



**Parent Support in Sure Start  
North West Kensington & Golborne:  
an evaluation of the Family Links  
Nurturing Programme**

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## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	4
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	5
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	11
1.1 What issues are involved in providing parenting support?.....	11
1.2 Defining family support.....	12
1.3 Professionals' conceptualisations of parenting.....	12
1.4 Assessment frameworks/guidance.....	13
1.5 Report outline.....	14
<b>Chapter 2: The Nurturing Programme</b> .....	15
2.1 Background & theoretical grounding.....	15
2.1a The Four Constructs.....	15
2.1b Emotional Literacy.....	16
2.2 Evidence-base and effectiveness of the programme.....	18
2.3 Evidence-base in the UK context.....	18
2.4 The internal evidence-base in North West Kensington & Golborne.....	19
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	22
3.1 Study outline.....	22
3.2 Research aims.....	23
3.3a Research questions: benefits & outcomes.....	24
3.3b Research questions: implementation & delivery.....	25
3.4 Sampling strategy .....	25
3.5 Parent sample.....	27
<b>Chapter 4: Implementation &amp; Delivery</b> .....	29
4.1 Selecting the programme.....	29
4.2 Programme principles, aims & objectives.....	30
4.3 Staff training & support.....	31
4.4 Recruiting parents.....	32
4.5 Referrals.....	33
4.6 Universal & targeted.....	34
4.7 Measuring effectiveness.....	35
<b>Chapter 5: Outcomes &amp; Benefits</b> .....	
5.1 Pre-programme: levels of awareness, clarity in understanding the programme.....	38
5.2 Motivations, expectations & encouragement.....	40
5.3 Experiences of the programme: practical matters.....	42
5.4 Experiences of the group.....	43
i Diversity.....	43
ii Reaching (and retaining) fathers.....	44
iii Language and literacy barriers.....	46
iv Effects of attrition.....	47
v Reflections on content.....	48
vi The facilitator(s).....	49
5.5a Outcomes.....	50
5.5b Long-term effects of the programme.....	52

5.5c	Parental appraisals and recommendations.....	53
	<b>Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations.....</b>	<b>55</b>
6.1	Formative monitoring and evaluation.....	55
6.2	Joined-up service delivery.....	56
6.3	Raising parental awareness and managing expectations.....	57
6.4	Whole-family commitment.....	58
6.5	Identifying and addressing the needs of ‘special populations’.....	58
6.6	Maintaining diversity through universalism.....	59
	<b>References.....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>Diagrams &amp; Tables</b>	
D1	Benefits of Emotional Health.....	17
T1	Sampling structure.....	26
T2	Parent interviews achieved by attendance grouping.....	27
T3	Parent interviews by course registered.....	28
T4	Parent sub-samples & registered parents (Jan 2004 –Jan 2006).....	28
D2	Dissemination of the Nurturing Programme.....	32
	<b>Appendices</b>	
1	Facilitator interview schedule.....	64
2	Manager interview schedule.....	66
3	Parent interview schedule.....	69
4	Sure Start mail-out to parents.....	71
5	Opt out letter to parents.....	72
6	Presentation of secondary data.....	74
	Table A6i: Parents registered on course.....	75
	Table A6ii: Parents completed course.....	76
	Table A6iii: Parents not attended.....	77

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## **Executive Summary**

The Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) was commissioned to undertake a research study to evaluate the effectiveness of a parenting support programme in North West Kensington and Golborne. The Family Links Nurturing Programme has been extended to families in this area by the Family Support Group and the local Sure Start Programme.

### *Study aims*

The study aimed to identify and explore the outcomes of the programme for parents, provide them with an opportunity to offer criticism/praise and suggestions for improvement. Secondly, the study was designed as a 'process' evaluation; that is to consider the implementation and delivery of the programme and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach with a view to reaching conclusions/ making recommendations that will aid the strategic and practical development of parenting support in a localised context.

### *Methodology*

To meet these aims the study involved qualitative semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews with 30 local parents (who have children under the age of five) who held varying degrees of experience of the programme. The interviews were primarily conducted over the telephone. The parents were divided into three sub-samples: those on a waiting list; those who ceased attending early on in the programme; and those who attended the course in its entirety. The study was also concerned to elicit views on the long-term effectiveness of the course and so parents that completed the programme between six months and one year prior to the interview were also included.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with staff including the Programme Manager of Sure Start and five trained/experienced facilitators from Sure Start and Family Support Group. In addition to the primary data collected throughout the study additional materials and relevant literature were reviewed to locate and inform the focus of the study.

### *Main Findings*

Family Support Group and Sure Start gave careful consideration to selecting the Nurturing Programme to extend to local parents in North West Kensington and Chelsea. Reflection upon the aims and theoretical underpinning revealed alignment to the ethos and values of both services. This careful selection of the Nurturing Programme accounts in part to the overwhelmingly positive appraisals given by parents.

The quality and appropriateness of the training provided to staff to become group facilitators was praised. The follow-up offered by Family Links was felt to be very important to support the facilitators in what is a very challenging role.

The study revealed that related agencies that work closely with Sure Start and Family Support Group; such as Social Services, Health and voluntary organisations would benefit from greater levels of awareness and a fuller appreciation of what the

programme aims to achieve and the methods used. This would have beneficial implications for the types and rates of referral made.

From the parent data it became clear that there was a degree of confusion amongst parents at the outset about what the Nurturing Programme aimed to achieve and what its main focus was. Few parents appreciated that the aim to enhance/develop emotional literacy was fundamental to the programme until they had participated. This points to the need for clearer information and explanation.

The integration of the Nurturing Programme with other activities that Sure Start and Family Support Group extend to local families, including for example home visiting, drop-in facilities and so on was an important factor. Parents (mostly mothers) were supported and encouraged to attend the programme and were familiar with the staff, venues and ethos of the services and so more willing to readily engage in the programme.

Throughout the report attention is paid to the innovative approach taken in North West Kensington and Golborne to reaching, engaging and retaining a diverse range of families. In particular the raft of issues that exist in attracting fathers to the Nurturing Programme is explored and the findings reveal that there is a groundswell of interest amongst local fathers but careful consideration (and consultation) with this group could help to expose ways of better engaging them. Similarly, the needs of parents with English as an additional language and/or a distinct cultural identity are fully explored in the report. The findings from this research reveal that the Nurturing Programme and its facilitators are effectively meeting the needs of BME groups. However, the findings indicate that 'hard to reach groups' require particular strategies (some of which were being piloted at the time of the research, such as Arabic-speaking or fathers-only groups) and that these strategies are inherently complex and require constant reflection and revision.

This study has also explored reasons behind rates of attrition and the effects of sporadic or non-attendance on other group members. Considerable attention has been paid to parental reflections on the importance of feeling confident in and comfortable with the facilitators co-ordinating the sessions. All of these findings build upon and add further illumination to the existing evidence base that exists in relation to the Nurturing Programme's effectiveness. In accordance with previous studies this research also focused on the outcomes of the programme for parents in North West Kensington and Golborne and our findings confirm those of other studies. The principal benefits to parents and their families of participation in the programme include:

- Feeling supported by peers (including a mirroring of problems);
- Challenging stereotypical views about the parenting approaches adopted in other cultures/social classes/family formations;
- Through calm thinking and new tools in parenting participants felt in greater control in their parental role;
- Improved communication within families;
- Longevity of lessons learnt (which was strengthened by the ability to refer to *The Parenting Puzzle* handbook at later points).

Additional findings that have implications for the effectiveness of the programme included:

- The need for ‘whole-family’ commitment/engagement;
- To combat a sense of isolation associated with being a parent full (or near full) commitment to the Programme is vital;
- Some parents need precursory support before embarking upon the programme (especially those with language difficulties and/or confidence issues);
- Appropriate referral mechanisms to channel parents with challenging teenagers to tailored parenting programmes.

### *Recommendations*

This research study was designed so that a series of recommendations could be reached which would act to inform future service delivery and development of the programme in this particular local context. Within Chapter Five a series of practical suggestions from the parent perspective is provided and includes such measures as a recorded version of the handbook that might be available in a range of languages thereby easing accessibility; a guarantee for mixed- or male-only groups; and other issues such as the timing of the sessions to coincide with children’s sleeping patterns and so on are discussed.

As the study was also aimed to aid strategic direction a number of recommendations have also been drawn from the study with the intention of assisting Sure Start and Family Support Group in developing the programme further. These include:

- **Formative Monitoring and Evaluation**

This needs to be developed both internally and externally. The programme collects a considerable body of attitudinal and evaluative data and opportunities to interrogate these data should be capitalised upon. Facilitators regularly feedback to Family Links as part of quality assurance measures - utilisation of this source of information should also be built into service delivery, reflection and planning;

- **Joined up service delivery and in particular the importance of partner agencies**

The study has emphasised the vitally important role of partner agencies and organisations that work with local families. Related professionals need to be fully aware of the existence, role/scope of the Nurturing Programme and feel confident to make effective and appropriate family referrals. An exercise in educating related professionals in this respect will be an important exercise to undertake.

- **Raising parental awareness and managing expectations**

This recommendation is related to that outlined above. A degree of work needs to be undertaken in communicating the aims, focus and intended outcomes of the Nurturing Programme to parents as well as other professionals working with families. Careful preparation of parental expectations at the outset could ensure that a lower rate of attrition is achieved.

