

**YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD PARENTING PROGRAMME
FINAL REPORT**

**BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS'
(YJB PROJECT NUMBER 332)**

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**YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD PARENTING PROGRAMME
LOCAL EVALUATION: FINAL REPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS' PROJECT

The primary **aim of the Blackpool Youth Offending Team** is to prevent offending by children and young people. It is a service funded by Social Services, Education, Probation, Health and the Police under the auspices of the Chief Executive's Department of Blackpool Borough Council. The Team is responsible to a Steering Group comprising these agencies, together with Barnardos North West, the Clerk to the Justices for the Blackpool Magistracy and Fylde Crown Prosecution Service.

The main **aim of the Barnardo's 'Parenting Matters' Project** in Blackpool is to "improve the quality of interaction between the target group of parents/carers and their children by helping parents/carers to build on their existing skills and strengths". The **Project objectives** relate to positive changes in the behaviour and attitudes of parents/carers and subsequent changes in the behaviour of children and young people.

Specific objectives/intended outcomes include:

- i) "The offending of children of the targeted parents/carers has been reduced/prevented.
- ii) Child management skills amongst targeted parents/carers are improved.
- iii) The confidence of parents /carers in dealing with difficult behaviour is increased, and their stress reduced.
- iv) The behaviour patterns of parents/carers in response to young people have altered.
- v) An understanding of the importance of boundaries amongst parents/carers has been developed, as well as the ability to set boundaries clearly and confidently.
- vi) A programme has been provided that is perceived by parents to be relevant and helpful to them in carrying out their parenting role.
- vii) The levels of agreements between children and parents/carers on 'house rules' (ie times to come in at night, etc) have been increased.
- viii) Self help parent support groups, derived from programme groups, have been established.
- ix) The self-esteem of the targeted group of parents/carers has been raised, through the provision of opportunities in voluntary and sessional work and, where appropriate, attendance at college courses". [Service Agreement, 2.3.00:1-2]

The **priority groups for referral** are:

- Parents/carers subject to a Parenting Order arising from any criminal proceedings against their child

- Parents/carers (of young people aged 8-17 years who are offending) who accept voluntary referral. This may involve a young person subject to a Final Warning Programme, Action Plan Order, Supervision Order or Attendance Centre Order.
- Parents/carers (of young people aged 8-17 who are at risk of offending) who have received Parenting Orders or voluntary referrals made by social workers (Education and Social Services). This could be as a result of non school attendance or the young person being the subject of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order, Local Child Curfew Order, Child Safety Order, etc.

Staff at Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' include the Project Leader, two Project Workers and a part-time Administrator. They are currently located in offices in central Blackpool, although it is intended that Project staff and the Youth Offending Team will be re-located to share a building from April 2002.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY DEVELOPED BY BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS'

Since its establishment in June 2000, a comprehensive range of activities has been provided to targeted parents/carers by 'Parenting Matters' staff:

- Home visits by project workers (following referral) to meet each parent/carer, conduct an initial assessment and agree suitable provision.
- 8 week parenting programme, based on 'Let's Talk Parenting' for parents/carers whose referrals are judged to be appropriate. This programme has been provided on separate premises, with creche provision. It has focused on improving parenting skills, self-esteem and confidence in dealing with behaviour management/boundary setting. A rolling programme has been delivered, with a total of 10 groups between June 2000 and October 2001. In the first year of operation, all groups were for women (who comprise the majority of referrals). A 'men's group' was established but was disbanded because low numbers made the group non-viable. Mixed groups operated during the second year, although 'couples' did not attend the same group.
- Individual 1:1 support with parents/carers for whom a group approach was inappropriate. For example, a parent with agoraphobia received support at home and the first four men to be assessed as suitable were provided with individual support by a male sessional worker because mixed groups were initially considered to be inappropriate and the 'men's group' was disbanded.
- 5 week follow up course, based on issues raised by parents as requiring additional information/support (from April 2001).

- Drop-ins with creche facilities (from November 2000 at one site, from February 2001 at a second site).
- 1:1 support to parents.
For example, accessing basic resources, engaging in advocacy work on behalf of parents/carers with a range of other agencies, signposting parents/carers to relevant agencies, etc.
- Provision of information to parents/carers about forthcoming events.

In addition, the Project Leader and Project Workers have worked closely with members of the YOT Team to gather/share information and discuss effective ways of working to support parents/carers and their children. They have also liaised with other agencies within Blackpool to raise awareness about the work of the Project, referral criteria/procedures, etc.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of Barnardo's Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' Project (June 2000-October 2001) draws upon analysis of data from a range of sources:

- Three national data collection instruments devised by the Policy Research Bureau on behalf of the YJB – parent/carer questionnaires, staff questionnaires and referring child questionnaires.
- Telephone interviews with individual practitioners from partner and other statutory/voluntary agencies in Blackpool.
- Face to face interviews with 'Parenting Matters' staff and YOT Team members.
- Telephone interviews with parents/carers and parent/carer questionnaires.
- Project monitoring data.

For details about each method, see Appendix Eight.

IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCESS ISSUES

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS/CARERS REFERRED TO BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS' (JUNE 2000 - OCTOBER 2001)

Parents/Carers

- The parents/carers of 163 children were referred to Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' between June 2000 and October 2001.
- One parent was referred for two of her children, so the total number of families referred during this period was 162.
- For some families, both parents/carers were referred, making the total number of parents/carers during this period 170.
- Parents/carers included 2 grandmothers and 1 grandfather.

Parent's/Carer's Gender [See Appendix 1:1]

- The overwhelming majority of parents/carers referred to Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' were female (87%). This reflects the continued assumption that mothers are the primary carers within families.
- Although it was generally the female parent/carer who was referred, in their initial assessment Project Workers encouraged the involvement of male parents/carers and, if appropriate, suggested that they also attended the parenting programme.

Housing Tenure of Families [See Appendix 1:2]

- Data about housing tenure was collected during the initial assessment by Project Workers, rather than at the point of referral. Consequently, such data was only available for half of the parents/carers referred.
- Of these 81 parents, the level of owner occupation (21%) was significantly below the national level of more than two thirds of the population.
- Amongst the 81 parents/carers, proportions of both council rented (25%) and private rented (46%) accommodation were higher than the national rate.
- Two parents/carers were in temporary accommodation (eg bed and breakfast).

Parent/Carer Employment [See Appendix 1:3]

- Of the 77 parents/carers from whom data had been collected during an initial assessment, the majority (66%) were unemployed.
- 19 (12%) worked full time, and 7 (4%) worked part time.

Parent's/Carer's Mental Health [See Appendix 1:4]

- Information about parent's/carer's mental health was gathered during initial assessments and based on self-assessment by parents/carers. This data was available for only 45% of the parents/carers.

- Of these 77 parents/carers, 25% reported that they experienced mental health problems.

Parent's/Carer's Drug or Alcohol Use [See Appendix 1:5]

- Information about parent/carer drug or alcohol use was also gathered during initial assessments and based on self-assessment. This data was available for only 44% of the parents/carers.
- Of these 75 parents/carers, 13% reported personal problematic drug/alcohol use.

CHARACTERISTICS OF REFERRING CHILDREN (JUNE 2000 – OCTOBER 2001)

Referring Children

- The total number of referring children/young people between June 2000 and October 2001 was 163.

Child's Age [See Appendix 2:1]

- The majority (61%) of referring young people were aged 13-16 (age 13:10%; age 14: 17%; age 15: 20%; age 16: 14 %).
- 27 children aged 10 or younger were referred (16%).

Child's Gender [See Appendix 2:2]

- The majority (74%) of referring young people were male.

Wards Within Blackpool [See Appendix 2:3]

- The highest proportion (10%) of referring young people were from Park ward.
- Eight or more children had been referred from each of the following wards: Brunswick (8), Claremont (8), Foxhall (9), Hawes Side (9), Layton (12), Park (17), Talbot (10), Tydesley (11).

Number of Children in Families [See Appendix 2:4]

- Half the families contained 3 or more children (51%).
- In 11 families there were 5 children, 1 family included 6 children, in 5 families there were 7 children and 1 family contained 10 children.

School Exclusion [See Appendix 2:5]

- Data about school exclusion was recorded during initial assessment, based on parent's/carer's definitions, and was available for just under half (48%) of the referring young people.
- Of these 79 young people, 65% were reported to have experienced some form of exclusion from school: 47% had been temporarily excluded and 18% had been permanently excluded.

Special Educational Needs [See Appendix 2:6]

- Data about the special educational needs of the referring young people was also collected during initial assessment, based on parent's/carer's definitions. This information was available for just under a third (32%) of the referring young people.
- Of these 52 young people, 48% were reported to have special educational needs.

Child's Mental Health [See Appendix 2:7]

- Data about the mental health of referring children was recorded during initial assessment, based on parent's/carer's definitions. This information was available for only 43% of the referring young people.
- Of these 70 young people, only 3 (4%) were reported by their parent/carer as having mental health problems.

Involvement with Social Services [See Appendix 2:8]

- Data about family involvement with Social Services was gathered during initial assessment and was available for 63% of the referring young people.
- Of these 102 young people, almost three quarters (73%) were involved with Social Services.

Child's Drug or Alcohol Use [See Appendix 2:9]

- Data about drug or alcohol use by the referring young person was gathered from parents/carers during initial assessment. This information was available for only 44% of the referring young people.
- Of these 71 young people, 41% were reported by their parent/carer to have problems with drug or alcohol use.

REFERRALS (JUNE 2000 – OCTOBER 2001)

Referrals

- The parents/carers of 163 children and young people were referred to Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' between June 2000 and the end of October 2001.

Referring Agencies [See Appendix 3:1]

- A variety of agencies referred parents/carers.
- The Youth Offending Team was the main source of referral, contributing 42% of all referrals (YOT: 31%; Police: 11%).
- Social Services referred a quarter (26%) of all parents/carers.
- Other statutory agencies referred 19% between them (Court: 10%; Education Social Work: 5%; Health: 3%; Probation:1%).
- Other agencies contributed the remaining 13% of referrals.

