

EBU/UER Children Documentary Series 2004

Revised outline – November 2004

Title

“Changing Barry”

Duration

14 minutes 45 seconds

Production Team

RTÉ Television, Dublin, Ireland

Producer/Director: Stephen Plunkett

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Working Hypothesis

A boy with ADHD and severe dyslexia faces many difficulties (practical, academic, social, emotional) as he leaves the special school he's attended for two years and moves back to his original, mainstream school for the final year of his primary education. Although he will find it hard to keep up in his new school, he has acquired a range of new skills to deal with his disabilities – for example, he can now read signs and billboards – so he's in with a chance. Unusually, he has also managed to retain some of his original schoolfriends, some of whom will be in his class come September, so that's also a help.

Topic

Barry lives in a comfortable inner-suburb of Dublin. He has a very supportive family, including an elder brother sister and brother. He suffers from ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and he's also severely dyslexic. Two years ago, after he had been finding it particularly difficult to keep up in his local primary school, St. Joseph's, and following psychological assessment, he was transferred to St. Rose's, a special school for children with reading difficulties, in the more distant suburb of Tallaght. Barry's getting a place in St. Rose's was only possible because he was considered to be of above-average intelligence. The school provides a very nurturing and supportive environment and as a result, Barry has now acquired a new range of skills and knowledge aimed at helping him survive. He is not 'cured', he has simply acquired more coping skills - and more confidence. Because he's done reasonably well at St. Rose's, he is now obliged to return to mainstream schooling. It was always expected that he would return to St. Joseph's.

The good news is that Barry kept up his friendships at St. Joseph's – his friend, Jamie, still goes there - and so he'll have some existing friends in his new class. The bad news is that, academically, Barry probably won't match their academic level: he still faces an uphill struggle due to his continuing disabilities. He needs to try as hard as possible in his new school before making the transition to a third school – a secondary school – in Autumn 2005. So, his move to St. Joseph's is a rehearsal for his move to secondary school a year later.

Barry is worried about the move back, even though he supports it in principle. He has greatly enjoyed being at the special school, St. Rose's, where he made many friends. Everyone in that school had a special need, unlike in St. Joseph's where Barry's differences are altogether more obvious and exposed. Barry is afraid he'll be embarrassed in front of the other boys and he's also afraid nobody will like him.

His new school, St. Joseph's Boys' National School, might be considered conservative by European standards: it's an all-boys school, there are rigorous standards of discipline, uniforms are mandatory and, typically for an Irish primary school, class sizes are quite large. But St. Joseph's is also a very supportive, attentive school, and its headmaster has always been far-sighted and personally helpful to Barry. Equally, the class teacher, Mr. Hallinan, once taught Barry's older brother, Conor, and is greatly respected by the Frizzelle family.

Overall, 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. He's prepared to do what he has to do. Once the school year gets underway, he will undoubtedly slip back academically but hopefully this won't be to too great an extent. He probably won't be fully prepared for the intellectual challenge of a conventional 6th Class, and this will remain an issue from September (and possibly for the rest of his life: unfortunately, very few children like Barry ever get into Irish universities). Will he keep his faith in himself?

This film follows Barry from his last week at St Rose's to his first months at St Joseph's, ending as the first mid-term approaches. It's obviously a period of change and upheaval for Barry. He has to run the gauntlet of schoolmates, both old and new, who will want to observe whether he's changed and whether he can fit in. The schoolwork will be much, much harder. Will he keep up? Will the reading and other skills he acquired in St Rose's be sufficient for him to keep up academically with his new classmates? Will he get his homework done and still have time for football? Will he make things work in his new environment?

Main Character

Barry Frizzelle is a Dublin schoolboy who will turn 12 just after filming begins. Quite young-looking for his age, he is active, intelligent and thoughtful. He lives in the suburb of Terenure with his parents Valerie and Jim, his sister Sinéad, 16, and brother Conor, 14. Barry was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) whilst very young. He is also severely dyslexic.

Because he was a hyperactive child from the start, he seemed as if he might entirely dominate the Frizzelle family life. In fact, his parents were active in managing his condition and his needs from an early age and life in their home is relatively normal. Valerie and Jim say they've always wanted Barry to lead the life of an ordinary child. For part of the time, Barry takes a common medication for the condition, Ritalin (methylphenidate), a stimulant not entirely

unlike caffeine in effect. He is neutral on the desirability of taking the drug – it is merely his parents' decision.

Barry has undergone psychometric testing at various stages of his life, and is considered to be of above-average intelligence. However, his disabilities are limiting and two years ago, after he had fallen quite far behind his classmates in St. Joseph's Boys' National School, he was transferred to St. Rose's National School, a special school for children with various reading difficulties. He has loved his two years there. He is both excited and apprehensive about returning to St. Joseph's. He's a candid speaker. He can describe his own circumstances well, and he comes across as bright, articulate, curious and humorous. Beyond this, he is also affecting, with a sense of emotional intelligence, of depth, as he describes his life, both past and present. He is clear that he will miss his current school, classmates and teachers – he reveals a strong affection for all three. But he's also sanguine – even enthusiastic - about his planned return to the mainstream school he once attended.

As a social being, he seems popular and loyal. It's perhaps unusual that he kept his friends from St. Joseph's even as he began forging new friendships at St. Rose's. Of course, that is a big asset to him now that he's returning to his former school. Undoubtedly, he planned it that way.

The casual or uninformed observer mightn't spot that Barry is either hyperactive or dyslexic. Because he focuses intensely on what he's doing, he does miss certain social signals and warnings, but for many observers the impression is just that of youthful enthusiasm, intelligence and articulateness. The downside of the dyslexia is that, academically, he may always have to struggle to survive. And the downside of the ADHD is that he sometimes wears others out – a classic hyperactive trait. He is a keen sportsman and he loves movies and music. His dad has partially soundproofed their garage to allow him practice with his pals. He and his friend Jamie are both guitarists, but Barry is willing to play drums and even do the vocals when he has to.

Format

Shot on Digibeta, 16:9 anamorphic.

Edited off-line using Final Cut Pro, and picture graded at on-line stage.