- **‘Whole family’ commitment**

We would recommend that where possible all family members are engaged in the programme, although we recognise this will not always be feasible. As a minimum the value of the programme should be translated to non-participating parents (typically

fathers). Whilst fathers are notoriously hard-to-reach, the importance of translating the value of the programme to family relationships would be a worthwhile exercise.

- Identifying and addressing the needs of ‘special populations’

This study has demonstrated that parents sit along a continuum of need (from Social Services referrals, to confident/competent parents in need of little more than affirmation). As such the programme can represent an end in itself or a means to an end when provided in conjunction with a range of other support. The Nurturing Programme in this local context represents a universal service to the widest of populations whilst room for a degree of targeting is also maintained. Work is underway to attract and retain members of ‘special populations’ i.e. fathers, parents from BME groups and/or with EAL. We would recommend that further consultation is undertaken to ascertain what members of these ‘special populations’ self-define their needs to be and how they can be best catered for. The findings would suggest that for parents (mothers) with limited English that a staged approach is taken to introducing them to the full Nurturing Programme.

- Maintaining diversity through universalism.

The universalism that underpins the philosophies of both Sure Start and Family Support Group has resulted in a de-stigmatising service to local parents. The Nurturing Programme embodies further this commitment to a non-judgemental approach to family support. We would recommend that whilst attention is paid to targeted support for ‘special populations’ the more comprehensive and universalistic approach be maintained.

In summary, the Nurturing Programme in the context of North West Kensington and Golborne is very well received and there is clear evidence of effectiveness. Sure Start and Family Support Group have approached the delivery of the programme in a reflexive and creative way and as such ventured in to uncharted territory. Therefore, it is hoped that this study and the recommendations outlined here can help in the development and strategic direction of the programme in this specific local context.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### *1.1 What issues are involved in providing parenting support?*

Supporting families is central to government policy as evidenced by the Children Act (2004c); as a key aspect of the Every Child Matters: change for children agenda (2004a and 2004b) and in the creation of a national Family and Parenting Institute. There is a strong emphasis on preventative forms of family support at an early stage and the provision of multi-agency support for children and families (for example through Sure Start, children's centres and the extended role for schools). In fact, it is important to note that the majority of family support initiatives are aimed at families with young children, so that problems later in a child's life can be prevented (Quinton, 2004).

Parenting education and support has expanded massively and continues to be promoted for a range of reasons. It is widely accepted that by working with parents professionals can help parents to strengthen parent-child relationships; find better ways of dealing with challenging behaviour; and become equipped to recognise the importance of their role (Desforges, 2003). Many groups of professionals are involved in providing parenting programmes and support activities of different sorts. Moran et al (2004) found parenting support to take many different guises and identified seven broad categorisations: skills training; education; peer support; home visiting; counselling; discussion; and family therapy. Of course, a combination of these methods is often used (as in the case of Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne) and hence should be viewed as interdependent and complimentary.

Various commentators, for example Stratham (2000), Henricson (2003) and most recently Moran et al (2004) have found a set of common characteristics underpinning the effectiveness of family support services, these include: early intervention to prevent problems becoming entrenched; targeted support within a universal framework of services; a clear rationale for how the support will help; an integrated, whole family approach designed to address multiple needs rather than issues in isolation. To deliver such support to families requires the skills and expertise of numerous practitioners and it is increasingly common for multi-agency support services to address the needs of a given community or group of parents. Henricson (2003) highlights the range of statutory agencies at the forefront of many family support programmes; these typically involve a combination of agencies including health, social services, education, and to a lesser extent leisure, youth justice and criminal justice. There are also a plethora of voluntary bodies and organisations that have been actively involved in parenting support (for example Family Links, Family Support Group) and who play a crucial role.

Yet it is the impact of relatively recent demands for greater co-ordination and coherence in planning and approach that have heightened the emphasis on more formalised arrangements for multi-agency approaches (DfES, 2005). There are numerous examples of joined-up service delivery and multi-agency approaches to supporting families wherein the expertise and specialist knowledge of various agencies are harmonised and co-ordinated to better cater for the needs of families. For example, family support in many Sure Start programmes involves a range of approaches including home visiting and other outreach activities as well as parenting programmes, and specifically targeted support, either on a group of parents (i.e. fathers, teenage parents) or a specific issue (e.g. breast feeding counselling,

employment skills). Sure Start is an extremely well resourced national initiative which translates into innovative joined-up service delivery on the ground, to great effect in supporting families (see [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/findings.asp](http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/findings.asp) for a national overview of Sure Start; and Osgood, 2005a, 2005b for a discussion and evaluation of multi-agency family support in Sure Starts North West Kensington and Golborne).

### *1.2 Defining family support*

Despite the increased emphasis and activity in family support there remains a lack of clarity around precisely what is meant by the term and what services are encapsulated within the concept. Hardiker et al (1996) provide a framework for understanding the different types of support available to families. They identify:

- a 'base' level of universal services (health, education, leisure etc) needed by all families;
- vulnerable groups/communities
- families at risk of problems
- families experiencing severe stress/difficulties
- rehabilitative services for children in care

Hardiker et al's (1996) categorisations resonate with Moran et al's (2004) review of parenting programmes, wherein reference is made to 'mainstream relevance', this is taken to mean support provided to parents dealing with common problems or disorders, i.e. parenting issues faced by a substantial proportion of parents and therefore support tends to be mostly preventative and/or mildly therapeutic.

Furthermore, within the mainstream Moran et al point to 'special populations' of parents and these are generally taken to include fathers, ethnically diverse parents, teenage parents and parents of teenagers. It is possible to identify a continuum of family support services from preventionist to interventionist; universal to targeted. So that for example in cases where child protection might be a concern or drug misuse a problem then typically Social Workers tend to work in an interventionist capacity to safeguard the welfare of children and parents. At the other end of the continuum where support is universal and preventionist in focus the role of a Health Visitor provides a good example of the way in which this service engages with, and supports all families with new born children. The multi-agency team in situ at Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne is able to extend both interventionist/targeted and preventionist/universal by virtue of the range of professional expertise within the team, the effective referral mechanisms in place and the range of services that it extends to families (i.e. home visiting, parenting support groups etc).

### *1.3 Professionals' conceptualisations of parenting*

As research by Newman et al (2005) demonstrates there is often a degree of consensus among health, social care and education professionals about the basic principles underpinning 'good enough parenting' and these typically include: boundary setting, consistency, unconditional love/affection, prioritising child's needs, recognition of difficulties and a willingness to co-operate with remedial programmes. However, theoretical consensus does not always translate into practice, and therefore understanding the ways in which practitioners assess parenting and the need for parenting support is a key area for research (this study addresses the ways in which universal services are extended and also the methods used to identify, recruit and retain 'special populations' of parents to more intensive forms of support i.e. in the form of the structured Nurturing Programme).

Newman et al (2005) have found that (through their professional practice) the range of professionals working with parents tend to adhere to a deficit model of parenting rather than Winnicott's concept of 'good enough parenting'. The term 'good enough' was coined by Winnicott (1965) to describe the kind of mothering that fostered a mother/infant bond, but the term has come to be more widely used as a response to persistent calls for perfection in so many areas of life, but in this case in respect to parenting.

Parenting and what constitutes good (enough) parenting has assumed a more prominent place in the media and popular culture (as evidenced by the popularity of programmes such as *Little Angels*, the series of *The Contented Little Baby Books* by Gina Ford and the websites such as [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk) and [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)) so that such questions are increasingly at the forefront of public conscience. But the increase in public information coupled with ever increasing professional guidelines can act to reinforce a climate of 'professionalisation of parenting' where the constant demand for high standards can lead to anxiety and fear (Newman et al, 2005). Henricsson (2003) and Moran et al (2004) warn that preferred styles and approaches to parenting are subject to fashion and shaped by current political priorities. So what are the implications of this situation for the practitioners involved in delivering support to families? We endeavour to shed light on the answer to this question from the perspective of staff delivering the Nurturing Programme in Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne.

#### *1.4 Assessment frameworks/guidance*

So how do practitioners from a range of professional backgrounds come to determine whether the parenting skills of families they serve are 'good enough'? As outlined above this is problematic. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the professional boundaries, personal identities and societal pressures that come to bear on conceptualisations of parenting and delivery of support, the role that formal assessment procedures play in this policy area are crucial to understanding.

The recent introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (DfES, 2005) represents a move by government to increase or at least encourage greater parity between the practices of various professionals working in family support. However, previous research investigating the use of assessment schedules (Newman et al, 2005) revealed that whilst they are widely used the importance of applying professional insight and experience to assessing need were more highly valued by frontline staff. Practitioners perhaps feel more confident in relying upon their professional intuition, insight and experiences because inadequate levels of training are provided to use the assessment schedules. The dangers of allowing personal/professional insight and intuition are that judgements become overly narrow and potentially highly subjective. Moran et al (2004) refer to this phenomenon as 'practice wisdom' where professionals' observation and opinions can shape the direction and evaluation of the support provided to families. Whilst the insights that practitioners have and their wisdom is vital to the success of programmes it can also act as a form of paralysis in catering appropriately for the needs of some parents (Osgood and James, under review). One example is the challenge professionals face in serving the needs of families from Black and minority ethnic groups; in attempts to be culturally sensitive

some professionals feel unable to engage in lengthy debates about what is ‘good enough’ or merely a ‘cultural difference’ in parenting approaches.