Reasons for Referral [See Appendix 3:2]

- 91% of all referrals resulted from the young person's offending or risk of offending.
- The main reason for referral was the referring young person's offending behaviour (53%).
- Risk of offending was the reason for referral in 38% of cases.
- 4 referrals (5%) were made on educational grounds, with an additional referral citing joint reasons of offending and education.
- Only 1 referral was received on the grounds of child safety.

Type of Referral [See Appendix 3:3]

- Almost all parents/carers were referred on a voluntary basis (94%). However, evidence suggests that some of those attending voluntarily felt they were under a degree of coercion, or threat of an Order being made, if they did not attend voluntarily.
- Of the 9 Parenting Orders made, 7 were as a result of the young person's offending (4 for 3 months; 1 for 6 months; 2 for 12 months) and 2 resulted from education proceedings.

Referral Outcomes [See Appendix 3:4]

- Most parent/carers referred (44%) were allocated to the 8 week parenting programme.
- 17% of parents/carers did not respond to the Project following an initial assessment.
- At any time during the year, a small number of parents/carers were waiting for assessment. Between June 2000 and October 2001, 7% were recorded as waiting assessment.
- During the first year, 4 male parents/carers were allocated to a 'men's group', as mixed groups were believed to be unsuitable. However, this group proved non-viable and a male worker was recruited to work individually with the men, as required.
- 1 parent required intensive 1:1 support.
- 22 parents/carers (13%) were not accepted onto the parenting programme, for reasons outlined below.

Reasons for Non-acceptance onto the Parenting Programme [See Appendix 3:5]

- Of the 22 parents/carers not accepted onto the parenting programme, the main reason was because the parent/carer could not attend (86%). This was generally due to their other commitments, such as work, during the hours of the programme.
- 2 parents/carers were considered to be inappropriate referrals and 1 was thought to be a risk to staff.

BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS' PARENTING PROGRAMME (JUNE 2000 – OCTOBER 2001)

Parenting Programme

- A total of 85 parents/carers were allocated to the 8 week parenting programme between June 2000 and October 2001. (The figure within the 'outcome referrals' chart in Appendix 3:4 is 71. However, 13 of those recorded as 'not known' were actually allocated to the programme following an initial assessment.)
- As previously stated, most parents/carers attended voluntarily.

Attendance [See Appendix 4:1]

- Of the 85 parents allocated to the parenting programme, 26 (31%) did not attend any sessions.
- While only 5% attended 8 sessions, 5 or more sessions were attended by 40% of parents/carers.

Successful Completion [See Appendix 4:2]

- Successful completion was usually defined by Project staff as attendance at 5 or more sessions within an 8 week programme. However, parents/carers who attended four sessions were deemed to have successfully completed the programme if they covered the relevant material during home visits/1:1 support.
- Of the 85 parents/carers allocated to the parenting programme, 49 (58%) were considered to have successfully completed the programme. [This figure includes some parents/carers for whom attendance was recorded as 'not known'.]

Breach Rates

- No parents/carers breached a Parenting Order.
- Those parents/carers who were allocated to a parenting programme but were unable to attend, were offered a second programme. If they did not attend this, they were sent a letter informing them that their case had been closed but continued to be offered support and information about drop-ins.
- If a parent/carer withdrew from a programme, or did not attend, Project Workers sent them a form requesting reasons and a follow-up questionnaire.

When data collected for the period June 2000-March 2001 is compared with data collected from June 2000-October 2001, the percentages within each category are consistent [See Appendix 5].

IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Following interviews with local agencies, members of the YOT Team and Project staff by the local evaluators during February – March 2001, a range of issues were raised concerning implementation [Interim Report for Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' Team and the Blackpool YOT Team, June 2001]. These have been resolved as the Project has progressed and developed.

PRACTICALITIES WITHIN SERVICE PROVISION

- The **timing of the 8 week parenting programme** led to difficulties in attendance for parents/carers during school holidays. It was also difficult to provide a creche for children of all ages.

Solution:

- From October 2001, this course was reduced to 7 weeks, thus avoiding school holiday periods.
- **Parents/carers who worked full time** were not able to attend the 8 week parenting programme, which was provided during the day.

Solutions:

- From October 2001, the Project offered the programme during mornings, afternoons and evenings. However, only one parent/carer opted for an evening programme.
- Parents working full time and unable to attend the parenting programme have been offered support via drop-ins, home visits/telephone calls during evenings, and signposting to after-hours services.
- One of the original objectives of the Project was to establish **self-help groups** amongst parents/carers. This development had not occurred between June 2000-October 2001.

Solutions:

- One of the drop-in sites was a hired room in the town centre. This had no 'core' base, and required parents/carers to travel into the town from their local communities. Consequently, attendance by parents/carers was relatively low. As a result, the town-based drop-in has been withdrawn.
- In contrast, the drop-in located on an estate, with a strong community 'core', was well attended by a coherent group of parents/carers. Since October 2001, this drop-in has developed into a self-help group – a savings club has been set up, a healthy eating and dieting group has been established, and

parents/carers share taxis to the supermarket while others in the group mind their children.

