

# Lithuanian Evaluation

## Nine Years On - *What Children Remember of Zippy's Friends*

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### Summary

The aim of this independent study was to trace teenagers who, nine years ago in 2000-2001, took part in the first pilot of Zippy's Friends (then named *Reaching Young Europe*) in Lithuania, to see whether they still remembered the programme and, if so, whether they felt it had been helpful. A total of 104 teenagers from the original enrolment of 314 were traced, and 73 completed questionnaires. A large majority remembered the programme and felt that it had helped them to solve difficulties in their lives. They also felt that programmes such as Zippy's Friends are important for young children.

### Introduction

The first steps of Zippy's Friends (then known as *Reaching Young Europe*) in Lithuania were not easy. Back in 2000, there were doubts about whether six year old children were too small to participate in a social skills training programme and whether they needed it. Some people believed that such programmes should instead be targeted at adolescents who exhibited inappropriate aggressive behaviour. However, evaluation of the programme in Lithuania in 2000-2003 revealed that it was very useful for young children. It helped them to improve the quality of their communication and to use more appropriate ways for overcoming everyday difficulties. However, two questions remained: would children remember their participation in the programme after a few years, and would they remember the skills they had learned for overcoming difficulties?

The author was the research coordinator for the original evaluation of the programme in Lithuania in 2000-2003. A conference in Vilnius in November 2009, marking ten years of Zippy's Friends in Lithuania, encouraged her to implement the long cherished idea of researching what, if anything, the first participants remembered of the programme.

### Aim of the research

The main aim of the research was to find out if children remembered Zippy's Friends nine years after taking part in it, and which memories were most clear in their minds. This plan had associated risks. Many years had passed since the children participated in the programme, and during this period they might have participated in other programmes and not be able to remember Zippy sessions. The children were now 14 or 15 years old, the 'objection age' for adolescents, and it was possible that they might refuse to participate in the survey.

### Method

The study, conceived and organized on the author's personal initiative, was implemented between October and December 2009. Short ten-question questionnaires were prepared for the children, with an information letter and consent form for their parents about the child's participation in the study. The three main questions were:

- Do you remember the programme *Reaching Young Europe*, in which the main character was the stick insect named Zippy, which took place in your kindergarten?

- Has this programme helped you to overcome difficulties in everyday life?
- What do you think about the need for such a programme for children?

## Participants

By academic year 2009-10, the first participants of Zippy's Friends were pupils in the 9th grade. There was a challenge to find them, because they had moved from primary to secondary schools, and from secondary schools on to gymnasiums. With the assistance of school psychologists, 104 out of the 314 participants of the first programme were found, studying at 19 secondary schools and gymnasiums in Vilnius. All these pupils had taken part in the original evaluation in 2000/2001 on the short-term effectiveness of the programme. Due to limited finances and human resources, only the schools with an employed psychologist and having more than one Zippy's Friends participant were invited to participate in the current study. Questionnaires were distributed to 82 children, and 73 completed questionnaires were received (42 from girls, 31 from boys). Children from all of the 11 kindergartens that participated in the 2000/2001 programme participated in this study.

## Results

To the question 'Do you remember the programme *Reaching Young Europe*, in which the main character was the stick insect named Zippy, which took place in your kindergarten?', 59 respondents answered Yes and 14 marked No. So 81% of the children remembered the programme nine years after taking part in it.

To the question 'Has this programme helped you to overcome difficulties in everyday life?', 50 respondents answered Yes, 18 marked I don't know, and only five answered No. Thus, 68% of children who participated in the survey thought that Zippy's Friends helped them to overcome difficulties in everyday life.

To the question 'Do you think children need such a programme?', 58 children answered Yes, none answered No, and in 15 questionnaires this question was left unanswered. Therefore, 79% of children who participated in the survey thought that the programme was useful for young children.

## Qualitative Analysis

According to the results, many children who remembered Zippy's Friends thought that it helped them to overcome difficulties in everyday life and was useful for young children. A qualitative analysis was made of the answers of children who remembered the programme, classified by categories and subcategories. This table presents some of the most informative answers.

