



**Evaluation of the Pilot
Strengthening Families Programme
Changing Trax Newcastle**

Final Report

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**School of Health Community and
Education Studies
Northumbria University**

Report Author: Dr Joanna Reynolds
Research Psychologist
School of Health, Community and Education Studies
Northumbria University
joanna2.reynolds@northumbria.ac.uk

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Evaluation of the Pilot Strengthening Families Programme Changing Trax Newcastle

Background

‘Changing Trax’ is a family intervention service funded by Newcastle Neighbourhood Renewal and line managed by Newcastle City Council.

As part of the Changing Trax service, the Strengthening Families Project offers families access to the ‘Strengthening Families Programme’ (SFP 10-14, UK), a seven-week family skills programme for mothers, fathers, carers and young people aged 10 – 14 years. The SFP 10-14 (UK) has been adapted for UK audiences (Allen et al, 2006). The programme aims to increase resilience for families living with a number of risk factors, including alcohol and substance misuse, depression, violence and aggression and underachievement in school. A recent World Health Organisation Cochrane Collaboration Systematic Review found the Strengthening Families Programme to be an effective preventative intervention for this target group of families (Foxcroft et al. 2003). Recent therapeutic practice reports have found positive outcomes for UK families taking part in the Strengthening Families Programme (see Coombes et al. 2006 for summary). Newcastle City Council commissioned an evaluation of the delivery and impact of the Pilot Strengthening Families Programme delivered within the Changing Trax service.

Evaluation Aims

The evaluation explored the *delivery* and *impact* of the Strengthening Families Programme from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including managers, facilitators, mothers, fathers, carers and young people.

Ownership of data

The data collated within the study will be co-owned by Newcastle City Council and the Changing Trax Service, Newcastle.

Evaluation Design

Methodology

The evaluation qualitatively explored the *process* of programme delivery and utilised both quantitative and qualitative approaches to measure the *outcome* of the pilot Strengthening Families programme for stakeholders. The methods for, and process of, data collection for the evaluation were collaboratively developed between the evaluator, the facilitators, Strengthening Families Project and Changing Trax. This collaborative approach was to ensure ownership of the evaluation findings for stakeholders.

Sample

The study focused on the first Strengthening Families Programme to be delivered within the Strengthening Families Project in the Changing Trax service. Using a purposive sampling strategy, all mothers, fathers, carers (n=4) and young people (n=4) participating within the pilot Strengthening Families Programme were included in the evaluation. All facilitators delivering the programme (n=5) and managers (n=2) also participated in the evaluation. Each participant was invited to take part in the evaluation through a process of informed consent.

Methods

Quantitative data on the outcome of the programme for families was gathered via pre- and post-programme standardised assessments on family functioning and young people's strengths and difficulties. The qualitative approaches of retrospective focus groups and interviews were conducted with programme participants, facilitators and managers in order to explore the process of programme delivery and reflect in more depth on the outcomes for participants. Figure 1 details the methods and sample.

Data Point	Baseline Week 1	End-point Week 8	SAMPLE
Methods			
Pre and post-programme assessments	•	•	5 parents 5 young people
Facilitator Focus Group / interview		•	5 facilitators
Manager interview		•	2 managers
<i>Celebration / Evaluation Event</i>			
Parents Focus Group		•	5 parents
Young people's Focus Group		•	5 young people

Figure 1: Sample and methods of the Strengthening Families Evaluation

Pre and post- programme assessments

Two standardised pre- and post- programme assessments were conducted with participants. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman 1997) has parental and self-report 25-item scales, examining the emotional and behavioural functioning of young people aged 6 -16 years. There are subscores for conduct disorder, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer difficulties, and prosocial behaviour. The

scale has a test-retest reliability on the sub-scales which ranges from 0.65 to 0.84, and in the 12-16 year old age group the parent and self-report instruments show convergent and discriminant validity. The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES II; Olson et al., 1982) consists of 30 statements that invite the family members to comment on relationships and attitudes to family life. Each statement offers a five-point response which ranges from “almost never”, scoring 1, to almost always, scoring 5. This instrument has tried and tested ability to distinguish different family patterns (Place et al., 2005).

Retrospective Focus Groups and Interviews

Service Providers

At the end of the 7 week programme, in-depth, retrospective interviews were held with a) facilitators of the Strengthening Families Programme and b) managers of the Strengthening Families Project and Changing Trax Service. These interviews utilised Appreciative Inquiry (AI; Coghlan et al 2003; Hammond 1996; Reed, 2007) in order to explore the process of developing and delivering the Strengthening Families Programme. AI is acknowledged as a powerful method of inquiry within evaluation studies seeking to examine the impact of a service or intervention, focusing on ‘what works’ within the setting or situation under exploration. Although AI focuses on what is working well within service provision, challenges and concerns are not marginalized. AI aims to find out what works and why it works, and argues that by examining factors that are productive and helpful it is possible to think of ways of extending and developing the positive factors in order to develop practice. The focus groups and interviews were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), where shared themes are identified across each participant’s verbatim interview transcript.

Programme participants

An additional session was included within the programme (session 8), and was designed as a data capturing session. This session was held in the week following the final programme session (session 7) and was entitled “Celebration and Evaluation”. This additional session was held within the same location, on the same weekday, at the same time. Session 8 marked the end of the programme and enabled the collation of data from mothers, fathers, carers and young people in the form of focus groups and post-intervention assessments.

Focus groups were held with one set of participants (e.g. parents), facilitated by the evaluator, in one room, whilst the other set of participants (e.g. young people), facilitated by the programme facilitators, completed the post-programme assessments. The focus groups were retrospective, and utilised Appreciative Inquiry (Reed 2007), exploring participants’ perspectives on what worked best for them about the programme, reflect on any outcomes / changes following programme completion.

Data collected within focus groups were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Data collated from the pre- and post-intervention assessments were analysed using the relevant scoring databases.

Ethical considerations

Parents and young people taking part in the Pilot Strengthening Families Programme were particularly vulnerable, as they were living with multiple risk factors. Therefore, the final “data capture” session was developed in collaboration with the Programme Facilitators as the optimum approach to gathering participants’ views. The data capture day was scheduled at the end of the programme, at the same venue, day and time as all previous sessions in the programme. This was to ensure participants felt as comfortable as possible in talking to the evaluator; feeling ownership of the setting and having comfortable group dynamics with their programme group. Awareness raising with programme participants occurred in the week before the data capture event, beginning the process of informed consent.

Results

The evaluation utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, in order to capture the *process* and *outcomes* of the delivery of the Pilot Strengthening Families Programme. This section illustrates the qualitative and quantitative findings.

The Process of Delivery

In order to explore the process of programme delivery, the evaluation focused on “what works” in delivering the programme, from the perspectives of facilitators, parents, young people and managers. In order to set the context, the evaluation first considered the training for facilitators and participants’ thoughts on the content of the programme.

Facilitator Training

Facilitators reflected on the training they had attended for the Strengthening Families Programme and identified key strengths:

- *Experiencing the programme first-hand as participants*

Facilitators appreciated the opportunity to experience the programme as a participant, during their training;

It was quite intensive because you actually do the course. We did the games and the exercises...they’d say “we want you back in 20 minutes” and if you weren’t back they’d start without you. And that’s what you need to do on the course...so on the training, they’re facilitating you and showing you how you should be facilitating.

Facilitator

- *Training with future facilitation team*

Participants included practitioners from a range of local authorities in the North East, and facilitators appreciated this opportunity to network. It was during the training event that the facilitators who delivered the pilot programme met each other for the first time, and they later felt it was important to have met at the training event, as this marked the beginning of their working relationship. As part of the training programme, facilitators had been grouped by local authority and had had to begin planning the facilitation of their first programme;

I think personally it’s about building up that relationship I think that it’s good that we did the course together, because on the course we sat together, we got asked to sit together and start planning together. So that was a really good planning part of it because you knew who was going to be on your team so it helped a bit because we weren’t [subsequently] all together to plan it.

Facilitator

The programme content

Practitioners reflected on some of the key strengths and difficulties of the programme content, in terms of the process of delivery. A detailed account of the strengths of the programme in terms of outcomes it provided for families is discussed in the subsequent “Outcomes” section.

Programme Strengths

- *Assimilates tried and tested techniques*

Facilitators and managers felt that a key strength of the programme was that it brought together many approaches that practitioners typically use in supporting families, including solution focused work, developing communication and empathy skills, introducing consequences. Participants commented on being familiar with all of these “tried and tested” approaches, therefore the programme did not introduce

new ways of working for the facilitators, however, they appreciated that the programme brought their typical practice into one accessible package;

A lot of the stuff, none of it I would say was startling brand new ideas, it's like family team meetings, consequences. Its stuff that I use in my work anyway but not the way it is [in the programme] because it's usually just snippets with parents and children.

I thought most of it was common sense, it's what we do with families anyway, its not rocket science; it's the listening, the behaviour management, the consequences.

Facilitators

- ***Unique family intervention***

Another key strength of the programme lay in its focus on the parent *and* the young person, both as individuals and together as a family. Facilitators and managers felt that this range of focus (individual and family) was unique to the Strengthening Families Programme, in comparison with other parenting and family support programmes;

I think the difference is that you're working alongside parents and children, and there's that bit where you come together. And I think that was the bit that I really liked, that it was something for the family.

I like the fact that parents and children were involved together, and that doesn't happen in 'Lets Talk', and it doesn't happen in the 'Nurturing Programme' and it doesn't happen in the 'Solihull Approach'. So I think that this is probably unique in that respect.

Facilitators

The young people enjoyed the structure of the programme, where both parents and young people attended their own groups, and came together for a joint family session at the end of the evening. This young person explains that this structure supported family communication;

It was good to be in our own group because you could say things without your mam hearing, and then after when you came together [for the family session], you were able to say what you wanted to say to your mam, and they had to listen, and they asked you questions, and then we had to ask them questions, so it was good. We were all talking and listening to each other.

Young Person

Programme Challenges

Participants discussed the difficulties and challenges that they had experienced with the programme.

- ***American, middle class perspective***

The programme was initially developed in America and has been adapted for a UK audience, however, when first introduced to the programme, facilitators and managers felt that it had retained an American, middle-class perspective. They were therefore concerned that some of the exercises and activities in the programme may not be accessible to the families, and would not encourage families' engagement;

Initially everyone's first thought was it was very American and we didn't know how it was going to work... I thought it felt a bit middle class. However from all accounts parents and young people get used to saying the mottos.

Manager

The programme is American and 'Americanisms' are evident...

Coordinator

The activity that was highlighted by many participants as an initial concern, in terms of how well it would be received by families, was the repetition of Mottos during each session. Young people and parents had their own mottos that they recited within their groups, and there were also family mottos that everyone repeated together in the family sessions;

The motto felt [like] we were swearing allegiance to the American Flag, where we all say it together, but it actually worked really well

Facilitator

However, in practice, parents and young people highlighted the mottos as one of their favourite exercises;

I thought it was alright. It felt strange at first. Then it was more fun and we were having a laugh with it. We had to beat the kids, so that we were louder! One week we were louder and the kids were quieter and then the next week they were louder than us.

Parent

- ***DVDs: unrepresentative***

DVDs were the core learning media for parents on the course, and used to a lesser extent with the young people. All participants highlighted the DVDs as an aspect of the programme that they found challenging, for different reasons. Facilitators and managers described the DVDs as depicting family life from a middle-class, South-East England perspective;

I was also concerned because the DVD seemed quite ‘middle class’ and quite particular to ‘southern’ life and trends.

Coordinator

This presented challenges in the way facilitators utilised the DVDs with the families participating on the programme. The following comments refer to an episode which models a family meeting, with parents and young people sitting together around a table, planning events using filofaxes;

The DVDs were very middle class [in their examples of families]. Our parents haven’t got tables, and certainly haven’t got diaries or filofaxes, well not all of them. So I was thinking “how are they going to cope with that?” And again, as a facilitator, it is your own skills that you can bring in to deliver it.

Facilitator

- ***DVDs: not relevant for larger families***

Parents highlighted that the DVD was not relevant for larger families, since families depicted on the DVD typically had two children;

The DVD could be a lot better for families with more than 2 kids. It’s not like in a normal house where I’ve got five kids, there was nothing like that on the DVD. All of us have more than 2 or 3 children, so there was nothing on the DVD that was [relevant] for us. We can use some of the stuff, but obviously it’s harder to cope when you’ve got more than three children.

Parent

- ***DVDs: not relevant for younger children***

Parents also felt the DVD was more relevant for families with older children, for example, 13 – 14 years, and not so relevant for the younger age group (10, 11, 12 years);

The DVDs were about older kids, not younger ones. It was about teenagers, not 11 year olds. It was about drugs, sex and alcohol, and [child] isn't at that part yet. It's probably another couple of years down the line for me.

Parent

- ***Time constraints***

Facilitators found the strict time constraints within the programme a key challenge in delivering Strengthening Families (e.g. 3 minutes to complete an exercise, 2 minutes to discuss an issue);

The timing was the main thing, I think if you were doing it straight from the manual it would be hard. You're very conscious of the time and what you have to fit in.