- Both Project staff and YOT Team members considered that **drop-in 'surgeries'** - where parents/carers could access a range of agencies in one place – might provide a useful information/support service.

Solution:

- multi-agency surgeries were offered in May, June and July 2001. However, these were not well attended and have been discontinued.
- It is predominantly females who are referred to the Project, particularly by Courts. Project staff try to encourage **male parents/carers** to take responsibility for parenting, and to attend the parenting programme. Initially, Project staff considered mixed sex groups on the parenting programme inappropriate – mainly because they believed that the needs of males and females may be different, but also because they wanted to provide a 'safe'/non-threatening environment for the women on the programme. Consequently, male parents/carers were allocated to a male group. However, small numbers meant that the first male group was not viable, and men were waiting for long periods for a viable group to be established.

Solutions:

- The first four men were provided with 1:1 support by a male sessional worker.
- It was decided that mixed groups would be offered, although couples were not allocated to the same group. This has been a successful arrangement – parents/carers have enjoyed being able to attend a programme at the same time as their partner, although not in the same group.
- Project staff work solely with parents/carers, while the YOT Team works with children/young people. Both were keen to develop effective strategies for **supporting the whole family**.

Solution:

- A Court Officer was appointed in September 2000 to: explain the services of the Project to parents/carers at Court; provide the Court with an assessment of parenting in stand-down situations; complete relevant sections of the Pre-Sentence Report; collaborate with the YOT officer (who focused on the young person's needs) about the needs of the parent/carer and how these could be met.

- Project staff have been located in a **building** which is **not accessible to parents/carers** and has no facilities for group work, pre-course activities, or a creche. This has restricted access to Project Workers by parents/carers and inhibited their involvement in the work of the Project on a voluntary basis.

Solution:

- From April 2002 it is intended that the Project and the YOT Team will share a centrally located building, which will be adapted to accommodate groups, a creche facilities, 1:1 work, etc.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS'

- Sound **knowledge of the criteria for referral to, and content of, the parenting programme** and other services offered by 'Parenting Matters' was **not evident amongst all YOT Team members**

Solutions:

- The Project Leader has been involved in induction of new YOT Team staff (clarifying Project activities, criteria and processes for referral, etc) and has become a member of the management group for youth justice services in Blackpool.
- With parent's/carer's permission, YOT Team members have attended sessions, as observers, on the parenting programme.
- **Local agencies** were **unclear about criteria for referral** to the Project

Solutions:

- Information leaflets (explaining Parenting Orders, outlining the ethos and services provided by 'Parenting Matters', and clarifying referral processes) have been produced and sent to all local agencies.
- Project staff have attended the team meetings of both statutory and voluntary local agencies, to discuss the work of the Project and disseminate information leaflets.
- Project staff take part in court user panels and training for magistrates
- Local agencies have been invited to contribute to the 5 week follow-up course for parents/carers, in which they explore specific issues identified during the parenting programme as requiring additional information/support (eg school exclusion).
- Project staff have established a practitioner awareness training day (15.3.02), which will be free for all local agencies and potential referrers. On this day, they will explain the work of the Project, discuss referral criteria and procedures.

MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

- Despite a clear commitment to **multi-agency working** at management level within the Project and YOT Team, and amongst colleagues in local agencies, this was **not always evident at an operational level**.
- Project staff, the YOT Team and local agency staff identified **factors inhibiting development of truly multi-agency policies and practices**. These included: lack of communication, defensiveness about own areas of work, limited insight into the roles of staff in other agencies, different working practices, the introduction of a number of new initiatives, different agendas/reasons for involvement, unwillingness to share information, overwhelmed/pressured staff, and resistance to change.

Solutions:

- The time taken to establish positive relationships, trust and understanding between agencies was acknowledged.
- Project staff have worked hard to network with local agencies and provide information about the Project. They have been involved in working parties or Forums developing strategic plans (eg Teenage Pregnancy, Volunteer Training, Parenting).
- Members of the YOT Team have established successful partnerships with other agencies relating to particular activities (eg career advice, summer splash scheme).
- Regular contact between Project staff and the YOT Team has facilitated sharing of information and discussion about effective ways of working to support parents and their children.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

- The Project established a comprehensive system for collecting **Project monitoring data** using EXCEL. This included details about characteristics of parents/carers; characteristics of children (gathered during initial assessments with parents/carers); referral agencies and outcomes. As the Project progressed, it became evident that the **system required additional information** to enable analysis of specific issues.

Solutions:

- From April 2001, Project monitoring data included information such as: referrer initials; reasons for referral; referral outcomes; reasons for non-acceptance; all additional services used by parents/carers.
- From April 2001, the Project also attempted to gather information about school attendance, school exclusions, and registration on

the child protection register for referring children and their siblings. However, it proved impossible to access this information from the relevant statutory agencies.