However, as multi-agency front-line service providers, local Sure Start programmes extend both universal and targeted provision to families within a defined geographical catchment area. Whilst the multi-agency professionals working within North West Kensington and Golborne continually make assessments to determine how best to support and cater for the needs of individual families, access to ‘services for all’ are a key feature of the initiative. In respect of extending support to families through a structured parenting programme, Sure Start and the Family Support Group are in a position to meet the needs of a diverse range of families through the non-targeted, and hence a non-stigmatising approach taken when inviting and engaging parents to participate in the Nurturing Programme. However, the challenges that the Sure Start programme and the Family Support Group face in balancing out universal provision against addressing the needs of ‘special populations’ are central to service delivery and hence will be discussed throughout the body of the report.

### *1.5 Report outline*

Following this introductory chapter the next chapter provides details about the theoretical underpinning and research base supporting the Nurturing Programme. Chapter Two also presents a review of other relevant research evidence about parenting support from both the international and national literature. Chapter Three then outlines the methodological approach taken in this study. In Chapters Four and Five the findings from this study are presented and reflection on their implications for service delivery and development is discussed. Finally, the report concludes with a presentation of key conclusions and a series of recommendations aimed to assist Sure Start and the Family Support Group in planning, extending and improving the support they provide to families through the Nurturing Programme.

## **Chapter Two: The Nurturing Programme**

In this chapter the aim is to outline the theoretical underpinning of the Nurturing Programme and highlight the international, national and localised evidence-base about its effectiveness to support families.

### *2.1 Background & theoretical grounding*

The Nurturing Programme is a structured ten-week programme of parenting support that involves the participation of a group of parents (and their children). Throughout the programme parents learn to evaluate, reflect, de-and-re-construct their attitudes towards parenting. With the aid of trained facilitators and access to materials and resources participants are supported to develop alternative approaches to parenting, approaches that rest upon the principles of emotional literacy and empathetic relationships.

The programme was developed as a result of research undertaken in the United States by Bavolek (in the 1970s), whilst working at an Institute for Child Abuse and Neglect. Through his work he identified four unhelpful, destructive attitudes that were common to families experiencing difficulties. Inverting the negative aspects led him to establish the *four constructs*, which form the foundation of the Nurturing Programme.

#### *2.1(a) The Four Constructs*

##### *Self-awareness and self-esteem*

Achieving self-awareness relies upon an intimate knowledge and understanding of oneself: personal likes/dislikes, wants/needs. By exercising sensitivity towards oneself Bavolek claims that it becomes easier to address personal needs. In nurturing oneself, and hence meeting personal needs it is argued that self-esteem increases which in turn enables the capacity to nurture others (and in particular help children to develop self-awareness and positive self-esteem).

##### *Appropriate expectations*

Recognising diversity in the ways in which children grow is a vital aspect of the programme. Bavolek stresses the need to understand (and accept) that children develop in different ways: physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Therefore parents need to match expectations to a child's capability and avoid setting unrealistic expectations (both too high and too low). Where expectations are unreasonable or unrealistic children can become rebellious, frustrated and angry, or despondent. By establishing appropriate expectations parents come to recognise small increments in their child's development and learning.

##### *Positive discipline*

The programme stresses that all children require and respond to disciplined approaches in order to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behaviour. However, the focus upon *positive discipline* enables the parents to recognise the value of praise, rewards, choice, negotiation and responsibility in place of negative disciplinary approaches, which rest upon the principles of punishment and fear. Although parents also learn the importance of boundary setting and issuing fair penalties for poor behaviour. This approach is designed to enhance the enjoyment of family life and promote enhanced self-esteem among children.

### *Empathy*

Becoming more empathic is the cornerstone of the Nurturing Programme; Bavolek stresses that developing the ability to sense how others are feeling, (to tune in to their emotional point of view) is central to improved family relationships. He argues that an empathic response to a child's inner world (to their excitement, frustrations and fears) can foster close/trusting relationships, and can assist them in learning to respond sensitively towards others.

### *2.1(b) Emotional Literacy*

The Nurturing Programme is delivered to parents and their children with the intention of aiding the development of *emotional literacy*. The child programme is designed to offer ways to help children acquire the skills necessary to become self-disciplined, kind, confident and resilient, avoid antisocial behaviour and enjoy positive relationships, and to fulfil their potential (Family Links, 2006). Meantime the complementary parent programme provides adults with the information and skills they need to support children's emotional, social and behavioural development.

### *Defining 'emotional literacy'*

In an influential body of work, Goleman (1999, 2004, 2005) identifies and discusses the main aspects of emotional intelligence which are necessary to develop emotional literacy, they include:

### *Identifying emotions*

Goleman (2005) argues that the initial stages of developing emotional literacy rests upon becoming attuned to ones own emotions, he argues that this is possible through greater self-awareness (recognising a feeling as it happens). It becomes possible to learn to sustain self-awareness. The ability to notice an emotion rather than becoming overwhelmed by it is vitally important although the challenges in developing this skill are considerable and likely to involve patience and practice.

### *Managing emotions*

Having developed an ability to identify particular emotions, the second stage focuses upon the capacity to manage them. Goleman provides the examples of offering reassurance to oneself when anxiety is experienced, or soothing oneself when feeling anger or upset. All emotions have a value and significance. The Nurturing Programme highlights that emotions represent the significance of particular events (and reactions to them) in every day life. Furthermore, the ratio of comfortable-to-painful emotions acts as an important determinant of emotional well-being.

### *Self motivation*

In the identification and management of emotions it becomes feasible to more clearly identify personal goals and hence achieve personal aims. By taking control of personal emotions, rather than becoming overwhelmed by them, it is possible to regulate behaviour in positive ways and hence develop self-discipline.

### *Developing empathy*

The capacity to sensitively and reflexively become aware of others' emotions is stressed as the most important skill to develop and is considered essential to experience satisfying relationships. The programme stresses that children who are treated with empathy and respect will grow up to be empathic and respectful towards

others.

### *Managing relationships*

Building upon empathy, the art of relationships is based on skill in coping with emotions in others while also managing and expressing our own effectively, in essence having good communication skills. Goleman claims that emotionally skilled people are easy to trust with our feelings, and learning these skills ourselves enhances all relationships.

These five elements of emotional literacy reflect the key principles of the Nurturing Programme. In essence, the programme supports positive behaviour in children, and furthermore explores the emotional needs behind particular behaviours. An increasing body of research, in the neurosciences, reflects the importance of Bavolek's approach (see LeDoux, 1992, 1993, 1994; Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc, 1980; Cahill et al, 1994). In summary, the programme articulates that adults play a crucial role in child development; by developing empathic relationships, children learn to manage their emotions and learn how to be sensitive in their relationships with others. The Nurturing Programme activities (for both adults and children) address cognition and behaviour; furthermore these approaches are underpinned by an awareness of the important part played by affectivity.

Each session in the Nurturing Programme is carefully designed to reflect different learning styles. The programme is structured so that each session is both self-contained and iterative to produce a coherent whole. Detailed handbooks and other resources support the work of trainers, staff and other facilitators.

Family Links (2006) outlines the main benefits of the Nurturing Programme in the following diagram, with emotional health at the core of the approach:



**[Diagram 1. Benefits of the Emotional Health]**

In summary, research demonstrates that the programme benefits both adults and children by:

- promoting emotional literacy and emotional health;
- raising self-esteem;
- developing communication and social skills;
- teaching positive ways to resolve conflict;
- providing effective strategies to encourage co-operative, responsible behaviour and managing challenging behaviour in children;

- offering insights into the influence of feelings on behaviour; and
- encouraging adults to take time to nurture themselves.

### *2.2 Evidence of the effectiveness of the Nurturing Programme*

The course was developed Dr Stephen Bavolek for use in the treatment and prevention of child abuse and neglect. Bavolek has evaluated the programme (see Bavolek, 1985, 1987a and b; 1995; Bavolek et al, 1983, 1987, 2005). In addition to Bavolek's studies the programme has been extensively researched by others including Alvy & Steele, 1992; Baxter & Chara, 1995; Cowen, 2001; Devall, 2004; Matlak, 2003; Vespo et al, 2002, Welinske, 2003, Broyles et al, 1992; Family Service of Milwaukee, 1997; Primer, 1991, Wagner, 2001. The various studies fall into different categories and demonstrate effectiveness from a pre-post design perspective, comparative design, and through longitudinal assessment. The programme is widely used (to date approximately one million families have participated), and runs in a two-part format combining a school-based programme and the parenting programme.

### *2.3 Evidence-base in the UK context*

Bavolek granted an exclusive licence to Family Links to develop the Nurturing Programme in the UK. Family Links provides training courses and support to multi-agency professionals across the UK, in addition to this activity though the organisation is actively involved in undertaking and commissioning research into the effectiveness and benefits of the programme to families in the UK. As such, there is a growing body of evaluative evidence of its effectiveness outside of the USA and Mexico. For example, Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) piloted an evaluation of the combined school-based and parenting programmes which were delivered to 450 children aged four-to-seven and 34 parents in two schools. Course participation by parents was voluntary, and take-up rates were 11 per cent (34 of 315 eligible parents). Barlow and Stewart-Brown (op cit) noted that a large proportion of the parents who took part in the parenting programme were from a 'high-risk' background and over half of these parents perceived their children as presenting borderline or abnormal behaviour. Overall attrition rates were found to be 11 per cent, which compares very favourably with other programmes (where average attrition is 28 per cent; see Forehand and Kotchick, 2002).

Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) collected quantitative data on children's emotional well-being and behaviour (from teachers and parents), and administered standardized questionnaires on psycho-social well-being to parents. The pilot study also involved qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with over a third of the parents (n = 11) who took part in the programme, to ascertain the range of benefits parents received from the programme. Parents reported benefits to include:

- 1) Receiving support (in the parenting role) from other parents, including a mirroring of problems;
- 2) Regaining of a sense of control (in the parental role), in part through an increase in the capacity to think about matters calmly, and also through the provision of new tools to approach parenting; and
- 3) Increased ability to empathise and identify with their children, and a better understandings of the factors, which motivate children to behave in particular ways.

Additionally, the study found that (as a brief intervention) the parenting programme can have long-term beneficial effects for parents. The authors attributed success to the combination of affective strategies, which helped the participating parents to focus on feelings, relationships and personal experiences of being parented. Furthermore, the provision of behavioural strategies aimed at providing the parents with new methods of managing their children's emotional and behavioural development were felt to be crucially important to long-term effectiveness.

However, the authors noted the limited transferability of the study with respect to particular demographic factors. Whilst the parents interviewed were from a range of social backgrounds, they were less mixed in other ways, particularly in terms of their ethnicity (10 white, one Asian) and gender (11 female). The researchers called for the need for other grounded theory research with families from BME backgrounds and with fathers. It is also notable that the family structures amongst the participants in the study were relatively uniform (eight dual-parent families and three single parents), so including a more diverse range of family structures could also provide additional insights to the value of the programme for wider populations.

McNeill (2005) undertook a qualitative evaluation of the training and implementation of the Nurturing Programme. In addition to this primary focus the study also included a review of the immediate impacts of the programme upon participating parents and their families (taken from secondary data). This data consisted of evaluation logs and forms completed by 21 parents during the programmes. Whilst the author notes the variable quality of the data from these sources, the findings nevertheless indicated that outcomes included:

- positive experiences in a supportive atmosphere;
- improved understandings of family relationships and parenting;
- improved confidence and communication with children;
- more positive attitudes towards children;
- behavioural improvements from reinforcing techniques;
- Choices and Consequences most successful strategy; and
- Time Out and ignoring were least successful strategies.

The study also presented findings on teachers' experiences of course training (from the data gathered in post-course evaluation forms (n = 196). The views of four headteachers were also included and focused upon their reflections of the relevance of the programme to their school, and staff satisfaction with training. Key findings included the enhancement of teachers' skills, greater empathy with children, and more tools to promote children's social, emotional and behavioural development. Headteachers reported positive experiences for the children, including empowerment and consistent approaches throughout the school. Heads also noted the need for explicit commitment to the programme, and the nurturing of teachers.

#### *2.4 The internal evidence-base in North West Kensington & Golborne*

In 2004 Campbell (for the Family Support Group) undertook a review of the Nurturing Programme in Kensington and Chelsea. Pamela Campbell is one of the most experienced facilitators contributing to the programme in the Sure Start area. She stressed that the rationale for the original implementation of the programme in 2003 (by the voluntary organisation, Family Support Group) rested upon two key factors:

- 1) availability of a family-support grant; and
- 2) requests from parents in the area for support around the issues of behaviour management, communication skills and peer support.

Preparatory work for the programme included an in-house review of parenting programmes that were available, and steering group discussion. Whilst noting that the programme had been validated both in the US and UK, the paper highlights that the Family Support Group adapted the programme for community use. Furthermore, an important factor influencing choice of the programme over others was the complementary and parallel courses for adults and children (although not all children attend).

The findings from the review focus on implementation and outcomes for parents in equal measure. Campbell occupies the role of researcher-practitioner, as such information is provided on participation rates/experiences and professional reflections on outcomes. At the time of the review, the Nurturing Programme was delivered through community venues, with an ethnically-diverse range of parents (including Black Caribbean (12), White British (10), Black African (seven), White European (six), and Asian (four)). The courses reached families in the lower and middle-income brackets with the middle-income more likely to self-refer. Two courses ran between January and March 2004 with 13 parents completing. A third course was scheduled for March 2004, but was abandoned due to low attendance.

The abandonment of the third course highlights the degree of planning and preparation necessary to recruit and retain parent. Campbell estimated that she spent between six and eight weeks establishing relationships/trust with parents who might potentially participate. Factors contributing to low attendance included:

- course-timings driven by funding, rather than parental need;
- lack of a central recruitment person for parents to talk to;
- inconvenient timings in the day;
- demands of a 10 week course, (Campbell notes a belief that some parents think it is acceptable to attend when they are able, rather than seeing the course as a whole).

The benefits of reputation, which accrue over time, were also highlighted in the report; it takes a considerable period for courses to become established and valued in a community. As a community-based programme resting upon the principles of universal access and non-compulsion this point seems particularly salient to this variant of implementation.

In summary, Campbell (2004) found positive outcomes to include:

- better communication within families;
- peer support;
- new skills and coping strategies;
- improved behaviour management; and
- reduced isolation/improved social integration (one group meet to socialise).

In addition to the more generic positive outcomes, the following specific benefits were also highlighted:

- two participants left violent relationships; and
- one family's improved parenting resulted in their child remaining off the protection register.

As researcher-practitioner Campbell outlined key areas for service development, which included:

1) Time available:

Facilitators found that sessions were insufficient in length to allow parents to fully share and discuss their experiences: “the programme encourages parents to share their experiences and for some it is an arena which is not often available. Parents usually therefore have a lot to say and questions to ask”.

2) Language and literacy:

A proportion of parents experienced difficulty with the language of the programme. In one case, a couple did not return because of EAL language barriers, and two native English speakers complained that “the language was difficult [and by implication] was aimed at middle class parents”.

3) Recruitment Strategy:

Careful recruitment practices are needed particularly in respect of providing opportunities for potential recruits to talk to facilitators, meet past-participants in order that expectations are managed, familiarity with the language used and a basic understanding of the course is achieved.

4) Commitment to de-stigmatise:

Facilitators and parents worked to dispel the myth that parenting courses are exclusively designed to address ‘problem parents’. The universal nature of the provision goes some way to address this concern and the increased proliferation of courses will increase the profile/ proportion of local parents reached.

Having provided an overview of the Nurturing Programme, the subsequent chapters in this report attend to the primary data collected in the study. These findings are presented in such a way as to build upon and extend what is already known about the programme. Additionally, through careful analyses new findings about the effectiveness and limitations of delivering the programme to families in North West Kensington and Golborne are discussed at length, and hence offer fresh insights, both in respect of delivery and outcomes.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### *3.1 Study outline*

The methodological approach taken was designed to establish the effectiveness of the programme, identify levels of satisfaction, and highlight service delivery issues. In effect the objectives of the study were two-fold. We firstly wanted to establish what the outcomes of participation in the programmes had been for parents; we were keen to unearth both positive and negative experiences and so included a range of parents (see sections 3.4-3.6 for more detail). The second principal objective was to understand the process of implementing and delivering the programme from both the staff and parent perspective. Again, we were keen to reveal both strengths and weaknesses so that Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne can identify areas for improvements and hence enhance the programme offered to local parents.

The approach taken was informed by the research studies outlined in chapter two, although time and financial constraints resulted in a much more focused and contained study than those undertaken in the US, and the data gathered for this research were entirely qualitative, although some analysis of secondary data has been undertaken (see appendix six).

The internal review undertaken by the Family Support Group (Campbell, 2004) and the recommendations stemming from that piece of work were particularly useful in shaping the direction of the research study reported here. Other factors directing the scope and direction of this study included previous experience of researching aspects of Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne (see Osgood and James 2005a, 2005b); and discussions with programme managers to ensure that the study and the reported findings could aid the strategic development of the programme.

The study involved qualitative semi-structured interviews with 30 local parents (who have children under the age of five) who held varying degrees of experience of the Nurturing Programme (see section 3.6 for further detail). Parent interviews were primarily conducted over the telephone, although a small number were conducted face-to-face where parents requested. Interviews were guided by the use of an interview schedule (see appendix four) which ensured that the same broad topics were covered in each interview but opportunities for parents to dwell on certain topics and skirt over others were available. The interviews lasted between 15 and 90 minutes, the variation in length of interview reflected the sub-samples of parents that were included (i.e. those on a waiting list and those who ceased attending early on, in contrast to parents who had attended the course and reported attitudes, experiences and recommendations in great detail). All interviews were recorded and detailed, annotated notes made from the recordings. Fieldwork took place in Spring 2006.

In-depth interviews were also undertaken with staff including the Programme Manager of Sure Start, and five trained and experienced facilitators from Sure Start and Family Support Group. As with parents all interviews were guided by an interview schedule (see appendices one and two). Two paired-interviews were undertaken with four of the facilitators which was aligned to the co-facilitator model adopted in the delivery of the Nurturing Programme in Sure Start. Pamela Campbell was interviewed individually since her knowledge and historical perspectives formed a central focus. Interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, this variation reflected

levels of involvement and differing experiences of delivering the programmes, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In addition to primary data collection information collected by the programme was analysed and relevant publications (see Chapter Two) were reviewed to inform the direction and focus of the study.

### *3.2 Research aims*

The aims of this study differ from those in the research undertaken by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) in that we were seeking to ascertain parental expectations, motivations and recommendations in addition to the *outcomes* of parenting support intervention in terms of behavioural, attitudinal and affective alterations. Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) measured pre-specified outcomes using standardised pre- and post-test measures. Such measures and studies are of course very valuable, and indeed informed decisions to implement the Nurturing Programme in North West Kensington and Golborne, but this study sought to expose unexpected outcomes and experiences as well as the extent to which the programme had met the aims of improved empathic behaviours and the acquisition/application of emotional literacy.

