



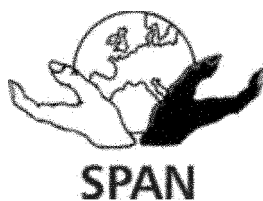
# Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) Independent External Evaluation

Of the

Bristol and Cornwall Parenting Fund  
Project(s)  
Strengthening Families  
Strengthening Communities

September 2006 – June 2008

External evaluator  
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Consultus Ltd  
June 2008



CN4C



Project(s) funded by the Parenting Fund

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The external evaluator wishes to record her thanks to the SPAN Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Management team in particular Annie Oliver (SPAN); Diane Maulding (CN4C); and Tove Samzelius (SPAN) for their continued support and willing co-operation in the work leading up to this report.

My gratitude is extended to the SFSC facilitators from both Bristol and Cornwall for their input and the valuable contribution made to this evaluation; the parents, for their honesty, time and support, and their contributed to the survey and case study material.

I trust that I have represented their thoughts, feelings and learning points fairly and accurately.

Also, thanks to my colleagues from the Consultus Team in particular Paul Price, CSQW, Consultus Ltd and Dr Brychan Thomas for their contribution and willing co-operation in the work leading up to this report.

Consultus Ltd would like to wish SPAN and the SFSC team our best wishes in their future implementation plans for what is viewed as a well structured and valuable programme.

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June 2008

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) successfully secured funding from the Parenting Fund to run the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) Programme in specific areas of Bristol and Cornwall. This report documents the findings of an independent external evaluation that aimed to assess the delivery and impact of the Parenting Funded Programme; Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) during the period of October 2007 to June 2008.

The evaluation design provided qualitative and quantitative information on course participants, the programme delivery and its outputs. It undertook field and desk research during the period of October 2007 to May 2008; conducting semi structured interviews with facilitators, telephone interviews with parents and examining a range of documents. The limitation of the design was that it could not carry out a longitudinal survey to comment on the longer term impact of the programme, there was no control group and we did not talk to the children of parents who participated on the course.

As a broad summary of the progress and achievement the report observes that SPAN and its Partners have achieved substantial results in terms of the deliverables, and substantive results, in terms of positively impacting on daily family life.

### ***Achievements that warrant this judgement include:***

#### **Key findings**

- The overwhelming support for the SFSC programme from both facilitators and parents. Parents stated that the most useful elements of the programme:
  - Control and discipline
  - Meeting and discussing issues with other parents
  - Positive parenting
  - Raised confidence as a parent
- The evidence provided by parents suggests that the programme had been instrumental in supporting parents develop skills and qualities for coping more effectively in their roles as parents.
- Parents highlighted that the programme had a significant positive impact on their daily family life. This was evidenced by parents statements in which;
  - 63% of parents found life less stressful since participating on the course
  - 89.1% of parents felt the course had offered them techniques to support their child's behaviour socially, expressing that the areas of most significant improvement were:

- Improved relationship with their child
  - Improved communication
  - Understanding the needs of the child and an increased understanding of their (parents) own behaviour
- Parents noted an increase in their child/children's good behaviours for example;
    - Helping around the house
    - Showing affection
    - Discussing problems
    - 43.5% of parents stated that the course made a difference to the way their child now socialises.
    - 15.2% of parents stated that their child had been withdrawn prior to the course – this reduced to 2.4% after parents participated on the course.
- A degree of personal and career development had been attributed to participation on the course, parents felt that their participation on the course could help them in the future toward:
    - Employment – 17.4%
    - Getting involved in voluntary work – 21.7%
    - Further learning – progressing to other courses – 58.7%
- There was a positive impact on parents' community life and with an increase of social networks;
    - 37% of parents were involved in community groups/events that they were not involved in prior to the course.
- 95.7% of parents felt that the discussion on culture was a good idea, stating that;
    - It raised awareness on culture and diversity
    - It raised awareness of parents own culture and cultural roots
    - Supported in understanding the 'multi-cultural family'
    - Deepened the knowledge of multi-cultural communities
- 4.3% of parents felt that the discussion on culture did not offer them anything new, stating that;
    - They were familiar with culture and diversity
    - They did not feel it was relevant to their life or current situation.
- Facilitators of the programme stated that the SFSC programme has at least three unique and distinct features. These were highlighted as the community aspect, the co-facilitation and the depth of the course content.
    - The community aspect in which the programme design is inclusive and culturally sensitive, and aims to engage community involvement.
    - The co-facilitation model used by SPAN encourages and engages parents to train as programme facilitators.

- The pairing of parents with practitioners works well as they can contribute with different insights and experiences. Furthermore, parents with little or no previous facilitator experience can initially benefit from, and be empowered by, support from parent practitioners.
- Facilitators echoed that the content and context of the programme was more detailed than other courses/programmes that they were familiar with. They felt that the SFSC programme offered participants a good range of information which enabled parents to achieve a deeper understanding of issues and solutions.

It needs to be noted that a further achievement for SPAN, as a direct result of delivering the SFSC programme was the success of a bid to Bristol City Council to deliver additional SFSC programmes in Bristol. SPAN was also successful in delivering a programme under the Respect agenda for an all male group. These two successes were key developments that validate the knowledge and reputation of SPAN and its core team to deliver programmes of this type in the heart of the community.

### **Suggested recommendations**

- Facilitators identified a number of interpersonal challenges within the groups that they facilitated. They also identified areas of practical support and resources that would be worthy of consideration in the future delivery of the programme:
  - Some practical adaptations would be welcomed in order to make the programme even more parent friendly and tailored to specific geographical needs and audience contextualisation.
  - Specific targeting approaches – meeting parents before the courses to gain an understanding of individual issues.
  - Speaking with parents prior to the course to understand which of the programme elements are of most importance to them and tailoring the course to the group.
- A more modular '*bite size*' delivery of the programme to help meet specific needs for example: it may not be timely for parents of babies to undertake the whole programme at this stage. In a similar fashion parents of teenage children may wish to concentrate more effort and discussion in their specific area of need.
- Facilitation of the programme in languages other than English has been suggested by a number of parents.
- More support for facilitators to deliver the programme;
  - Supervision and feedback
  - Peer group support
  - Up to dated resources

- The newly developed peer group website could be further developed to share upload material resources and provide a confidential area for facilitators share experience and practice
- Management staff support in terms of administrative support and additional time allocation for supporting the facilitators.

### Concluding observations

- Strategically, the programme underpins and adds value to current Government policies
- Parents have provided testimonials to indicate that the programme has a positive impact on daily family and community life.
- SPAN has developed a core team that have the expertise, strength and 'know how' to support the management and delivery of the programme.
- SPAN is well placed to reach '*hard to reach*' groups, they have a track record of engaging and working alongside communities that require creativity and additional support measures to reach. This valuable knowledge could be usefully engaged to work with local government in the follow up to extended and more integrated services in schools and children's centres.

The future challenge for SPAN is whether continuity in delivery can be maintained long term and how the programme itself can be embedded as a mainstream provision. These aspects are not mutually exclusive, they are interdependent. In the first instance:

- Continuity of delivery, SPAN requires appropriate financial support to deploy the resources required to enhance the current management and delivery arrangements. This would enable them to better address the interpersonal challenges and the resource deficits that facilitators encounter. In the second instance:
- In order to embed and mainstream the programme in schools and Children's Centres (as this is the most obvious fit) there is a need for a stronger strategic alignment with local government service delivery. This would raise awareness of the programme and its impact on family life and behaviours to the movers and shakers in local government.

The closing remark comes from a parent who offers "*the more that parents can learn and share with each other the better support they can offer their children.....there was no parenting manual given to me when I had my children.....This course has been very useful to me*".

May 2008

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# 1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Consultus Ltd is a private consultancy that was commissioned by the Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) to undertake an independent evaluation of the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFFC) Programme with effect from September 2007.

The evaluation aimed to assess the delivery and impact of the Parenting Funded programme Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities that was to operate in areas of Bristol and Cornwall.

More specifically the overarching aim was to be underpinned by<sup>1</sup>:

- Examining the performance and effectiveness of the project(s) in meeting the objectives and outputs as stated in the funding bid proposal.
- Assessing the programme(s) contribution to preventative work, particularly with regard to family crises, depression, anti-social behaviour and community tension.
- Investigating the extent to which SFSC parenting support can be integrated into existing family services through mainstreaming and cross-sector partnerships.
- Highlighting any problems encountered and recommending solutions aimed at improving future delivery of the SFSC programme.
- An identification of related elements of *good practice*, including those that are innovative, unique and/or empower that can serve as good practice models to usefully inform future provision.

Expressed in other terms the evaluation may be seen as objectively providing a formative external report on SFSC delivery processes and outcomes. It had no direct remit to analyse or comment on the finances of SFSC or on the financial compliance of the Parenting Funds.

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<sup>1</sup> This list of summarises those given in the pre-tender brief

## **1.1 Research plan**

The evaluation undertook field and desk research during the period of October 2007 to May 2008. The following offers a brief insight into the level and scope of the work undertaken:

- *Desk research*
  - Explored models of other parenting programmes via website research for example Parentline Plus<sup>2</sup>.
  - Reviewed and drilled available literature for example: Published Government Reports<sup>3</sup>, past SFSC Evaluation Reports<sup>4</sup> and Single Parent Action Network case studies<sup>5</sup>
  - Reviewed a range of documents provided by the project team including reports and statistical data.
- *Field research*
  - Attended a SPAN conference at the Hellenic Community Hall in Bristol on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2007
  - Attended a briefing meeting in Redruth Cornwall on the 28th January 2008
  - Developed the parents questionnaires and carried out telephone interviews with a sample of parents from Bristol and Cornwall: (February to May 2008)
  - Undertook semi-structured telephone interviews with a sample of facilitators from Bristol and Cornwall (February to May 2008)

The interviewees were directed to the evaluation through a list provided by the Bristol project team (for Bristol parents and facilitators) and the Cornwall project team (for parents and facilitators residing in Cornwall).

