

Family Matters: Families Matter

Investors in Families Annual Conference

SWALEC Stadium Cardiff

A county cricket ground may seem an odd place to run a conference for school staff to talk about their work with families. However, Glamorgan County Cricket Club have links with schools and families across South Wales, going out to local communities and inviting communities in to play and watch cricket. Mark Frost and Andrew Hignell were on hand all day to talk about the Glamorgan offer and take delegates behind the scenes on an impromptu tour of the stadium.

The second annual Investors In Families conference attracted delegates from across Wales, with guests coming from Scotland and Northern Ireland, eager to see what Investors in Families could offer to schools and other settings in their areas.

One of the key messages of Investors In Families is to encourage thinking “outside of the box” and Chris Waterman, Executive Director of IIF explained to *Education Journal*: “Investors in Families is all about active engagement and we have to reflect that in the conferences and events we run for our members. Our annual conference is about moving people out of their comfort zone but building strong relationships between professionals working with children and families.”



Dylan Rowlands

The conference started early, with delegates invited to bring their trainers and to dress appropriately for cricket. No encouragement was needed as delegates flocked to the indoor cricket school to try their hand at batting, bowling and fielding. Registration proper (badges, coffee, croissants and pastries) started at 0900 and, with a few minutes to catch their breath, next up was Emma Goodwin, who led an introductory session of Bollywood Dancing, with a mixed ability class of delegates. After a more energetic session than many expected, there was still time for another coffee (and for some, another pastry or two) before the first session. By this time Dylan Rowlands had arrived to play his harp and delegates were able to listen to an eclectic collection of traditional Welsh music as the conference opened.

The conference proper was opened by Lowri Reed, from the Department of Education, who set the scene by outlining the Welsh Government’s range of initiatives to encourage schools to work with families. She emphasised that working with families was a key part of minister Kirsty Williams’ strategy to improve education in Wales. She was followed by Einir Williams, Managing Director of NSMTC & Director of Eryr, who led an interactive session “Dealing with Hard to Reach Parents!”

The remainder of the morning included sessions on dealing with the impact of adverse childhood experiences and how to prevent abuse and promote independence.

The heart of the conference was a lunch-time market place – there was nothing for sale but plenty

(Continued on page 19.)

(Continued from page 18.)

of trading of ideas for working with families. Delegates from schools that had already achieved the Investors in Families quality mark brought their portfolio's to share with colleagues from schools working towards the award. "Seeing what other schools have already found successful – and being able to discuss it with them – is so helpful," one delegate said, "this is all about sharing effective practice.

At one end of the "market" the Mavron Quartet treated the delegates to "Baroque around the clock", with tumbling arpeggios, coruscating crescendi and perfect pizzicati.

There were five breakout seminars on offer to delegates including one of how Investors in Families works inside Parc Prison and how schools can arrange parents' evenings with mum and dad, inside Parc. Another session dealt with how to facilitate discussions with families and students on the difficult choices that everyone must make about relationships and sex. Sid Madge outlined his approach to positive thinking used the MEEE programme.

The star session, however was the one on Pupil Voice, presented by pupils from Maesycwmmmer Primary School: it's easy to see why you should avoid appearing on the same programme as inspirational young people!

The final plenary session comprised an interactive session by Totem Games, with delegates using a specially designed game, downloaded onto their 'phones and iPads. Spencer Holmes demonstrated how games can be used for educational purposes by families and children to improve outcomes in school.

The conference ended with the customary Investors in Families celebration cake and the award of the quality mark to four schools:

- Aberdare Park
- Maesycwmmmer
- Millbank
- Stacey Road

Delegates were asked to complete a letter to themselves saying what they do differently as a result of attending the conference in one week, one month and two months. On 1 July 2018, IIF will send the envelopes to delegates – and IIF will ask them to report back on progress in working with families. We also expect some of the delegates will have taken up cricket and Bollywood dancing!

- For more information about Investors in Families, visit www.iifwales.com or email Chris Waterman at chris@waterman.education



Family practice at Glamorgan Cricket Club