

**EBU/UER Children Documentary Series 2004**

**“Changing Barry”, a film from RTÉ Television, Ireland**

**Produced and directed by Stephen Plunkett**

Barry Frizzelle is a good-humoured, articulate 12-year-old Dublin schoolboy. Though he's considered to be of above-average intelligence, he suffers from ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and he's also severely dyslexic, so school has always been hard for him. Two years ago, after he had been finding it particularly difficult to keep up in his local primary school, he was transferred to St Rose's, a special school for children with reading difficulties. He loved this school, with its small classes and safe atmosphere. But now Barry must return to mainstream schooling. In September, he returns to his old school, St Joseph's, and already he's feeling the pressure. He has mixed feelings: he doesn't want to leave St Rose's, but he's also excited at the prospect of returning to a mainstream school, to the friends he still has there.

This film follows Barry from his last week at St Rose's through his first few months at St Joseph's, ending as the first mid-term approaches. It's a period of major change and upheaval, and sometimes crisis, for him. Arriving back at his old school, he has to run the gauntlet of schoolmates, old and new, who will want to know whether he can keep up, or even just fit in. Will the other boys like him? Will his friends be there for him? Will the reading and other skills he acquired in St Rose's be enough? Certainly, the schoolwork will be much, much harder - so will Barry get his homework done and still have time for football? In short, will he survive?

In the film, Barry tells us how he feels about the challenge facing him. He comes across as bright, articulate, curious and humorous. Beyond this, he is affecting, and there's a strong sense of emotional intelligence, of depth, as he describes his life, past and present. He is on the cusp of change. He knows his new school is just a rehearsal for the following year's move to secondary school, a rehearsal, really, for the hard task of finally leaving childhood behind.

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Children with ADHD and severe dyslexia face many difficulties: practical, academic, social... and emotional. Barry is lucky he has a very supportive family and he's also lucky to have attended St Rose's school, one of two schools in the Dublin area that deal with reading difficulties. The boys and girls there were all determined to conquer their reading problems, and they were great at helping each other. So Barry made new friends and he acquired new skills. But his academic future is still uncertain. Very few Irish children with problems like Barry's ever go on to attend a university. The system just isn't geared to their needs.

Because Barry's teachers, family and friends are keenly aware of the many pitfalls he faces and because of their supportiveness, his trepidation is held in

check. His new school, St Joseph's, Terenure, might seem daunting at first. It's a school that could be considered conservative by European standards: it's an all-boys school, there are rigorous standards of discipline, uniforms are mandatory and, as is the norm in Ireland, class sizes are quite large. But it has a very supportive ethos and its headmaster, Matt Hume, is considered far-sighted. He has already been personally helpful to Barry. Equally, the class teacher, Mr. Hallinan, once taught Barry's older brother, Conor, and as a result is greatly respected by the family. And Barry has a final ace up his sleeve: he kept up his friendship with one or two of the boys from St Joseph's after leaving the school two years ago – so he has some existing friends in his new class. Even so, when the school year gets underway, Barry does face academic difficulties, even a crisis, and he needs all the resources he can muster to pull through.

“Changing Barry” was filmed between late June and early October of 2004 in Dublin city and county.

**Production Team**

RTÉ Television, Dublin, Ireland

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