

WAIMH 2014: Coming of Age

By Jane Barlow, United Kingdom

WAIMH 2014 Congress Co-Chair

To use the words of Hiram Fitzgerald, the WAIMH 2014 Congress, which was held in Edinburgh's magnificent International Exhibition Centre and was attended by over 1700 people from 52 different countries, marked the coming of age of Infant Mental Health. I have never attended a congress where there was so much passion for the subject matter, and so much collegiality. The papers presented cutting-edge science and practice, and there was great joy at meeting old colleagues and making new friends.

The buzz began on the Pre-Congress day, which was attended by over 450 people who wanted to witness the tributes to two phenomenal thinkers in the Infant Mental Health field- Colwyn Trevarthen and Peter Fonagy. Along with their co-presenters they showcased some of their work from the past three decades, as well as new directions in which their work is now progressing. The pre-congress day also hosted the first ever Live Reflective Supervisions with superb contributions from Karl Heinz Brisch and Patricia O'Rourke in the first, and Louise Emmanuel and Sarah Jones in the second. We hope that these will now be a regular feature of future congresses.

The opening ceremony in the evening got off to a rousing start with a highly energetic Scottish band called the Pokey Hats (you can see for yourselves on u-tube!). It was attended by over 600 participants, and there were wonderful presentations from George Hosking who introduced the audience to the national 1001 days: Conception to Age 2 campaign (<http://www.andrealeadsom.com/downloads/1001cdmanifesto.pdf>), Dilys Daws who talked about the inspiration for Infant Mental Health and the need to work across professions and services, and Tam Baillie (Scotland's commissioner for Children and Young People) who gave a wonderfully inspiring talk about Infant Mental Health in Scotland. Drinks and canapés were served in the starlit Cromwell Hall amidst book stalls, a book signing by Lynne Murray of her wonderful new publication, *The Psychology of Infants*, and hundreds of posters.

Although we very much missed Karlen Lyons-Ruth who was not able to attend because of health problems, we had some superb plenary lectures from James Swain, Christine Anzieu-Premmereur, Pasco Fearon, and Lynne Murray who stood in for Karlen. There were over 800 presentations in total



Jane Barlow at the WAIMH 14th World Congress Opening Ceremony. Photo by Simon Williams.



WAIMH 14th World Congress Opening Ceremony. Photo by Simon Williams.



Dilys Daws at the WAIMH 14th World Congress Opening Ceremony. Photo by Simon Williams.

and the biggest difficulty of the Congress was choosing which of the amazing speakers to go and hear next. I wasn't too surprised when my Congress handbook fell to pieces on the third day because it had had such a battering!

The Congress dinner, which was attended by around 600 participants, was held in the amazing Our Dynamic Earth (<http://www.dynamicearth.co.uk>) where Campbell Paul, WAIMH Board Member, with bagpipes and kilt, took part in a Blessing of the Haggis ceremony and the novelist Sandy McCall-Smith provided a superbly erudite and entertaining after-dinner talk. And if you had never taken part in a Scottish Ceilidh this was your chance to find a partner and to dance your way through the remainder of the evening.

Wednesday arrived all too soon and I felt a great sadness seeing all the posters and stands being dismantled, and people packing to go home. The closing ceremony hosted the WAIMH Presidential Symposium and included brief speeches by previous presidents including Tuula Tamminen, Antoine Guedeney, Hiram Fitzgerald, Robert Emde and Joy Osofsky, as well as a wonderful presentation by Miri Keren about WAIMH's work to develop a statement about the Declaration of Infant's Rights (DIR) that will complement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was introduced in 1990. Miri explained how this will explicitly address the rights of babies and toddlers (up to age 3), and be underpinned by recognition that their needs are distinct from those of older children.

The 2014 Congress closed with a very moving plea from one of our Palestinian colleagues to give our support to the 2016 Congress, which will be held in Tel Aviv on 29th May 2016 with the theme, 'Supporting Babies and their Families in a Rapidly Changing Era'. This is of course a very difficult time for our Israeli and Palestinian colleagues to be planning a world congress, and the conflict may make it impossible for this congress to be held in Tel Aviv. We must remember that academics and clinicians, particularly those working within the interdisciplinary field of Infant Mental Health, have an important role to play in ensuring that we continue to come together through these difficult times. It is only through such discourse and meeting that we will find ways of working towards a future that will be fit for all infants and their families irrespective of race, culture and community. I very much hope to see you in 2016.



James E. Swain at the WAIMH 14th World Congress. Photo by Simon Williams.



The Main Hall of the Edinburgh International Congress Centre. WAIMH 14th World Congress. Photo by Simon Williams.



Gala Dinner at Dynamic Earth. WAIMH 14th World Congress. Photo by Simon Williams.