This study was concerned to:

- Identify a range of outcomes to a specific parent population (i.e. parents of very young children), drawn from a defined local context with particular characteristics (i.e. socially and culturally diverse populations located in an inner city neighbourhood).
- Consider the Nurturing Programme as part of wider raft of service provision, designed to support local parents in a variety of ways, but that all share the core aims of tackling child poverty, reducing isolation, etc.
- Sure Start services are parent-led and as such the aim to ensure that local parents can influence service development was incorporated into the design. Parents were given the opportunity to reflect upon the relevance of the programme to their unique family circumstances and provide recommendations for improvement.
- The multi-agency ethos and composition of the service suggested that the use of a positivistic medical approach to measuring outcomes would provide narrow results rather than the richness of data and exposure to unanticipated outcomes/recommendations that this study allowed.

Furthermore, the localised nature of the programme provided valuable opportunities to gather data from ‘special populations’ (Moran et al, 2004) such as parents from BME backgrounds, fathers, single parents and Social Service referrals. By gathering the views of a wide range of parents the effectiveness of the programme to parents along a continuum of need can be usefully explored and the merits/challenges to diverse group composition is address fully in Chapter Five.

In summary, the research aimed to identify and explore the outcomes of the programme for parents, provide them with an opportunity to offer criticism/praise and suggestions for improvement. Secondly, the study was designed as a ‘process’ evaluation; that is to consider the implementation and delivery of the programme and

to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach with a view to reaching conclusions/ making recommendations that will aid the strategic and practical development of parenting support in a localised context. Below we outline two sets of research questions (a) benefits and outcomes, and (b) implementation and delivery which combine to satisfy the dual aim of the study.

### *3.3 a) Research questions: benefits and outcomes*

#### **Do Sure Start parents report the same benefits as previously researched parents? For example, do they report:**

- support from other parents, including a mirroring of problems;
- regaining of a sense of control in the parental role (through calmer thinking and new tools of parenting); and
- an increased ability to empathise and identify with their children and better understanding factors which motivate children to behave in certain ways.

[Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001]

- positive experiences in a supportive atmosphere;
- improved understanding of family relationships and parenting;
- improved confidence and communication with children;
- more positive attitudes towards children; and
- effectiveness of positive discipline.

[McNeill, 2005]

#### **Does the research confirm the benefits for parents highlighted in the 2004 internal review?**

- better communication within families;
- peer support;
- new skills and coping strategies;
- improved behaviour management;
- reduction of isolation;
- reduced isolation/improved social integration; and
- improvements in critical family problems (eg domestic violence, social services interventions).

[Campbell, 2004]

**Do parents in Sure Start experience different or additional benefits to those reported in other research?** (especially given the differences of context, methods of delivery, and the age of children).

#### **What are the particular experiences of ‘special populations’?**

Do parents from BME backgrounds experience the same benefits as other more researched groups?

What are fathers’ experiences?

What effect does compulsory participation have i.e. those who are referred by Social Services?

With these research questions in mind we therefore aimed to achieve some degree of comparability with past research in three main ways: firstly, by focusing the research instruments on outcomes/benefits (see appendix three for the interview schedule used with parents); by purposive sampling (see 3.4 below), and finally, by comparing

outcomes when undertaking data analysis (see appendix seven for analytic framework).

### *3.3 b) Research questions: implementation and delivery*

Given that facilitators in Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne are charged with delivering programmes in a way that differs from that researched by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) and McNeill (2005) the study focused upon experiences of delivering the programme and the challenges/strengths, as they perceived them. To summarise the distinctiveness of the Nurturing Programme in the Sure Start context lies in the fact that it is delivered:

- to a diverse range of parents;
- to parents with pre-school children;
- through community-based programmes, and
- often where children are not involved on parallel courses.

Hence, we endeavoured to address the following set of research questions:

- Does the facilitator training prepare facilitators effectively for this context?
- What key factors effect recruitment and retention?
- What barriers exist to access?
- Do *all* parents experience (similar) benefits from participating in programme?
- Is the parenting programme aligned to Sure Start goals? Is it universal, non-stigmatised, parent-led?
- How far can facilitators deliver a structured programme and meet the needs/expectations of parents?

We gathered data about the processes of implementing the Nurturing Programme in this unique context through interviews with parents, which included questions about recruitment, attendance and facilitation styles (see appendix three, interview schedule used with parents). Data were also gathered from staff facilitators' experiences of planning/delivering the course and from attending training (see staff interview schedules, appendices one and two). Parents were sampled to capture different patterns of attendance (see 3.4 below), which was important to inform findings and conclusions about process and implementation as the achieved sample provides insights into factors influencing access and take-up of provision.

### *3.4 Sampling strategy*

To understand how the Nurturing Programme was introduced and developed we decided to interview all staff that delivered or co-facilitated courses before April 2006, and those in key management positions. (Trained staff members that had not facilitated a course at the time of the research were not included in this study).

To cover a range of parent expectations, experience and satisfaction, we devised quota groups based on attendance and timing of parental involvement with the programme. We monitored numbers of interviews achieved in each group as the research proceeded. The sample structure was designed to include parents who had participated in different courses run by different staff, in order to gauge whether there were common patterns of experience across courses. We therefore adopted a sample *stratified* by each course; within each course, we drew *proportionate and random* numbers of parents to contact for interviews.

Group Ai	Group Aii	Group Aiii	Group Bi	Group Bii	Group C
Additional <b>purposively-sampled</b> parents; to be decided during research	Parents who had begun but <b>not completed</b> the course  (Jan 04 – May 06)	Parents who had been on the register for a course but <b>never attended</b>  (Jan 04 – May 06)	Parents on the <b>current waiting list</b>  (Feb – May 06)	Parents who had <b>completed most current</b> courses  (Feb – May 06)	Parents who had <b>completed past</b> courses  (Jan 04 – Jan 06)

[Table 1: Sampling Structure]

Given the fact that our research was focused on the diversity of the parents to whom the programme was delivered, we did not aim to nest other variables of interest within the sampling strategy (e.g. family structures, ethnic background); and of course no individual was assumed to be representative of the ‘category’ to which they might be considered to belong. Our aim was to capture the outcomes, which the Nurturing Programme might deliver to a *diverse* group of participants, and we expected these to emerge through our sampling strategy. We did however retain a small number of interviews for purposive ‘top-ups’, in order to meet particular research interests (e.g. the experience of participants with English as an additional language).

Given the inability to capture longitudinal data, due to time and resource constraints, the decision to include parents that had attended past courses represented an expedient opportunity to gather data about long-term outcomes. Obviously this approach has limitations with regard to recall but these interviews focused upon more general aspects of the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of what was learnt. Parents were asked to reflect upon whether or not, and what ways, the programme had impacted upon approaches to parenting and family relationships. This provided interesting data about the suitability of the course for different stages of child development, given that the Nurturing Programme in North West Kensington and Golborne is being delivered to parents with younger families than is usual. However, we also aimed to sample a large proportion of current participants/current waiting list parents.

We knew from conducting previous research in the local area (Osgood & James 2005a and 2005b) that the sample would probably present a series of logistical difficulties. As with many London boroughs, geographical mobility is high, and therefore we anticipated inaccurate addresses and telephone numbers. Furthermore, the demands of parenting young children, often in particularly stressful life circumstances, would make our respondents’ time particularly precious and pressurised. However, we maintained a principled selection system of alternative respondents, and pursued particular respondents rather than working through registers. Only two parents declined to participate. Although a small proportion was unavailable at the arranged interview time, we respected this as a tacit withdrawal of consent.

Parents were invited to participate by letter (see appendix five), which provided details of the study and an invitation to decline. Parents were given time to consider whether to participate before they were contacted. Informed consent was secured before telephone interviews began. Where telephone interviews were unsuitable face-to-face interviews were offered. (Only two parents whose first language was Arabic requested face-to-face interviews). No interpreted interviews were requested.

We specifically avoided contacting parents on current courses (the Bii group) until they had completed. Given that we were not engaged in a pre-post study, we wished to avoid the possible research effects or placing unintentional pressure upon parents. For example, we did not want to put pressure on parents to complete the course, or to feel they were committed to an interview which they later decided they would prefer not to participate in. Therefore, these parents were interviewed in the week after their last session.

### 3.5 Primary Data: details of parent sample

Our first sampling priority was to achieve quotas in groups A – C. We were confident that the numbers achieved would give a range of data on benefits to parents, and delivery of the course (including factors in recruitment and retention, and the group experience). The effects of the mobility/sample wastage factors are reflected in the fact that achieved numbers were not proportionate to those registered on courses, but there is a chronological spread across the delivery of the Nurturing Programme.

<b>Group Ai</b>	<b>Group Aii</b>	<b>Group Aiii</b>	<b>Group Bi</b>	Group Bii	Group C	Total
Additional <b>purposively -sampled</b> parents	Parents who had begun but <b>not completed</b> the course  (Jan 04 – May 06)	Parents who had been on the register for a course but <b>never attended</b>  (Jan 04 – May 06)	Parents on the <b>current waiting list</b>  (Feb 06 – May 06)	Parents who had <b>completed current</b> courses  (Feb 06 – May 06)	Parents who had <b>completed past</b> courses  (Jan 04 – Jan 06)	
<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>30</b>

[Table 2: Parent interviews achieved by attendance grouping]

Jan 04 Weekday (5 reg)	Jan 04 Weekend (8 reg)	May 04 Weekday (14 reg)	Oct 04 weekday (10 reg)	Sept 05 weekday (9 reg)	Feb 06 waiting list (reg)	Feb 06 weekday (reg)	Feb 06 weekend (reg)	Total
2	1	3	1	4	4	8	7	30

[Table 3: Parent interviews by course registered]

In addition to the above sampling criteria the achieved sample also captured the following:

- diverse backgrounds of all participating parents;
- a range of family structures; and
- ethnic diversity of the local area.