## **1.2 Evaluation Activity and Structure of the report**

In drawing from this 'richness' of information the evaluation engaged in the following activities:

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<sup>2</sup> [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk) (thinking about discipline and various other fact sheet information)

<sup>3</sup> Every Child Matters DfES 2004

<sup>4</sup> SFSC, South West Conference Report, February 2006, SFSC Evaluation Summary Report, REF, Jenny Wilding, Mark Barton, 2004/05 – funded by the Social Care Institute of Excellence

<sup>5</sup> SPAN [www.spanuk.org.uk](http://www.spanuk.org.uk)

- Holding regular face to face meetings with SFSC team manager in Bristol and one (1) meeting with the lead partner in Cornwall.
- A face to face meeting was carried out with two facilitators from Bristol which also benefited from a brief and valuable, discussion with a Manager from a Children's Centre.
- Conducting semi structured telephone interviews with seven of the thirteen facilitators (52%) working in Cornwall and eight of the seventeen facilitators working in Bristol (45%).
- Discussion with two Children Centre Managers in Cornwall and one Children Centre Manager in Bristol
- Carried out 46 telephone interviews with parents across the programme delivery area – sent out twenty questionnaires to facilitators and participants.
- An analyses of the questionnaires returned and the telephone interviews conducted

In keeping with its methodology and ultimate objectives and by drawing on the sources described above, the report is structured to offer:

- A 'snapshot' of the organisations that delivered the project(s).
- A brief overview of the SFSC project(s) in terms of its targets and achievements, the methods used for delivering the programme and
- Give a similarly brief overview of project(s) strategic fit with current Government Initiatives and Policies
- In observing the progress of project activities from inception in 2007 to May 2008, and by carrying out an analysis of the findings, the report exemplifies the impact of SFSC by offering qualitative feedback of the consultation carried out with facilitators and parents.
- Observations are shared about the projects achievements and its remaining challenges – these observations are offered both within the framework of the parenting fund bid submission, and more generally.
- Points for discussion are raised and an outline of a number of key messages are highlighted that can be structured and shaped for wider discussions, particularly in terms of sustainability and (or) dissemination purposes for sharing with policy and practice audiences.

- Inter-alia, provide formative feedback drawn from both the parent and facilitators interviews.

It was agreed with the individuals interviewed that quotations would not be attributed to named individuals or named organisations in this report. Direct quotations are shown in the following pages by the use of *italics* and ‘quotation’ marks combined, but individual anonymity is fully respected. Elsewhere *italics* are used alone to *stress* points made and quotation marks to indicate a specialist or ‘contestable’ meaning.

## **SECTION A INTRODUCTION**

### **2 Background**

The background leading up to the bid submission to the Parenting Fund for the delivery of the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Programme was led by SPAN in 2006. SPAN submitted two separate applications, one for programme delivery in Bristol and another for programme delivery in Cornwall.

As the lead body SPAN was responsible for managing both the delivery and the financial elements of both these applications. SPAN recognised that practical delivery of the programme in Cornwall would be better placed with a local organisation that held the same principles and ethos as SPAN. This would ultimately engage SPAN in a project management role but delegating delivery to a ‘like minded’ organisation. The organisation was to be Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change (CN4C) and a new working partnership between the two organisations developed primarily to deliver the SFSC programme.

The SFSC programme had historically been delivered as a partnership between SPAN and the Race Equality Foundation (REF) and this relationship was to continue into the delivery of these new project(s).

#### **2.1 *The project partners***

This collaborative partnership of three organisations was a unique set up, for the delivery of the SFSC programme. The following section offers a very brief overview of each of the organisations mission and objectives.

The overview provides a baseline of information that clarifies why the partnership was well placed in terms of 'know how' to deliver the programme to parents in diverse communities.

## **2.2 Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)**

The organisation was founded in 1990 under the the Third European Poverty Programme. Since its inception SPAN has worked effectively with one parent families to offer a diverse range of services in support of combating poverty and promoting empowerment. *Its aims are to:*<sup>6</sup>

- Support single parents to empower themselves and take control of their lives
- Give a voice to one parent families from diverse backgrounds and cultures living in poverty and isolation
- Support the development of user-led one parent family groups
- Work with organisations and decision-making bodies.
- Develop partnerships to improve policies for one parent families in the UK and internationally
- Celebrate our diversity, our children, our lives

## **2.3 Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change (CN4C)**

CN4C was established in 2001 as a charity and social enterprise. Since its inception CN4C has emerged as one of Cornwall's largest voluntary sector organisations. The organisational mission is to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Cornwall.<sup>7</sup> *'Our vision is to create vibrant and thriving communities with the resources, opportunities and choices for all residents to pursue positive dreams and ambitions'*.

## **2.4 Race Equality Foundation (REF)**

The REF is a leading national agency that was commissioned in 1999 by the Home Office to review existing parenting materials and adapt or develop new parenting programmes that would be appropriate and sensitive to the needs of black and minority ethnic parents.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.spanuk.org.uk](http://www.spanuk.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> CN4C website

This work led the REU to review a range of available parenting materials in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Race Equality Foundation promotes race equality in social support (what families and friends do for each other) and social care (what 'workers' do for people who need support).<sup>8</sup>

## **2.5 The parenting Fund**

In 2003 the Government's Every Child Matters Green Paper set out five outcomes for children;<sup>9</sup>

- To be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic wellbeing

The Parenting Fund is one of the mechanisms by which the Government aims to support parents in achieving these outcomes for their children. In 2004 it allocated £25 million to the Fund to broaden access to parenting support services. The Parenting Fund is managed by the Charity Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The fund's objectives are to increase parenting provision, strengthen sector infrastructure and increase provision for less well-served groups.

## **3 Context**

The SFSC Programme is the UK version of the United States programme 'Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families: A Violence Prevention Programme'. The programme was originally developed by [Dr Marilyn Steele and colleagues](#) in the early 1990s. It has been adapted by the Race Equality Foundation,

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> The Parenting Fund 2004-2006, voluntary sector parent support summary document of 'Research and Policy for the Real World', 2007 Family Parenting Institute. [www.familyandparenting.org](http://www.familyandparenting.org)

working with parents and professionals and with the support of Dr Steele, to be deployed in the UK.

The context in which the work began to deliver the programme in Bristol and in Cornwall was due to recognition by SPAN, that there was a need to address an unmet need for an in-depth educational programme that promoted cultural diversity and community engagement. Historically, SPAN has a long and established commitment to inclusive practice and fully engages grass roots groups within their work. SPAN works in partnership with groups and agencies on a range of projects supporting families living in poverty and isolation.

In partnership with the Race Equality Foundation (REF), they have managed the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Programme in the South West since 2004. The programme has up to date received two rounds of funding from the Parenting Fund.

SPAN, through their work with communities have developed a wealth of understanding in how to engage communities and address their needs. Based upon their research they have identified that SFSC Programme is the most appropriate educational programme to deliver within the communities, primarily but not exclusively, due to the level of inclusiveness that the programme itself promotes.

## **Section B**

### **Project Strategy and development**

#### **4 *The Project(s) and targets***

Strategically, the development of these project(s) fit well within SPAN and its partner organisations strategic objectives, as they underpin the mission and ethos of all three partners. The delivery of the SFSC programme adds value to Government targets, Policies and Strategies for example, Every Child Matters, the Community Cohesion Policy and the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy.

In response to these governmental policies, the National Family and Parenting Institute and Local Authorities have offered specific, localised strategy and implementation plans. The SPAN project(s) have been designed to positively contribute to Every Child Matters (2003) the Cornwall Parenting Strategy (September 2007) the Bristol Parenting Strategy, and Bristol's Community Strategy (2006) whose delivery mechanism is Bristol's Local Strategic Partnership and Safer Bristol Partnership.

#### **4.1 Bristol project's statistical targets**

The project stated that in Bristol it would:<sup>10</sup>

- Deliver the SFSC course in four of the most deprived areas of Bristol;
  - Easton, Lawrence Hill, St Paul's and Southmead
- It would increase the number of isolated/vulnerable families from diverse backgrounds and cultures in Bristol to access culturally sensitive parenting support and education.
- It would provide infrastructure support by increasing the number of skilled grassroots facilitators delivering SFSC parenting courses in deprived areas.
- Mainstreaming the SFSC parenting education programmes into cross-sectoral preventative work with parents and children.
- Disseminate cross-sector models to partnerships implementing change for children in the South West.

The deliverable targets for Bristol were stated as:

- **10 thirteen week parenting courses** to be delivered to a minimum of **150 parents.**
- **10 new course** facilitators will be trained – increasing the current numbers to 20 (10 facilitators already trained)
- The formation of a **Practitioners Forum** to support peer group learning and specific training in parenting education e.g. teenage parenting, support for fathers, cultural perspectives, dealing with separation, violence/drugs in the community, sex education.

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<sup>10</sup> ibid page 13

- Mainstreaming the SFSC parenting course into **3 cross-sector partnerships delivering education** - partners will include the SPAN Study Centre, the City of Bristol College, Children's Centres and agencies participating in Every Child Matters.

**Target group characteristics:** lone parents with teenagers, young mothers, refugees, asylum seekers, BME groups, fathers, grandparents, parents recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, parents living in deprived areas across Bristol.

#### **4.2 Cornwall project statistical targets**

In a similar fashion the Cornwall proposal <sup>11</sup> set out four interconnecting strands:

- The development of a partnership between SPAN and Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change (CN4C) in the delivery of Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parenting Programme to socially excluded families in Cornwall's areas of:
  - Cambourne, Pool, Redruth and St Austell
- Training of facilitators living in deprived/isolated areas to deliver the accredited SFSC Course to parents living in their communities.
- The development of a Practitioners Forum on SPAN's interactive website to support training and peer group learning.
- Strengthening infrastructure support with whole family support agencies in disadvantaged areas, helping to mainstream the SFSC course into their service delivery.

The statistical targets or deliverables were expressed as:

- Roll out the **programme to 150 isolated/disadvantaged families** in Cornwall – especially rural areas, coastal towns and social housing estates.
- **Train 14 grassroots facilitators** by the Racial Equality Foundation to deliver the course in their own community areas.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid page 13

- Establish a designated Practitioners Forum on the SPAN interactive **website for 50 SFSC facilitators** for South West England to share training, peer group learning and non-confidential issues in providing parenting support.
- Disseminate and work to integrate the SFSC course in the services of Children's Centres and College programmes across Cornwall.

**Target group characteristics:** lone parents, parents with teenage children and teenage parents – target, and involve in the delivery programme.

### ***4.3 Achievements of project targets in Bristol***

128 parents completed the programme, which were 22 below the estimated target number. It was felt that this maybe partly due to the characteristics of the target group; parents whose lives are chaotic due to varying reasons were not able to fully commit to the length of the programme. The reasons why parents 'drop out' or do not complete may be attributed to complexities such as domestic violence, children's exclusion from school, parent illness, child illness, depression, lack of self-esteem, housing issues and financial problems. This list is not by any means exhaustive but is intended to offer an example of the many issues that face parents on a daily basis and how their priorities may change from one day to another. Page 40 of this report offers three separate views and reasons from parents who did not complete the programme.

13 new course facilitators were trained, exceeding the original target of 10 by 3.

The vehicle for the practitioner's forum was web based. The web forum has been developed however, the usage in terms of the number of facilitators fully utilising this resource has not materialised as anticipated. Perhaps and in hindsight the usage of a new site generally takes time to build momentum and the stated number (of in Cornwall's targets 50) was an ambitious target to achieve within the restricted time span of the project.

The cross sector partnerships in Bristol were fully achieved.

