The Effectiveness of Family Links Nurturing Project for Parents in Worcestershire

Report Summary

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Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to examine the impact of the Family Links Nurturing Programme (FLNP) on parents on behalf of Worcestershire Local Authority. This programme is one strand of an existing comprehensive programme of parenting support provided by the Local Authority.

Research design:

The researchers wished to capture the voices of those concerned within the agreed timescale of March – September 2012. These included:

- Local Authority officers with responsibility for parenting and family intervention;
- Parents who had participated within FLNP;
- Multi-agency practitioners with responsibility for delivering FLNP;
- A local head teacher.

Data Analysis:

In addition to exploring the desired outcomes, the research also considered:

1. Local commitment to the Programme;
2. Impact on Parents;
3. Sustainability of the programme;

The analysis revealed 5 further issues concerning implementation of the programme:

- Referral pathways;
- Initial engagement;
- Retention of parents on programme;
- Workforce Development;
- Value for money.
Key Findings:

1. Strong local commitment to the programme

   *Key finding 1: Very Strong local commitment to the FLNP.*

2. Impact on Parents

   *Key finding 2: There is strong evidence from the research that the FLNP is delivering positive outcomes for parents.*

3. Sustainability of the Programme

   *Key finding 3: There is some evidence from the study that the reported gains for parents are sustainable in the longer term.*

4. Impact on children

   *Key Finding 4: There is some evidence that the FLNP is delivering improved outcomes for children.*

Conclusions:

- There is strong early evidence that the FLNP is delivering improvements in wellbeing for parents, and that these improvements appear to be sustainable at least in the medium term (i.e. 6 months to 2 years after the end of the programme);
- There is some early evidence that the FLNP is delivering improvements in outcomes for children;
- The programme is meeting the indicators of positive intervention outcomes as identified from the literature review and analysis;
- The research suggests that FLNP can play an important role within the parenting strategy for the County.
- Small improvements to the overall implementation of the FLNP within Worcestershire could further enhance the effectiveness of the programme.
Recommendations:

- The local Authority has recently agreed a definitive data set for Family Links Parenting Programme. This includes robust on entry information from and on participants, an agreed mechanism for capturing distance travelled and a structured end of programme evaluation. The data requirements need to be clearly communicated to parent programme facilitators within all participating agencies, with training provided if necessary. Despite, extensive efforts by the Parent Matters Team, not all practitioners fully recognise the importance of data as a key requirement of their role.

- Consideration should be given to how best to stress the importance of regular practitioner attendance of the Parent Matters Forum. This is essential for ensuring a consistent approach to delivery and evaluation, as well as providing an opportunity for practitioners to help shape service delivery and contribute to quality improvement.

- Consideration should be given amount and timing of paperwork for parents, some of whom from case study observation have literacy issues. The researchers observed that this impacted on the quality of their responses. There is an opportunity to build on the good practice of Triple P, whereby the paperwork is purposeful within the programme, and the data is used to communicate with the parent, regarding their needs and progress. This results in the “paperwork” being seen as an integral part of the programme, and not an “add on”. The use of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale within Triple P is a particularly strong feature, and consideration could be made to substituting this for the WEMBWS within FLNP. Whilst there is currently no requirement from Family Links to work in this way, a local pilot to explore ways to make the paperwork more meaningful and embedded within the programme would be useful for practitioners and parents alike.

- Further consideration should be given to developing referral routes and/or parenting pathways. The research has suggested that the FLNP has real value in helping parents to understand their own and their children’s behaviour, whilst “behavioural” programmes (eg Triple P) have an equally important role in helping parents to consistently apply positive behaviour management approaches. The recently developed flow chart provides a good starting point to consider the relative merit of these programmes for individual parents as part of a parenting plan tailored to meet individual need. This tool should be further refined, piloted and rolled out to all practitioners for use.
• The data seems to suggest that a number of parents are dis-engaging following referral and prior to the first session. Consideration should be given to methods for initial engagement of parents, prior to the commencement of the parenting programme, in order to promote better uptake and improve value for money. The initial engagement strategies are crucial to the success of the programmes and require prioritisation: time needs to be allocated to reflect its importance. The research indicates that the quality of the early engagement strategies is more important than having a known practitioner to the families leading the programme.

• Urgent consideration should be given to the high levels of non completion of parenting programmes. It will be important to consider approaches to engagement of families and development of a strategy for reengagement where necessary. The newly introduced County-wide referral system will provide an opportunity for monitoring referral and take up and using proactive approaches to re-engage parents where necessary. Giving consideration to mechanisms for measuring readiness to change, motivational interviewing and keeping in touch approaches could all potentially support improved parent engagement. Again, this needs to be given priority in relation to resourcing.

• The value for money section of this report highlights ways in which the programme delivery could be made more efficient. In particular, consideration should be given to reducing the number of facilitators from three per group to 2 per group, which will immediately impact positively on the unit cost for the programme. However, it is anticipated that this would prove unpopular with practitioners, who are concerned about the impact introducing a “new” person to cover staff sickness could have on the group dynamic. Consideration could be given to having a third “reserve” facilitator, who is introduced to the group at the coffee morning, but not required to attend sessions except for cover purposes.

• Whilst the research suggests a promising early indication that the programme benefits are likely to be sustainable, it is recommended that longer term tracking of a cohort will provide further insight into the sustainability of programme gains. The establishment of Family Support groups following the intervention will provide a vehicle for undertaking a longer term evaluation.