The other thing for me, because I'm from a teaching background I guess, was the speed of the delivery. We didn't cover all of the material that we were meant to in the time that we were given because it wasn't possible.

- ***Reliance on literacy***

Facilitators highlighted the significant reliance on literacy within the Strengthening Families Programme as a key difficulty, presenting challenges for delivery; facilitators may be unaware of families' literacy abilities, families with literacy needs may feel excluded and uncomfortable, jeopardising their engagement, and the delivery of the programme as a whole may be compromised;

I think there is a lot of literacy [in the programme], and you're not sure of the literacy skills of either the adults or the children.

After the first session, we were aware that some of the young people didn't like to put pen to paper. [One young person] would write something down that was meant to be an idea but she was getting so concerned about whether she was spelling the words right and whether you could read her writing, that she wasn't taking notice of the actual process that we were trying to take them through.

One of the parents asked me "will there be any writing" so I think for some of them there was always that slight worry, its like going back to the classroom, or any learning situation where you think "I'm going to be asked to do something and I might not be able to." And then there's that feeling of failure straight away. And I don't know how you get around that, because I hope I'm not stereotyping, the majority of families we work with have poor literacy and numeracy skills. So I think the programme would need to be adapted so that those pressures were taken away straight away.

Facilitators

- ***Complex learning***

Facilitators all identified the complexity of the learning within the programme, and the challenges this presented for delivery; facilitating this level of complex learning within the time constraints of the programme, and with the particular learning needs and abilities of participants;

I think throughout we were quite concerned as a team [about] the level of intellect that would be necessary for the programme to be understood by possibly some of the families we would be working with, around literacy skills, around the level of ideas that people were expected to assimilate quite quickly.

Some of sessions, the ideas that you're talking about are quite difficult...you're talking about feelings, you're talking about empathising with other people...you can't just do that once with some of the young people that we were working with because again just intellectually, some of the ideas that we were talking about whilst appeared quite simple, weren't simple at all.

Facilitators

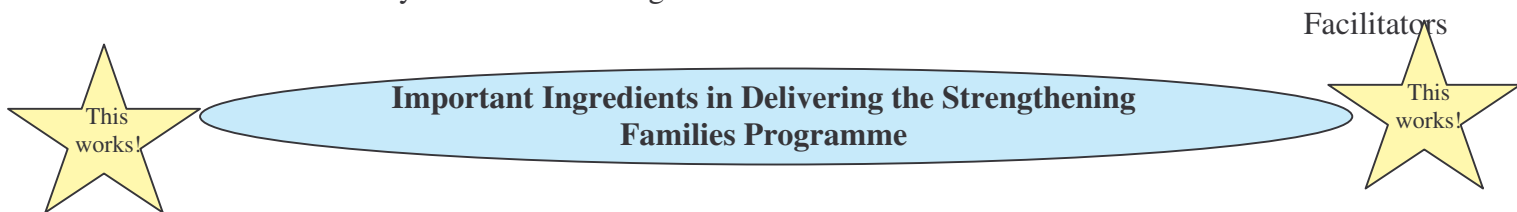
- ***Transferring the learning***

Facilitators discussed their concerns that the learning from the programme is not easily transferable for families, since families have a range of learning abilities and live with varying risk factors and needs;

I think that the group that we had weren't necessarily at that intellectual level where they could fully take on board how they would use the ideas from the programme in their families.

Some of them are going back to another four children. And I think it was too much for them to transfer the skills back in to the family.

The process of getting yourself out of potential difficulty with friends, you needed to practice, groundrules in the family, all of the things that we did, felt rushed and in some cases tokenistic, because we knew they wouldn't be taking them back.



Facilitators, managers, parents and young people shared their perspectives on “what worked” within the pilot Strengthening Families Programme, in order to build on this effective practice, share lessons learned and inform future programme delivery. Bringing together these shared perspectives has created a set of “Important Ingredients” for delivering the Strengthening Families Programme.

Programme workforce

The programme workforce was described as a vitally important ingredient in the effective delivery of the Strengthening Families Programme. The management, coordination and facilitation of the programme was discussed by participants, who described the challenges they faced when managers and coordinators were appointed part way into the lifespan of the project, where they had not been involved in originally securing the funding or designing the project.

Management

The management of the programme was highlighted as an important ingredient, with participants discussing the layers of management, including the coordination of the programme (see below), the management of the overarching Changing Trax service and the strategic, Local Authority management of the service. Participants particularly appreciated managers' enthusiasm and effective support;

The two managers who secured the funding for Changing Trax are very positive and keen for the project to succeed and the Children's Social Care line manager is also very keen for us to succeed. I have been allowed to develop the project as I see fit, but I know that there is a manager there to support me if necessary.

Coordinator

Coordination

The coordinator of the Strengthening Families Project, responsible for running the Strengthening Families Programme within Changing Trax, was appointed several months after the Project began. This meant that by the time the coordinator came into post, the facilitators for the programme had been selected and trained and the pilot programme had been planned, including securing the venue and referrals. The coordinator reflected on the work they had volunteered to undertake prior to taking up their post, in order to limit the delay in coordination of the project;

I actually started developing documentation before I came into post as well as going to meetings and attending planning meetings with facilitators. The facilitators were trained before I was interviewed for the job and they were very keen to get a course up and running straight away.

Coordinator

Networking and awareness raising

The coordinator highlighted the importance of networking and raising awareness as part of her role, sharing information about programme aims and referral routes with potential referrers. In addition to introducing the programme, an added dimension to the aim of this networking was for the coordinator to introduce themselves to local practitioners, agencies and networks, since she was new to Newcastle;

I am new to Newcastle so on top of setting up documentation, I need to go out and build networks and sell the project. The other practitioners / managers were based in Newcastle before Changing Trax so they are well known to a certain extent within Newcastle. That has been a big part of the project, not only getting the project 'out there', but getting myself known as well.

Coordinator

The commitment and expertise of the coordinator was praised within this pilot programme;

The coordinator has been exceptional, she came from an education background, and she has had experience of setting up projects, going out networking. I think she's been an absolute star in getting things done. She's actually been moving things on, undertaking CAF, the common assessment framework so that families have the support [during / after the programme].

Manager

Facilitation

Parents, young people and managers praised the skills and expertise of the facilitators, and reflected on their pivotal importance in the successful delivery of the programme.

The time and effort the facilitators contributed was immensely important. I don't think anyone had any idea of what would be involved prior to the course. I have no doubt that the skills the facilitators brought to the course as well as their approach to working with families and each other was crucial to the success of this course.

Coordinator

I really like it here and I really like [the facilitators] and I think they deserve their jobs! They were talking to us and listening.

Young person

All of them running the groups were fantastic weren't they?

They were understanding, they were helpful and they really cared.

They told us what they did themselves, that really helped as well.

The facilitators were lovely, they made you feel welcome. They really listened to you.

Parents

Facilitator Skill Set

Drawing on their experiences in attending and delivering the pilot Strengthening Families Programme, participants in the evaluation highlighted a number of skills and approaches that they felt were important for facilitators to have in order to deliver the programme effectively.

- Skill and experience in family work

All of the facilitators were highly experienced practitioners, with particular expertise in supporting families and facilitating learning and development. They were therefore able to use this expertise in the planning and delivery of the programme and recommended that this expertise is necessary for facilitating the Strengthening Families Programme.

We all had the expertise and knowledge to be able to say “this is what we need to be doing”. It depends on your background. Some people may never have delivered a programme before. Everyone [who facilitated the pilot] has done group work before. Everyone has a lot of years experience working with people where you have to be sensitive to their needs.

Facilitator

- Solution-focused methods

Abilities and experience in solution focused work with families was highlighted as important;

It’s about bringing in that solution-focused [approach] in to it, “so how can it work in your house?” Not “this is how you do it”, but “this is a model of it, but how can that model be adjusted so that you can work it well? It’s those kind of skills that you need.

Facilitator

- Approach to families

The facilitators’ approach to working with the families participating on the course was highlighted as vitally important, and a number of skills and attitudes were emphasised in contributing to positive and effective approaches with families;

- Communication skills
- Non judgemental
- Non threatening
- Sense of humour
- Honesty / transparency
- Valuing people

You’ve got to be able to communicate at a level that people understand. You can read all this out [from the manual] but if you’re looking at people and they haven’t got a clue what you’re talking about...its being able to pick up on that

It is those skills of being able to coax people to talk, not judge them, all the skills that you need to get to a level where they can talk at the same level, so you’re not saying “this is how you do it!”

I think they would have to have an understanding of “family” and an empathy of where some of the families were coming from, in terms of what they were having to deal with on a day to day basis.

We were honest with families...because this was the pilot, we were able to say “we’re learning too”

Facilitators

- Understanding how to engage people in learning

The ability to identify learning outcomes within the programme and to engage people with a range of learning needs was highlighted as particularly important for facilitators of the Strengthening Families Programme;

I think the facilitators should be coming from a social care background where they've got an understanding of how people learn, the process that they need to take people through.

I think you would need to have an understanding and an awareness of how to present things, so you present [the programme] in a way that is non-threatening, takes into account numeracy and literacy skills. So I guess you would have to have an understanding of how you engage people in learning that's meaningful.

Facilitators

- Ability to foster successful working relationships (with the other facilitators)

I think as a facilitator it is about being able to come together as a team.

I've really enjoyed doing it, I was really enthusiastic for this, I've really enjoyed working with [the other facilitators] you know, for five people who didn't know each other, we've managed to get on really well and work well together and be supportive of each other.

Facilitators

- Shared values and definitions on key issues in family work

Facilitators in this evaluation highlighted the importance of their having shared values as a team and stressed that this would be an area that may require some support in future programme deliveries, where facilitators come from different disciplines and typically have different definitions of key issues;

It is worrying; you know child protection, what someone perceives to be a child protection issue someone else might not perceive to be a child protection issue. They all have different definitions and ideas and who's leading?

It'll be very interesting when they roll out this programme, how it works in terms of when they have [facilitators] from different disciplines, having different views and opinions on parents and young people.

Facilitators

Facilitator Numbers and Gender Mix

Facilitators underlined the importance of having five facilitators to run a programme, with at least one being male. The number was necessary for effective session management, ensuring sessions ran to time, providing individual support in sessions and addressing any emotional distress or violent outbursts, where a participant may need to be separated to another part of the venue.

Because it is so time constrained, like you've literally only got three minutes for this...we found it helpful to have that third person there to say "right we need to be moving on" so someone keeping an eye on the time.

Having a spare worker that could take someone...if they kick off

Facilitators

Facilitators and parents felt that male representation within the facilitation team was highly important in order to deliver the male perspective, to ensure that the programme felt inclusive for male participants, for any dads and young men on the programme to feel more comfortable and gender-represented, and for participants to see men and women working together and problem solving.

I was glad there was another man there, being the only dad! It was a bit scary at first, with it just being women, sitting together, but after a couple of weeks you got used to it. It would have felt more strange if it had been all women [facilitators]. I might not have come back, I'm not sure.

Parent

It's important to have male facilitators on programmes; we had one dad on our programme. It's important for young people to see males and females working together, having disputes without the violence.

Facilitator

Facilitator team work

Facilitators discussed the importance of effective team work, including meeting and planning together, identifying the strengths and skill sets of each facilitator, and agreeing on the different roles to be taken within programme delivery.

- ***Time to meet and plan***

The time to meet together and plan the delivery of the sessions was pivotal to the success of the programme, according to the facilitators' experience during this pilot. The facilitators were from different agencies therefore it was a significant challenge to arrange meetings, which in turn presented significant challenges to preparing and delivering the programme.

We all struggled to even meet because we all work in different projects and our diaries get very full.

If you want to deliver a first class, effective programme you have got to have time to meet with the others, you've got to know which part of the programme you're developing, you've got to check that the resources are appropriate.

Facilitators

Facilitator time was released through backfilling their roles and this felt somewhat unsatisfactory for both managers and facilitators. They described their ideal situation as more of a designated role as a Strengthening Families Programme facilitator, perhaps an integrated position of Strengthening Families Programme facilitator and family support worker. This would create more of an accessible pool of facilitators.

One of the difficulties with the facilitators is that we are paying the agencies the facilitators work for to back fill their posts. However this does not appear to be happening successfully. I think if you could free up a smaller amount of facilitators and have a part time post for people, I think that would work better, so you're backfilling properly.

Manager

I know for some [facilitators] on the programme, its also been an addition to what they're meant to be doing as a full time job and we were told that that wouldn't happen, and its quite clearly happened for some of the facilitators, they've had quite a rough ride really.

Facilitator

- **Identifying strengths**

Facilitators were able to identify their own strengths and decide on roles within the programme accordingly, based on skills and preferences, for example, one facilitator took more responsibility for the resources, another took more of a lead with games in the sessions. This meant that facilitators felt comfortable with their roles within the sessions and this has a positive impact on their delivery;

I hate doing stuff on flip chart, so [facilitator 2] took that role, and I took more of the verbal lead. So it was finding out, between us, what our strengths were, what we were comfortable with doing and so...when we were working together it came over more relaxed.

