Evaluation of the Family Links Nurturing Programme at the Minerva Project 2012
Introduction

Family Links is a registered charity promoting emotional literacy, nurturing and relationship skills in families, schools and communities.

The Family Links Nurturing Programme has been running in a number of prisons across England since the programme was first trialed in HMP Styal and Foston hall in 2007.

Family Links continues to encourage community Parent Group Leaders to link with local prisons in their area to support family relationships during separation. Many Children Centres across the UK are interested in supporting the parent and family outside prison in an attempt to improve outcomes for their children.

Alan Johnson, MP for West Hull, suggested the link to the Minerva project when he experienced the programme in action along with his colleague Graham Allen MP for Nottingham, with parents at The Rainbow Children’s Centre in West Hull in June 2011. He saw the benefit of how Family Links’ work in building family relationships would support the overall aim of preventing reoffending. Family ties can make all the difference to rehabilitation.

The Minerva Project kindly supported the development of a ten-week Nurturing Programme for parents, with funding for resources, venue, lunches and Open College Network accreditation costs. A commitment towards future sustainability at Minerva has already been made by funding the training costs of their own in-house facilitator who plans to run more groups using a co-facilitator from the Children’s Centre community.
A word from the Project Manager of Minerva

The Minerva Social Enterprise was created by the Hull Community Safety Partnership to support ex-offenders leaving prisons from returning to custody. We recognized that key to that journey was a strong family network that supported not only the offender but the family unit that supported that person on his or her journey. Often families suffer greater harm whilst a parent carer is in custody than the offender themselves, and this often leads to conflict and further periods of custody: a continual cycle of offending and re-offending with harmful effects on the family and society.

We became aware of the excellent work that The Family Links team in Hull and the surrounding area did to support families when one of our workers participated in the Nurturing Programme to become a foster parent. Such was his enthusiasm of the support he received that we knew we had to meet the Family Links team and integrate that support into our service. I can say without doubt it was one of the best decisions we made. The team delivered their nurturing programme on site at our family resource centre and the participation and commitment from all was outstanding.

We were so impressed with the programme we have now trained one of our staff in the process and look forward to a long and rewarding association with the Family Links organization.

Regards,

Russ Waterman, MA, CMgr MCMI, ABCI.
Acknowledgements

Parent Group Leader and External Moderator: Shirley Stephenson
Parent Group Leaders/ Tutors: Sandra McAlpin and Sharon Watts
Parent Group Leader in Training: Joanne Waterman
Evaluation Research and Production: Hollie Waterman MA (ELM Communication)

Family Links would like to thank all the parents and parent group leaders for completing the questionnaires and participating in the programme.

Any use of materials in this document, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Hollie Waterman (Elm Communications) is prohibited.
Rationale and Group Selection

The selection process generated interest from various agencies and partnerships in the area. The course attracted attendees from many different backgrounds, accepting delegates from The Minerva Project (25%), The Together Women’s Project (5%) and The Family Intervention Project (10%). Some attendees also heard about the course through friends/relatives and colleagues who worked for The Minerva Project (60%). Some attendees were engaged with agencies working within the criminal justice system. Others were engaged with organizations working to support vulnerable adults and complex need families. The selection method provided the programme with a diverse group of participants promoting inclusion and acceptance as well as effective multi-agency working.

Funding was made available by Minerva for all the parents to register for national accreditation through the Open College Network at level One or Two in The Nurturing Programme.
Attendee Perceptions

Attendees were asked to discuss their perceptions about the Family Links Nurturing Programme prior to the course start. Attendee’s answers were measured qualitatively. Attendees were asked to discuss their perceptions again at week 5 and after the course ended.

Attendees were asked to comment on four areas of expectation in relation to the course. Attendees stated that they hoped the course would:

1. 74% stated they would like further knowledge
2. 52% stated they would like to maintain positive relationships within their family
3. 94% stated they would like reassurance and guidance

At week 5 (mid-way through the course), and at week 11 (the end of the course) attendee’s were asked if the course had:

a. Exceeded their expectations
b. Met their expectations
c. Did not meet their expectations

The table below shows the number of attendees whose perceptions of the programme were ‘met’ at week 5 (mid-way through the course) in comparison to week 11 (the end of the course). The number of attendees expectations that were only ‘met’ decreased as the course progressed. As the ‘met expectation’ perceptions decreased, the ‘exceeded expectation’ perceptions for attendees increased.
Attendance

The Nurturing Programme ran for a total of 11 weeks. The table below is an indication of the parents’ attendance. The individual who attended for 3 weeks only had gained employment and so was unable to continue training. The individual who attended for 5 weeks was subject to court appearances during the weekly sessions. All other absences were due to holiday and other family commitments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individuals

Attendees of the Family Links Nurturing Programme were asked to scale their personal and families progress at two stages of the course (Week 5 and Week 10). This log is used to determine areas in which attendees and their families are noticing progression with the help of the course and also where there are particular areas in which attendees could improve their family life. The ‘Family Logs’ are a positive way of assessing personal progression throughout the course.