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| <b>Category: 1. What do children remember about Zippy's Friends?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Subcategory: Group activities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We kept in touch with the other children from the group.</li> <li>• I remember the meetings in the group and sitting in a circle. Teachers told various situations in which Zippy would behave correctly.</li> <li>• I remember everyone sitting in a round and discussing various topics.</li> <li>• Zippy's meetings were once in a week. During these meet-ups we had to describe our moods and feelings. We even draw if we are sad or cheerful. Clarified what need to be done to be cheerful and have a lot of friends and how to overcome various life difficulties.</li> <li>• We were sitting in a circle, passing a 'beetle' from hand to hand and discussing various topics, learning to communicate, to understand the world around us.</li> <li>• I remember that we were taught how to behave in different situations. I remember us drawing Zippy.</li> <li>• I remember the sheet of paper in which we had to colour a face (cheerful or sad) as you feel,</li> </ul> |

and to colour a cloud or a sun.

- I remember that teachers told various stories about Zippy, and there were Zippy meetings.

#### **Subcategory: Programme materials and presentation**

- Still remember children in the illustrations, because some of them were black. It was very strange to see such people.
- Beetle Zippy had two friends who helped him in difficult situations.
- About this programme, I remember only that it was grasshopper Zipas and every lesson we drew faces of how we feel.
- Various stories about Zippy and his friends were read. I remember that I got a pencil, card and a diploma with Zippy.
- Had to learn 10 rules. I remember one (listen when others are speaking).
- I remember the sheet of rules, where beetle Zippy directed the rules of proper behaviour.
- There was a grasshopper, a boy and a girl raised him and they had many friends.
- Told the stories about three friends, their emotions. How they behaved in certain situations. After that, we were allowed to tell our stories on the topic of the story.
- I remember that I was crying because the beetle died. I started to feel pity, started to see what I have, etc.

#### **Subcategory : Programme tools**

- I remember that I received the diploma.
- Some people arrived from abroad, we participated in the events, got scarves with Zippy.
- I remember a brand pencil, a card with Zippy's name, scarf with the name and the diploma when we finished kindergarten.
- Oh, I remember only Zippy. I have a diploma, card and pencil. These things remind me about the programme.
- The most I remember when I got A4 paper with a sun and a cloud, and I had to colour it.
- I particularly remember when we got pencils with Zippy on them. I was really happy.
- I remember I got the pencil. Now I sometimes remember my Zippy's pencil.
- I had Zippy's pencil until the unhappy accident when I broke it.
- I remember when we (all children from the kindergarten) got Zippy's medals. I also remember how all the pictures were presented in one Zippy's paper sheet and I was very pleased. They are still with me.
- I had a yellow scarf with a title: Zippy's Friend.
- Various stories about Zippy and his friends were read. Their friendship, games. I remember that I got a pencil, card, and diploma with Zippy.

#### **Category: 2. Zippy's Friends - influence and benefit for the child**

#### **Subcategory: Children were more self-confident**

- During the lessons it was easier to express your opinion, when all your classmates are looking at you.
- I think that because of Zippy project I became more self confident and started to communicate freely with my friends.
- Zippy's programme developed my self-confidence and trust in others. Zippy was a very good friend in our group.

#### **Subcategory: Children communicated easily**

- I have learned to communicate with others, not to fight and not to scuffle, to solve problems peacefully.
- I found many friends, and started to like to go to the kindergarten.
- Even though I remember little about what we talked, but it encouraged us to communicate with a group of friends with whom we previously did not communicate, to express our opinions about the situation. It helped us to manage our feelings in a better way.
- Also it helped to make acquaintance with new friends and communicating with them.
- Two of my friends fought. I remembered Zippy's programme and used it. It helped me to understand the cause of the conflict and to bring my friends back together.
- Zippy's programme encouraged me to communicate, not to be afraid to ask, to inquire. When I moved to a school, I communicated with teachers more freely than others, was not afraid (and *am* not afraid) to ask if something is unclear to me.
- I have learned not to interrupt another person, no matter if he's saying an interesting or not interesting thing. You must always listen.

#### **Subcategory: Children improved self-control skills.**

- I learned to make a remark about a person's behaviour without hurting him/her. Learned to control myself when someone insults me.
- As an example, I still remember one discussion about fighting. The fight with somebody would not help to solve a problem.
- I was irritated by one person, I was angry with him, but I decided that there is no point to be angry because that would not bring anything good.
- When someone is insulting me, I do not attack or try to get involved in a conflict, but I try to explain calmly to him or her that I do not like it.
- Though I remember little about what we talked, it encouraged us to communicate, to express our opinion about a situation with friends from the group with whom we previously did not communicate. It helped us to manage our feelings better.
- It can reduce teenage crime rate. It is appropriate to teach a child to control oneself since childhood. Children raised like that will not become involved in a crime.
- What should I do when I feel angry? The answer is - no fight. Just need to talk. Do not keep it inside yourself.