Recruiting fathers to participate in the study was particularly challenging (and reflects the difficulties facilitators delivering the Nurturing Programme experience when attempting to recruit them to the courses). Despite this both female and male interviewees included in the research provided insightful experiences and views around gendered assumptions of parenting and experiences of mixed-gender groups; these issues are addressed fully in Chapter Five.

Table 4, below illustrates the range of parents included in the research and the contrast of the achieved sample to the entire population of registered parents for the Nurturing Programme since its inception in Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne in January 2004.

<i>Parent details</i>	<i>Number of parent interviews (of 30 interviews)</i>	<i>Number of parents registered on courses Jan 04-Jan 06 (of 46 parents<sup>1</sup>)</i>
<b>Family Structure<sup>2</sup></b>		
2 parent family	15 (50%)	14 (30%)
1 parent family	10 (33%)	12 (26%)
Adoptive parent/s	0	1 (2%)
Attends with friend/relative (not spouse)	2 (7%)	2 (4%)
Both parents at same course	3 (10%)	4 (9%)
Both parents separately	0	4 (9%)
Pre-natal	1 (3%)	0
Known to have teens	5 (17%)	6 (13%)
No data	0	16 (35%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	2 (7%)	4 (9%)
Female	28 (93%)	36 (91%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Black African	4 (13%)	4 (8%)
Black Caribbean	3 (10%)	9 (19%)
Black British	1 (3%)	-
Asian	1 (3%)	5 (10%)
White British	6 (20%)	12 (26%)
White European/Other White	4 (13%)	6 (13%)
Mixed	3 (10%)	1 (2%)
Chinese	1 (3%)	1 (2%)
Other	1 (3%)	3 (6%)
No data	6 (20%)	6 (13%)
<b>Attendance</b>		
Completion (Groups Bii & C)	17 (57%)	28 (63%)
Non-completion (Group Aii)	7 (23%)	12 (26%)
No attendance/no data (Group Aiii)	2 (7%)	6 (11%)
Waiting list (Group Bi)	4 (13%)	N/a

**[Table 4. Parent sub-samples & registered parents, January 2004 –January 2006]**

<sup>2</sup> Figures do not round to 30 and 46 due to double-counting on aspects of family structure

## **Chapter Four: Implementation and Delivery**

Sure Start and Family Support Group shared the view that families in North West Kensington and Golborne would benefit from parenting support in the form of structured, facilitated peer support groups. The area is characterised by relatively high levels of poverty and many parents experience acute isolation, in part as a result of their parental status but often this is further compounded by language and cultural difference (see Osgood and James, 2005a and b for a discussion about the effects of isolation for families from BME backgrounds).

### *4.1 Selecting the Nurturing Programme*

The implementation of a structured parenting support programme was felt to be an effective means of complementing and extending the existing range of support and outreach activities that are provided to local families through the Sure Start Programme and via Family Support Group. Through the extensive work that these organisations undertake with families (through a range of group activities, home visiting, etc) and through consultation exercises, they are attuned to the needs of local families. Many families experience stressful lives characterised by poor housing/overcrowding, insufficient kinship networks, post-natal depression and mental health difficulties. However, there are also pockets of relative affluence in the catchment area and as such Sure Start reach a diverse range of parents in terms of cultural and social backgrounds. The aim to provide universal services to local families and simultaneously address the needs of specific groups is a key feature of Sure Start provision. The Nurturing Programme, with its emphasis on non-judgemental, de-stigmatising support was felt to be an effective model aligned to the ethos of the organisations involved. It was also felt to hold the potential to address the various needs of the widest range of families that reside in the area, as the Programme Manager explained:

*'I feel that the people in the group are happy and excited that it is a very mixed group and that you haven't just picked out a group of vulnerable Social Services cases where they might all be incredibly needy...talk is from everybody whether you are White middle-class or you are a Somalian mum who has been here for six months, you know with a reasonable level of English'.*

And also the facilitator from Family Support Group:

*'It was very appealing in that it had a very broad and generous outlook towards parents in that it was about supporting, nurturing them and basically looking at how well parents do generally but at the same time realising that parents need a little bit extra support, that parents are isolated, and that they can benefit from coming together and sharing ideas and information'.*

The scientific evidence base and the validation of the course in both the US and UK (as discussed in Chapter Two) were also important factors influencing the decision to implement the Nurturing Programme.

### *4.2 Programme principles, aims and objectives*

The foundations of the Nurturing Programme, i.e. the four constructs (self awareness/esteem; appropriate expectations; positive discipline; and the exercise of empathy) and the prominent focus upon developing emotional literacy (see Chapter

Two (for a fuller discussion) were influential factors informing decision-making about implementing the course in North West Kensington and Golborne.

Sure Start and Family Support Group share a commitment to developing new and innovative ways of working to provide support and intervention to families, with the intention that they will experience improved life chances. The organisations share the principal aim of improving the health and well-being of families and young children. So the emphasis on emotional health in the Nurturing Programme is squarely aligned to the goals of both Sure Start and Family Support Group. Managers, co-ordinators and facilitators share the view that the Nurturing Programme places an appropriate emphasis upon recognising the commonalities in parenting and the fallibility of *all* parents in their role, rather than seeking to identify individual weaknesses the programme offered opportunities for parents to share their experiences and views and to reflect upon the origins of their behaviours. There was wide consensus amongst those involved in delivering the programme that it was a positive programme, or as one respondent described it, a ‘feelgood’ course:

*‘It’s a feelgood course that appeals to parents who might be feeling unsure or sensitive about their role as parent, so it really is a feelgood course but it also has these really serious and important underlying messages and techniques that are quite powerful, but it generally makes parents feel good too’.*

It is worth revisiting the elements of acquiring/mastering emotional literacy outlined in Chapter Two, to consider the degree of ‘fit’ they have with the aims and objectives of Sure Start and Family Support Group. Developing emotional literacy requires the ability to identify emotions through greater self awareness, to then manage emotions in a sensitive and generous way, then the goal becomes to take control of the emotions and translate them into self-discipline. Having undertaken self reflection and self-management, emotionally literate people are then able to exercise empathy – this final stage is crucial to safeguard and promote the well-being of families and children and is the cornerstone to the programme. All staff involved with the programme were enthused about the outcomes that can be achieved in family relationships from developing and applying emotional literacy. Most spoke about the importance of breaking destructive cycles of familial conduct and attitudes, so that parents come to understand, through self-reflection, that they have the capacity to alter patterns of behaviour (that they may not have been aware they were displaying and/or that they believed to be inherent within them). The manager explained the power of developing the capacity to become empathic which is central to the Nurturing Programme:

*‘It gets you to think about what happened to you as a child, how you might feel, what you might do in certain situations and gives you lots of tools to look back and re-evaluate, approach things differently’.*

The Nurturing Programme was also deemed to fit with the Sure Start remit of working specifically with very young children and their families. The Every Child Matters framework for supporting child development and child well-being overlaps considerably with the principles, aims and objectives of the programme. Staff interviewed highlighted that The Birth to Three Matters Framework (DfES, 2004) emphasises an holistic approach to supporting development. The four main aspects of the framework include: ‘a strong child, a skilful communicator, a competent learner and healthy child’. These aspects are mirrored in the four constructs and the focus on emotional literacy that the Nurturing Programme promotes. For example, the

emphases in the framework upon ‘being acknowledged and affirmed’; ‘developing self assurance’; ‘a sense of belonging’; ‘finding a voice’; ‘listening and responding’; and importantly in relation to the programme, achieving ‘emotional well-being’ clearly resonate and complement the underpinning philosophy and objectives of Bavolek’s approach (outlined in Chapter Two).

In summary, the staff at Sure Start and Family Support Group made careful judgements about the suitability and parity of the Nurturing Programme to the target audience and organisational goals and objectives.

#### *4.3 Staff training and support*

Family Links provide training to parent group leaders; a four-day-course offers a comprehensive introduction to the principles and practice of the Nurturing Programme to professionals working with parents and carers. The training emphasises the importance of facilitative approaches, both in group work and one-to-one support. The staff at Sure Start and Family Support Group attended training that was designed specifically for community professionals such as health visitors, social workers, school nurses, youth offending teams, Sure Start teams, and Children's Centre staff. The training reflects the four constructs on which the Nurturing Programme is based; as such the Family Links trainers expect that participants will demonstrate the four constructs in action throughout the training.