- Project staff developed a range of monitoring forms relating to different activities. As the Project progressed, staff appreciated **the need to adapt/extend recording systems** to include information for specific purposes (eg to clarify amount of time spent on each activity, build on feedback from weekly sessions within a parenting programme/drop-in, provide information to referrers).

Solutions:

- From April 2001, staff clarified what information was required for different purposes and refined monitoring systems appropriately.
- The **IT systems** established **within different agencies** (particularly the Project and the YOT Team) were **implemented at different times and incompatible**. It has been difficult to access information from some statutory agencies, and forms from which information is gathered (eg referral forms, ASSET forms) have often been incomplete or inconsistently completed.

Solutions:

- Over time, protocols have been agreed for sharing information between the Project and the YOT Team, and between the Project and statutory/voluntary agencies.
- In preparation for the implementation of the multi-agency Group Intervention Panel (funded by YJB and the Children's Fund), a system has been established to enable sharing of relevant information about the young people involved between the police, health, social services, education, voluntary organisations and the Project.

RANGE OF SERVICE PROVISION

- 'Parenting Matters' was initially established as a service funded by the YJB to work with parents/carers of young people who were offending or at risk of offending. These parents/carers were predominantly referred by the YOT Team. Many other agencies within the local community considered that they were working with parents/carers whose children were 'at risk of offending', and who would benefit from access to the services of the Project. Both the YOT Team and Project staff believed that the **Project should be able to offer services to parents/carers whose children were 'at risk of offending'**, thereby undertaking more preventative work.

Solution:

- The Project actively encouraged local agencies to refer parents/carers whose children were 'at risk of offending'; providing information about Project services and procedures for referral via leaflets and attendance at local network meetings.
- Project staff, and some parents/carers, believed that it would be **beneficial if the Project was able to provide services for children and young people**; enabling early intervention, providing opportunities aimed at reducing the risk of offending and developing comprehensive support for families.

Solutions:

- YJB funding will secure Project provision of services for parents/carers referred by the YOT Team for the year 2002-3. It will also partly fund a new, early intervention, initiative with children – G.R.I.P. (see below).
- In addition, the Project has been successful in a Children's Fund bid (3 years, from October 2001), which will enable provision of services to a broader range of parents/carers. This funding will also enable the Project to work directly with children and young people. The work of the Project has therefore expanded considerably into 4 key elements:
 - *Personal Support Team (supporting parents/carers of 5-17 year olds within the Blackpool area whose children are at risk of not reaching their full potential, plus direct work with the children of parents/carers to develop a holistic approach in supporting the family).
 - *Outreach Services Team (providing 5-13 year old children and their families in Blackpool with play and leisure services, support and advice).
 - *Group Intervention Panel - G.R.I.P. (a multi-agency project involving the police, health, social services, education and other voluntary organisations in an early intervention process aimed at preventing children entering the criminal justice system by offering support and alternative solutions).
 - *Sunflower House (a multi-agency project, involving Blackpool Borough Council, Homestart and Muir Housing, providing support to teenage mothers within Grange Park estate as well as breakfast/after school clubs, parent and tot groups, community events and outings).

PROJECT EXIT STRATEGIES AND LONG TERM OBJECTIVES

- Following completion of the parenting programme, parents/carers are encouraged to attend drop-in sessions. These have led to development of a 'self-help' group on one estate.
- Project staff continue to offer 1:1 support on a limited basis, as required, to enable successful closure of cases.
- Where appropriate, parents/carers are referred/signposted to other agencies.
- From January 2002, an additional 10 week course will be provided for parents/carers who have attended the 7 week parenting programme and expressed an interest in volunteering/training. This self-assertiveness course, accredited as an Open University Level 3 qualification, will be run by an external facilitator.
- Parents/carers are encouraged to consider opportunities for volunteering and/or training. One parent who attended the parenting programme volunteered to talk to parents/carers on a later programme about her experiences.
- Expansion of the Project, as the result of a successful Children's Fund bid, will enable consolidation of services for parents/carers and development of services for children, young people, and families.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Two sources of information have been used as the basis for evaluating the impact and outcomes of the Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' parenting programme: YJB Parent Questionnaires and interviews/questionnaires completed by parents/carers as part of the local evaluation [See Appendix 8].

Time 1 and 2 YJB Parent Questionnaires were completed by 37 mothers. All defined themselves as white, British. 14 (38%) were married or living with a partner, and 23 (62%) were single or not living with a partner. One mother attended the parenting programme in relation to two of her children (total number of referring children concerned was therefore 38).

17 out of 45 parents/carers (who attended the parenting programme in Groups 1-4 or the first male group) were interviewed/completed a questionnaire 6-8 months after completion of their programme. Quotes from these parents/carers have been included, where appropriate, to illustrate key points.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PARENTING PROGRAMME BY PARENTS/CARERS

Expectation/Satisfaction [See Appendix 6:1 and 6:2]

- 73% expected the programme to be very (57%) or fairly (16%) helpful.
- Parents/carers were overwhelmingly satisfied with the programme – 68% rated it as being very helpful, and 32% fairly helpful.