#### **Category: 3. Why is this programme useful for young children?**

**Subcategory: Parents are not always able to explain to a small child the proper rules of behaviour**

- Parents are not always able to tell everything that is necessary and what is always beneficial to the society.
- Parents almost do not teach young children what to do when they feel down.

**Subcategory: Helps young children to understand themselves and others**

- I think it is useful. Every time we were waiting for all those different stories. All children really enjoyed the project. After this programme, for sure, children's feelings developed.
- It helps children to understand their emotions, feelings.

**Subcategory: Helps children to develop behavioural skills.**

- It will be fun and interesting for children to listen to Zippy's stories. Maybe they will not understand the messages of the stories at the beginning, but later they will get this.
- Already young children should understand that to hurt and offend others is very bad. They should know that it's better to control oneself.
- This programme is useful for modern young children, especially if it is now improved (of course, at that time it was perfect for us). It should be initiated early because children can turn to the 'bad side' too early.
- The child should develop nice and right behaviour in the kindergarten. I think that children enjoy such a programme, presented with examples of animals or toys, and they develop at the same time.

Many children remembered the interactions during the Zippy sessions, sitting in a circle and speaking about their concerns. Many remembered the group activities, and the programme's materials and characters. Some even remembered the tools of the programme – scarves, cards with the programme name, pencils, paper sheets with sun and cloud, and diplomas. Several children mentioned that they still have their Zippy's pencil, diploma or scarf, and that these things are important for them.

**Impact**

Is Zippy's Friends useful for children? The survey results suggest that it is. Children stated that with the help of the programme they became more self confident, started to communicate freely with their friends, and improved their self-control skills. They felt that it helps young children to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others, and improves self-control.

Responses to the questionnaire show that Zippy's Friends has been very influential. The programme's materials and tools, which are essential for young children, are very well prepared, and this is probably the most important reason for its success. Sensitively taught, the materials make it possible for six-year-old children to memorize simple but very necessary life skills.

This was confirmed in a face-to-face meeting with six children who participated in Zippy's Friends in 2000/2001. To a question about what they miss from this programme, they said that they miss sitting in a circle with a teacher and discussing things that concern them simply, honestly and openly. The meeting itself served as a reinforcement and reminder of the programme and was very important for the children. They were surprised that they were remembered and found after so many years. They became increasingly engaged in the conversation, remembering more and more situations from the programme that related to their everyday lives now. They also suggested that the duration of the programme is too short, and that it should continue at school as well as kindergarten. They thought it would be especially useful in adolescence, and asked why there is no continuity into adolescence.

### Teachers' Views

Telephone interviews were conducted with kindergarten teachers who taught Zippy's Friends in the first year but have not done so in recent years. They remembered the programme very well. They recalled that it was prepared very well, with a clear structure and quality tools. Having qualified specialists available for training and advice reduced tension and anxiety. They said that the programme was very useful for both children and teachers. Two quotes:

- 'The programme was very useful for children. They used the rules in their communication. At the beginning, I did not believe that children would understand or listen, and I was surprised to see that such simple rules significantly improved communication. I remember that we, the educators, liked the rules very much and sometimes applied them to our personal life.'
- 'I remember this programme very well. We had one problematic child in the group, and this programme helped us to find a way to the child, to get to know him, to know ourselves, to find ways to communicate with him. I think that the programme was running for too short a period. When we thought we started to know that child, the programme had already ended. I do not know if the child was successful later, so it would be good if there could be a continuation of the programme after children move from kindergarten to school.'

### Conclusions

Many children who participated in the survey remembered Zippy's Friends nine years after taking part in it. Their responses confirmed that the programme helped children to acquire skills for overcoming everyday difficulties and improved their emotional well-being. The children who participated in the survey thought that the programme is very useful for young children.

These conclusions were once again confirmed by the children in their wishes for Zippy's Friends, expressed in their answers to the questionnaire and during meetings.

- I wish that everyone would know about the existence of Zippy's Friends and that more children would attend and participate in it.
- Thank you for organizing this programme.
- Thank you very much, and pass my kind regards to my friend Zippy.
- I would like to wish success to all future, current and former Zippy's participants.

### Contacts

For further information about this study, please contact the author Vida Gudauskienė at [vida.gudauskiene@sppc.lt](mailto:vida.gudauskiene@sppc.lt).

For more information about Zippy's Friends in Lithuania, please [click here](#) (in English)

or go to <http://www.vaikolabui.lt> (in Lithuanian)