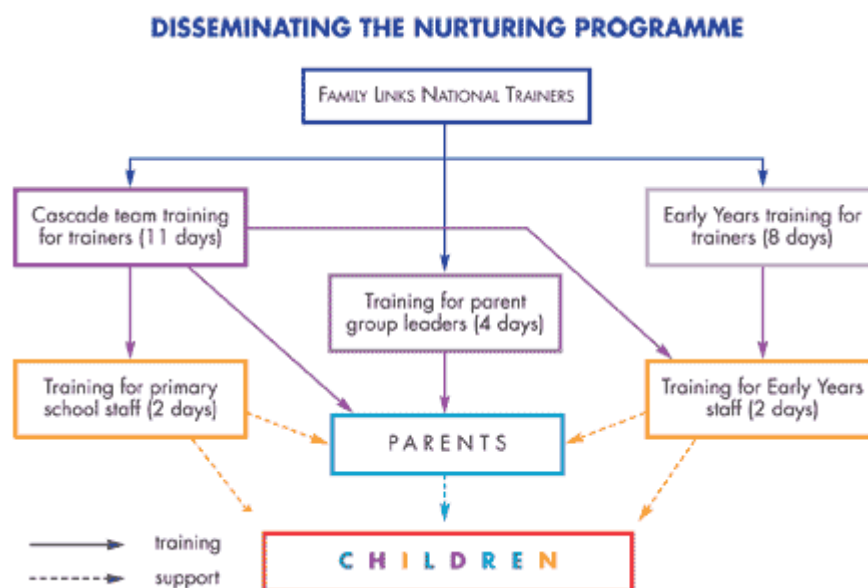
Family Links (2006) stress that trainees will be involved in many activities, some of which are personally as well as professionally challenging, stimulating and rewarding. It is also stressed that professionals working with the Nurturing Programme need to be reasonably comfortable with the emotional issues in their own lives, as well as those they may encounter in the lives of people they support.

The aims of the training are to:

- introduce trainees to the principles and practice of the Nurturing Programme;
- link the programme to the development of emotional literacy and emotional health in adults and children;
- offer experience of the programme at a personal as well as a professional level;
- enable trainees to share expertise and experience;
- encourage a reflective approach in one-to-one and group work;
- demonstrate an empathic, supportive facilitation style;
- build confidence in using the programme effectively and enjoyably;
- assess trainees' readiness as trainers; and
- familiarise trainees with the programme resources.

At the time the research was carried out 10 members of staff in Sure Start and Family Support Group were trained to deliver the Nurturing Programme (to parents) and four of these were also trained to deliver the course to children. A further three members of staff were about to go on stream. With such a large body of professionals trained in the method and approach the manager was considering the possibility of establishing a cascade model of training within the Sure Start Programme. The diagram below (from the Family Links website) demonstrates that as an organisation and training provider it is committed to a cascading model, but the details about whether, and how, such an approach in North West Kensington and Golborne might materialise remain at the planning stage. However, the overlap with other providers of the Nurturing

Programme in neighbouring London Boroughs was felt to represent a potential site for development.



[Diagram 2. Dissemination of the Nurturing Programme]

Staff reflections upon the quality and appropriateness of the training received from Family Links were overwhelmingly positive. The aims outlined above were met and the fact that facilitators deliver the programmes in pairs (one more and one less experienced) meant that peer support and coaching was built into the delivery of each course. The top-up days that Family Links provide and the on-going support were praised; facilitators were extremely appreciative of the opportunities that exist to reflect upon their practice and share experiences with others.

A final point raised in relation to the on-going dialogue with Family Links was related to the requirement for Sure Start and Family Support Group to monitor the courses that they run and provide course evaluation feedback to Family Links. Staff were uncertain what happened to these data, and indeed whether Family Links were undertaking any form of analyses, several facilitators suggested that such an exercise could be very beneficial to provide insights into the effectiveness of the programmes that are delivered (this issue will be returned to at later junctures in the report; see 4.6 below and Chapter Six: Recommendations).

#### 4.4 Recruiting parents

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Sure Start were mindful to ensure that the Nurturing Programme was integrated to other services that it provides to local families, for example the Baby Café, Breastfeeding Counselling, drop-in provision and so on. The intention for the programme to exist in conjunction with other services prevents it being constructed as an ‘add-on’ or the preserve of ‘special groups’. Therefore, parental awareness and interest in programme were thought to be mostly generated through word-of-mouth. The increasing numbers of participating parents has a demonstrable impact upon levels of awareness and curiosity about the Nurturing Programme (an outcome that Campbell (2004) had anticipated). As well as casual

enquiries from parents, more formal approaches have been taken to invite parents to participate.

Periodic mail-outs are sent to parents who express an interest to Sure Start. This letter outlines the scope/aims of the programme and additionally, the level of commitment required for participation on the course. The letter also highlights the availability of crèche facilities, the location and timing of the sessions and the fact that a cost will not be incurred. Parents are invited to phone the manager for information and/or to complete a form, which will secure a place on a waiting list. Parent reflections on the adequacy of this letter to manage expectations, and provide accurate information are discussed in chapter five. However, it is important to note that facilitators believed it to be an effective mechanism. Although most pointed to occasions when parents were initially anticipating practical support, i.e. potty training, establishing routines, sleep patterns etc. Staff endeavoured to manage such expectations by providing careful explanations and written literature, as a result most parents that attended the courses were felt to hold accurate expectations.

The facilitators also prepare publicity, which is displayed locally in GP surgeries, libraries, and other community venues. Resources permitting, facilitators also raise awareness by delivering presentations to groups of professionals, such as health visitors.

#### *4.5 Referrals*

Related to the issue of accurately managing parental expectations of the course are the explanations provided by non-facilitators who are in contact with local families. A key method of raising awareness and recruiting parents to the Nurturing Programme was via the home visiting team. The manager believed that all families receiving family support through the home visiting service would be invited to participate on the course if it was deemed appropriate. Home visitors exercise their professional judgement about the readiness of parents to attend the Nurturing Programme but facilitators (many of whom also perform home visits) recognised the important role of home visitors in stressing the value of the programme. More enthusiastic explanations and encouragement is provided to parents who are experiencing particular difficulties such as isolation, or mental health issues (e.g. post-natal depression). This approach was considered to be both effective and integrated (parental perspectives about the role of home visitors in this capacity are discussed in Chapter Five). However, it is important to note that where a home visitor lacks first hand experience of the programme the explanations provided to the parents may differ to those provided by those who are actively involved in delivering the programme.

The close links that Sure Start and Family Support Group have with other local organisations, in the voluntary as well as statutory sector were also believed to be effective ways of raising awareness about the Nurturing Programme. The manager at Sure Start reported that many parents were referred from voluntary sector local community organisations and the full range of statutory services. Health visitors and GPs, nursery managers and staff, as well as Social Workers were cited as having highlighted the course to local parents. (The full extent of this activity was not the focus of this study but interviews with parents gave some insights into the nature of referrals to the course and will be discussed fully in the next chapter). Further investigation into the precise explanations provided by partner organisations may be

beneficial. Where professionals have limited understandings of parenting support programmes, and specifically the Nurturing Programme in this instance, it is possible that vague explanations are provided. This factor taken alongside the resource limitations (staff availability to provide comprehensive explanations) could lead to confusion about the aims and purpose of the programme and account for a proportion of the attrition rate.

Social Service referrals were a particular focus of discussion in the interviews with the facilitators. The particular circumstances of families involved with Social Services have to be carefully considered before inclusion in the Nurturing Programme can be assured. All facilitators highlighted that Social Service referred families can often require acute sensitivity. The particular circumstances of a given family can present challenges in terms of confidentiality (for example in relation to child protection, substance misuse, domestic violence). Furthermore, such parents can come to the group with extremely negative attitudes about themselves and about Social Services. Attendance can seem (or might be) compulsory, this compulsion can engender feelings of resentment and resistance to the programme. Such families may feel that they are constructed as 'bad parents' and there is a danger that they may perceive the Nurturing Programme as punitive and/or remedial and therefore it can become inflected with stigma. Where this situation exists facilitators invest considerable time and energy dispelling such notions, and report that stigma is lifted and the value of the course appreciated because it is founded upon emotional literacy and nurturance. This is facilitated by the generally diverse group composition, comprised of parents who have self-referred, been referred by Social Services, who are middle-class, working-class and from a range of ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

#### *4.6 Universal and targeted*

Criteria for inclusion on the course are mainly stipulated by the Sure Start remit, in that parents must have children under the age of five years and live within the local programme catchment area. However, the involvement of Family Support Group (which has broader remit in terms of both age and geography) means that a wider range of parents is included. Also, many Sure Start parents have older children in addition to the under-five-year-old that make them eligible for Sure Start provision. Beyond these criteria though the range of parents that are invited to participate is varied. The commitment to extending services universally and therefore encouraging diversity in uptake of provision renders the notion of assessing 'need' a complex issue. Whilst facilitators stressed that participation on the Nurturing Programme is suitable for *all* parents, thereby satisfying the universalism agenda, it nevertheless remains the case that some parents have been 'targeted'. Parents who have been referred, or encouraged to participate in the course have been identified as likely to benefit from the structured peer support and facilitation available through the Nurturing Programme. So in a sense the provision is both universal and targeted, which is aligned to Sure Start principles and service delivery. The facilitators stressed the value and effectiveness of the programme but there was acknowledgement that for parents experiencing multiple and/or acute difficulties in family life, the Nurturing Programme represented only one part of a wider package. Such a wider package of support would include one-to-one family support, other activities designed to tackle isolation, the Nurturing Programme and most likely the input of other agencies and organisations.