#### **4.4 Achievements of project targets in Cornwall**

In Cornwall 116 parents completed the programme, this was 34 below the estimated target. The reasoning here could be second guessed as partly complexities of the target group characteristics but there is also a part to be attributed to the operational and delivery aspects of the programme. As an example the newness of the partnership, effective peer support and support in targeting and recruiting parents. These operational delivery mechanisms are further explored in section 6.4 facilitator's thoughts on the programme, page 27 to 31.

16 facilitators were trained in Cornwall, exceeding the original stated target of 14 by 2.

The website target for Cornwall as already mentioned above was not fully met however, recognition of this has been acknowledged by the Project Manager and further development by way of negotiation with CN4C and supported by a further Parenting Fund grant is enabling the use of facilitators in Cornwall to work on the site to fully engage facilitators on practical methods of usage. The same work will be undertaken in Bristol to support and encourage full use of this resource.

#### **4.5 Characteristics of the Bristol participants**

The following data offers a snapshot of the characteristics of the project(s) participants. The data has been collected, collated, analysed and provided by courtesy of SPAN and REF. SPAN maintain a data system for project monitoring and reporting purposes<sup>12</sup>. Here is a sample of target group characteristics which have been collated from 8 SFSC Programmes that have ran in the Bristol target areas and were attended by 50 parents.

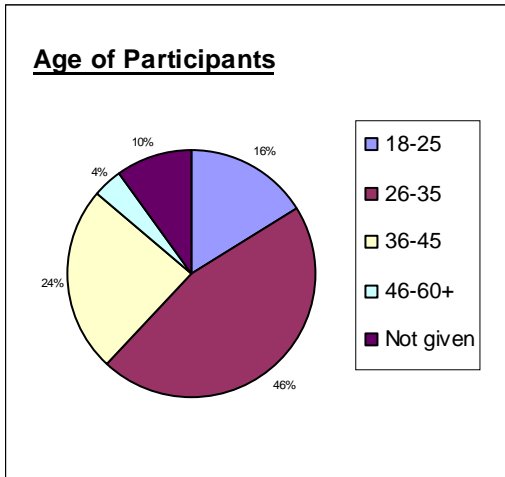
**49** of the parents were **female**.

**1** of the parents was **male**.

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<sup>12</sup> Statistical data and graphs courtesy of SPAN, December 2007

The data was taken from the Parent Registration forms, completed at the beginning of each course. Here follows the data:

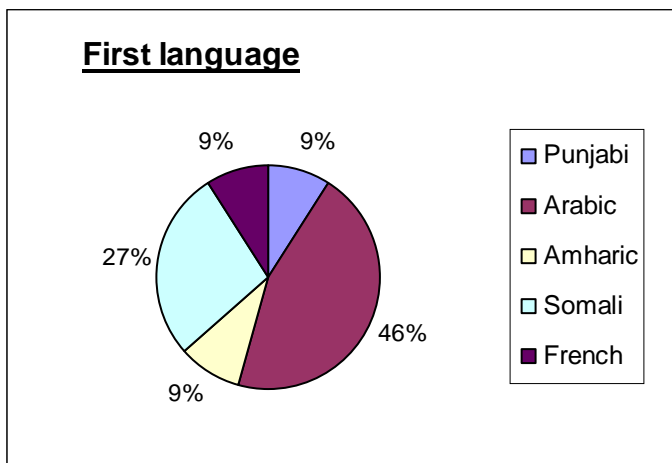
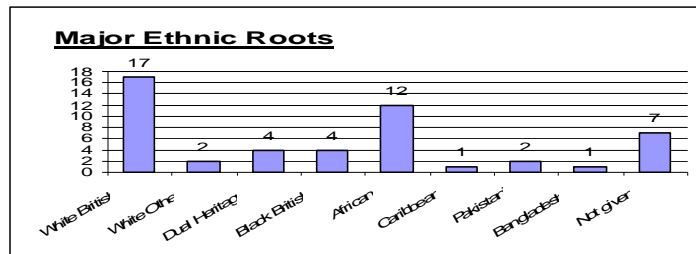


The majority of parents were aged 26 to 35 years.

8 parents <25  
 2 parents >46  
 12 parents aged between 36 and 45

Of the participating parents 34% were White British, 4% were white other, 8% were Dual Heritage, 8% were Black British, 24% were African, 2% were Caribbean, 4% were Pakistani, and 2% were Bangladeshi.

2 people said their 'other' ethnic roots were White British and 1 parent said their 'other' ethnic roots were Asian. 14% of parents did not give their Ethnic Roots.



The majority of parents (78%) stated the that English was their first language.

4% did not respond to the question.

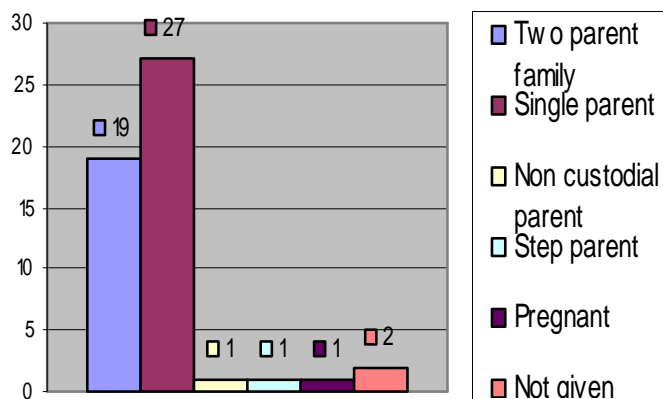
22% of parents stated other languages as their first language; Arabic was the majority with 5 people stating this is their first language.

53% of participating parents were raising their children in a single parent family.

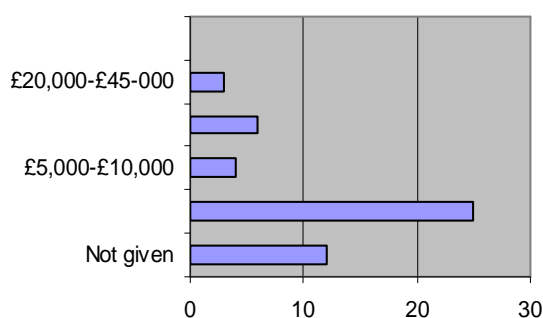
37% of participating parents were raising their children in a two parent family.

1 participant was a non-custodial parent.  
 1 participant was a step parent  
 1 participant was a pregnant parent  
 4% did not respond the question

### Parenting Status or relationship to child



### Household Income



50% of parents had a household income of under £5,000 per annum.

8% of parents had a household income of between £5,000- £10,000 per annum.

12% of parents had a household income of between £10,000- £20,000 per annum.

6% of parents had a household income between £20,000 - £45,000 per annum.

No parents training on this programme have a household income of over £45,000. 24% of parents did not answer this question.

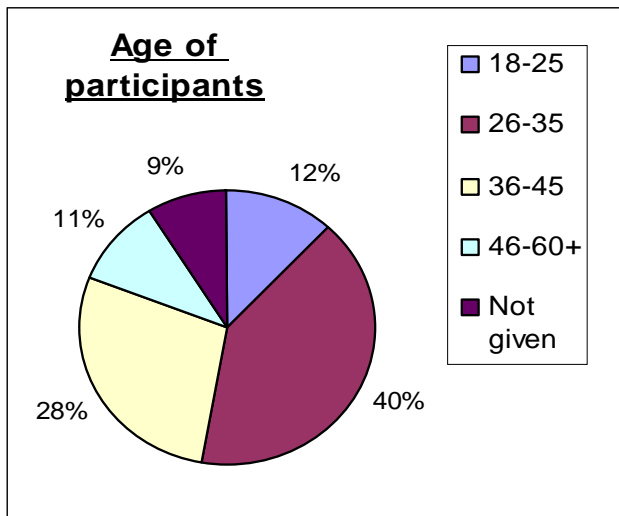
#### **4.6 Characteristics of the Cornwall participants**

Here we present a collation of 8 Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Programmes which ran in Cornwall target areas and were attended by 57 parents.

**54** of the parents were **female**.

**4** of the parents were **male**.

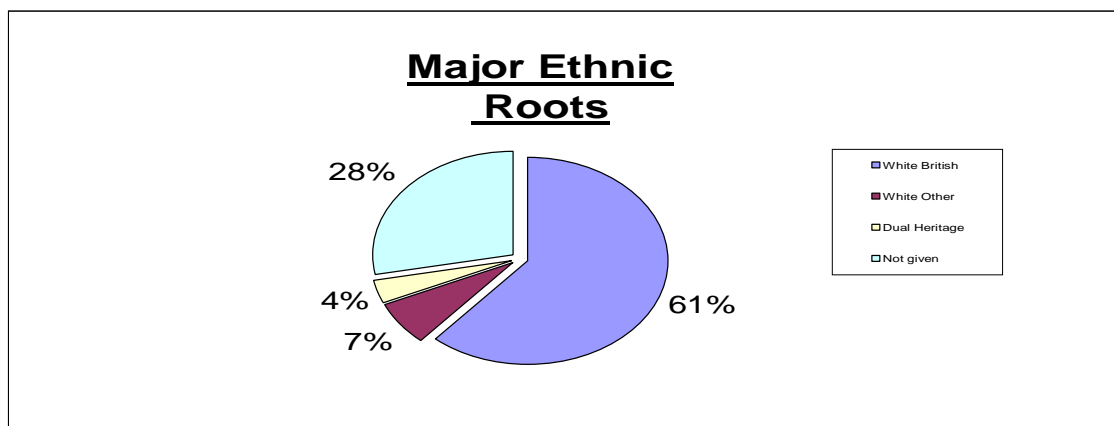
The data was taken from the Parent Registration forms, completed at the beginning of each course.



The majority of the parents were aged 26 to 35 years.

There were 7 parents under the age of 25 years and 5 parents over 46 years.

There were 16 parents who were aged between 36 and 45.



The majority of parents were White British.

2 parents were of Dual Heritage and 4 parents of White Other heritage.

3 parents said their other ethnic roots were Irish.

16 parents did not give their Ethnic Roots.

All parents except for 2 said English was their first language.

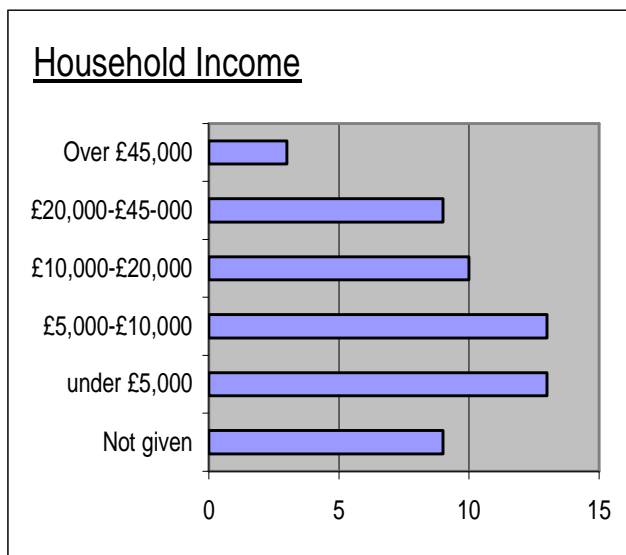
**The parenting status or relationship to the child was as follows;**  
 54% of parents were raising their children in a two parent family.