Facilitator

This opportunity to collaboratively decide on roles within sessions based on strengths and preferences worked well for facilitators. However, they were concerned this may not be the case in future programmes, where they may not have the opportunity to meet together and develop a working relationship which supported this collaboration;

[Facilitator] took charge of the resources because [they] liked doing it, [another] took responsibility for the financial side of things and keeping things in check. [Another] is quite intellectual so was able to focus in on the processes and how to get the best from them. But the next time that can't happen because I don't know these people.

So I think that's important for the next programmes, especially because you're going to be working with people you've never met before, seeing what their skills are, and what they want to do. Because we should be able to do it all [any part of the programme], but there's stuff where you know yourself that you'd be more comfortable with.

Facilitators

- **Role identification**

Coming from multiple agencies, facilitators highlighted the importance of identifying the different roles and responsibilities within their facilitation team. For example, whose responsibility is it to find the venue? To conduct a risk assessment of the venue? To conduct risk assessments of the families? What is the reporting process for any child protection issues that may arise in the sessions?

Usually if we do co-work it's with other agencies, but we would normally take the lead in child protection issues. Where with this, where do we go? If its one of our families do we pick it up...We got that sorted out at the beginning, so it would go to the manager and then to the agency that had referred.

Facilitator

In this pilot programme, facilitators were in post before the coordinator and were keen to deliver a programme after having been trained, and therefore took on added responsibility for identifying families to participate in the programme (who they were currently working with), finding a suitable venue and conducting risk assessments for participants and venue. Facilitators highlighted, however, that although they were happy to assume this role in the pilot, in future these responsibilities will be passed over to the coordinator who is now in post.

We did risk assessments before we started. It shouldn't be the facilitator's job, it should be the coordinators, but [coordinator] wasn't in post so we did it jointly, and then when [coordinator] came into post, she took that up. Same with referrals, once [coordinator] came into post, that was passed over to her.

Facilitator

Effective working relationships between the facilitators directly impacted on the success of the programme. Facilitators in the pilot felt they worked very well together, they 'gelled', they were able to collaboratively share roles and responsibilities in delivering the programme. Because they were happy working together, they felt this was obvious to the families and that it enhanced their ability to deliver the programme. Facilitators spoke of their team being a model for families on the issues of negotiation / communication / valuing each other that families were learning about on the programme.

Facilitators voiced their concern that because of their experience facilitating this pilot, they may have to assume lead roles within future facilitation teams where the rest of the team were delivering the programme for the first time;

I just feel that because I've run the programme before there's an expectation on me to be leading the sessions. But I feel in the dark. We won't have any time to meet together as a team beforehand [before the programme starts].

Facilitator

Addressing programme challenges

To address the concerns they had with aspects of the programme, the facilitators made a number of minor changes to certain activities and exercises, and for areas of the programme that they could not change (e.g. the DVD), they ensured that their facilitation techniques enabled relevancy for families and encouraged family engagement.

- ***Dealing with time constraints***

In order to address the challenge of delivering the quantity and complexity of each session's content, within the prescribed timings (e.g. 3 minutes), facilitators identified the key learning outcomes within each session, so they could afford to miss out other aspects of the programme, in order to keep within the time constraints. They also replaced some of the games which had complex rules with quick and easy to understand games.

On occasions we changed the games because again the instructions were quite complicated and it would have taken a lot longer than the two minutes you get to explain something.

Facilitator

- ***Addressing literacy difficulties***

To address literacy difficulties and parents' and young people's sense of discomfort around the use of writing, the facilitators adapted the exercises from individual written work into group work with a flipchart, and facilitators acting as scribes. This worked very well, and enabled the participants to focus on the learning and the issues and experiences they were discussing, rather than focus on their writing.

So we made sure that in as many exercises as we could that there would be a minimum of writing and that worked, and if we hadn't done that, we wouldn't have got through half the material we were meant to get through.

Facilitators

- ***Addressing the DVDs***

Facilitators used solution focused approaches to discuss the content of the DVDs with families, and offered different ways of doing things, for example, where a family meeting was modelled by a family sitting around a table with flipcharts, facilitators suggested other ways of meeting and planning together that were relevant and accessible for the individual families taking part in the programme. Therefore, the way the sessions were facilitated broached the potentially difficult issue that the DVD families may look and sound different from the participating families;

Talking to the parents, they felt [the DVD] was ok actually, once it was explained that it was the content of what they were saying that was what they wanted to listen to, not necessarily how they looked or where they were or the locations where they were talking and meeting.

Facilitator

On one or two occasions, due to technical difficulties, facilitators had had to use role-play to act out some of the content of the DVDs, and parents and young people had preferred this approach. Families reported that it was more fun, more relevant to them, more interactive and they were able to concentrate more on the words and the issues being discussed, without the distraction of unfamiliar voices and surroundings.

It was better when the facilitator acted it out...they still had to stick to what was on the DVD, but it was better, it was funny.

Parent

And the advantage of it being done like that is that they can come in, you know when you're watching a DVD, you have to listen to it all and when you come to the end, the question you have you lose.

Facilitator

Parents said that was more fun and they were able to concentrate more on the language, without the additional distractions of the visuals.

Facilitator

The possibility of re-shooting the DVD with actors from the North East was discussed, in order to make the DVD more accessible to local families;

There is a possibility that we might, if we can, re-shoot the video with 'northern' families to make it more relevant to their lives... Every area of the UK has it's own accent, dialect and culture so maybe there should be a regional DVD for areas just to reflect that and make it more relevant.

Coordinator

- ***Programme summary slideshow***

Instead of the slideshow in the final week, facilitators took photographs in sessions and created a photograph album collaboratively with the participants, asking parents and young people to add their comments to the photographs. This was a more personal, immediate and engaging activity with the same outcome, where families reflect on all that they have learned and thought about over the different sessions. Each person also had their own album and chose the photographs that they felt best represented their time in the programme. This was something for people to keep as a reminder of their experiences on the programme.

What you're meant to do is the facilitator stands and says; "session one was about..." and you show them some photos, then, "session two was about" and so on. So everything is prescribed... We thought with the photograph albums, they need to take something away with them that's personal...photographs are accessible, and they're immediate.

Facilitator

Referrals

The families who are referred in to the programme are a central ingredient in the effective delivery of the programme. Facilitators discussed the impact that the mix and dynamics of families can have on programme delivery;

It's a huge task picking out who should and should not do the programme. Some of the reasons behind children's behaviour will be emotional, so do you need to look at that within the family before they come on the programme?

That's one of the things that needs to be looked at; the mix of families coming in. We did a session on the training where we should have the extreme from both ends of the spectrum, so you maybe have one from the top, one from the bottom and a couple in the middle bit, so you've got people who have got some of the skills to bring on other families who don't have the skills.

Facilitator

Facilitators suggested engaging families with young people in the final year of junior school, with milder levels of difficulties, in order to utilise the programme as a preventative intervention for families;

Looking at school as referrers...looking at year six, the last year of junior school, picking out children there that maybe don't have a wadge of problems, but who are on the fringe, and getting them before they go on to the big schools, doing some programmes at that age.

Facilitator

The numbers of families recruited into the programme was underlined as an important consideration. Facilitators highlighted their concerns around increased numbers of families within a programme, in view of the impact these increased numbers would have on delivery of this time constrained, complex programme. Conversely, managers felt that increasing the initial numbers of families recruited into programmes would compensate for the expected drop-out rate;

If we had had more families to start with, maybe 12-14 families because there's drop out, and if you're left with four or five families I think it makes it difficult for everyone.

Manager

Looking to the future: Continued referrals

The Strengthening Families Project within Changing Trax will continue to run a further two Strengthening Families Programmes. As a result of effective networking and awareness raising, referrals are being received from a range of agencies, and from families themselves;

Referrals come from a mixture of places including; parent support advisors in schools, Social Services, Looked after Children (LAC) prevention teams, CAMHS and self-referrals. Facilitators themselves filled the first course, but referrals are now coming through as a result of my networking and awareness raising.

Coordinator

This influx of referrals has led to the Strengthening Families Project collaborating with the RESPECT agenda within Newcastle;

The local authority received RESPECT Agenda money which came on line in June 2007. I have been able to use RESPECT trained facilitators, I have also had to use RESPECT Strengthening Families courses due to the number of referrals I have received.

Coordinator

Information sharing

Facilitators and parents highlighted the importance of 'knowledge transfer' at various points in the programme, from referrers to facilitators, from facilitators to follow-up practitioners and for families to transfer their learning, both during the programme and afterwards, to sustain this learning.

- ***Pre-programme (referrers to facilitators; facilitators to referrers)***

Prior knowledge about families was ensured in this pilot, since families were referred in from facilitators' agencies. This prior knowledge meant facilitators were aware of any issues in the families, where they would have to be particularly sensitive in their delivery of the programme. The facilitators were also aware of the literacy skills of the families, and this helped to develop their alternative methods of delivery, for example group work instead of individual work.

I knew some of the families who came on this programme, so I knew about literacy skills, I knew about some of the issues that were going on that you would have to be sensitive about different things.

I think if you look at the referrals you've got to have the right information, and enough information. Our coordinator is going to go and do home visits with people and get the information that way, and I think that's what's needed.

Facilitators

In addition to the knowledge transfer from referrers to facilitators regarding the families who have joined the programme, facilitators highlighted a second flow of knowledge transfer that was important at the pre-programme stage; from facilitators to referrers, regarding the aims of the programme, and underlining the importance of referrers' follow-up work with families (where appropriate);

[Coordinator] may be already doing this...I think it would be important to meet with the referrers, to explain to them that they have a commitment to ensuring that they have an overview of the programme, so they have an understanding of some of the main learning points, so they can pick them up with their family.

Facilitator

- ***During and post-programme (facilitators to referrers / family practitioners)***

Facilitators highlighted how important it was that they not only delivered the programme but also worked with some of the families, therefore, they were able to share with their organisations the different exercises and learning developments that families were engaging with on the programme. This meant that the family support workers were aware of what families were experiencing and learning, and could build on this with their own work with families both during and after the programme.

I spent group supervision telling the workers here about the programme, and we did some of the exercises from the programme together so that they could get an idea of what we were trying to do with the families on the programme. I think we have a very experienced team here who can pick up what we've been doing.

Facilitator

Having experienced this multi-faceted role with families, of referrer, facilitator and practitioner who would continue to work with the family, the facilitators in this pilot realised the importance of this transfer of knowledge from families' progress on the programme to their family work with practitioners. They therefore recommend that this flow of information sharing is available in future programmes;

If the workers who work with the family have information about what we are going to be doing [on the programme] so they can follow it through over the time that we're working with them, and continue that afterwards.

Facilitator

However, facilitators emphasised that not every referrer would have a continued role with a family, and therefore would not be able to take forward this follow-up work with families. Facilitators therefore felt

that a strategy needed to be devised in order to develop the most effective information sharing and knowledge transfer system between practitioners, in order to best support families to achieve the optimum impact from their attendance on the programme.

It might not be in their role to take it on and work with the family, for example, if they're education welfare offices, it could be that they could look at a part of it.

Facilitator

Follow-up work

- ***Transferring the learning***

Follow-up work with families was highlighted by both facilitators and parents as vital in supporting the transfer of a family's learning from the programme into their lives. The information sharing between facilitators and practitioners working with the family (as discussed above) was highlighted as an important ingredient in this follow-up work. Both facilitators and parents underlined the importance of follow-up work to support families to put their learning from the programme into practice;

One parent had decided that they were going to follow through on one of the particular [points in the programme], but then the parent's mam didn't want to do that, and there was that kind of conflict within the family.

Facilitator

Facilitators explained that within this pilot there had been no funding available for the follow-up "booster" sessions which are part of the Strengthening Families Programme, and they felt that these would have been useful to support the transfer and sustainability of the learning;

I guess where there needed to be more work was that all of those families would have appreciated some booster sessions, to practice, because whilst you can take on the idea and you can try it once, you needed to practice those techniques.

I think what we would like to do is the booster sessions, I think there should be something that keeps going back and re-feeding it back in. you know "remember when we did this", so its not just a piece of work and that's it, because then there's no contact afterwards, but [it would be good if] there was that bit that was continuous, that keeps it going, where you can go back and re-look "remember when you set up these consequences, are you carrying them through?"

Facilitators

Parents confirmed that they would have appreciated some booster sessions, to support them putting their learning into practice;

I'd like to do the booster sessions, you know, the follow on from this.

Parent

- ***Sustaining the learning***

Follow-up work was also identified as key in sustaining a family's learning from the programme. Parents and facilitators discussed the importance of booster sessions in supporting this embedding of family learning;

Maybe do a follow-on for a year, to see how your life's changing.

Parent

Because the facilitators worked with many of the families on the programme, they were able to conduct this follow-up work with the families;

We have been able to know how the programme has been working because the families come from [facilitator's agency], so we can use some of the models that were presented in the programme, we can take these back into our work with the family.

