

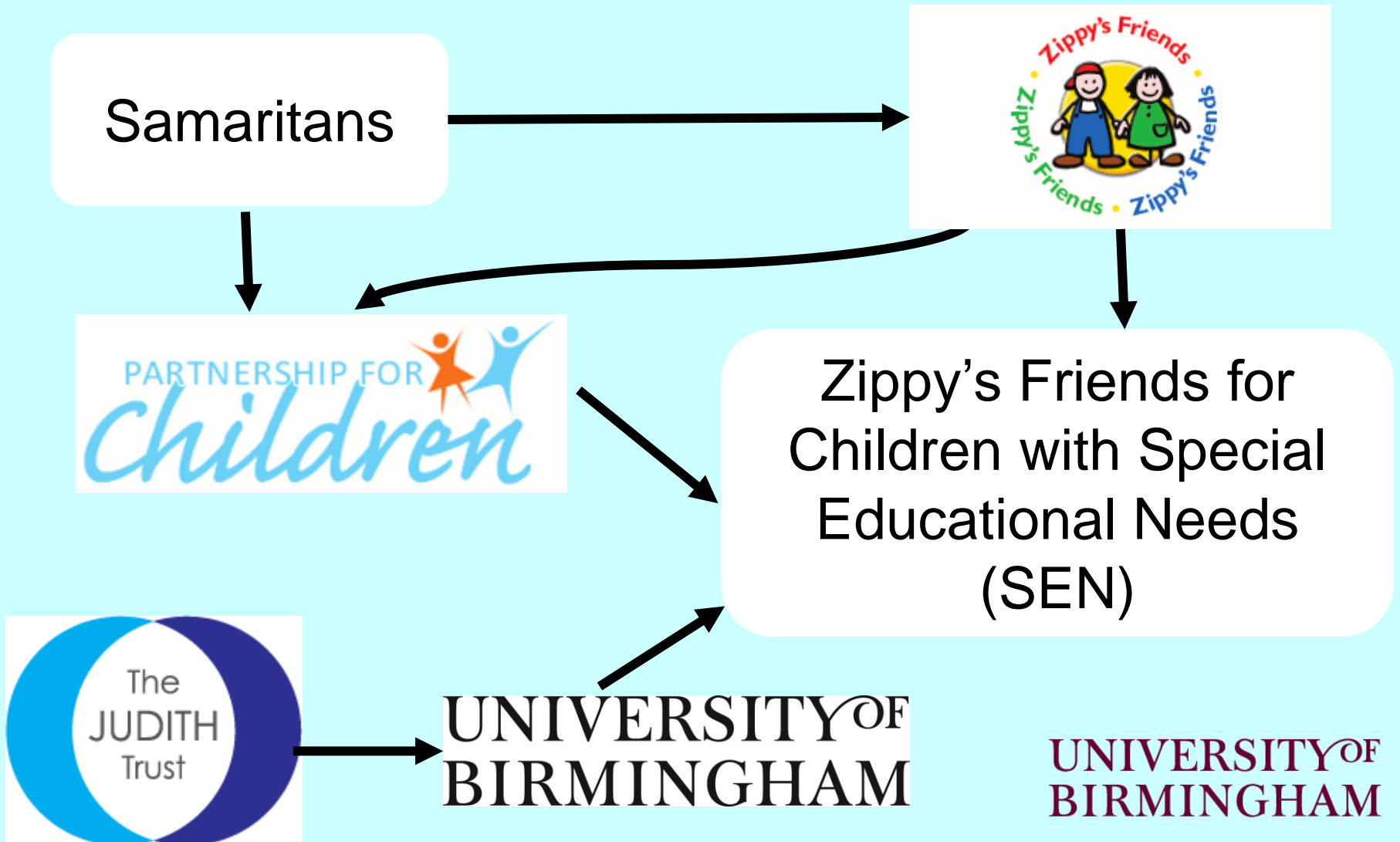
**A mental health promotion
programme to improve
emotional, social and coping
skills in children and young
people in special schools:
A feasibility study**



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Background



Background continued

- Increasing focus on the mental health and well-being of children and young people
- Prevalence of mental health problems high (36% vs 10%) in children and young people with intellectual disabilities
- Increasing focus on the role of schools:
 - Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiatives from 2005
 - Children and young people's mental health –the role of education (Green paper, 2017)

Background

- The NICE (2016) guidelines for people (including children) with intellectual disabilities and mental health needs recognises the importance of promoting social and emotional wellbeing at a young age
- As yet, there are no suitably adapted emotional literacy programmes for children attending SEND schools