38% of parents were raising their children in a single parent family.

3% of the participants attending the programmes were step parents.

3% of the participants on the course were Grandparents.

2% were foster parents.



23% of parents have a household income between £5,000 - £10,000 per annum.

22% of parents have a household income of under £5,000 per annum

18% of parents have a household income between £10,000 - £20,000 per annum.

16% of parents have a household income between £20,000 - £45,000 per annum.

5% of parents have a household income of over £45,000.

16% of parents did not answer this question.

### Key point 1

The above data set offers a snapshot of the participants' characteristics. If, we were to offer a hypothetical analysis of a 'typical' participant at the Bristol and Cornwall courses by taking the highest percentage from each of the data sets it would suggest that for the Cornwall programme the participant was; female, aged 26 to 35, of White British ethnic roots, spoke English as a first language, raising their children in a two parent family with a household income of between £5,000 and £10,000 per annum. The 'typical' participant on the Bristol programme was: female, aged 26 to 35, of BME ethnic roots, spoke English as a first language, is a single parent family with a household income of under £5,000 per annum

There are both similarities and differences between the 'typical' participant of Bristol and the 'typical' participant of Cornwall. The notable differences are: ethnic roots, parenting status and household income per annum. The similarities were; the age range and gender of participants

## 5 The SFSC programme and its delivery

The Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parent Education Programme is an inclusive and culturally sensitive community based

programme<sup>13</sup>. The programme is generally delivered over a ten week period, consisting of three hour sessions.

It has five main component/subject areas;

- Cultural/spiritual
- Enhancing relationships
- Positive discipline
- Rights of passage
- Community involvement

The programme is designed to promote ethnic/cultural awareness, positive parent-child relationship, community/environment awareness and parenting/life skills. An integral component to the programme is anger management, positive discipline approaches and modelling and teaching as a vehicle to encourage and raise self-esteem, self-discipline, responsibility and social competence. At the same time SFSC deals with the factors in parenting that are associated with increased risk such as;

- Inconsistent parenting
- Harsh discipline in an overly critical environment
- Limited supervision
- Isolation and lack of knowledge of community resources

The SFSC approach emphasises that parenting is impacted by the local environment (for example the availability of good schools) and that parents should play an active role in shaping their environment by engaging with community resources.

### **5.1 Programme facilitation**

The programme is delivered to parents by facilitators, who are in the majority of cases parents themselves, and at some point may have been course participants. Facilitators undergo an intensive training course in which the concepts of the programme are introduced in a step by step method.

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<sup>13</sup> SFSC Evaluation, September 2006, South West Evaluation Project (Catherine Waith M.Sc)

There are no prerequisite qualifications required in order to become a facilitator, however, a non judgemental approach is essential.

Facilitators' intensive training programme is delivered over five days. After which time, they receive a facilitators manual which details the background to the programme, the concepts, a session by session guide on how to deliver the programme and a range of resource materials to support delivery of the programme to participants. SPAN's co-facilitation model has been developed as good practice.

### **Key Point 2**

The SFSC programme is always co-facilitated. The model of facilitation used by SPAN in Bristol and in Cornwall, has demonstrated that the pairing up of parents with practitioners works particularly well. They can contribute with different insights and experiences. Furthermore, parents with little or no previous facilitator experience can initially benefit from, and be empowered by, support from parent practitioners

### **Best practice in facilitation offered by SPAN highlights that facilitators should**

- Work in pairs
- Have appropriate qualifications (training)
- If inexperienced work with qualified/experienced facilitator
- Make adequate time for preparation, debriefing and evaluating sessions
- To have appropriate information available about local support agencies and service to signpost parents on to
- To attend regular supervision
- To be able to identify gaps in own knowledge

## **6 Consultation with key stakeholders**

The evaluation carried out a consultation between December 2007 and March 2008. The method used was one to one telephone interviews, postal questionnaires and face to face meetings. This next section of the report will present the interviews with the facilitators, the interviews with participants, the findings and a couple of case studies to exemplify the '*real life*' impact.

## **6.1 Facilitators thoughts on the programme**

The semi-structured telephone interviews with facilitators in Bristol and Cornwall explored facilitator's thoughts about the programme and its practical delivery.

It asked facilitators what lessons had been learned, what good practice was emerging. The findings are respectively presented here, followed by some discussion and the drawing of differences and similarities of the two geographic areas.

## **6.2 Bristol**

Six facilitators were interviewed between February and March 2007. Two of these interviews were face to face.

All the facilitators were enthusiastic and positive about the SFSC Programme. The Bristol facilitators commented on the inclusiveness of the course and stated that the uniqueness of the course was its community aspect *“it presents the family as a wider community, encouraging parents to engage in working with their child and show an interest in the community....The emphasis on ethnic group and spirituality helps to build a child's self esteem and confidence”* (interview B1) *“The programme is very comprehensive and facilitative, sharing experiences and learning from each other has been very positive”* (interview B2)

Facilitators explained that the concepts of the programme were often difficult for parents to grasp and facilitators needed to explain and model the concepts for clearer understanding. To illustrate an example two of the facilitators explained that *“for example religion is not central to many people, therefore when we cover the right of passage on spirituality it is difficult to facilitate the concept of ‘inner spirituality’.*(facilitator B3) Another facilitator added *“the concept of culture can be difficult to facilitate but when we begin to explain in day to day terms of things that we do for instance, every Saturday we play rugby or we cook a Sunday roast this becomes easier to understand”.*(facilitator B4)

The observation made here was that the facilitation of the programme and the flexibility of the facilitator to contextualise and explain the concepts is a crucial factor in delivering the programme.

### **6.3 Cornwall**

Seven of the thirteen facilitators were interviewed in Cornwall between February and March 2007.

The overwhelming consensus from all the Cornwall facilitators as with the Bristol facilitators can only be described as enthusiasm and passion for the course. One facilitator stated that having done the course herself she had felt more confident about parenting and had put into practice many of the techniques the course offered with her own teenage children. When she began facilitating the programme on a regular basis it enabled her to see what a difference the course made to parents *“the course really does help parents, I have seen the change....the course offers a tool box for parenting and after a few sessions parents change before your eyes”* (facilitator interview C5)

It was evident that the SFSC course had been a very positive experience for the facilitators and this was explained in two ways: personal development for the facilitators themselves and also the sense of positive satisfaction in sharing the learning with other parents. Facilitator interviewee C1 expressed that having completed the facilitators training and delivered the course a few times she used the learning experience to *‘springboard’* to employment. Another facilitator concurred with this saying *“yes personal development is definitely a plus and we get great feedback from groups, you can see their confidence growing. They are gaining skills and confidence....”* (Facilitator interview C7) A number of facilitators interviewed were familiar with other parenting programmes and were keen to explain that SFSC was very different to other programmes that they had either professional knowledge of or had participated in as parents. They explained that the content of other courses were not as comprehensive in terms of depth and that they were not familiar with any other available courses that covered the community aspect.

It was felt that SFSC had at least three very unique points; the community aspect, the depth of the course and the co-facilitation. It was felt that the course required some practical adaptations in order to make it more parent friendly and transferable for the audience in Cornwall. The suggestions offered were that *“this is a really good programme but can be a bit heavy. It talks about depression and people can get upset. It also talks about guns and gangs and this is not relevant in the geographical areas that I work in at present”* (interview C4) *“...it needs to be put into easy speak in order to make it work for parents.”* A thirteen week commitment is a long time – *it’s expecting an enormous amount from parents and facilitators need to work very hard to keep parents motivated for this length of time.* (Interview C1) As a contrast the length of the course was not an issue for some facilitators it was felt that *“ the length of the course gives parents time to bond and go on to do things as a group”* (interview C5) An example of a parent group was offered by facilitator C7 *“a result of the course has brought a group of parents together that now meet at a local Children’s Centre...they explored different things that they wanted to do, for example; community skills and computer training and have done this”*

### **Key point 3**

#### **Findings from Bristol and Cornwall programme facilitation**

- Overwhelming support for the SFSC programme
- A degree of personal and career development has been attributed to the facilitation of the course.
- At least three unique and distinct features of the SFSC programme were highlighted by the facilitators: community, co-facilitation and depth of the course content.
- Some practical adaptations would be welcomed in order to make the programme more parent friendly and tailored to a specific geographical needs and audience contextualisation.
- Specific targeting approaches – meeting parents before the courses to gain an understanding of individual issues.
- Speaking with parents prior to the course to understand which of the programme elements are of most importance to them and tailoring the course to the group.

### ....and Emerging good practice in programme facilitation

Cornwall have begun to develop an additional resource pack to accompany the facilitators manual. The pack includes people games to encourage more audience interaction, visual and audio prompts to support in explaining the concepts of the course and facilitators have also explained that they offer incentives for parents such as pampering gifts.

As part of the Parenting Fund – SPAN set up a new peer support Web facility to enable a wider share of practice between facilitators, including the sharing of resources, experiences and ‘know how’

Structured peer support sessions are offered to enable consistency in facilitation.

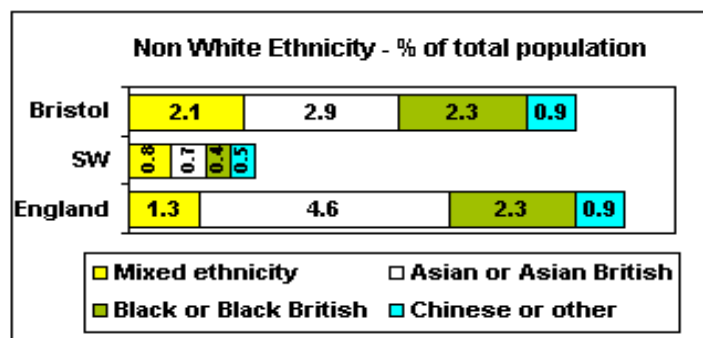
## 6.4 Facilitators thoughts on programme delivery and management

To contextualise the issues it may be worth exploring the local context of Bristol and Cornwall respectively, by illustrating some of the factors that can influence the need for parenting support.