Facilitator

Having had this opportunity for information sharing and follow-up work with families on the programme, facilitators voiced their concern for future programmes where this may not be possible, where referrals will come from multiple agencies and facilitators will not have prior knowledge of families, and families may not have the opportunity for follow-up work;

Its going to be really interesting if families are being referred in and we don't know the family, the people who've referred them in don't know the programme, I don't know how its going to continue, and [how] the kind of essence that the parents get from the programme is going to stay with them and spread, and evaporate around the rest of their family members. So I've got concerns about that...I think that would be the downfall of the programme.

Some of the people who are referring will simply refer but don't have a relationship, they don't continue to see the family.

Facilitators

In recognition of the importance of follow-up work with families, the Changing Trax team discussed their aims to include a family support dimension into their service, subject to funding;

At the moment the project stands alone but in the future I would like a family support element to be built into Changing Trax to help families maintain the changes they have made.

Coordinator

- ***Support beyond the programme***

Also helping to sustain and embed any learning and development within families, the facilitators and coordinator encouraged parents to think about "what's next" for them after the programme, identifying different courses and activities within their communities that they would like to access, therefore putting support in place for families to access beyond the programme;

The facilitators encouraged families to think about what they would like to do after the programme and we know all of the support workers who are working with them.

Facilitator

It was suggested that the learning could be further embedded with parents who have completed the programme progressing on to take up a facilitation role within the programme;

Something to progress on from what they're doing...some of the parents actually facilitating groups, so it's really embedded.

Manager

Programme Practicalities

- ***Session Materials***

Facilitators described the important and time consuming task of preparing the resources they needed for each session. Facilitators in the pilot programme had taken on this responsibility whilst awaiting appointment of both the programme coordinator and administrator;

You need lots of cuts out [magazine clippings]. One of the exercises was a treasure map. And there were four sections to that. So you need lots of pictures, and that's a really consuming job,

getting the right pictures. A couple of the facilitators did a lot of work outside of the sessions, so that those resources were there.

The coordinator highlighted the important role of administrative support in ensuring that session materials are available for facilitators;

We are currently waiting for our administration worker to come into post so it has been quite a juggling act for me! I am putting together the resource packs for the programme and am splitting them up into individual sessions so I am going to have boxes with all the resources and paper work for each session which is taking a lot of time.

Coordinator

- ***Guest Young People***

As part of the programme, older young people were invited to come and speak to the young people in the programme, to participate in discussions around applying the programme learning “in real life context”. Facilitators and managers reiterated how important it was to select a group of young people who would have positive messages that echoed the programme learning;

The facilitators felt that there should be more emphasis on the problems the young people had when they were younger, their own troubles with their parents etc...The facilitators were concerned that the message the young people were giving was “don’t worry because we managed after we left school and after we left home”. We may have to look at maybe getting some school councils involved.

Coordinator

- ***Guest speakers for parents***

It was suggested that in future programmes, guest speakers for parents would be invited, to answer questions and discuss issues of particular interest to each programme cohort, replicating previous work on other parenting programmes;

In future it may be worth adding in an extra session. This has worked well in parenting programmes in the past where we have added an extra session and invited guest speakers to discuss topics such as benefits, childhood illness etc.

Coordinator

- ***Venue***

Facilitators described the necessity of a neutral venue, with two rooms, one each for the parents’ and young people’s sessions, with one of the rooms large enough to host the family sessions. Whilst planning the pilot programme, the coordinator was not yet in post; therefore, facilitators had sourced the venue themselves. They highlighted that it was important to visit and familiarise themselves with the venue before the programme began.

- ***Transport***

Facilitators and managers identified the importance of the provision of transport for families, to and from the venue, enabling families to attend the programme who otherwise may not have the means to attend;

I think that the importance of the programme for me was that transport wasn’t an issue for families, and you know we work with families who sometimes don’t have the bus fare, I know from experience that some of the families are poor and haven’t got money. I was at a case conference the other day and someone was saying “I couldn’t keep that appointment the other day because I didn’t have the bus fare”.

Facilitator

That was a big help getting picked up.

It would have taken forever to get here [without the taxi].

Parents

The project utilised a local taxi company to provide transport between home and programme for families, which generally worked well, however, participants explained that towards the end of the programme, the taxi company's time-keeping lapsed, often being late in bringing families to the programme, or late to collect families. For the final celebration and evaluation session, the taxi failed to arrive to collect families, therefore the session was rearranged and a different taxi firm contracted in to the project.

The only problem we found with the taxis was towards the end of the programme. As a result we changed taxi companies, but apart from that I think everything worked really well.

Coordinator

- ***Childcare***

Childcare was highlighted by participants as an important ingredient in delivering effective programmes for families. Within this pilot programme, childcare costs were repaid to families, which was described as a fairly costly enterprise for the Changing Trax project;

One of the things was I don't think we explored enough whether families had their own resources in terms of childminding which I think has cost [the project] quite a lot.

Therefore, for future programmes, Changing Trax will approach the Newcastle Childminding Network for possible collaboration in providing childcare for families attending the programme. Families may also have another family member who would be able to provide childcare.

In future courses we will utilise community child minders

Coordinator

- ***Good endings: for families and facilitators***

Facilitators felt there could have been more of a marked ending to the programme, for both facilitators (e.g. meeting up to mark the end of the programme) and for families (e.g. having a 'graduation');

I kind of feel that the ending of this programme for me felt unsatisfactory, and it felt unsatisfactory the way we said goodbye as a team. We just sort of stood outside and said "bye". I think there should have been something coordinated by the Changing Trax, just to bring us together. We're all from different disciplines so it would have been nice to have the opportunity together to unwind rather than now I'm embarking on working with a whole different team.

If you run the programme the way the Americans talked about it, at the end of their programme, someone of note would come to give them their certificates. They call it the graduation. So why didn't we call it the graduation? So the ending I think they need to get right.

Facilitators

- ***Continued funding***

Facilitators and managers emphasised the importance of continued funding in order to continue providing the Strengthening Families Programme within the Changing Trax Service. Both facilitators and managers discussed the challenges in delivering the programme within a short-term funded context;

I think Changing Trax are under a lot of pressure, I mean come on, they've got funding until March? How crazy is that? How can you actually roll something out and see if it happens and do the tracking in less than a year. Because the coordinator didn't come into post until July so what are they expecting this team to do?

Facilitator

Looking to the future

Participants discussed the future plans they had for developing the practical ingredients of delivering the programme, including changes to the ways they will provide childcare, and additional support for families, including engaging with healthy eating and utilising volunteer escorts to and from the programme sessions;

We have looked at childcare arrangements and have changed taxi companies to suit. I have advertised for volunteers to escort families to and from the sessions, and that is something I'd like to utilise in the future. This would also provide the family with more support and it might be a way to develop family support issues. I have also linked up with Newcastle Community Food Initiative, a food network in Newcastle with regards to getting funding for a healthier diet (fruit and vegetables) and trying to get the families involved in thinking about healthier ways of eating.

Coordinator

Funding was underlined as vital in enabling the progress and development of the Changing Trax Project;

Funding is needed! Family support I think is something that really does need to come in at some stage. I also think it would be good to maintain some of the progress, especially for self-referrals who may not be working with anybody else. I do offer and have done C.A.F's on families so that is a way to signpost people on. However if a family support worker was added to Changing Trax they could be a lead professional (on the C.A.F) and they could manage that. More money for advertising [is needed] to raise the profile of the project.

Coordinator

Outcomes for Families

The outcomes for parents and young people attending the programme were assessed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Parents and young people completed pre- and post- programme assessments, which a) measured their perspective of their family's cohesion and adaptability, and b) assessed the strengths and difficulties the young person had across a number of domains, including emotional symptoms (e.g. anxiety), hyperactivity and difficulties interacting with their peers. During their focus groups, parents and young people discussed the outcomes they had experienced for themselves and their families as a result of attending the Strengthening Families Programme. In their interviews, facilitators and managers also reflected on the outcomes they felt families had gained from the programme.

Family cohesion and adaptability

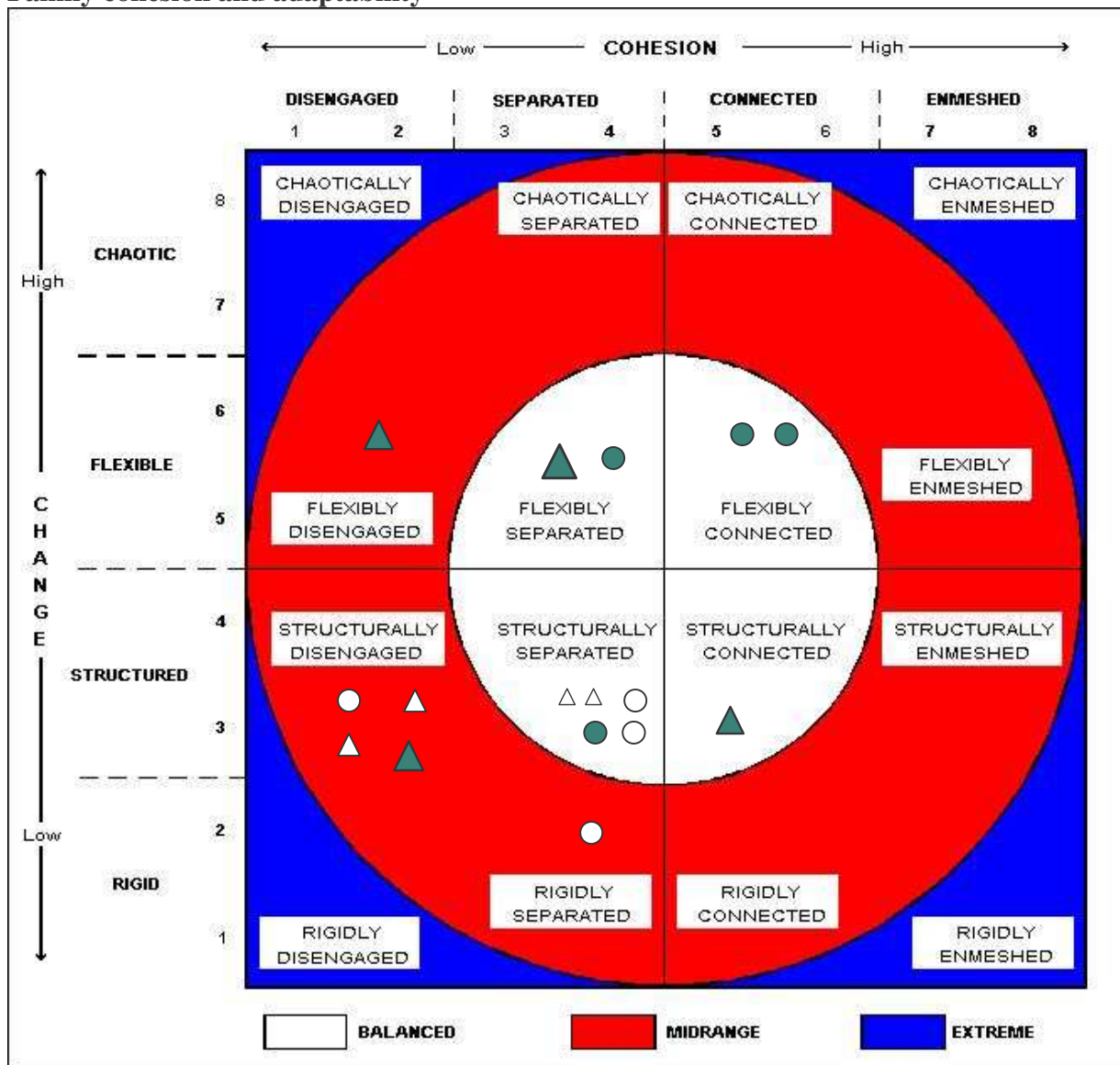


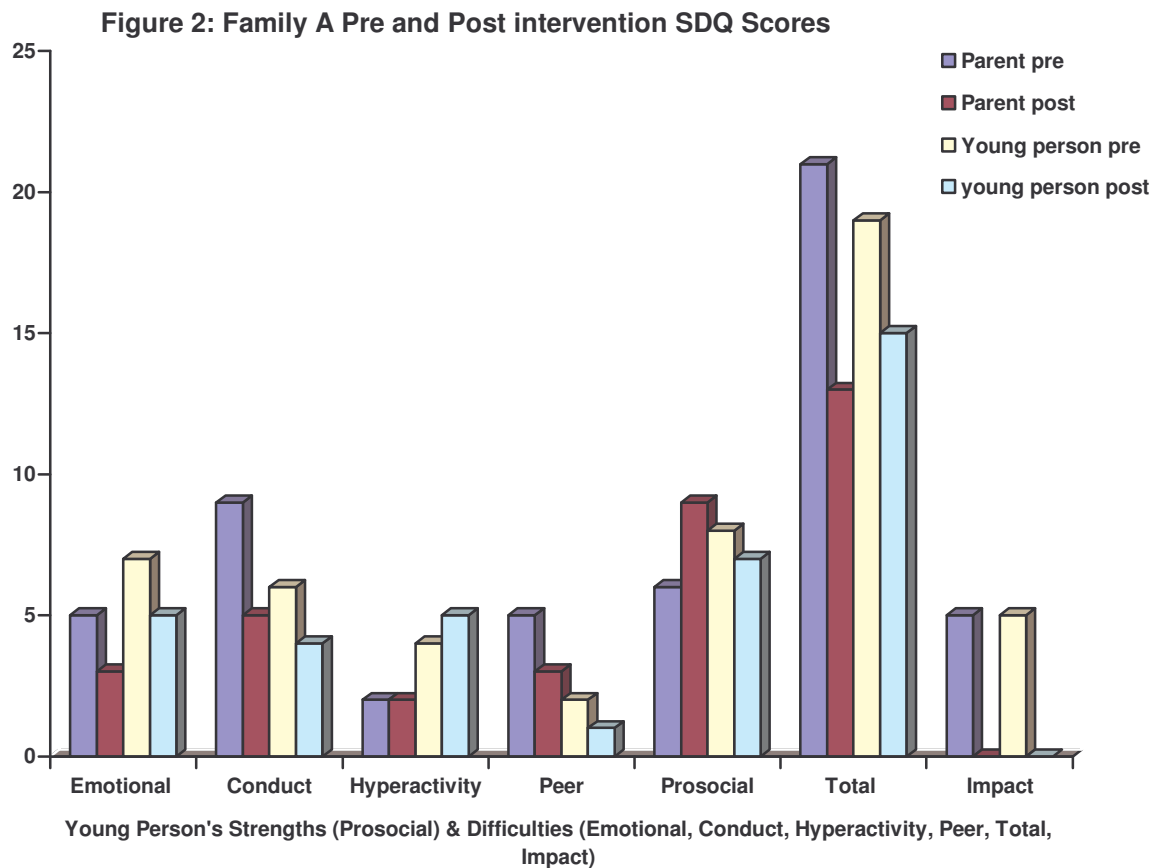
Figure 1: Mean pre- and post-intervention scores from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale (FACES II; Olson et al, 1982)