Parent Group Leaders are encouraged to measure the progress of the families with whom they are working by asking parents to complete validated pre and post measure questionnaires at the beginning of the parent group and after the course completion.

The aim of the questionnaires is to measure whether parents (and optionally their children, if aged between 11 and 16) perceive their family circumstances to have been improved after attending the Nurturing Programme. This information is useful at a local level – to show effectiveness and appropriateness to demonstrate how important it is for local groups to be supported. It is also useful at a regional and national level to encourage local and national government to support our work.
The validated pre and post measures recommended by Family Links are-

1. **The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ)** focusing mostly on individual children or young people’s behaviour
2. **The Warwick and Edinburgh mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)** focusing on parental feelings and thoughts.

Data collected routinely from parents attending the Nurturing Programme for Parents and Carers in community settings indicate that parents’ well-being and children’s behavior increase after participating in the programme. Please see appendix – *Evaluation of the Nurturing Programme for Parents and Carers, Executive Summary December 2011*.

The table below shows the scaling process completed in week 1 and week 10 by attendees. The table shows how attendees considered their families were getting on in relation to the categories: ‘Great enjoying life together’, ‘Co-operation and understanding’, ‘More fun than pain’, ‘Equal amounts of fun and pain’, ‘Could be better’, ‘Fight more than get on’ and ‘Poor’.

From the table below, we can see that the rise in parents considering their family to be ‘great enjoying life together’ increased dramatically from week 0 to week 10.

![Scaling Process Chart](chart.png)
Of particular interest to the Family Links Programme is whether attendance has an effect on the personal progression of attendees.

The Family Log consists of 5 questions. Each question attempts to count the extent to which attendees feel their family life is improving as a direct result of the course and offers an opportunity for qualitative comments additionally. Results from questions 1-4 are detailed in the bar charts below. Results from questions 4a and 5 will be considered separately.

Attendees were given a 5 scale option to choose as an answer to this question. The scale contained options 1-5 (1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neither agree nor disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree). The questions and attendee results are outlined below.

Question 1: “The course is helping me to change”

![Bar chart for Question 1](image1)

Question 2: “The course is helping my family change”

![Bar chart for Question 2](image2)
Question 3: “My child/family say that things are better”

The tables above show that in all cases, attendees opinions on their own progress increased throughout the programme.
**Question 4a:** “What strategies are you using?

1. Praise
2. Time out
3. Family rules
4. Choices and consequences
5. Rewards and penalties”

Attendees were asked to tick which ideas and strategies they are using **confidently** in the home from the list above.

By week 5, the majority of attendees were using most ideas and strategies at home **confidently**. 100% of attendees were using the ‘praise’ strategy, followed by 90% of attendees using the ‘time out’ strategy.
Question 5 asked attendees to consider the ‘temperature’ in their household at the time of the scaling exercise. Attendees could choose between describing their household as “Cold” (critical, distant), “Warm” (kind, nurturing) or “Hot” (angry, shouting). Attendees were to acknowledge when their household was ‘cold’ or ‘hot’ and aim for ‘warm’ by the end of the course.

**Question 5:** “The temperature in my family at the moment is: (Cold, Warm, Hot.)

![Bar chart showing temperature preferences over 5 and 9 weeks](image)

The majority of attendees reported a ‘warm’ temperature by week 5. One attendee noted that their household was “warmish – we are getting there.” One attendee noted that their household was “nearly warm – still a bit difficult at times.” The majority of attendees reported a ‘warm’ temperature by week 9.
Attendees were asked to complete Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires (SDQ) at two points during the programme (week 0 and week 11). Based on attendee’s answers, scores reflecting total difficulties, effects of intervention and helpfulness of intervention were calculated. Additionally, attendees scored their personal emotional wellbeing and perceived behaviour of their children.