## 6.5 Bristol

The facts presented here have been extracted from a Government statistical data source<sup>14</sup>

At 8.2%, Bristol had the highest ethnic minority population in the region in 2001. This was an increase from 5.1% in 1991 (Office of National Statistics, 2001 Census)



<sup>14</sup> <http://www.gos.gov.uk/497666/docs/220636/309014/Brisstatbrf.doc>

- In 2006/07 Bristol had the 6<sup>th</sup> highest crime rate for key offences of 354 Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships in England.
- In 2006/07, 46.9% of Bristol pupils achieved 5+ grades A\*-C at GCSE and equivalent, the lowest proportion of all 149 LEAs in England.
- 39 (15%) of Bristol's 252 Super Output Areas are among the 10% in England showing the most deprivation.
- In the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 39 (15%) of Bristol's 252 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are among the most deprived 10% in England. This is 4 more than in the earlier IMD 2004.
- 4 of these LSOAs are also within England's most deprived 1%, one in each of the wards: Filwood, Lawrence Hill, Southmead and Whitchurch Park. (Indices of Deprivation 2007)

Facilitators explained that parents often have multi-faceted issues and this often determined whether they commit to completing the course, what they take from the course and how they benefit but it also presented challenges to facilitators in a number of ways. Here we present some of the issues that facilitators raised:

- Life's complexities – some parents were '*ground down*' by daily life to a point where they could see not see a positive angle to parenting or more specifically, say anything positive about their children. In some cases parents had expended all their available skills and resources and were left with no where to turn. Facilitators expressed how some parents were in tears in early sessions.
- The concepts discussed during the course would often stimulate parents to think about how they themselves were parented and as one facilitator offered "*it brought back feelings and emotions that had been hidden for years*". Facilitators needed to deal with emotional issues as and when they arose and they needed to be able to signpost parents, if need be to appropriate professional services that could assist and support them.

- The dynamics of the groups sometimes presented challenges, for instance if one group was over subscribed with parents of older children (teenagers) it was difficult to balance the discussion between younger and teenage children. It was also explained that balancing a cultural mix was sometimes difficult for instance people who may find it culturally sensitive or uncomfortable about openly discussing family issues would not be as participative as others in the group or would stop attending the course.

## **6.6 Cornwall**

Research funded by Government Office South West suggests that “Poverty, deprivation and social exclusion are very closely linked and many people in Cornwall suffer from these problems. When the Objective One strategy was written a number of contributory factors were identified”<sup>15</sup> including:

- the nature of employment in Cornwall
- the prevalence of unemployment
- low wages, particularly in key sectors of the economy
- lack of job security, under-employment, casual and seasonal employment
- low levels of service provision in sparsely populated areas and,
- a lack of skills

The Indices of Deprivation 2004 published by the Government attempt to assess objectively the relative levels of deprivation in each district and ward in England. Under this analysis Kerrier and Penwith are among the worst districts in the whole of England and 17.56% of the Cornish population live in the most deprived 25% of wards in the country.

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<sup>15</sup> Research funded by Government Office South West  
Research Commissioned by the Cornwall Strategic Partnership, carried out by Local Intelligence Network Cornwall, in 2006.

Positive about Parenting is Cornwall's Parenting Strategy<sup>16</sup> and suggests that deprivation ranks from the Office Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) demonstrate that all of the districts in Cornwall are in the bottom 50%; and concur with the above researched data stating that this is reflective of Cornwall's low wages and seasonal employment. Cornwall has the second largest area and the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest population density of the six South West Counties. The county contains a wide scatter of small towns with only about one third of the population living in towns of over 10,000 inhabitants.

Facilitators echoed the point that the geographical span of Cornwall is such that facilitators travel some distance to deliver courses (or and) to meet with co-facilitators *"meeting with the co-facilitator is sometimes a strain due to the travel time... It was a 40 minute car journey to do one course and this time was unaccounted for"* (facilitator C6).

The low levels of service provision in sparsely populated areas presented a critical delivery issue for SFSC in the lack of childcare that was available to run along side the course.

It was a problem area that was outside the control of the facilitators and the programme managers but had an impact on course delivery. The course could only be run in 2-3 hour sessions as there was no Ofsted crèche available. It sometimes also meant that the children would be on the course with their parents for periods of time.

Other issues raised centred around practicalities and were generally expressed by facilitators as *'teething'* problems which could be attributed to distance management and the lack of human resources (i.e. one overall manager to cover both Bristol and Cornwall) and that the partnership was itself new and therefore may have required time to 'gel' and fully familiarise itself with the SFSC programme.

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<sup>16</sup> Cornwall Parenting Strategy, September 2007, Facts about Cornwall, Pg 10

### **6.7 The practical issues as expressed by facilitators;**

Monitoring visits were built into the programme as good practice in delivering the course. Facilitators expressed that there was no time span for feedback and that after visits were carried out it would take weeks to get feedback.

It was generally expressed by facilitators that opportunities to share practice would be valuable for example; techniques on recruitment of parents, how to keep parents motivated to stay on the course and such practical support as providing more resources such as; a computer and presentation equipment, office space and an appropriate venue to run the course, would prove invaluable. It was also highlighted that communication with the office was sometimes difficult as messages had to be left and evening contact with the office administration was often a problem. A number of the more practical issues highlighted may be dissipated by structured peer support and encouraged use of the website. The latter is work in progress.

#### **Key point 4 Lessons from Cornwall**

- Geographical span of Cornwall – increased travel time for facilitators
- Crèche facilities – were an ongoing issue throughout programme delivery
- Facilitators feedback – after monitoring sessions were slow
- More share of practice would have been welcomed
- Practical communication was sometimes difficult in and out of office hours.
- A lack of resources and up to date equipment to facilitate the course

#### **Key point 5 Lessons from Bristol**

- Facilitators to be wholly involved in the process of targeting and engaging parents to participate on the course so that they may gain an early understanding of any issues and barriers parents may have.
- More share of practice between facilitators
- Adaptations of the course to suit participants – simplify but keep the depth and context.
- Update the method of delivery i.e. power point presentations

***Note: as of June 2008 the programme became available on power point.***

### **....and what might be done differently next time?**

#### ***As suggested by Bristol (B) and Cornwall (C) facilitators;***

- Taster sessions – prior to full course participation (B+C)
- Target secondary school parents (B+C)
- Recruitment of paid facilitators (C)
- Structured targeting of schools to run SFSC as an integrated programme for parents and pupils *“the majority of pupils will be parents at some point”* (facilitator C5)
- Accreditation of the course participants, as some parents may wish to use the course as stepping stone to further learning. (C)
- More time to deliver the course (C)
- Structured and timely feedback from monitoring visits and (c)
- Supervision and support for facilitators (C)
- Mentoring support for facilitators in particular planning and organising, and managing group dynamics for example; delegation of tasks and how to move discussions on professionally (B)
- Allow more time at the end of each session to support parents that may require additional emotional support. (B)

### **6.8 *Parents thoughts on the programme***

The evaluation carried out a survey with forty six parents who had attended the course. Thirty parents from Bristol who had attended course in Easton, Lawrence Hill, St Paul's, and Southmead; and sixteen parents who had attended the course in Cornwall's Reduth, Penryn, Torpoint, Falmouth and St Ives.

The parents that attended the courses stated that they lived in the following areas:

Bristol	Cornwall
Easton	Falmouth
Fishpond	Pool
St Pauls	Redruth
St Phillips	Torpoint
Whitehall	St Ives
Southmead	Penryn
Barton Hill	
Newtown Eastville	

### **6.9 Analysis and findings**

The evaluation followed a structured questionnaire and the analysis was carried out using the SNAP package by Dr Brychan Thomas. The survey was conducted (in 97% of cases) via one to one telephone interviews. A small number of questionnaires were returned by post. As the majority of interviews took place via telephone it was possible to explore the questionnaire responses further with parents to gain a more qualitative view of how the programme impacted or otherwise on their family life. The questionnaire is appended to this report as Annex A.

The findings are presented here as a collective analysis i.e. Bristol and Cornwall. It may also be noted that some of the questions have been amalgamated for the purpose of analysis to offer a more in-depth representation. The question numbering therefore may not be sequential; this does not mean that responses have been omitted but that they have been incorporated. The evaluation will offer any unusual or interesting comparisons as a summary at the end of this section.

### **6.10 Background/characteristics of parents interviewed**

Parents were asked why they attended the course, what prompted them to attend. Here they offered a range of reasons from “it looked interesting, suggested by friends, recommended by a professional i.e. health visitor, school, social worker, to wanted to socialise and it was free.

There were also more specific personal reasons and aspirations for attending the course as one parent explained *“I came from a big family and had to follow my brothers and sisters. I am a single parent”* (parent interview 1) suggesting that modelling was an important aspect of parenting to her and she was keen to learn as much as possible in order to offer her child the support that was needed. Another parent offered *“my kids are driving me mad, I wanted to find out how to help me and my children”* (parent interview 2) A number of parents echoed this and stated that their reason for attending was to gain ideas, understanding, knowledge etc of supporting their children and themselves through particularly difficult times. One parent offered *“the more parents can learn and share the better support they can offer their children. There was no parenting manual given to me when I had my children – this course has been so useful”* (parent interview 27)

76.1% of parents interviewed were not employed. 73.9% of parents had children between the ages of 0-5 years old. 45.7% of parents had children between the ages of 6-12 years old and 15.2% of parents had children between 13 and 16 years old.

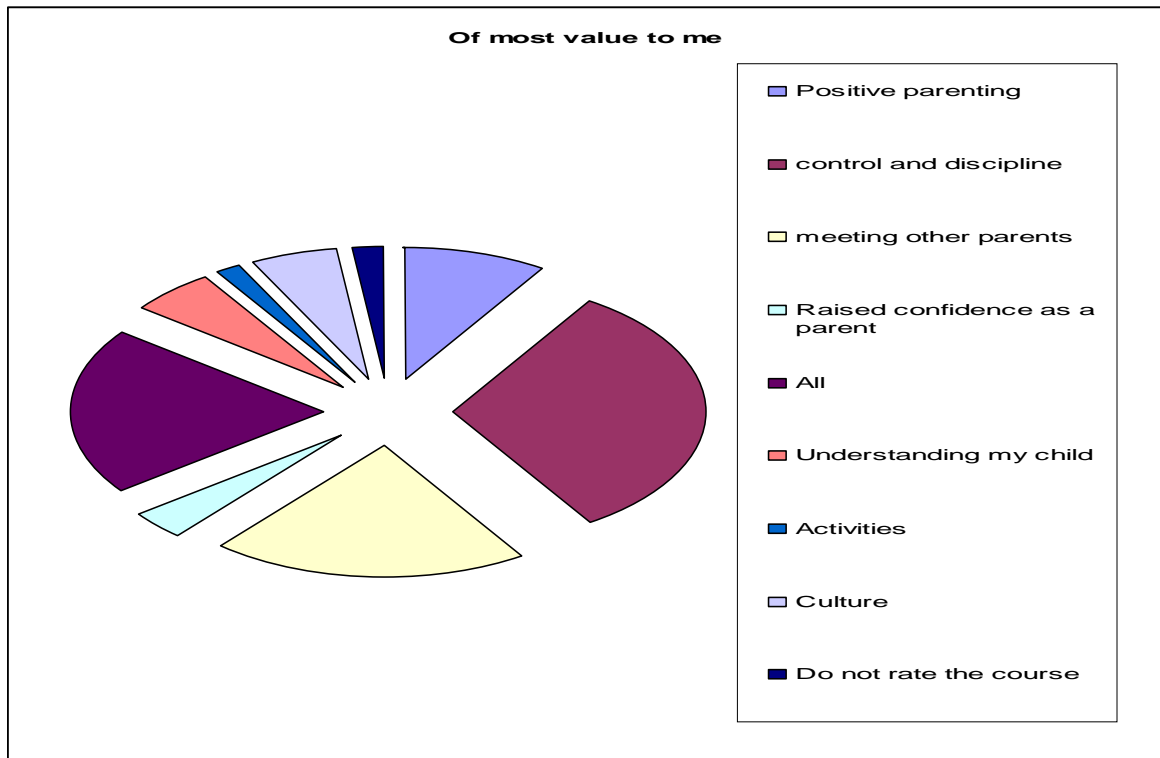
10.9% of parents stated that their child had a disability, 2.2% expressed that the disability was physical, 4.3% said their child had a learning disability and 8.7% stated as other. (In some cases it was expressed that the child had both a physical and learning disability)

**Q1 How useful do you feel this programme has been?**

58% of parents stated that they found the course to be very useful, 37% stated that the course was partly useful and 4.3% said that the course had not been at all useful.