Background

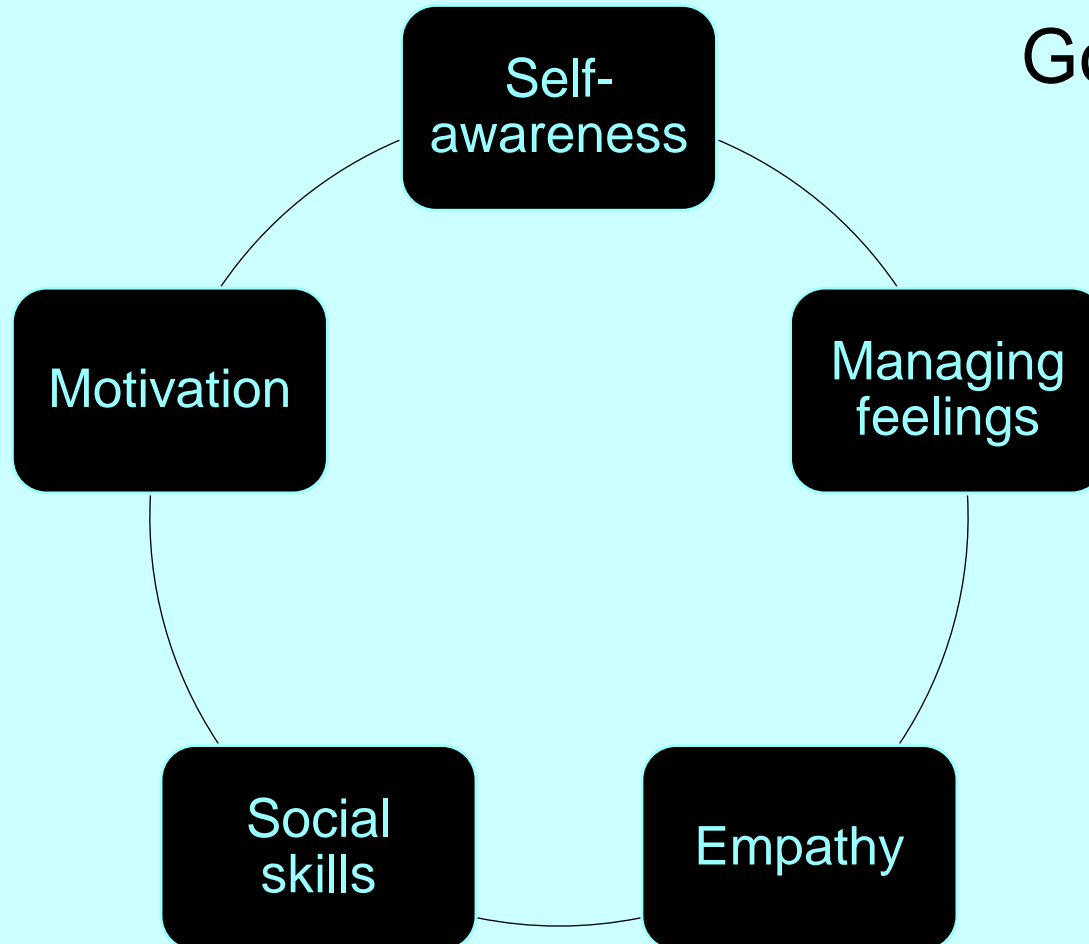
But recently...

‘What good looks like in psychological services for schools and colleges’ BPS (Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review 2017)

recognises that children with SEND are at higher risk of mental health problems and that schools must receive specialist input to
“develop positive strategies to help children to cope...”

Emotional Literacy

Goleman, 1995



Zippy's Friends



- Aims to support children to develop emotional literacy skills with a focus on problem solving and coping
- School-based, delivered by teachers
- 6 modules, each with 4 sessions:
 - *Feelings, Communication, Making and Breaking Relationships, Conflict Resolution, Dealing with Change and Loss, and Coping*
- Each session involves reading part of a story and activities
- Mainstream programme for 5-7 year olds, SEN programme for wider age range
- Mainstream programme currently running in 29 countries
- Mainstream programme has been widely evaluated (large RCTs)



Aims

- To evaluate the effectiveness of Zippy's Friends (restricted to modules 1-3 to ensure the study could be completed within one academic year) as an intervention for improving emotional literacy in children and young people who attend SEND schools
- **To assess the feasibility of the research methods, including provision of the intervention, recruitment and assessment procedures**
- **To investigate process issues in the implementation of the intervention**, including fidelity, mechanisms of impact and effect of context
- **To explore the experience and acceptability of the intervention** to children and young people, parents/guardians and teachers

Methods

- N=53 children, aged 5-14 years
- Recruited from 8 SEN schools
- Pre- and post- measures:
 - Emotional Literacy Assessment and Intervention (EL)
 - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
 - Social Skills Improvement Rating Scale (SSiS)
 - Emotion recognition tests (maximal behaviour, sub-sample, N=27)
- Post intervention interviews with teachers, parents and children
- Detailed session-by-session feedback

Main findings

- The adapted Zippy's Friends programme is both feasible and acceptable to and for children with SEND as well as their teachers and parents
- Significant improvements were observed in communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility and self-awareness