**Effect of Intervention**

- Same 9%
- Much Better 82%
- Better 9%

**Intervention otherwise helpful**

- Same 9%
- Better 91%

**Behaviour of child (expected decrease)**

**Emotional wellbeing (expected increase)**

Pre and post measures for SDQ and WEMWBS showed improvement for all the parents bar one in their own emotional wellbeing and their child’s behaviour. The one parent showing low progressive movement was experiencing complex personal issues and had no contact with his child.
Despite a small group of attendees, there are consistent increases in participant’s satisfaction levels of the course, their use of ideas and strategies and the temperature levels in the home. It is not possible to determine whether this increase is dependent on level of attendance but it can be suggested that the increase in the use of ideas and strategies can be explained by attendance levels as those who attended 9-11 weeks used more ideas and strategies than those who attended 5-9 weeks.

The parents taking part in the group chose to complete the Open College Network (OCN) Accreditation to gain 6 credits at either a Level 1 or 2. This process involved the parents completing a reflective journal, in their own time, throughout the 10 weeks of the programme, supported by the facilitators. The completion of the journals gave the opportunity for deeper reflection on the strategies learned throughout the weeks and also the opportunity to record how these worked within their families. The parent’s all took great pride in their work and there was a real sense of achievement, rewarded with all of the parents attaining a Level 2. One of the parents proudly told the social worker she was involved with that she was now “a Level 2 parent”. The journals provided an encouraging record of their journey and served to boost the self-esteem of the parents, encouraging some to think about further qualifications. One of the parents reported completing their portfolio alongside their own school age child whilst they did their ‘homework’ together.

Attendees were asked to give their opinion of the atmosphere in the group including whether or not they felt respected and whether the techniques were explained clearly. Some of the responses are detailed below:

“In the group I have always felt welcome and listened to. I felt wanted in the group and it was a pleasure to come every week.”

“There is always a relaxed atmosphere in the group. Everyone is welcoming and I got along easily with them all. I felt respected and listened to.”

“I felt very welcome. I wanted to attend each week and the group made me learn that even though we are responsible adults – we all need rules. Loved the pass by, so useful in emotional times.”
Sustaining the programme in the setting is the ultimate aim, enabling more parents and children to benefit. Ideally, co facilitating with another trained parent group leader from either the local authority Children’s Centres or another voluntary sector setting would promote interagency working as good practice.

The Minerva project plan to present the report on Family Link’s behalf, to colleagues inside HMP Hull to map against other resettlement outcomes to see if a trial of the programme inside prison would be beneficial prior to release.

In 2011 Family Links launched a Parent Group Leader handbook for practitioners delivering the programme for parents in custody. Further information is available upon request (see contact page).

This report will support similar development in other areas of the UK.

Evaluation of the Nurturing Programme for Parents and Carers, 2011, Sean Grant
This report describes the results of an internal evaluation of the Family Links Nurturing Programme for Parents and Carers, using data collected in the field over the past ten years.

**Holme House Prison Nurturing Programme Evaluation, 2010**, Sue Welburn, Pam Clarke
A review of a 10-week parenting programme run for prisoners at Holme House prison. It highlights the difficulties of running a programme within a prison, but also how powerful a tool the Nurturing Programme is within the prison environment.

**The Nurturing Programme in Foston Hall: piloting the full programme – An evaluative commentary, 2006**, Jonathan Nicholls, Mental Health Foundation
The report describes a second pilot in Foston Hall women’s prison in Derbyshire with changes made to the format since the Styal pilot (see 2005). A ten week programme was run over eight weeks. Attendees were able to submit a portfolio for assessment by the Open College Network. It was clear that, overall, the usual 10 week version of the programme worked: the women enjoyed it and attended consistently; they engaged in the material; and as the weeks progressed, they became more open to trying the exercises they originally felt less confident about, such as relaxation. There was also evidence of them trying the skills and strategies, supporting each other in doing so, and praising each other for the work they were doing. Six learners submitted portfolios to OCN and received 6 credits at level one.

**The Nurturing Programme: a prison based pilot – An evaluative commentary, 2005**, Jonathan Nicholls, Mental Health Foundation
The report describes a pilot in Styal women’s prison in Cheshire, focusing on the lessons learned from taking the Nurturing Programme into a prison setting. There were indications that the course was raising the women’s awareness of their role as parents in a useful way. Voluntary attendance levels were consistently high, indicating that the prisoners found the course of value.
EMAIL

mailto:info@familylinks.org.uk

PHONE

01482 504330

POST

Family Links
Suite 9, King’s Parade
Kings Street
Cottingham
HU16 5QQ
East Yorkshire

familylinks.org.uk