**Q2 which elements of the programme do feel have been most useful?**

95.7% of parents offered a range of thoughts as to what had been of most value to them. Many parents felt that the course as a whole had been extremely valuable in offering them techniques to help and support in their role as parents. This was explored further with them to articulate what components of the course made the most difference or raised confidence.



17 parents stated that the techniques on control and discipline were the most useful to them. 11 parents stated that meeting other parents, being able to talk about their issues and the support they had in a group setting was valuable. Other key elements that parents highlighted were: positive parenting, understanding my child, culture, raised confidence as a parent and the activities that the manual presented. One parent summed up the value of the course as *“understanding and dealing with the ‘spring effect’ of parenting, the ups and the downs”*. (Parent 28)

**Q3 the course offered discussion on culture. Did you think this was a good idea?**

95.7% of parents stated that **yes** this was as a good idea; of these 87% felt that it had made a difference to them and their child. 4.3% of parents felt that culture was not an important element for them.

Parents offered comments that supported raised awareness and understanding of diversity and multi-cultural communities. *“It helped me understand everyone has different values and we need to respect everyone’s opinion”* (parent interview 11) and *“explaining that everyone is different with*

*different ways of doing things*” (parent interview19). Parents felt that by raising their own awareness they were able to pass the knowledge to their children *“I gained an understanding from most areas of the cultural discussion. It has made a difference to my children and our relationship within the whole family, it made me realise that culture is not just important as an adult but also as a child”* (parent interview 8) *“I have been teaching my child a lot more about her home and culture. This is something I had not thought about before as she is two and half years old. But it works”* (parent interview 33)

Parents were also saying that the discussion on culture enabled them to work better with their children. An example of this was parent interview 30 who stated that her family consisting of herself, husband, mother, father and mother in-law were all of different ethnic roots and were now living in Bristol – this was posing a number of dilemmas for her, not least in terms of raising her children in a different country and culture, but also, how the differences and sometimes complexities of different family cultures can be managed within one household. She felt that the discussion enabled her to better understand and manage the issues. The discussion seemed to form a catalyst for parents to consider their own culture *“it made me think about what my culture means to me and how it has made me have the values and traditions that I have. I have passed this on to my children and will help them learn about their own culture”* (parent interview12)

The newly raised awareness and understanding seemed to raise an interest in parents to find out more and draw comparisons and similarities between cultures. Parents offered that *“there are differences in the discipline of other families and the way others lead their lives. It was good to recognise the difference in cultures and how the family help with problems”* (Parent interview 20). *“There needs to be more discussion on culture. I found it very interesting”* (Parent interview 21). *“I have found that there are more support networks in other cultures rather than white”* (parent interview 32).

The similarities as expressed by parents were: *“having a mixed group and different cultures all coming together was good. I was surprised that they had the same problems as we do”* (parent interview 23) *“I explain different cultures to my daughter and help her understand that all the families have the same problems...we try and learn together”* (parent interview 25) and *“interesting to see different cultures and that Bristol mums have the same problems* (parent interview 35) The summing up of the value of the cultural discussion is best presented by parent 6 who stated *“we now live in a multi-cultural society and it is important to respect other people’s beliefs and faiths. The discussion on culture enhanced the idea of how we can all live together”*

The parents that felt the discussion on culture was not important to them offered the following views. *“It hasn’t made a huge difference to me and my children but I think it’s good to have the choice of discussion”* (parent interview 14). *“...it was good to know but it was not new for us”* (parent interview 17). *“I understand other peoples culture so it has not made any difference to me”* (parent interview 22). *“..Not massively relevant to me, but good to have a broad perspective”* (parent interview 36). The parents that did not take a great deal from the cultural discussions were not totally adverse to the session. They felt that the discussion was not necessarily relevant to them and their daily lives but overall felt that it was not a negative aspect.

The final parent quote for this section is more of a question from parent 41 who offered *“bringing in different aspects of culture is good and this should be expanded on. The challenge is how do you expand the horizons of people who have no concept of different cultures?”*

## Key point 6

### Summary of findings 'about the programme'

- The majority of parents rated the course as very useful
- The most useful elements of the programme were stated as:
  - Control and discipline
  - Meeting and discussing issues with other parents
  - Positive parenting
  - Raised confidence as a parent
- 95.7% of parents felt that the discussion on culture was a good idea.
  - It raised awareness on culture and diversity per se
  - It raised awareness of parents own culture and cultural roots
  - Supported in understanding the 'multi-cultural family'
  - Deepened the knowledge of multi-cultural communities
- 4.3% of parents felt that the discussion did not offer them anything new.
  - They were familiar with culture and diversity
  - They did not feel it was relevant to their life or current situation.

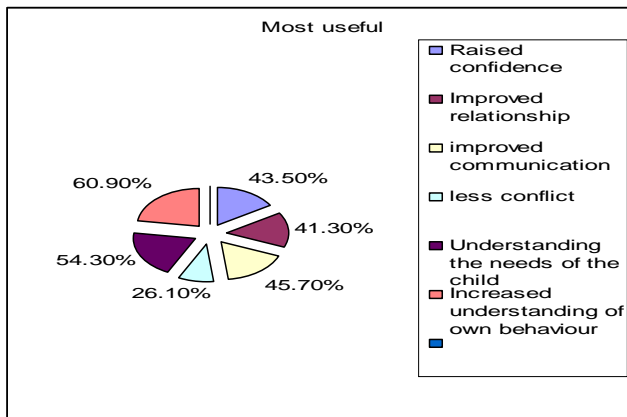
### **6.11 How the programme has/or has not made a difference**

This section of the questionnaire seeks to identify the difference that the programme/course might have had (both positive and negative) to family crisis.

#### **Q 7 Do you feel family life is less stressful since participating on the programme?**

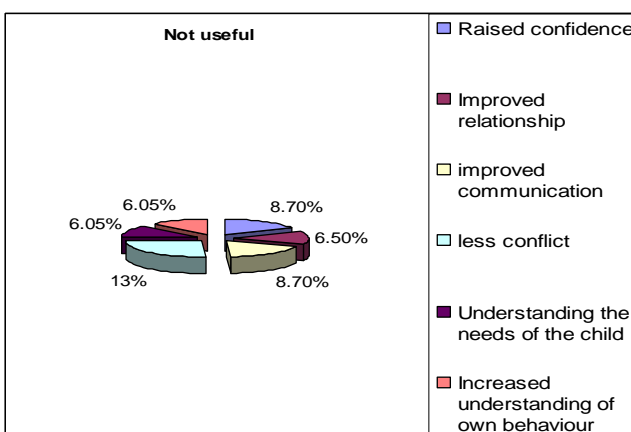
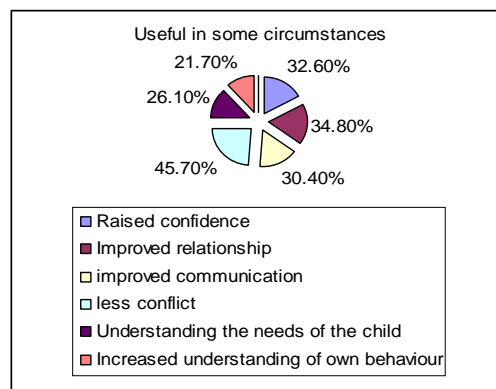
63% of parents stated that family life was less stressful since participating on the course, 26.1% of parents stated that there had been no change. Parents were offered a range of statements that they were asked to rate in terms of improvement or otherwise since participation on the course. It was found that 43% of parents felt the course had raised their confidence as a parent, 41.3% stated that their relationship with their child had improved, 45.7% had noted an improvement in communication with their child,

54.3% stated a better understanding of their child's needs, 60.9% stated that the course had increased an understanding of their own behaviour and 26.1% stated that there was now less conflict between them and their child.



Percentage representation of parents rating the **most useful areas**

Percentage representation of parents rating the **course as useful in some circumstances**



Percentage representation of parents rating the course **as not useful**

89.1% of parents felt that the programme/course had offered them techniques in nurturing and supporting their child to behave more positive socially.

## Key point 7

### Summary of findings 'about how the programme/course has made a difference to family life'

- 63% of parents found life less stressful since participating on the course
- 89.1% of parents felt the course had offered them techniques to support their child's behaviour socially.
- The areas of most significant improvement were:
  - Raised confidence as a parent
  - Improved relationship with their child
  - Improved communication
  - Understanding the needs of the child
  - Increased understanding of own behaviour
- The area rated as '*most useful*' in some circumstances was the reduction of conflict between parent and child. Parents rated this at 45% suggesting that although some improvement had been made it was possibly not as significant and expected/needed/aspired.
- In a similar fashion the highest rating of '*not useful*' was the area of conflict between parent and child (13%)

## 6.12 How if at all the programme has made an impact on daily life?

This section seeks to assess the impact that the programme/course has made on daily life. It focuses on social behaviour and asks parents to consider the following questions;

Q10 has this course made a difference to the way in which your child socialises with the family?

43.5% of parents stated that the course had made a slight difference to the way in which their child socialised, 34.8% of parents stated that there was no difference, and 19.6% stated that there was a great difference.

Parents were asked if their children had been withdrawn prior to the course and 15.2% stated that they had, however, after the course this figure reduced to 4.3% of parents stating that their child remained withdrawn.

Parents were asked how often they and their child talked about things happening in their life. 56.5% of parents stated that talking with their children about things that happened during the day was an every day occurrence. However, after the programme the percentage had increased to 76.1% of parents stating that they talked to their children everyday.

23.9% of parents stated that they rarely talked to their children prior to the course this figure decreased to 6.5% after participation on the course.