The majority of parents/carers who participated in the local evaluation believed that the programme was successful in meeting their expectations. While many had initially felt apprehensive about attending, Project staff reduced tension/negative feelings by encouraging participants to express their feelings and views.

Extent to which help was required/received in specified areas [See Appendix 6:4 and 6:5]

- More than half the parents/carers considered that they urgently required help in the areas of: handling arguments with their child (54%), setting boundaries (63%) and difficult behaviour (62%).
- Only 22% considered that they urgently required help with either their child's offending behaviour or handling arguments with their partner.
- Half (51%) considered that they had received a lot of help with communication.

- A third considered that they had received a lot of help with both handling arguments with their child (35%) and difficult behaviour (32%).
- More than half considered that they had received some help with setting boundaries (60%) and difficult behaviour (51%).
- More than 80% considered that they had received either some or a lot of help with communication (89%), handling arguments with their child (81%), setting boundaries (87%), and difficult behaviour (83%). Therefore, parents/carers received help in the areas they defined as requiring help.

Delivery satisfaction [See Appendix 6:6a-f]

- The programme was considered very/fairly interesting by 95% of the parents/carers.
- 95% considered the timing of sessions to be convenient.
- The location of sessions was considered to be convenient by 92%.
- 89% considered it very true that staff knew what they were doing during the programme, with 11% considering this to be fairly true.
- 78% considered it very true that staff understood how they were feeling during the programme, and 22% considered this to be fairly true.
- 96% considered it very true that staff listened to what they had to say during the programme, the remaining 4% considered this to be fairly true.

Willingness to recommend the programme [See Appendix 6:7]

- 95% would recommend the programme to parents/carers in a similar situation.

Staff perception about parent's/carer's happiness at referral compared with parent's/carer's satisfaction at the end of the programme [See Appendix 6:8]

- While only 16% of parents/carers were considered by staff to be happy about their referral at the beginning of the programme, staff considered that 62% of parents/carers were satisfied at the end of the programme.
- 21% of parents/carers were considered by staff to be not at all happy about their referral at the start of the programme. No parents/carers were perceived to be either fairly or very dissatisfied by the end of the programme.

Staff perception of benefit derived by parents/carers from the parenting programme [See Appendix 6:9]

- Staff considered that 32% of parents/carers had benefited a great deal from the programme, with 35% benefiting considerably.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME ON PARENTS/CARERS

Parent-Child Conflict [See Appendix 7:1a-d]

- The proportion of parents/carers who calmly discussed issues with their child once in the last week doubled (from 13% at the beginning of the programme to 26% at the end). However, proportions who calmly discussed issues either 2-3 times, or 4-7 times, in the last week remained consistent.
- The proportion of parents/carers whose child had *not* sulked/refused to talk in the last week increased (from 40% at the beginning of the programme to 50% at the end). The proportion whose child had sulked/refused to talk 2-3 times in the last week had decreased by two thirds (from 26% at the start of the programme to 8% at the end).
- The proportion of parents who had *not* shouted at their child during the last week almost doubled (with an increase from 16% at the beginning of the programme to 31% at the end). The proportion who had shouted at their child more than 7 times had decreased by almost two thirds (from 29% at the start of the programme to 11% at the end).
- The proportion of parents/carers who had *not* sworn at/said something nasty to their child in the last week increased (from 37% at the start of the programme to 47% at the end). The proportion who had sworn/said something nasty more than 7 times during the last week had significantly decreased (from 21% at the beginning of the programme to just 3% at the end).
- The proportion of parents/carers whose child had *not* stomped off in a huff in the last week had increased (from 47% at the start of the programme to 60% at the end). No parents/carers reported their child as having stomped off four or more times (compared with 8% 4-7 times, and 5% more than 7 times at the start of the programme).
- These figures indicate that parent-child conflict had significantly reduced.

How well parents/carers felt they coped with their child [See Appendix 7:2]

- There was a significant increase in the proportions of parents/carers feeling that they had coped very or fairly well with their child over the last month, with a corresponding decrease in the proportions feeling that they had coped fairly/very badly.

Parent-child communication [See Appendix 7:3a-e]

- The proportions of parents/carers who considered it very or fairly true that they talked together a lot with their child remained consistent. However, the proportion who considered that this was not at all true decreased by two thirds (from 16% at the start of the programme to 5% by the end).

- The proportion of parents/carers who considered it very or fairly true that their child listened to their point of view doubled (from 26% at the beginning of the programme to 55% at the end).
- The proportion of parents/carers who considered it very true that they had a lot of arguments with their child decreased by nearly two thirds (from 34% at the beginning of the programme to 13% at the end). In contrast, the proportion who considered it fairly untrue or not at all true that they had a lot of arguments with their child increased from 21% at the start of the programme to 32% at the end.
- Figures relating to the child understanding how their parent is feeling remained fairly consistent, with a slight increase in the proportion of parents/carers who considered this to be very or fairly true (from 28% to 31%).
- The proportion of parents/carers who considered it very true that, whenever they tried to talk to their child they end up in a fight, was reduced by three quarters (from 32% at the start of the programme to 8% at the end). More than half (56%) considered this to be very or fairly true at the beginning, while only 21% considered this to be very/fairly true by the end. The proportion considering it fairly untrue increased by two thirds (from 8% to 26%).
- These figures indicate significant improvements in communication between parents/carers and their children.

