2004) the programme was run in English-medium schools, with the aim of evaluating its cultural suitability and, if appropriate, translating it into the local language, Konkani, for the second year. Whilst a minority of Goan schools teach in English, these generally cater for middle-class, fee-paying families, and if the programme is to be spread widely in Goa, it needs to be translated into Konkani. Mental and emotional health are low on the agenda for most Indian schools, where academic performance is valued above all, and Sangath is keen to reach as many children as possible.

Initially, however, it was important to see whether *Zippy's Friends* could be run successfully in Goa. The English-language pilot involved 207 children and nine teachers in five primary schools and one kindergarten. Teacher training took place in July 2003, with the programme commencing immediately afterwards, and all school classes completed the 24 sessions of the programme by the end of the school year in April 2004. The Programme Coordinator, a member of Sangath's staff, observed and monitored the teachers and ran follow-up support sessions for them. From her observations and the teachers' responses at the support meetings, the Coordinator evaluated the suitability and effectiveness of *Zippy's Friends* in the context of the Goan classroom.

At the final follow-up session it was decided not to run the programme in the kindergarten class in future years. The children in this class were very young – only 4-5 years old – and their teacher found that the concepts discussed were too complex for them to grasp. These children would in any case progress to one of the primary schools where the programme was being run, and would participate at a later date.

Feedback on the programme in primary schools was very positive. Firstly, the teachers all felt that the materials were culturally appropriate. Only one revision was deemed to be necessary for Indian culture; this concerned a session in the module on Change and Loss, where it is suggested that children visit a graveyard. It was felt that this was not feasible

in the Indian context, but that, instead, teachers would use the session to look at the various rituals used by different faiths when somebody dies. Overall, however, the teachers encountered no significant problems in delivering the materials. One teacher, who had previously struggled to find time to talk to children individually about their problems, said, 'I found the *Zippy's Friends* programme well structured and sequenced. The idea... suited my very need and vision for reaching out to a group at a time.'

Secondly, the teachers reported significant effects on the children – and on themselves. They noticed the children talking more about their feelings. One said, 'The role play helps the children to get over their nervousness and they end up confident and happy with themselves. It encourages facing up to your problems, then deciding whether the solution is good or bad.' Another teacher reported that a child came up to her after the session on bullying and told her that he had not known that what he did to other children was bullying. And teachers felt themselves changing as they taught the programme. One said, 'It was helpful for me. It made me more aware of my own feelings, which I was not used to before.' Another said, 'I would never have known my class children so closely if not for *Zippys' Friends*.'

Best of all, the children loved the programme and felt they were learning from it. Many drew pictures and wrote letters to Zippy: 'Thank you for teaching me how to solve my own problems. ... I wanted to tell you that I love Zippy's class.' And at the end a girl wrote, 'I really really really miss Zippy a lot. I wish we could have lots more! But anyways I've got him in mind.'

Next steps

With such a positive response, Sangath felt confident that *Zippy's Friends* was well suited to Indian schools, and proceeded to commission a Konkani translation. This has now been completed, and classes in five government-funded schools will pilot this version from July 2004 – April 2005. Sangath is hopeful that a successful Konkani pilot will attract public funding to spread the programme more widely. Two hundred sets of materials, 100 in English and 100 in Konkani, are now being printed with a view to major expansion across the state of Goa in 2005-06.

Media coverage

Although there has been no media coverage of the programme so far, the translator is a well-known person in Goa, and has proposed launching the Konkani version at a small function, to which people from relevant academic departments and the media will be invited.

Summary

In summary, The Funding Network's grant has enabled the Sangath Society in Goa to introduce into Indian schools a successful programme that has been demonstrated to improve children's social and coping skills. With the first year's pilot successfully completed, the grant has also contributed to the costs of translating the materials into the local language, Konkani, and the production of many more sets of materials, so that thousands of children across the state of Goa, and maybe beyond, will benefit from *Zippy's Friends*.

For further information, contact:

Caroline Egar, Programme Manager

Email: caroline.egar@partnershipforchildren.org.uk

Tel: 020 8974 6004

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