4.3% of parents stated that they never sat down and talked with their children prior to the course this figure decreased to 0 after the programme.

Q17 Parents were asked to comment on what events/actions they believed created the most frustration/problems within their family? Parents offered a range of responses which suggested that there was recognition of the catalyst and the events that created the problems.

The sorts of situations that caused the most frustration were identified by parents as: Sibling rivalry was a popular response – parents talked about siblings not sharing toys, competing for the parent's attention, not wanting to share mum. *“Both my children would try to talk to me at the same time and they would get frustrated and end up shouting”* (parent interview 8). Other situations like bed, meal times and table manners time were also a popular response. Parents suggested that at times when they themselves were stressed or in a hurry as they are running late would also create family tensions.

Parents within their conversations offered ways of how they would now deal with these situations. One parent offered *“all children have paddies, its learning to deal with them. I find its controllable now”* (parent interview 1)

Another parent offered *“I was reacting aggressively to my child – I can now deal with and understand things better”* (parent interview 30) and *“although I didn’t have a problem the course did help in a positive way”* (parent interview 44)

Parent interview 39 began to explain *“I have three boys and they are constantly fighting. I am not able to get through to them all...”* Parent interview 33 explained that *“the problem for me is lack of money and lack of space – I have a one bedroom bed sit that I share with my child, I have space for one bed which we share. I would have liked to finish the course but was not able to. I have been on the housing list for three years and six months”*. Another parent offered *“I am currently going through a house move and a separation. Every aspect of my life is disrupted, things are extremely difficult and it’s hard to pinpoint what the impact of the course has been. I have started to use some of the techniques”*. (Parent interview (34)

### **6.13 Impact on community life**

37% of parents interviewed stated that their child always informed them of where they were going and what time they would be back. 8.7% stated that their child did not inform them. The question did not apply to parents of young children and babies.

Parents were asked if their child’s circle of friends had changed since they had participated on the programme. 10.9% responded that they had. However; in at least four cases the changes had come about as children had left infant or junior school and had started junior or secondary school. It was therefore a natural cause of events that had changed their circle of friends and was not necessarily due to the course.

In cases where parents stated that the course did have an impact in their children’s friendships they felt it was through their child’s raised confidence levels. Parent interview 8 explained that her son had become more confident in himself and around others. *“He had started to go to Badgers (St John’s Ambulance) and has made lots of new friends.*

*He was also keen to go to a holiday club and when he did go he really enjoyed it and had fun making things with his new friends”* Another parent said “my son has lots of new friends now, they are better chosen friends. (Parent interview 23)

In the cases where parents had noted a different circle of friends they attributed it to the course saying that *“because we stayed friends with everyone in the group”* *because we communicate better now”* *“because my son is more confident now”*.

The significant impact seemed to be on parents themselves and their circle of friends they explained: *“My friends increased through attending the parent group and I now attend a new group to help in the community”*. (parent interview 2) *“My friends went from zero...its made a massive change, I have friends that stick around now”* (parent interview 36) *“since completing the course I have become a volunteer, this was through the people I met on the course”* (parent interview 9) *“My friends increased – I made new friends on the course and we share experiences”* (parent interview 11) and finally, *“I now speak and meet regularly with other parents from the programme”* (parent interview 10)

Q(s) 23/24/25 are you and your child involved in community groups, events that you were not involved in prior to the course? If yes how many of these on your own and how many with your child?

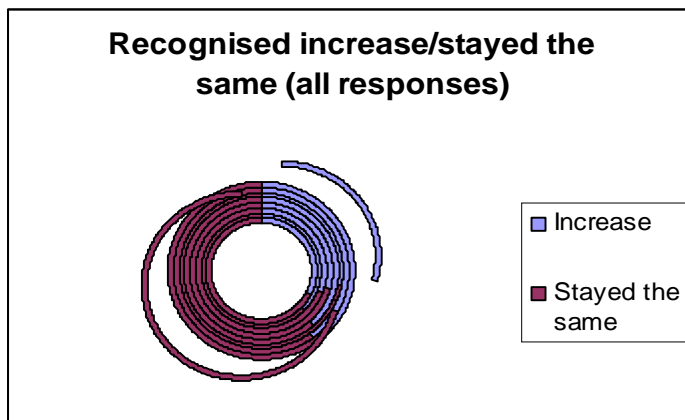
37% of parents stated that they were involved in community groups that they were not involved in prior to the course. Of these 23.9% were attending groups without their child and 15.2% were attending groups with their child.<sup>17</sup>

Parents were asked to rate their child’s good behaviours. They were offered a series of statements and asked to state whether their child’s behaviour had increased, decreased or stayed the same.

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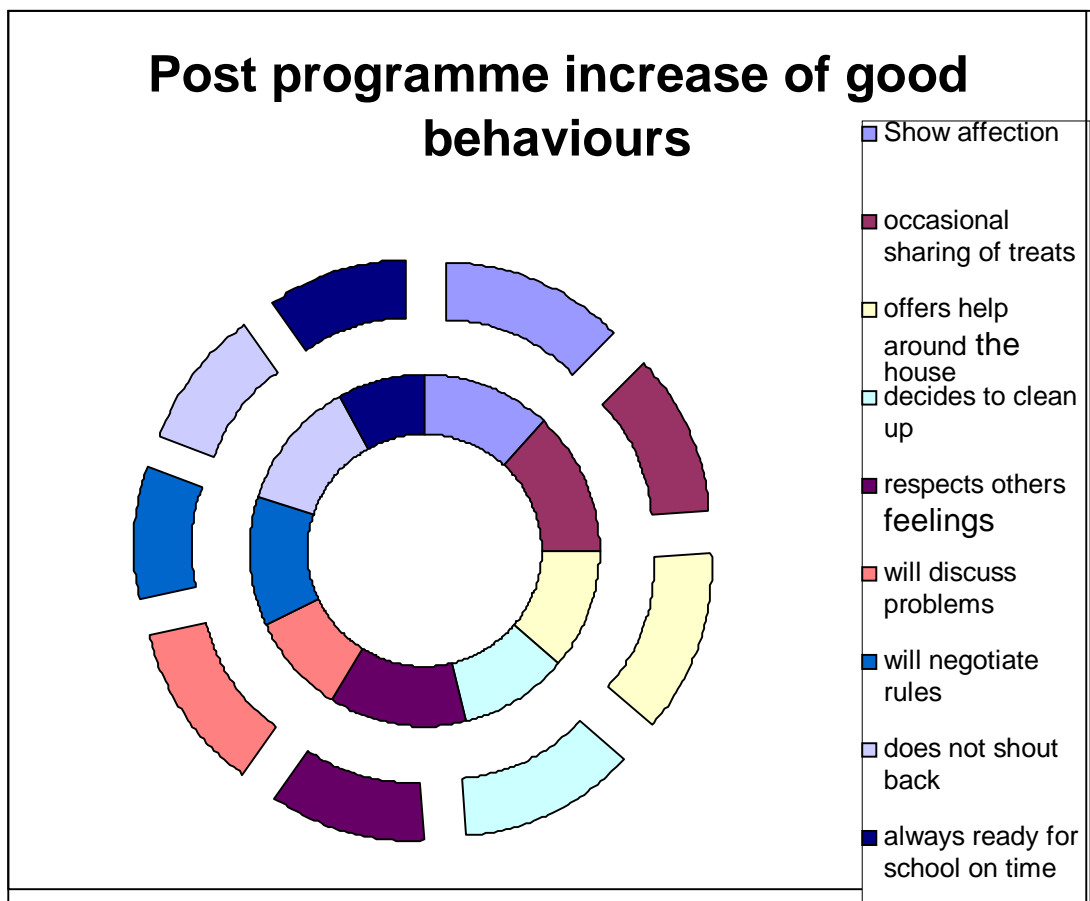
<sup>17</sup> Note: some parents attended new groups both with and without their child.

The two graphs below offer the parents responses on each of the areas and suggest that in all cases there had been an increase of good behaviour, or stayed the same but there had been no decrease.



Post course good behaviours as recognised by parents.

A small percentage increase



The inner circle offers a view of each behaviour. Where parents have responded that there has been no improvement post course the behaviour has remained the same. The outer circle offers a view of the increase of good behaviour that parents recognised post the course.

Parents' comments were canvassed to offer practical examples of the difference in their child's behaviour post course. Here we present some of the comments;

*“Putting own toys away. Well mannered. Shares more with others - more good communication than bad. Trying harder at everything he does and getting good results....much nicer when playing with his brother. Communication has improved hugely, they talk to me now. More loving and kinder – giving hugs and taking more notice. My daughter is about the same now as she was prior to the course. There has been an increase of good behaviour generally.”* (Extracted from a range of parent interviews)

### **Key point 8**

#### **Summary of findings ‘about how the programme/course has made an impact on daily family life’**

- 43.5% of parents stated that the course made a difference to the way their child now socialises.
- 15.2% of parents stated that their child had been withdrawn prior to the course – this reduced to 2.4% after parents participated on the course.
- There were significant increases in the area of communication between parent and child.
- There was a significant impact on parents' community life and social networks.
- Parents noted an increase in their child or children's good behaviours.

### **6.14 About longer term impact and how the programme may have changed the way life is now.**

This final section explores the longer term impact of the course. It seeks to identify the skills, techniques and practices that parents feel they have gained to use on a practical day to day basis to support their parenting role.

Q28 asked what practices you feel you now have as a result of the course that you can use within your family situation.

The majority of parents responded positively to this question, two parents stated that the course had not offered them anything.

The majority of parents (73.9%) stated that since participating on the course they have gained practices that enable them to recognise what makes them and their child angry/upset/frustrated and are able to use techniques and practices to calm or avoid the situation.

Parents offered a range of new practices that they now use, for example; the reward chart was stated as a practice that worked for some parents, others stated they preferred the attention chart. The *time out* technique was quoted by many parents. Overall, comments that followed were very positive. Here we present a range of parent's comments;

*"I now notice more when my son is upset and when I'm about to get frustrated which helps as we can both calm down"* (parent interview 14) *"I can control my behaviour and how to react and handle my son"* (parent interview (30) *I help my children deal with their feelings of anger* (parent interview 16) *I now recognise that although I guide my daughter and teach her things we are two different people and do things differently* (parent interview 33) *We talk more and I listen more instead of shouting* (parent interview 25) *I now understand the individual needs of my children and my own self awareness.* (Parent interview 38)

Parent interview 28 and parent interview 39 felt that the programme/course had not offered them the skills and techniques that they required to better understand and manage their child's behaviour. For other parents it was a difficult question to respond to as their child was too young and therefore felt that it was not applicable at this time.