Parent-child supervision [See Appendix 7:4a-d]

- The proportion of parents/carers who knew where their child was (when they were not with them) always or most of the time increased from 47% at the beginning of the programme to 63% at the end.
- The proportion of parents/carers who hardly ever/never/less than half the time knew what their child was doing (when they were not with them) more than halved (from 47% at the start of the programme to 22% at the end).
- The proportion of parents/carers who hardly ever/never/less than half the time knew who their child was with when the child went out decreased by two thirds (from 26% at the start of the programme to 8% at the end).
- The proportion of parents/carers who hardly ever/never/less than half the time knew what time their child would be back when the child went out decreased by more than two third (from 42% at the beginning of the programme to 13% at the end). While only 45% knew when their child would be back always/most of the time at the start of the programme, this increased to 66% by the end.
- These figures indicate that levels of supervision by parents/carers significantly improved.

Parent-child relationship [Appendix 7:5a-d]

- Over half the parents/carers (54%) lost their temper with their child very or fairly often at the start of the programme. This had decreased to just 16% by the end of the programme. Nearly three quarters (71%) of parents/carers lost their temper sometimes or rarely by the end of the programme, compared with 35% at the beginning.
- The proportion of parents/carers who rarely praised their child when the child had done something well decreased significantly (from 16% at the start of the programme to 3% at the end). In contrast, the proportion who very often praised their child increased from 26% to 34%.
- The proportion of parents/carers who very or fairly often criticised their child decreased by nearly two thirds (from 34% at the start of the programme to 13% at the end). In correspondence, the proportion who rarely/never criticised their child doubled (from 16% to 32%).
- Strangely, the proportion of parents/carers who very/fairly often told their child that they loved or cared for them decreased (from 74% at the beginning of the programme to 66% at the end).
- These figures indicate significant improvements in the relationship between parents/carers and their children. However, the fact that parents/carers report a reduction in the frequency with which they tell their children they love/care for them is of some concern.

Parental confidence [See Appendix 7:6a-f]

- The proportion of parents/carers feeling that they understand why their child behaves the way they do always, most or half the time increased from 48% at the start of the programme to 65% by the end. The proportion who hardly ever/never understood why their child behaves the way they do decreased by almost a third (from 21% to 8%).
- The proportion of parents/carers who were hardly ever/never able to set ground rules for their child halved (from 34% at the start of the programme to 16% at the end), while the proportion able to set ground rules most of the time increased from 18% to 26%.
- The proportion of parents/carers who felt able to solve problems between themselves and their child without losing their temper most of the time increased by three quarters (from 8% to 34%). In contrast, the proportion hardly ever/never able to solve problems without losing their temper more than halved (from 29% to 13%).
- By the end of the programme, more than half the parents/carers (55%) considered that their child did as they were asked by them most/about half of the time, compared with 29% at the start of the programme. The proportion who considered that their child hardly ever/never did as they were asked reduced significantly (from 42% at the beginning of the programme to 24% at the end).

- The proportion of parents/carers who felt that their child hardly ever/never respected them decreased from 45% at the start of the programme to 24% at the end.
- The proportion of parents/carers who felt that their child did whatever they liked (no matter what the parent/carer said) always or most of the time decreased by two thirds (from 60% at the start of the programme to 21% at the end). The proportion who considered that their child hardly ever/never did whatever they liked increased by more than two thirds (from 8% at the beginning of the programme to 29% at the end).
- These figures indicate that parental confidence significantly improved.

Half the parents/carers who participated in the local evaluation 6-8 months after completing the parenting programme stated that they had noticed a change in the relationship with their child while receiving support. Additional changes included increased confidence and self-esteem. Two parents/carers had attended training courses as a result of the support they had received. Three expressed an interest in volunteering in the future, but did not feel ready to undertake that commitment yet.

CONCLUSIONS

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BLACKPOOL 'PARENTING MATTERS' PROJECT

The local evaluation has provided evidence to demonstrate that **Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' has achieved each of the objectives relating to parents/carers outlined in the Service Agreement.** As a result of support from the Project, the management skills of parents/carers have improved; confidence in dealing with their child's difficult behaviour has increased; responses to their children are more positive; their ability to clearly and confidently set boundaries has developed; levels of agreement with children about 'house rules' have increased; and self-esteem has been raised. Parents/carers perceive the parenting programme to be relevant and helpful to them in carrying out their parenting role, and self help groups derived from programme groups have been established.