- △ Young person pre-intervention
 - Parent pre-intervention
- ▲ Young person post-intervention
 - Parent post-intervention

Before taking part in the intervention, parents and young people described their families as having low levels of cohesion and low levels of ability to adapt to change. Figure 1 shows that families' scores were all located within the low cohesion and low adaptability quadrant (bottom left hand quadrant), with 50% falling within the balanced range and 50% in the midrange, illustrating greater than typical levels of need. Parents and young people described their families as separated and disengaged from each other, and felt they were structured and inflexible in their approach to problem solving and adapting to change.

After taking part in the Strengthening Families Programme, a significant, positive shift is seen in their scores. Figure 1 shows that although one parent and one young person's scores remained within the low cohesion and low adaptability quadrant, the majority of scores moved to the "high adaptability", upper half of the graph, showing that parents and young people now viewed their families as flexible and capable in adapting to change. Low cohesion scores also shifted to reveal that 2 parents and one young person felt their families were more cohesive after they had participated in the programme. Despite some families maintaining feelings of low cohesion, 90% of parents and young people's scores fell within the balanced, i.e. 'typical' range, after taking part in the programme, compared to only 50% prior to the programme.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)



Family A

The areas of strengths and difficulties showing the most improvement after the programme for this young person are:

- *Emotional difficulties*

Prior to the intervention, the parent and self-report indicated the young person had particularly *high* levels of emotional symptoms, including feelings of anxiety and unhappiness, however, on completion of the

programme these scores dramatically shifted into the *low need* or 'normal range', and comparable with 80% of the population.

- ***Conduct difficulties***

Both the parent and the self-report indicated a decrease in the level of conduct difficulties for this young person after taking part in the programme. The parent scored conduct as an area of *very high* need, and this fell to *high* need after the intervention. The young person scored their own conduct as an area of *high* need before the programme and this decreased to *some* need after taking part in the intervention.

- ***Peer difficulties***

Before the programme, the parent scored the young person as having high levels of need (i.e. great difficulties) in interacting with people of their own age. After the programme, this *high* level need had shifted to *some need*. The young person themselves also indicated an increase in their abilities to interact with peers after the programme, with their initial score of *low need* shifting to *very low need*

- ***Prosocial behaviour***

Although the parent described their young person as showing high levels of prosocial behaviour before the programme, they scored their young person as having even more kind and helpful behaviour after taking part in the Strengthening Families Programme. This was demonstrated by a shift from low levels of need in this area, to very low levels of need. The young person's score for themselves remained at low levels of need, indicating they believed they were kind, helpful and sharing before and after the programme.

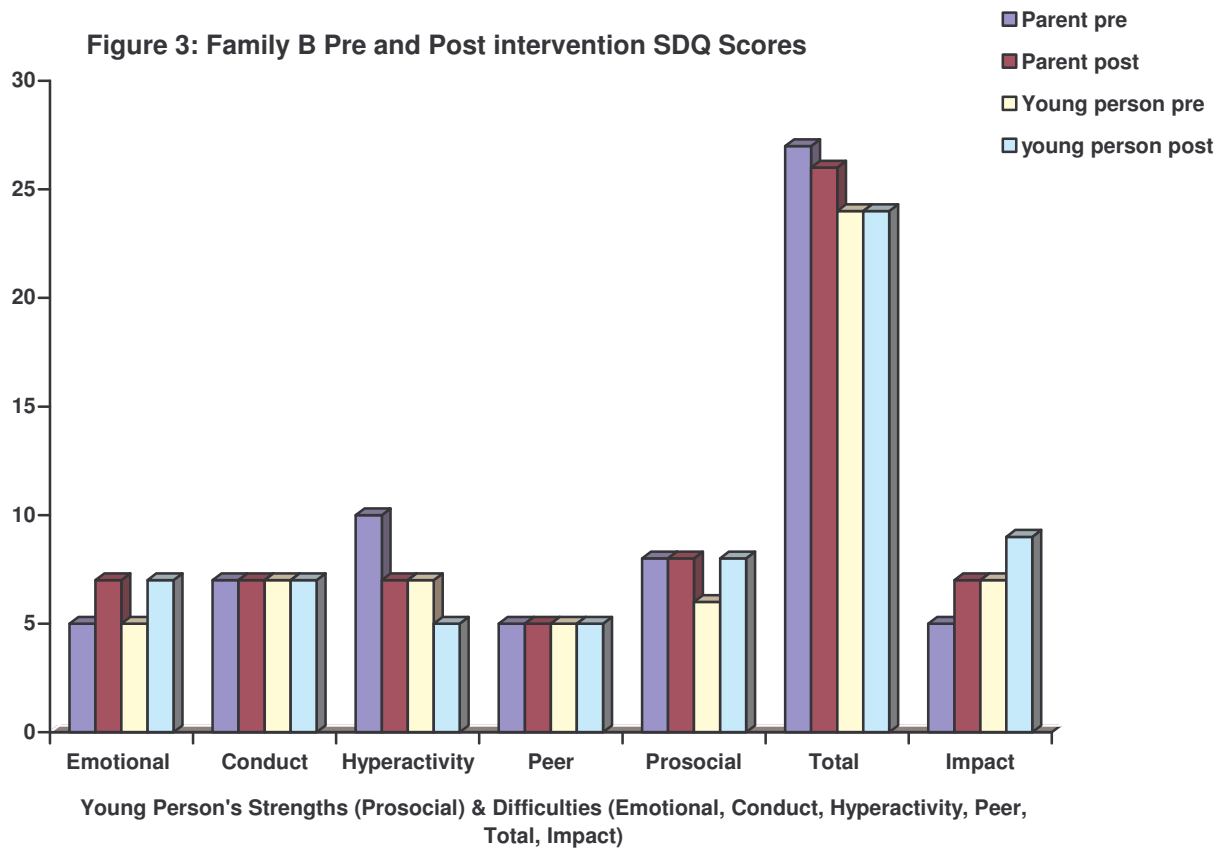
The parent and self-report both scored the young person with low levels of hyperactivity both before and after the programme.

- ***Total difficulties***

The parent's score for the young person's overall difficulties dramatically moved from '*abnormal*', indicating high levels of need across the domains of the assessment, comparable with 10% of the population, to '*normal*', indicating low levels of need and comparable with 80% of the population. The young person scored their total difficulties as *borderline* before the programme and this score improved to *normal* after the programme.

- ***Impact***

Similarly the parent's and young person's scores on the impact of the child's difficulties on the child's life shifted from '*abnormal*' (i.e. atypical negative impact on their life) to the *normal* range (i.e. typical for 80% of young people of this age).



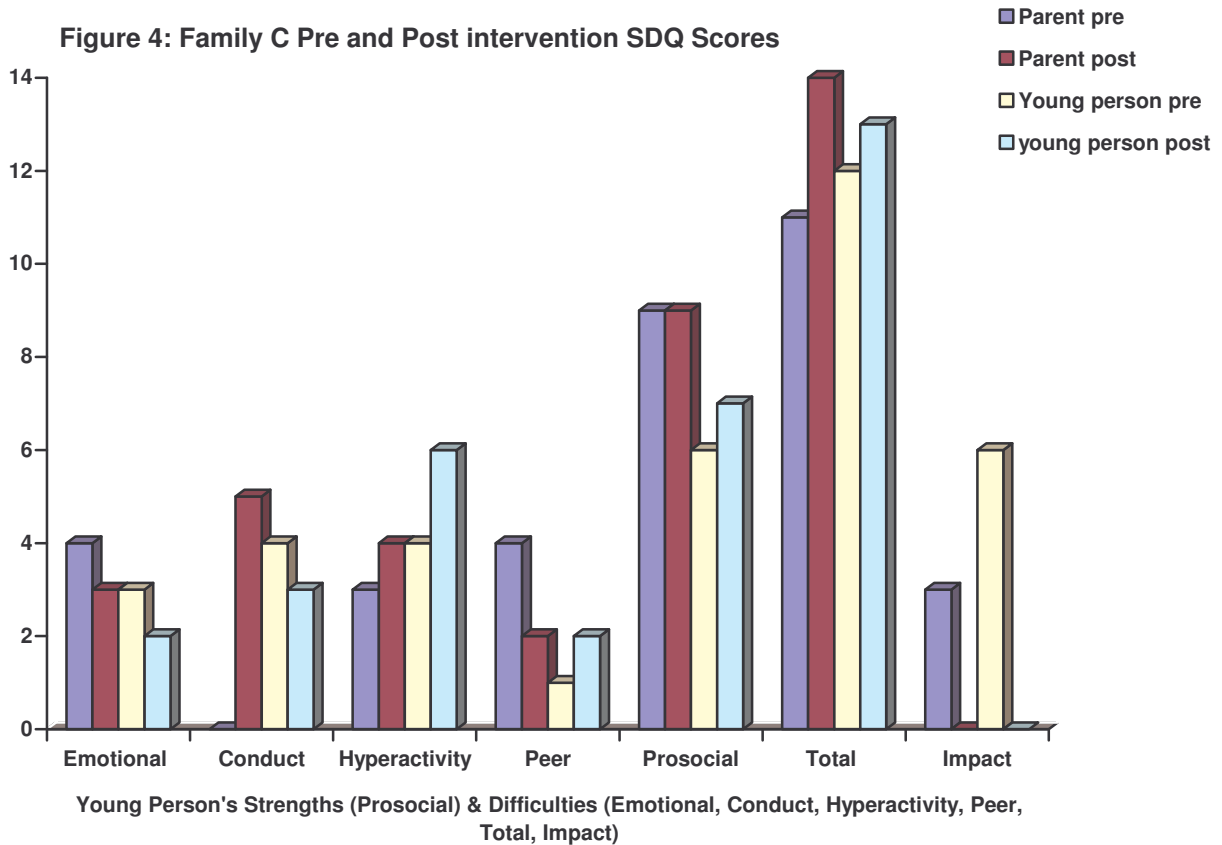
Family B

The only area to show improvement after the programme for this young person is:

- **Hyperactivity**

The parent and young person highlighted an improvement in the young person's level of hyperactivity on completion of the Strengthening Families Programme, with a positive shift from very high need to **high need** and high need to **low need** respectively.

No other improvements were recorded, with the pre- and post intervention scores for emotional symptoms, conduct difficulties and peer difficulties remaining at **high** levels of need. The total difficulties score and the impact that the difficulties have on the young person's life were also scored as high, within the '**abnormal**' range, and this was unchanged following intervention. The young person was scored, on self-report and by their parent, as having high levels of kind and helpful behaviour, indicating **low need** in this area, both before and after the programme.



Family C

The areas of strengths and difficulties showing the most improvement after the programme for this young person are:

- **Emotional difficulties**

The parent identified *some* emotional difficulties for the young person before the programme, however, after taking part in the programme, this score decreased to *low need*, indicating emotional difficulties within the normal range. The young person themselves scored their emotional symptoms as an area of *low need* both before and after the programme.

- **Conduct**

The young person scored themselves with *some* behaviour difficulties prior to the programme, and this score decreased to *low need* after taking part in the intervention. However, the parent's scores indicated a negative shift, where they had scored the young person with very low levels of conduct difficulties at the start of the programme, and shifted this score to *high need* after the intervention.