## **7 Case studies**

Here we offer three personal case studies as presented by parents;

*I am a single parent of my little girl who is 14 months old. A nursery nurse recommended this course to me. I was having separation difficulties with my child and felt that the crèche offered would help. I have learned different types of discipline and have found the ignoring/praise method useful, Also learning about the developments of children at different ages gave me a better understanding of why children behave as they do and what techniques to use. I enjoyed listening to other parents who tried the methods and proved that they work, and the sharing of experiences. I would recommend this course, even to parents with younger children, especially with your first child because it's really scary and it won't be too long before I use these skills. I enjoyed it and am looking forward to going to the parent group.*

Carrie, 2007

*I have been with my partner for 21 years. We have two girls aged six and ten. I found out about the SFSC programme through a friend of mine who I often sought advice from. She is a SFSC Facilitator and suggested I enrol on my local course. I made the decision to join because my girls were fighting regularly, argumentative and volatile with one another, which I found stressful and became depressed. I came to the course more for the parenting advice than the community engagement side, but as the course progressed it helped me look at the wider community and I realised it is nice to get involved. Since I attended the course our children are a lot calmer. My partner has noticed the effects that the course has had. We talk about problems and communicate better we are able to problems solve by looking at problems and working through them. My friend has also noticed how much happier we are now, that my child is more responsive. I recommend this course to anyone.*

Debbie, 2008

*I am a single parent with two teenage children, my daughter is 17 and my son is 15. Before I got involved with the SFSC Programme, I had no hope. I felt that I had failed as a parent because my son has behavioural and emotional difficulties. I thought there was no support for me, only for my son. Then I was offered to do the SFSC Facilitators Training. At first I was doubtful this it would make a difference but on the first day of the training I was intrigued and I realised I can do things differently as a parent and pass on this information to other parents. I learn so much as a facilitator each week. I feel I can connect with parents through my own experiences. At home I've learned to walk away from a situation and not to take the behaviour personally. I used to give in to demands, now we have a contract to work towards privileges and I stick to my agreement. I have learned not to take privileges away once agreed. I recommend this course it's worthwhile and it makes sense. Facilitators are very supportive of the parents. All parents need some form of support*

## **8 Conclusion**

It is generally accepted that *people do not use services to meet government targets but because they feel a need and imagine the service will meet it.*<sup>18</sup> This seems to be the case with the SFSC course. Parents attended the course for varying reasons and with varying aspirations however, the end result was that the course contributed positively to their 'good parenting' skills.

### **8.1 Has the course had a positive impact?**

In the majority of cases the survey undertaken by the evaluation found that there was clear evidence from the parent's perspective that the SFSC programme/course had raised awareness and positively impacted on family and community life. In particular the findings pointed to substantive impact in the aspect of culture through raised awareness and deeper understanding. This aspect was more striking in the Bristol analysis but had also offered many benefits to the Cornwall parents in terms of a deeper awareness.

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<sup>18</sup> The National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) in its comments to the Every Child Matters Green Paper

The course had contributed positively towards preventative work in terms of family crises and day to day practice. Parents had a set of 'new tools' to work with. Techniques that supported clear instruction on discipline and modelling and this seemed to contribute to raised confidence levels in parents themselves as 'good parents'.

One of the unique features of the course as offered by the facilitators was its community aspect and this has been clearly articulated by parents as they demonstrated how the course had made significant differences to them as individuals and to their children.

When these factors are considered systemically, there is no doubt that the programme/course has had a positive impact on the parents and consequently on the families and family life.

### ***8.2 The performance and effectiveness of the project(s) in meeting their stated objectives and outputs.***

The project performed well towards meeting its stated objectives and targets. In some instances for example; the training of facilitators it exceeded its stated targets.

### ***8.3 SFSC parenting support integration into existing family services through mainstreaming and cross-sector partnerships***

An Independent Evaluation carried out by Researcher Catherine Waithe M.SC in September 2006, offered in the key findings that "*the SFSC programme can add value to government policies and strategies such as every Child Matters, Community Cohesion and the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy*". The researched findings of this Independent External Evaluation Report, has evidential support which has been informed by parents experience of the programme to suggest that SFSC directly supports the five priority areas set out in Every Child Matters, by offering parents a skills set to positively support their parenting skills, and by raising awareness of cultures and communities to develop a heightened understanding of diversity and citizenship.

The challenge here is to ensure continuity of learning and development and to continue to research the longer term impact of SFSC. Whilst the model promoted for delivering the SFSC programme is one of facilitation it requires intensive support for facilitators, a forum for share of practice for facilitators and a robust administrative system. Stated in other terms it needs nurturing, consistency and community 'know how'.

SPAN has developed a core team that have the expertise, strength and 'know how' to support the management and delivery of the programme.

Often in discussing mainstream and mainstreaming there is expectancy that a programme such as SFSC can simply be imbedded into daily practice without a further funding or support. The case on a realistic level is that this embedment of provision takes time and finance; time to build skills and finance to support additional staffing. The National Family and Parenting Institute suggest that voluntary sector provision should be encouraged through central government. Voluntary sector family and parenting support is cost-effective, flexible, responsive, and acceptable to users. It has led the way in service innovation.

The Government's pledge that, by 2010, 'all children should have access to a variety of activities beyond the school day' and that these will give them 'the opportunity to keep fit and healthy, to acquire new skills, to build on what they learn during the school day or simply to have fun and relax'.<sup>19</sup> Extended services are planned to incorporate the five outcomes for children in the Every Child Matters agenda.

SPAN is well placed to work with local government in the follow up to extended and more integrated services in schools and children's centres.

#### ***8.4 Good practice models to usefully inform future provision.***

Parents may view professionals' power as both vast and arbitrary. This view may deter parents from participating on programmes and courses in particular

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<sup>19</sup> Ofsted survey, Better education and care, Published July 2006. Reference number HMI 2609

when the emphasis is on parenting skills. Parents may feel that a stigma is attached to attending courses on parenting as the feeling that parenting is something that is done naturally. By attending a course it reinforces negative views of not being a good enough parent.

A view reinforced by the public attention paid to instances of actual or supposed incompetence. Yet, it is well documented that the most effective family happens when parents and children feel involved and trust their workers. Importantly, the SFSC approach emphasises that parenting is impacted by the local environment (for example the availability of good schools) and that parents should play an active role in shaping this environment by engaging with community resources. The model that the SFSC programme uses for facilitation is one of inclusivity, empowering parents to work as facilitators (either on a voluntary or on a paid basis). This model of facilitation takes away any distrust parents may have in 'professionals' and can be viewed more as peer facilitation rather than top down training.

### ***8.5 Improving future delivery of the SFSC programme***

In considering any improvements for future delivery it may be worth noting that an action research project could usefully inform on practical judgements, in particular the validating through practice, of the issues that parents face in disadvantaged or isolated communities. Further, the programme and the model used for delivery would benefit from a longitudinal study that may plot and validated the longer term impact of SFSC. This research could make use of a control group and could also include in its design feedback from children of parents who participate on the programme/course.

Generally, participants stated that they enjoyed the course and felt that it had proved beneficial to them. They felt that the sessions could be shortened or restructured as there seemed to be too many concepts in too short a space. It was felt that more discussion on topics that parents felt were important to them at that point in time would be useful and that there were elements of the course that did not always apply to their communities or situations.

## **8.6 Final observations**

The final observations are that overall the project (s) funded through the Parenting Funds has delivered substantially against its targets.

The mode of programme delivery may benefit from tweaking i.e. tailoring it for its specific audience but this is a consideration that requires wider discussion with the facilitators of the programme.

The wider use of the website and the peer support element of the model will enhance the consistency of programme facilitation.

The model or concept of delivery used by SPAN has and can play a key role in reaching a wide range of parents including '*hard to reach*' and can usefully support and add value to Government Policies and Strategies that aim to deliver services and support directly to communities.

The SFSC programme currently managed by SPAN and funded under the Parenting Fund has since its inception in 2007 achieved a demonstrable range of deliverables and as stated by parents has positively impacted on their daily lives by empowering parents to be more involved in their communities and living environments, raising awareness and confidence in their own skills and abilities within their role as parents and gaining new skills and techniques that support positive parenting.

The challenge for SPAN is whether continuity in delivery can be maintained long term and how the programme itself can be embedded as a mainstream provision. Both these aspects are not mutually exclusive, they are interdependent. In the first instance:

- Continuity of delivery, SPAN requires appropriate financial support to deploy the resources required to enhance the current management and delivery arrangements. This would enable them to better address the interpersonal challenges and the resource deficits that facilitators encounter. In the second instance:

- In order to embed and mainstream the programme in schools and Children's Centres (as this is the most obvious fit) there is a need for a stronger strategic alignment with local government service delivery. This would raise awareness of the programme and its impact on family life and behaviours to the movers and shakers in local government.

The Children's Centres recognise the value of the programme but as the programme cannot be self-financing, they face challenges in finding the appropriate funding to continue with delivery. They are also conscious that in funding the courses and the facilitation, without the facilitation support structure offered by SPAN, a management and course consistency vacuum may emerge.

It would therefore seem that the mainstreaming of the SFSC model in its current form may not be ready for total mainstreaming and embedding, and that in order for this to happen it may require a little more time. In such circumstances there needs to be reliance on a degree of public sector support and SPAN require additional funding in order to further develop the required measures and structure in which to incrementally move towards mainstreaming.

Government strategies to reduce inequality, increase wellbeing and deliver personal development and community cohesion has at its core the broader family support structure. This has become evident as more and more key government documents express their strategic focus areas and targets. It is generally accepted that stress, poverty, poor housing, isolated communities and communities disadvantaged by services has a negative impact on parenting. People can get drowned in a sea of troubles and can get down trodden by daily life. Child psychologist Rudolph Schaffer in his review of child development literature argued that *"parents who receive more support, behave towards their children with greater warmth and more consistency. They are able to provide more effective discipline and yet be less punitive; they respond to their children with greater sensitivity and have more*

*positive attitudes about child rearing. They show greater affection and are more likely to have securely attached children” (Schaffer, 1996)*

The closing remark comes from two parents. One who offers “ *the more that parents can learn and share with each other the better support they can offer their children.....there was no parenting manual given to me when I had my children.....This course has been very useful to me*”. And from Andrew who eloquently wrote:

I was getting a bit worried,  
About how I was going to cope,  
Confidence as a parent was low,  
I thought there was no hope.

I always thought I was good,  
The best dad there could be,  
The cracks were starting to show  
Then a leaflet distracted me.

Strengthening Families and Communities  
What is this I see?  
Free childcare and training  
Be the best parent you can be

So I plucked up the courage to go,  
Nervous but willing to learn,  
New ideas and lots of new skills,  
Over a new leaf I will turn.

Ethnicity, culture and violence,  
Characteristics and discipline  
All around behaviour, we cover everything.

I gain something new every week,  
And so do my children as well.  
Our relationships are much better,  
Problems.....you couldn't tell!

And by the end of this course I know,  
All the info and encouragement I've had,  
Will help to achieve,  
Being a better person and a better Dad....

**Andrew, Cornwall, 2008**