It has not been possible for the local evaluation **to determine whether the offending of referring children has been reduced/prevented.** Some parents considered that the 'criminal' or 'anti-social' behaviour of their child was "part of growing up" – a transient 'phase', which needed to be addressed but which would not necessarily continue beyond adolescence. This appears to confirm established research concerning the 'offending' behaviour of many young people, making it difficult to determine whether reduction in offending behaviour is the result of specific initiatives or would have happened anyway. Reduction/prevention of offending behaviour by children and young people is a long term objective, which will be affected by circumstances both within and external to families. **Any analysis of changes in the behaviour of young people will need to take into account the socio-economic circumstances contextualising their experiences and opportunities.**

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Evaluation of the Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' Project has identified many examples of **good practice:**

- Project staff carry out home visits following referral - to meet parents/carers, conduct an initial assessment and agree suitable provision.
- Project staff discuss the role of partners/other carers during home visits, and encourage their involvement in the parenting programme.
- Recording and data collection systems have been revised to include detailed information about parents/carers, referring

children, referrers and referral outcomes, and to link with the *Framework for Assessment of Need*.

- A range of services has been provided to meet the diverse needs of parents/carers. This often includes 1:1 support and time spent by Project staff accessing basic resources (eg furniture, clothing, food) on behalf of parents/carers until they reach the stage where they can attend the parenting programme.
- Project staff engage in advocacy work, on behalf of parents/carers, with a range of other agencies.
- Parents/carers are offered a second parenting programme if they are unable to attend the one to which they have been allocated.
- Project staff follow up parents/carers who do not attend/withdraw from the parenting programme.
- Project staff successfully engage with reluctant parents/carers – encouraging them to express their feelings and gain support from each other.
- Project staff emphasise provision of support, encouragement and positive reinforcement for parents (rather than 'failure').
- Project staff have spent a great deal of time and effort liaising with other agencies to raise awareness about the Project (eg attendance at staff meetings/networks/Forums and production of information leaflets).

Since the inception of Blackpool 'Parenting Matters' in June 2000,

service provision has adapted/extended in response to parent's/carer's needs:

- Unsuccessful strategies (eg the town centre drop-in, drop-in 'surgeries' on the estate, and the 'mens group') have been discontinued.
- Successful services have been adapted to accommodate parent's/carer's needs (eg reducing the 8 week parenting programme to 7 weeks, operating mixed sex parenting programmes).
- New services have been developed in response to parent's/carer's requirements and suggestions (eg 5 week follow up course, self help group, 10 week accredited course preparing parents/carers for volunteering/training, services for children and young people). Additional funding from the Children's Fund has enabled considerable expansion of services.

The Project has worked closely with the YOT Team and other statutory/voluntary agencies to ensure **development and consolidation of multi-agency policy and practice**. This has included:

- Clarifying protocols for sharing of information about parents/carers and young people.

- Developing/consolidating networks in which agencies exchange information about services, establish procedures for referral, devise and review local/regional strategies, etc.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Project staff, the YOT Team, local agencies and parents/carers were agreed that **lack of parenting skills** was **not the only issue affecting parent's/carer's ability to effectively 'parent'**. As one local agency professional observed: "Poor parenting is often a manifestation of other problems".

Local agencies noted high levels of deprivation in Blackpool, and gaps in service provision (particularly concerning families who are not in major difficulties but have some level of need). Poor housing, high levels of unemployment, the transient lifestyle of some families, and a limited sense of 'community' within certain geographical areas were acknowledged to be key problems.

Project staff, YOT Team members and local agencies recognised that social and economic problems undermined parental ability to manage children's behaviour and maintain a healthy/positive context for their children's upbringing. In addition, they noted the impact of second or third generation poor parenting as well as parental inability to cope as a result of isolation, lack of support, unrealistic expectations and low self-esteem.

Parents/carers suggested three main reasons underpinning parents' need for support:

*parent's/carer's personal circumstances (eg physical health, mental well-being, financial security, lack of family support)

*lack of understanding and/or knowledge about their child and her/his behaviour

*the difficult behaviour of their child.

As one parent/carer stated: "We are not born with the knowledge of how to be a good parent" and, as all parents/carers know, the behaviour of any child can be 'difficult' at times. However, the ability of parents/carers to deal with problems is significantly affected by their circumstances.

This evaluation reinforces research literature demonstrating that the socio-economic consequences of poverty, unemployment, and limited opportunities have a direct impact on living conditions, health, education and employment opportunities, personal confidence and ability to deal with problems, including the difficult behaviour of children. **Issues of social exclusion, crime and anti-social behaviour**

cannot be divorced from the physical, material and social contexts in which individuals live and communities are established.

Parents/carers identified a range of **services** which they considered **parents/carers need**. These **include**:

- provision of **informal support** to parents/carers - having someone with whom they could discuss their worries.
- **help and support while their children are still young - before they 'get into trouble', or as soon as help is requested.**
- **advice**, from experienced professionals, **about issues such as anger/behaviour management.**
- **work with children**, so that they appreciate how their parents/carers feel.

Local agencies, Project staff and YOT Team members considered that **parenting programmes** should be:

- Aimed at parents/carers experiencing difficulty coping
- Preventative, rather than 'crisis intervention'
- Based on voluntary attendance
- Needs-led
- Interactive
- Based on sharing of experience and recognition that parents/carers have skills.