- **Hyperactivity**

Both the parent and young person identified *low need* in the area of hyperactivity before the intervention. However, the parent continued to score the young person with low levels of hyperactivity after the programme, whereas the young person's self-score increased to indicate *some* need in this area.

- **Peer interactions**

Prior to taking part in the programme, the parent scored the young person as having high levels of difficulty in interacting with their peers, and this score decreased to *low need*, within the normal range, at the end of the programme. The young person scored themselves with no difficulties interacting with peers, both before and after the programme, indicating *low need* in this area.

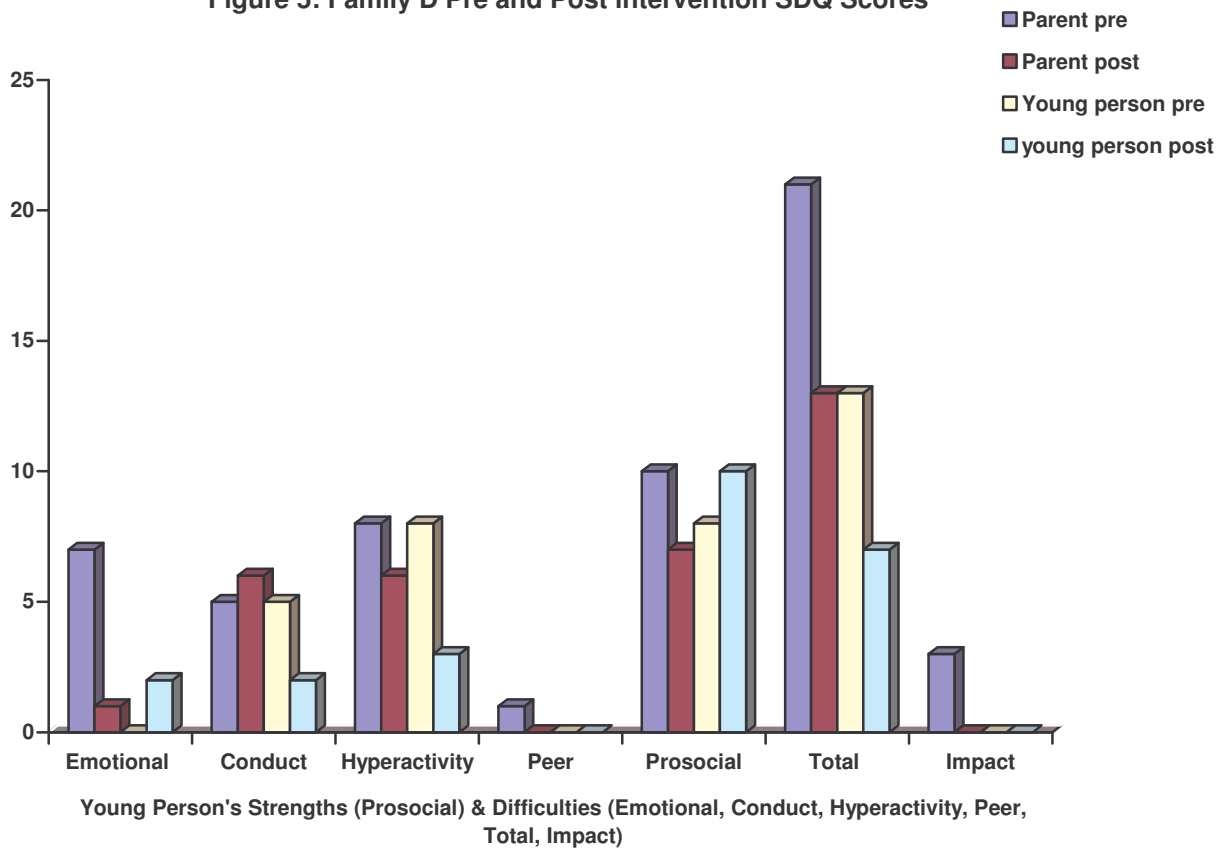
- **Total difficulties**

The young person’s overall difficulties were scored within the *‘normal’* range by the parent and young person before the intervention, with no change in the young person’s score following intervention, but an increase into the *‘borderline’* range in the parent’s post-intervention score.

- **Impact**

Before the programme, the parent and young person both scored the impact of the difficulties on the child’s life at a high level, within the *abnormal* range, comparable with only 10% of the population. After taking part in the intervention, both the parent and young person reported the impact of these difficulties had dramatically decreased to within the *normal* range, shared by 80% of the population.

Figure 5: Family D Pre and Post intervention SDQ Scores



Family D

- **Emotional difficulties**

The parent noted a dramatic decrease in the young person’s emotional symptoms, including anxiety and unhappiness following the intervention, where their score shifted from *high* to *low need*. The young person scored themselves as having a very low need in this area before the programme, and although this score increased after the intervention, the score remained within the low need, normal range.

- **Conduct**

The young person themselves noted a dramatic improvement in their reported conduct difficulties, with their scores falling from *high* to *low need* after taking part in the programme. Interestingly, the parent scored the young person as having high levels of conduct difficulties before and after the programme.

- **Hyperactivity**

The young person reported a considerable decrease in their levels of hyperactivity after taking part in the programme, with their scores falling from **high** to **low** need. Conversely their parent scored them as having **high** levels of hyperactivity before and after the programme.

Before and after the intervention, the parent and young person themselves felt they had little difficulty interacting with their peers and demonstrated positive social behaviour, such as sharing, being kind and helpful and considerate of others.

- **Total difficulties**

At the start of the programme, the parent scored the young person's overall difficulties within the **abnormal** range, indicating high levels of need and comparable with 10% of the population. After the programme, the parent reported a significant decrease in the overall difficulties, so much so that the score now fell within the **normal** range. Interestingly, the young person felt they had low levels of difficulties overall, both before and after the intervention, falling within **normal** levels, and comparable with 80% of the population.

- **Impact**

Similarly, the parent felt that the impact of the young person's difficulties was so severe that it fell within the **abnormal** range before they took part in the programme. After taking part, the parent's score for impact of the young person's difficulties shifted dramatically into the **normal** range, indicating a huge improvement in the parent's perception of impact on their lives. The young person reported the impact of their difficulties to be minimal before and after the programme, where their scores fell within the **normal** range pre- and post- assessment.



Qualitative Data

Participants discussed the range of outcomes for families who took part in the Strengthening Families Programme; particularly the development in communication and social interaction for all participants, the increase in emotional and social interactions within families, increase in parents' and young people's self esteem and self efficacy, through learning new skills and approaches, and setting goals for the future;

There was a social interaction [intra and inter families], there was an understanding there that you are not alone, there was time to spend with your young person in a safe, structured environment, your confidence was built, maybe a couple of things twiggled in your brain, like the example we gave about how often do you tell your child that you love them? For some people, that was a big realisation; "I don't, because I think they know".

Facilitator

Positive experiences

Facilitators highlighted the fact that the programme provided a positive experience for parents and young people;

The thing is, none of the programme says "you're really bad parents" it's not "this is what you should do", it's people discussing it together; "oh well I tried this or that". So for them I think it's probably been really positive for them that they haven't been condemned. They've been given some new skills that's given them the confidence to move on to do new things.

Nothing negative happened to those young people. And some of them were coming from very negative experiences.

It's great if you think that once a week you're going to go to a place where there's no hassle and everything that's said to you is going to be positive, and you're going to be complimented and you're going to chant that you're a strong young person who's got goals and you're going to practice how you're going to get those goals and you're going to have time with your mam or dad, then you're going to be taken there and taken back and it's lovely and I think if that's all they get out of it, that's an awful lot to get for that group of young people.

Facilitators

Young people echoed the overall enjoyment they had experienced within the programme;

I really like the games, the food and talking to people.

I liked the games. I liked the balloon game.

I liked the car game, when you had the cards and you had to do different things and make choices.

We had our own mottos to say, for the young people, and then we said mottos with our mams and dads. It was good.

Young People

Structure / routine

Facilitators highlighted that the programme became a routine for families who do not typically experience routine or boundaries. There were strict groundrules and timeframes within the programme and facilitators felt the strict timelines created boundaries that enabled families to feel safe and move on in their learning within the programme sessions. Therefore, the structure of the programme enabled the outcomes for the families.

It was a routine, and I think some of the things I struggle with in my role [with families] is trying to instil with families some understanding that it's important to have a routine, it's important to have boundaries.

It was something they got used to doing and they weren't fearful of it, so they moved on, because they had the boundaries and the structure.

Facilitators

Time out together

Parent, young people, facilitators and managers all felt that an important aspect of the programme was that it provided the parent and the young person with time and space to be together, away from their family environment where they typically do not have the opportunity to spend one-to-one time together;

I think the main benefit of this course was that the children were being able to spend some quality time with their parents as a family unit.

Coordinator

Just having an hour together, just having that time that they could spend with that one child, especially when they come from [having] four or five kids. And especially when the child is the oldest one and there's a lot of responsibility put on them for childcare and all the other things.

Facilitator

Parents appreciated this one-to-one “time-out”, and many remarked that they would miss the weekly programme sessions;

I enjoyed coming because it was my bit of free time, like one to one with [child]. Now I just think, what am I going to do on a Wednesday now!

It’s meant I can spend time with my daughter and meet other parents with the same problems as me.

Parents

Promoting communication

Participants described the ways the programme had supported the development of communication for individual family members, and within whole families, by increasing listening skills, patience and empathy.

What the programme lays out is being able to communicate with each other

Just to be able to say someone’s name...was a really excellent outcome, and having to look at someone when you’re talking to them

They could learn to talk to each other. In the first exercise where they’re doing the treasure maps, children are given questions to ask the parents and parents are given questions to ask the children. So they’re not having to stand there wondering what to say.

Facilitators

Listening

I think the young people learned how to listen to other people and not judge them when things weren’t going right.

Facilitator

The programme has given me more patience and I listen to my children more.

Parent

Empathy

There’s an exercise where [the young people] have to think what an adult’s stresses are, and they have to pick the top five. Then they ask the parents what their top five stresses are, to see if they’ve matched it up. Then the parents have to do the same for you. It gives them a different view about what the parent’s life is like and what the young people’s life is like. It gives them a chance to see it from the other side.

I think the children realised that its not easy doing what the parents do, and just that acknowledgement, even if it only lasts a few weeks, its there for them to take forward.

Facilitators

Improvements in relationships

Parents and young people described the differences they felt the programme had made to the quality and quantity of communication they experienced within their family, and in their interactions and friendships with others.

Parent-child relationships

Young people described improvements in their communication and interaction with their parent as a direct result of attending the programme. They emphasised that they now spent much more time with their parent, talking together and engaging in activities together;

I enjoyed coming here. Me and my mam spend more quality time together. Before we never, but now we do. We didn't used to talk to each other, but now we do.

We never used to sit and talk together or go out together, but now we know each other better.

I really like coming to Strengthening Families because we do more things as a family.

Young People

Parents noted the improvements in communication with their young people, particularly where their young person will now share information with them about their friends and about where they are going;

[Young person] will come and talk to us more, whereas before she never used to talk to me, she would always go and tell her aunty who lives up the road everything. Whereas now she does talk to me a little bit. Like before I wouldn't have got to know anything about her boyfriend, I wouldn't have got to know his name, or what he looked like, but now I've seen a picture of him, I haven't met him, but she's showed me a picture of him that's on her mobile.

She's starting to tell me where she's going more now, who she's going with, coming in at a sensible time, whereas before it was just any time.

Parents

Young people felt that the structure of the programme had supported this development of communication with their parent, particularly mentioning the mottos, where families recite a motto together, having a separate young people and parent's group, and the joint family session at the end of each weekly session;

We never used to talk together, but when we were saying the mottos, we were saying them together.

It was good to be in our own group because you could say things without your mam hearing, and then after when you came together [for the family session], you were able to say what you wanted to say to your mam, and they had to listen, and they asked you questions, and then we had to ask them questions, so it was good. We were all talking and listening to each other.

Young People

Emotional availability

Families described the improvements in their ability to share emotions with each other, and an increased sense of being closer as a family. Parents discussed the "Letters" exercise, and appreciated that this had helped them to share their feelings for their child with their child, in a way that felt more accessible than verbally sharing their feelings. Parents particularly appreciated receiving the letters from their young person, where their child had written about their feelings for the parent;

It was emotional when [child] read hers, and when I read hers, I was like "is that my daughter?" kind of thing. The things she was writing down, oh it was brilliant.

It means you know they've got it in them, but they won't say it to your face, but they'll write it down on paper.

Parents

Parents discussed how they had enjoyed sitting together with their young person and thinking about their family, and that they had found this to be an emotionally challenging exercise;

The family shield, we had to sit down together...we were talking to each other and thinking about what people are in your family, and what people help you...and what we thought about people in our family, you know?

And it was extended family, all the help around you, not just your family. It was quite hard to do, it caught you a bit, it was [emotional].

Parents

Parents reflected that the programme had helped them to think about many aspects of their parenting, including their emotional availability for their child;

I realised I didn't tell my daughter I loved her enough, that was hard.