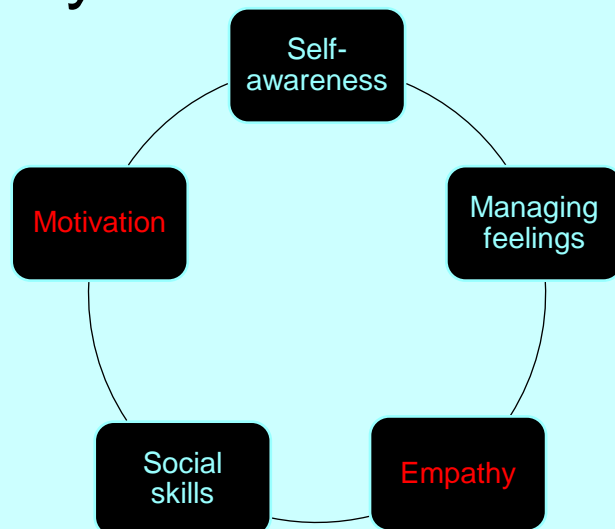
Main findings

- Comparisons of scores pre- and post- Zippy's Friends indicated self-awareness, ability to manage feelings and social skills improved significantly.



Main findings

- Motivation and empathy did not improve. This may relate to the challenges in measuring these concepts using informant report; they may not be as amenable to direct observation by others.



Main findings

Few of the child characteristics were related to change from baseline to end-point except:

1/ Younger children demonstrated a significant improvement in empathy whereas empathy remained stable in older children

2/ Those with higher verbal abilities demonstrated improved pro-social behaviour and self-control whereas these remained stable in lower ability children

Main findings

- The children and young people also demonstrated improved emotion recognition skills
- It is not clear whether these improved skills would generalise to real-life and further work is required to help children to transfer these skills to every day settings

Main findings

The parent-informed measures of emotional literacy did not demonstrate any changes over time. This may indicate that the positive effects of Zippy did not generalise to the home or....

it may take longer for improvements to be noticed at home and/or changes are not picked up by outcome measures (completed by the parents).

Feedback from teachers

I've really enjoyed it, I think the resources are really good, really straightforward. And everything's kind of there. I haven't had to do a lesson plan, which saves so much time. That's helped. And it's the way it's written, it's just easy to read.

I like the fact that it's got stuff for our Autistic children. It's got routine, structure. You come in, do the rules, the story. Sit in a circle. And then go off and do an activity.

I've always felt supported, and the training was fantastic, we had a huge range of resources to get started, erm... and the training day was really informative, it sort of, I felt it covered everything I needed to know, and make a good start with the session.

Feedback from teachers

I think they've got a much better grounding on talking and discussing about things, and they will now say, I am sad... they will come out with it before being asked.

And I have seen an improvement in ... their ability to sort of name, erm..., and identify emotions.

It's certainly getting them all talking about feelings now, far more than, and I think far more than if I had chosen another PSHE type lesson plan.

Feedback from teachers - limitations

But jealous, I just thought I was banging my head against a brick wall and kind of felt really despondent about it... They can recognise that somebody's cross with them or that someone is cross with somebody else, then actually do they need to know that that person is jealous?

Erm... nervous. They didn't really enjoy that because they couldn't quite understand it. No matter how we tried to explain it or do it through drama, they just couldn't understand it.

Feedback from parents

Yes, he says how he feels now and he will tell you. He was not happy about something, want to go somewhere and he will tell you.

Yes, 'cause he just tells you how he feels and what he wants, he will let you know.

Feedback from parents

There is more sympathy and empathy towards me, less outbreaks, so I think he is understanding his feelings better, and he's been a lot better around other children, you know both with his sister and at play scheme.

And helping the other children at play scheme, that did surprise me. They said compared to last year almost a different child. [...] So I think if he's interacting with the other children, that could well be why.

Children's feedback

I kind of like him. I like his face by the way [...]

It's Tig, Sue, Leela, Sandy; Sandy was Tig's friend.

These children and nice friends, his friends and this girl Sue. I liked about Zippy these boys, children and I liked Zippy [...] I like Zippy because it's clever.

Key findings

- ❑ Zippy's Friends is both feasible and acceptable for and to children with SEND and their teachers and parents
- ❑ Social skills, self-awareness, ability to manage feelings as well as emotional literacy and emotion recognition improved significantly from baseline to end-point
- ❑ Teachers, parents and children were positive about the programme
- ❑ Teachers identified some limitations

Practice recommendations

- Allow extra time
- Further development to improve suitability for children with limited expressive verbal communication and ASD
- Most suited to PSHE P-level of 6+
- Further modification of sessions on jealousy and nervousness

Plans for future research

- Cluster RCT
- Larger sample sizes, longer duration and follow-up
- Self report measures
- Further assessment of suitability for a wider range of abilities and impairments
- More active involvement of parents

Key References

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Thank you!