Parent

Shared values

The programme supported families to identify their shared values, and to discuss and listen to each other's points of view. Facilitators felt this was another important outcome for improving cohesion and family relationships;

One of the things it looks at is the values within a family, and it's not something you ever discuss as a family. And it's made them look at what they value, and they came up with the same sort of stuff; "we agree on this and this" and there's stuff they don't agree on that they can talk about. It's bringing it back to basics; respecting each other, listening to each other.

Facilitator

Whole-Family relationships

Young people reported that the improvement in their relationship with their parent has had a positive impact on the relationships within the family as a whole;

Me and my mam talk together loads now. We didn't before, but now we talk a lot. It's different at home now because we talk a lot and we don't argue. Before we were always arguing. I get on better with my sister as well.

Young Person

Facilitators noticed the positive changes within and between family relationships as the programme progressed;

When they first came, they were quite separate, chairs here and there, little bit groups, where now, they're all sitting together.

The parents and young people [over the weeks] were different, seeing them together, they would talk a bit more, and when we asked, the young people would say "my mam and I did this"...so there was some of [the programme] that they had talked through.

There was a lot more cuddling and physical contact that I noticed from the beginning of the programme to the end of the programme and I just think that there was that feeling "I'm getting on"... that bonding.

Facilitators

Improved cohesion within families is also illustrated in the parents' and young people's post-programme assessment scores, where they describe feeling more connected as a family.

Friendships

Parents discussed the friendships they had made with the other parents within the programme, and the plans they had made to continue this friendship beyond the programme.

Oh yes, we're all going to meet up for a night out soon...we all got on so well.

Parent

Young people also highlighted the ways in which the programme had supported their social interactions with peers, particularly the approaches they had learned which help reduce stress and anger, and enable the young person to disengage from activities and friendships that they are uncomfortable with.

I felt better about knowing what to say when you don't want to do something, if you want to make different choices [from your friends].

Young Person

Their post-programme SDQ scores also show their improved abilities in interacting with peers. Parents' scores also describe the young people as more able in their interactions with others, and rate them as increasing in their kind and helpful behaviours.

Facilitators commented on the demonstration of the development of social interaction and friendships within the young people's group;

When you looked at them in the beginning they were four individuals, and at the end they weren't, they were a little group. And they'd made friends.

By week three they were really chatty, really open.

Facilitators

Specific exercises within the programme targeted the development of relationships within the young people's group;

The round of compliments was a lovely process, and it started off with something like "I like your shoes". Towards the end they started to compliment each other as people, you know, the attributes that they had as people, so there were comments like "I like the way you listen", or "I like your sense of humour", so that moved on, and it was that kind of developing of relationships.

Facilitators

Young people discussed how they had enjoyed this particular exercise that was a regular feature within each session;

It was good to do the compliments, they were good. They made you feel good about yourself, when other people said nice things and you thought of good things to say about other people. When we first started we said things like "I like your clothes" but at the end we were thinking about their personality and the good things about them as people. So that was good.

Young Person

Self efficacy: young people

Young people reported that taking part in the programme had helped them to feel less anxious and isolated, since they were able to see that other young people also experience a similar range of thoughts and emotions. Their SDQ scores also highlight much lower levels of anxiety and unhappiness on completion of the programme;

Before, I felt by myself, like I was the only one [with their thoughts and feelings and worries], but then I found out I wasn't the only one.

Young Person

The young people appreciated that the programme had introduced different approaches to manage their stress and anger levels, which had helped them to feel more in control of their emotions and of their responses to the world around them, therefore, giving them an increased sense of self-efficacy.

It helped me when I was feeling stressed. There's different things you can do, with your behaviour, to stop you feeling stressed, when you feel like you're getting stressed you can stop it.

I've stopped fighting with my sister.

Young Person

Parents also noted the decrease in their young person's anger and anxiety;

[Child] is a lot calmer now.

Parent

Parental and self-report post-programme scores on the young person's strengths and difficulties also illustrate this decrease in hyperactivity, anxiety and unhappiness and an increase in the young person's prosocial behaviour, where they are described as more helpful, kind and sharing.

Understanding consequences

Facilitators felt that an important outcome for the young people was in understanding the consequences of their behaviour;

I think one of the big learning points for them was the consequences of your actions and staying out of trouble by going through a series of statements and actions.

Facilitator

Young people themselves also highlighted the reflection on consequences as an important learning outcome for them;

I liked the reward thing as well. Like if you'd agreed with your family what you would do [specific behaviour, e.g.], and then you did it, and then you got a reward.

Young Person

Self efficacy: parents

Parents reported an increase in their own self-efficacy, where they felt reassured that their experiences in parenting were not unique to them, that the challenges and difficulties they experienced were often shared by many other parents;

For parents it's finding out that you're not the only one. One of the best tools for parents is to know that your child is not the only one who doesn't like school, will not do what they're told and is cheeky. Because people think that they're the only ones.

Facilitator

[I enjoyed] meeting other parents that are going through more or less the same as you.

You think you're the only one [before the programme].

Parents

Parents enjoyed discussing the different approaches they could try with their families. They felt this exposure to new ideas and approaches was a key outcome for them. Having new options to consider also raised parents' feelings of being in control and their ability to cope within their families;

Getting fresh ideas. When you're living day to day you don't have time to think about things

Parent

Parents reflected that sharing experiences and approaches with each other was a positive way to share anxieties and concerns, as well as hints and tips, and also increased parents' confidence that they were not the only parents to have experienced these concerns;

We have a laugh! We had a good chat with each other and things like that. You don't always believe other people have problems with their kids, even when they say they do. It's not till you sit down with other people and discuss it with them. Some people don't like to say they've got problems with their kids. If you've got a problem, and someone else is talking about theirs, you might as well not sit there and say "oh no, my bairn's perfect!"

It's much better to be open and honest about it.

A problem shared is a problem halved isn't it?

Parents

Young people also noticed changes in their parents as a result of the programme, particularly their lowered stress levels and willingness to spend time with the young person;

My dad's different because before we'd play football sometimes, and when I asked him to go to the park he'd say no, but now he says yes, and we play football all the time. It's really good. He's a lot calmer now. Not as stressed.

My mam's different because we talk together.

Young People

Confidence

As a result of the positive outcomes within the programme, parents and young people described the increase in confidence that they felt as a result of attending the programme;

You get some people who are looking you up and down, as though they're better than you...but I feel more confident now.

Parent

I feel good about myself.

Young Person

Facilitators echoed this view, describing the increase in confidence from their perspective;

The young people liked to say [mottos] individually themselves, because I think it gave them some pride actually saying out loud that they were strong young people who were going to make good decisions.

Facilitator

Future Plans

Young people had the opportunity to reflect on their goals for the future, and to discuss the possible steps they would need to take to achieve these goals, therefore increasing their locus of control within the wider world.

It made them think about their goals, that there is something five years down the line, and what you're doing now affects where that's going to be. So some of them have got that concept, you know, "if I don't stick in at school, where I want to be isn't going to happen".

Facilitator

Similarly, parents also began to plan for the future, for themselves and for their children;

I've told all my kids that they've got to stick in at school till they're 18. And get a job or go to college and get a proper job. Or an apprenticeship, where you go to college and you've got a job.

Parent

Parents talked about the different courses and activities they were planning to pursue, and they felt they would not have considered such options for their own development if they had not participated in the programme;

I'm going to go and do my maths and English now. Get qualifications that'll help me more when I'm going for jobs. I wouldn't have had the confidence to go and do that before [this programme]. I wouldn't have thought of it.

I'm going on food and hygiene; I need this certificate for cooking at the breakfast club.

I'm going to go back to college, and do courses on kids with special needs, so I can learn about how [child] is going to be when he's older, what to expect.

Parents

Facilitators also emphasised the parents' development in thinking about "what's next" beyond the programme and the friendships that have developed between the parents;

There are friendships that have been made, and they are planning to meet up outside of the course. All the women on the course are doing a personal development course, and some of the parents are also going to do another [different] parenting course with [voluntary agency]. They're all interested in doing SFP again; they all want to take another child with them.

Facilitator

Discussion

The results from this evaluation have shown the Strengthening Families Programme to be an effective intervention for families living with a range of medical, emotional and social risk factors, with young people aged 10-14 years. Opinions and experiences were gathered from the parents, young people, facilitators and managers involved in the pilot Strengthening Families Programme delivered through the Changing Trax Service in Newcastle. Pre- and post-programme assessments with parents and young people showed the changes in family cohesion and adaptability, and in the young people's strengths and difficulties following participation in the programme. These combined results describe "what works" in the process of delivering the programme, creating a set of "Important Ingredients" that participants have recommended. The combined results also describe the outcomes for parents and young people, for themselves as individuals and for their family as a whole.

The process of delivering the programme

Drawing on their experiences of "what worked" on their pilot programme, the facilitators, managers, parents and young people identified a set of "Important Ingredients" for ensuring effective delivery of any Strengthening Families Programme. The key ingredients included supportive management and coordination, and in particular, skilled and experienced facilitators, knowledge transfer and information sharing, and continued, sustainable funding.

Facilitator skill set

The skill sets of facilitators on this pilot programme were recommended as important for facilitators in future programmes. The important skills and expertise for facilitators to have included; previous experience in solution focused family work and facilitation of programmes, effective communication and engagement skills with families, including a non-judgemental, non-threatening approach, a sense of humour, honesty, respect and shared team values and definitions on the key issues involved in family work. Another important skill was to have an understanding of the learning process (e.g. the ability to identify key learning outcomes and the process necessary to achieve these), and the ability to engage people with varying needs and abilities and support their learning. This range of skills and expertise is vital in ensuring effective facilitation of a programme that presented some challenges, including an American, middle-class bias, a reliance on literacy and tight time constraints for each exercise. Drawing on their skill sets, facilitators can make informed adjustments to the content and delivery of the programme, ensuring it is accessible and inclusive for all participants, without compromising the learning outcomes. Key adjustments made by the pilot programme facilitators included replacing individual written exercises with group work and flip charts to address time constraints and literacy abilities, replacing complex games with quick and easy games, replacing the final slideshow with photograph albums, enabling families to remember the fun and learning from different sessions, and using solution-focused approaches with families when working with the DVD, to ensure relevancy for larger families living in the North East.

Facilitator number and gender mix

The number and gender mix of the facilitation team was highlighted as an important ingredient for effective programme delivery. Five facilitators (as proposed in the programme manual) were found to be the necessary number to ensure effective session management and to safeguard participants and facilitators in the event of a violent outburst. At least one male facilitator was recommended in order to ensure gender representation for participants.

Facilitator time

Time for facilitators to meet and plan together was vital to ensure facilitators had the opportunity to develop their working relationship, to identify each facilitator's strengths and preferences and collaboratively decide on the roles each facilitator would assume within programme delivery.

Referrals

The number and level of abilities and needs of families recruited to the programme is important to consider in light of the complex learning and time constraints within the programme. The programme training suggests that ideally a mix of families would be recruited onto the programme, to ensure more able families can support families with greater difficulties. However, within this pilot programme, the families were similar in their level of needs and abilities and in their family experiences, including having larger families, and living with multiple risk factors. Facilitators commented on how well the parents and young people had bonded within the programme, and parents explained that they appreciated the fact that the other parents on the programme were similar to them. Therefore, this pilot programme would suggest that smaller numbers of families, with similar needs and abilities aids programme delivery and outcome.

Knowledge transfer

The results show that knowledge transfer is a key ingredient for effective programme delivery. Multiple directions of knowledge transfer and information sharing, at key points, were identified as important within the pilot programme. These included the transfer of relevant information about families from referrers to facilitators prior to the programme, from facilitators to referrers or current family practitioners regarding the aims and learning outcomes of the programme, prior/during the programme (to enable practitioners to build on the work of the programme and support transfer of learning), from facilitators to referrers or current family practitioners regarding families' progress at the end of the programme (to enable practitioners to build on the work of the programme and support transfer of learning) and families' transfer of programme learning into their everyday lives.

Follow-up work

Results from this evaluation emphasise that follow-up work is essential for families to effectively translate the learning from the programme into their lives and therefore achieve the optimum outcomes from the Strengthening Families Programme. Facilitators and parents suggested they would have liked to have had access to the booster sessions to support families in practising and embedding the programme learning. Facilitators felt follow-up work was essential, particularly in light of the multiple risk factors that the pilot families were living with.

Programme practicalities

Results reiterate the importance of providing a neutral, accessible venue, transport for families to and from the programme and childcare for families to ensure additional children are cared for whilst the parent attends the programme. Research and practice reports continue to highlight the importance of this practical provision for families attending intervention programmes (Barker et al, 2003). The importance of marking the ending of the programme; creating a positive ending, was described by participants, who suggested that future programmes should follow the graduation ceremony that the manual discusses, and also provide an event for facilitators to mark the end of their working together within their team.

Continued funding

Practitioners underlined the importance of continued funding, in order to ensure the sustainability of the programme within the Changing Trax service, and the sustainability of the learning for families, which requires follow-up work, which in turn requires funding resources. Despite the universally recognised challenges in delivering an effective service within severely time-limited funding, the practitioners and managers involved in this pilot programme demonstrated a tenacious commitment to delivering the aims of the Strengthening Families Project and Changing Trax service, whilst facing the reality that they may not secure funding beyond March 2008. The manager and coordinator shared their plans for the delivery of future Strengthening Families Programmes, including collaboration with healthy eating networks in Newcastle, to promote being healthy, and the inclusion of volunteer escorts to travel to and from the venues with families, which may develop into the family support role that Changing Trax is seeking to

develop within their service. The inclusion of a family support element within the Changing Trax service would provide families with the follow-up work that this evaluation has identified as necessary for families to fully benefit from the programme. It was suggested that an ideal outcome from successful follow-up work would be for a parent who has participated in the Strengthening Families Programme to go on to facilitate it. Managers felt this would signify the embedding and sustainability of this learning within families and communities.

Outcomes for Families

Positive experiences

The Strengthening Families Programme represented a positive experience for families, where they experienced fun, support and praise, and a solution focused approach within the sessions. For many parents and young people attending the programme, this positive experience was particularly valuable in light of their many negative experiences. The programme gave families access to support from facilitators and peers within their groups and access to new ideas and approaches which were made relevant for their own individual family contexts. Families experienced giving and receiving appreciation and praise, where participants identified their own and other people's strengths, and identified their shared family strengths and values. The structure and framework of the programme was found to enable participants' learning and development; the programme provided a sense of safety and routine, and provided the parent and young person with a unique opportunity to spend one-to-one time together away from the many demands of their family life.

Communication

Communication is an integral part of the Strengthening Families Programme. Parents and young people had the opportunity to practice and develop the many skills and approaches inherent in effective and positive communication, including listening, patience and empathy. Parents and young people reported significant improvements in their communication with each other and with their family as a whole, following their participation in the programme. Facilitators also noted the families' increases in communication confidence as the programme progressed.

Emotional availability

Parents and young people described increases in their ability to be emotionally open with each other. They emphasised the importance of some of the exercises in helping them to think together about their family and to share their thoughts and feelings with each other. Parents' comments illustrated their own and their young person's development in emotional availability for each other. The FACES II assessment shows this development in family cohesion and facilitators observed marked increases in families' non-verbal interaction (e.g. physical proximity, more eye contact) and demonstration of affect (e.g. more smiling and laughing together, more cuddles).

Improved Family relationships

The quantity and quality of family relationships were found to increase as a direct result of attending the programme. Parents and young people were spending more time together, talking more and engaging in more activities outwith the programme. Young people were communicating more with parents about their lives outside the home, for example, talking to their parent about their friends and relationships, and sharing their social plans, for example, letting their parent know where they were going, who they were with and what time they would be back. Young people in particular emphasised how much they appreciated spending more time with their parent, talking together and sharing activities together, and they felt this was directly attributable to having attended the programme together. Relationships within the whole family also improved, with young people reporting less arguments and friction with siblings. Elements linked with the improvements in family relationships included the development of communication skills, empathy, patience, identifying shared values, thinking together about their family, stress management techniques, and identifying family-specific solutions.

Results from FACES II (Olsen et al, 1982) echo these improvements in family relationships. The findings show that parents and young people felt their families were more flexible and able to adapt to change after having participated in the Strengthening Families Programme. Some parents and one young person also felt their families had become much more cohesive, where family members felt more connected and close to one another.

Decrease in young people's difficulties

Results from the SDQ (Goodman,1997) show that parents felt that their young person's difficulties had lessened after taking part in the programme, in particular emotional difficulties including anxiety and unhappiness, hyperactivity and difficulties interacting with peers. Parents reported an increase in their young people's pro-social skills, including being more kind and helpful. Young people reported that they too felt they were more kind and helpful, and that their friendships were easier where they were more able to interact with their peers. Young people also felt their hyperactivity, behaviour difficulties and emotional difficulties had also lessened following their participation in the programme. Before the programme, parents in three out of the four families reported such severity of difficulties with emotions, hyperactivity, conduct and peer interactions and with such an impact on their lives that their young people were scored within the "abnormal" range, which can signify individuals at greater risk of psychiatric disorders (Coombes et al, 2006), with approximately 10% of a given population typically falling within this range. After taking part in the programme two out these three parents reported their young people's difficulties to have significantly lessened, so much so that they fell within the "normal" range, along with 80% of the population. Parents and young people describe this decrease in young people's difficulties during their focus groups; particularly their increased abilities in relationships with family and friends.

Friendships

Parents appreciated the friendships they had made within the programme, and planned to continue these friendships beyond the programme. Parents particularly appreciated meeting other parents who had shared some similar experiences within their families. Young people felt they were better able to cope with many of their peer relationships, since the programme had given them the opportunity to develop and practice strategies in navigating peer relationships (particularly in being able to say "no" to activities they felt uncomfortable with). Parental and self-reports on the SDQ post-programme assessment confirm that young people had increased in their pro-social behaviours, and their friendships with peers were much easier. In addition, their lower levels of anxiety, hyperactivity and conduct difficulties would also impact on their ability to make and sustain friendships.

Self-efficacy

The participants on the programme reported increases in their sense of self efficacy, as a result of many approaches and learning opportunities within the programme. For example, the families particularly appreciated meeting other parents and young people who shared similar experiences, thoughts and feelings. This helped individuals to feel they were "not alone" in their experiences and feelings, which helped, in turn, to reduce any sense of anxiety and isolation. Young people appreciated learning about different approaches to manage stress and anger levels, as this helped them to feel more in control of their emotions and their responses to the world around them. In addition, young people also practiced effective ways of removing themselves from situations or people where they felt uncomfortable.

Looking to the future

As a result of the many positive outcomes for parents and young people within the programme, families and facilitators reported marked increases in parents' and young people's confidence. An example of this growing confidence can be seen in the future plans that parents and young people were discussing, which they emphasised were as a direct result of their participation on the programme. The programme provided young people with the opportunity to reflect on their goals for the future, and consider the steps they would need to take now in order to achieve these future goals. The parents described the plans that they

had made for themselves and their children, and they emphasised that this was a direct result of taking part in the programme and the confidence they had gained. All of the parents had decided to pursue adult education, the majority of whom stated they were doing so in order to increase employment opportunities, for example, literacy and numeracy skills. Other reasons for pursuing adult education included attending child development courses in order to better understand and manage a particular child's disability, therefore further developing their parenting abilities with a child with particular needs. Many parents had also signed up for a self-development course, aimed at increasing self esteem and confidence. In addition, all parents showed interest in attending additional parenting programmes aimed at specific issues, such as separation, and all parents requested to attend the Strengthening Families Programme again, with one of their other children within the 10-14 years age range. Parents discussed their plans for their children's future, which involved continuing their education at school/college. Parents discussed the opportunities they were now encouraging their children to aim for, including higher education and apprenticeships. Young people and parents particularly appreciated this outcome from the Strengthening Families Programme.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Pilot Strengthening Families Programme was found to be highly effective. The pre and post-programme assessments, completed by both parents and young people, indicated significant increases in young people's pro-social behaviour and abilities in making and sustaining friendships. The results showed significant decreases in the young people's anxiety and unhappiness, and for some young people, there were marked decreases in hyperactivity and conduct difficulties. The majority of families reported significant decreases in the young person's overall difficulties, and subsequently, significant improvements on the "whole-family impact" of these difficulties. Many families reported the overall difficulties and the impact of these difficulties to be so severe before the programme, that they fell within the "abnormal" range, and indicated predisposition to many clinical disorders. Following the programme, these overall difficulties and resulting impact had fallen within the "normal" range. Parents and young people both reported significant improvements in their families' adaptability and cohesiveness, reporting greater flexibility and less rigidity within their families' approach to life, including problem solving and adapting to change. The results also show an increase for some families in their feelings of closeness and cohesiveness.

The decreases in young people's difficulties and the increases in families' flexibility and cohesiveness were reiterated and further evidenced within the qualitative data, where parents and young people described the many positive outcomes for themselves and their families as a result of attending the programme. The key outcomes included; increased abilities in communication, empathy and emotional availability; feeling supported and appreciated, learning about new approaches that were relevant in the family's own context (solution-focused), increased feelings of self-efficacy, i.e. feeling more competent and able in their roles as parents or as young people interacting in their families and the world around them; and planning for the future. Facilitators and managers echoed these outcomes in their own discussions of the developments and learning that the families have evidenced within the Strengthening Families Programme.

Facilitators, managers and families all appreciated that the programme incorporated both parents and young people, providing more of a "whole family" approach than is afforded by other parenting programmes on the market. "Time out" for a parent and young person to spend together, away from their demanding family context, was particularly valued. The routine and structure imposed by the programme was found to enable learning and development for individuals and families.

Key facilitator skills were identified as central to the successful delivery and outcomes of the programme, including; experience and skill in solution-focused family work, skills in engaging people in the learning process, shared values and definitions in family work and effective team working; identifying strengths and working collaboratively to plan and deliver the sessions. This skill set was vital in identifying effective approaches to facilitate learning in the face of inherent challenges within the programme, namely the tight time constraints, reliance on literacy abilities and the American, middle-class bias within the DVDs. In addition to this skill set, the importance of facilitator resources was highlighted, namely time to meet and plan and funding for five, mixed gender facilitators per programme. Knowledge transfer between referrers and facilitators, and between facilitators and practitioners working with each family, was a key ingredient in supporting families to effectively transfer the learning from the programme into their every day lives. Follow-up work was emphasised as pivotal in the success of the programme, particularly for families living with a number of difficulties and risk factors. The facilitation and follow-up work was reiterated time and time again by many participants as key to ensuring families' learning within the programme, and the translation, sustaining and embedding of this complex learning into families' everyday lives;

A programme is only as good as the facilitation and the follow-up work that happens afterwards.

Facilitator

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Appendices

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)

	Family 1				Family 2				Family 3				Family 4			
	Parent		Young person		Parent		Young person		Parent		Young person		Parent		Young person	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional symptoms	5	3	7	5	5	7	5	7	4	3	3	2	7	1	0	2
Conduct difficulties	9	5	6	4	7	7	7	7	0	5	4	3	5	6	5	2
Hyperactivity scale	2	2	4	5	10	7	7	5	3	4	4	6	8	6	8	3
Peer difficulties	5	3	2	1	5	5	5	5	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	0
Prosocial scale	6	9	8	7	8	8	6	8	9	9	6	7	10	7	8	10
Total difficulties	21	13	19	15	27	26	24	24	11	14	12	13	21	13	13	7
Impact score	5	0	5	0	5	7	7	9	3	0	6	0	3	0	0	0

	Family A			
	Parent		Young person	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional symptoms	5 High	3 Low	7 High	5 Low
Conduct difficulties	9 Very High	5 High	6 High	4 Some
Hyperactivity scale	2 Low	2 Low	4 Low	5 Low
Peer difficulties	5 High	3 Some	2 Low	1 Very Low
Prosocial scale	6 Low	9 Very Low	8 Low	7 Low
Total difficulties	21 Abnormal	13 Normal	19 Borderline	15 Normal
Impact score	5 Abnormal	0 Normal	5 Abnormal	0 Normal

Table 1: Family A scores and related level of need across the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)

Table 2: Family B scores and related level of need across the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)

	Family B			
	Parent		Young person	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional symptoms	5 High	7 High	5 Low	7 High
Conduct difficulties	7 High	7 High	7 High	7 High
Hyperactivity scale	10 Very High	7 High	7 High	5 Low
Peer difficulties	5 High	5 High	5 Some	5 Some
Prosocial scale	8 Low	8 Low	6 Low	8 Low
Total difficulties	7 Abnormal	26 Abnormal	24 Abnormal	24 Abnormal
Impact score	5 Abnormal	7 Abnormal	7 Abnormal	9 Abnormal

Table 3: Family C scores and related level of need across the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)

	Family C			
	Parent		Young person	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional symptoms	4 Some	3 Low	3 Low	2 Low
Conduct difficulties	0 Very Low	5 High	4 Some	3 Low
Hyperactivity scale	3 Low	4 Low	4 Low	6 Some
Peer difficulties	4 High	2 Low	1 Low	2 Low
Prosocial scale	9 Very Low	9 Very Low	6 Low	7 Low
Total difficulties	11 Normal	14 Borderline	2 Normal	13 Normal
Impact score	3 Abnormal	0 Normal	6 Abnormal	0 Normal

Table 4: Family D scores and related level of need across the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)

	Family D			
	Parent		Young person	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional symptoms	7 High	1 Low	0 Very Low	2 Low
Conduct difficulties	5 High	6 High	5 High	2 Low
Hyperactivity scale	8 High	6 High	8 High	3 Low
Peer difficulties	1 Low	0 Very Low	0 Very Low	0 Very Low
Prosocial scale	10 Very Low	7 Low	8 Low	10 Very Low
Total difficulties	21 Abnormal	13 Normal	13 Normal	7 Normal
Impact score	3 Abnormal	0 Normal	0 Normal	0 Normal