The groups comprised diverse collections of local families, which reflect the issues raised above. For some parents this was their main/only encounter with Sure Start or the Family Support Group whilst for others it was part of the 'wider package' described above. The facilitators regarded diverse groups as extremely beneficial; without exception facilitators strongly believed that the social/cultural mix within parenting groups work to accentuate the commonality of parental experiences, and hence act to de-stigmatise and reduce artificial social barriers within communities. Parental reflections on the diversity within groups are discussed fully in the next chapter but there was an overwhelming consensus in opinion that diversity offered additional benefits. Notwithstanding this, facilitators stressed that extreme diversity could present challenges to facilitation. Some pointed to the intellectual range which could include confident, articulate, degree educated middle-class parents at one end of the spectrum and at the other end parents who experience learning difficulties or literacy/language barriers. In fact, some parents with extremely limited English are not invited to participate as the course requires a considerable command of literacy to be able to participate in activities and to work through the accompanying handbook that is an integral feature of the course. Where levels of English are sufficient though, the skills to manage the sorts of scenarios described above were praised by parents (as will be discussed in Chapter Five). However, staff acknowledged that balancing out the demands of different parents and pitching the group appropriately was at times quite challenging.

At the time of the study Sure Start were preparing to introduce an Arabic-speaking group and debating ways to reach under-represented groups, such as fathers. Both language/cultural difference and minority status groups (such as fathers) are covered in subsequent sections. However, it is important to note that on-going work to consider how best to meet the widest possible range of parental need was integral to service design, implementation and delivery. As such, the team responsible for delivering the Nurturing Programme created opportunities to reflect on the approaches they take individually, collectively and in accordance with the programme objectives. The willingness to be flexible and reactive to the needs and requests of parents is a core feature of Sure Start provision. Some commentators (Mihalic, 2002) take issue with iterative approaches such as this because of the dangers of 'implementation infidelity' (so that what is delivered deviates from the original programme objectives and hence raises uncertainty about the longitudinal outcomes).

The findings from this qualitative study with staff and parents would indicate that there are high levels of satisfaction from those who attend, but as with all parenting programmes there is a degree of attrition. In the next chapter we turn to the experiences of a wide range of parents, including those who failed to attend all sessions, by considering the views and experiences of this group it is hoped that Sure Start and Family Support Group will have findings that can aid the strategic direction of the programme. Without opportunities to reflect, reassess and make alterations to family support, a situation could arise where services are beneficial to those it reaches, but continue to fail to identify how to meet the needs of those that slip through the net (the 'hard to reach'). The 'hard to reach' are a key target group for initiatives such as Sure Start, so the opportunity to include the views of parents who have dropped out or refused to participate are an interesting additional focus to this research study.

#### *4.7 Measuring effectiveness*

Facilitators were confident that the programme was effectively promoting emotional literacy and emotional health amongst parents who participated in the course and hence meeting the broad aims of the programme. They also recounted examples where parents reported back the practical benefits of implementing the range of strategies they had learnt throughout the course. However, very little systematic assessment of the extent to which the programme was meeting its intended aims was analysed. Although evaluation forms are routinely issued and collected from parents there is reportedly insufficient time or human resources available to monitor effectiveness in any systematic way. Instead, the facilitators rely upon anecdotal evidence to gauge the appropriateness and effectiveness of the courses they provide. As mentioned previously, Family Links require the facilitators in Sure Start and Family Support Group to collect data from parents, but what is done with these data remains uncertain.

Other methods of gauging the effectiveness of the programme relied upon feedback from related professionals, for example nursery teachers or others directly involved in delivering family support. Although no formal arrangements were made for this to occur, facilitators mentioned that this was an important means by which they could assess the impact of the course upon parents and hence their children. More formal arrangements are in place however for individual one-to-one support. Where facilitators feel that parents would benefit from more intensive support or where a parental request is made, arrangements are made within the home visiting service to tailor additional support to meet a family's particular needs, the Nurturing Programme was considered to provide valuable opportunities for such needs to become exposed.

At the time of the research facilitators spoke about the importance of follow-up sessions, reunions and workshops which were in the planning stages. The will to implement such arrangements had existed for some time but due to time and resource limitations it had not been possible to establish them. It was believed that follow-up sessions and similar activities would reflect the model used by Family Links with trainers. The top-up sessions that the facilitators attended at Family Links were highly praised for the opportunities provided to reflect on their own practice and share experiences, anxieties and successes with others. A similar arrangement would be aligned to the nurturance model and create additional opportunities for parental self-reflection and affirmation of ability/ improvement.

The manager discussed at length her commitment to improving the on-going assessment of effectiveness of the Nurturing Programme but emphasised that developing this aspect of the programme was dependent upon resources. It would be necessary for a designated member of staff to take on this task, in effect the programme requires human resource commitment to ensure that it is effectively co-ordinated, managed, monitored, and developed. To date the orchestration of the Nurturing Programme is one of a multitude of responsibilities that the Sure Start programme manager assumes but continued growth, development and appraisal will require a greater commitment.

This research study goes some way to provide evidence of the effectiveness, degree of satisfaction and appropriateness of the course for local parents. However, we would strongly recommend that formative self-evaluation should be built into the

programme and time/resources made available to undertake a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the programme for those who have attended to date.

## **Chapter Five: Outcomes & Benefits**

### *5.1 Pre-programme: levels of awareness, clarity in understanding the programme*

Most parents included in the study had relatively accurate understandings of what the Nurturing Programme could offer. Although a very small proportion claimed to have no idea and others stated that they were approaching the experience with an open-mind and therefore held no preconceptions about the content and aims of parenting support. Aligned to the concerns raised by staff, a small number of parents (three) believed that the programme was principally focused upon the acquisition of practical skills such as establishing sleeping patterns, potty training and coping with mealtimes. The vast majority of parents believed that parenting programmes in general, and the Nurturing Programme specifically, would help them to become better parents and the for most the appeal of such interventions lie in the potential for them to be able to better manage their child's challenging, and in some cases, violent behaviour. The desire to gain insights into child development was also stressed.

Many parents were enthusiastic about group-based parenting support, believing that opportunities to share experiences and 'compare notes' would be encouraging and offer affirmation that other parents experience similar difficulties in the role. For some parents, who described themselves as shy, the group scenario engendered a degree of anxiety; this was particularly the case for some parents with English as an additional language. The prospect of public speaking was problematic and actually deterred some from continued attendance (which is discussed below in section 5.4iii) but for others the language barrier represented a challenge to overcome and they approached the course with enthusiasm and commitment.

More negative views of parenting support were held by those who felt a degree of compulsion to attend (i.e. Social Service referrals). Other parents, who had self-referred or received gentle encouragement to enrol were also reflective upon the effect that compulsion might have upon attitudinal predispositions to parenting support. However, it is reassuring to note that the scepticism and resentment expressed by such parents at the outset was effectively alleviated by their experiences of the course, the warmth of the group and the skills of the facilitator (this is more fully discussed in section 5.4vi below). A small number of middle-class mothers also expressed scepticism, but of a different sort. For them, parenting support groups ran the risk of becoming self-indulgent, narcissistic exercises, which was felt to be exacerbated where such interventions incur a fee and therefore represented a profit-making venture for organisations willing to capitalise upon middle-class parents' insecurities, as this mother explained:

*'...I felt certain that it wouldn't because it was run by Sure Start, which is just amazing, but my initial fear, or impression of parenting groups is that they can amount to little more than a talking shop for martyred middle-class mothers who are indulging themselves in self-pity and have the money to pay for things that will make them feel better about themselves, a form of therapy I suppose'.*

The diverse group composition was felt to prevent the above respondent's fear being realised in practice (group composition is fully discussed below, in section 5.4i). But it is important to highlight that the fact that Sure Start was running the groups (many interviewees were aware of, or actively engaged in Sure Start services and activities) helped parents to hold generally accurate notions of what the course would involve.

Parental awareness and understandings of parenting support were also informed by the increased media coverage of behaviour management through programmes such as *Super Nanny*, *Little Angels* and *Nanny 911*. Such populist TV programmes contributed significantly to levels of understanding and awareness about parenting support and what could be expected.

Many of the parents included in the research received explanations about the Nurturing Programme from home visitors. The manager stressed that this was an important means of raising awareness and recruiting parents to the programme. The involvement of home visitors ensured that parents had more accurate understandings of the focus and aims of the programme, and they were therefore less likely to state that they had no awareness, little understanding or that they envisaged the focus would be upon practical aspects of parenting. For the small number of parents that were referred by social workers understandings were less clear and this perhaps represents an area for development; that partner agencies and practitioners need to have more informed understandings of what the Nurturing Programme involves so that this can be effectively relayed to parents. As discussed in the previous chapter, these parents can come to the parenting programme with resentful attitudes and scepticism, therefore convincing them of the value of the programme rather than constructing it as a punitive or remedial intervention could be helpful.

Parents described their reactions to the letter received from Sure Start (see appendix four). Whilst it was generally appreciated, and provided basic information about the programme a number of parents suggested that it could have included more detail. For those parents included in the research who were on the waiting list at the time of interview it became clear that they would have liked more extensive information about what the course would entail. Some parents on the waiting list who had received the letter (but no further explanation at the time they were interviewed) referred to the acquisition of practical skills (potty training, sleep patterns etc), which indicates that the emotional literacy goals of the programme have not been adequately relayed. Suggestions were made by past-participants that the letter could include case studies and quotes from parents about the value of the course and reactions to different sessions. Home visitors were cited again as important in providing greater clarity about the course. In respect to the letter, expectations were better managed where the home visitors talked parents through the structure of the course and stressed the level and nature of commitment that would be required.

Opportunities for parents to make contact with Sure Start and Family Support Group facilitators is clearly vital to ensuring that parents have accurate understandings, and so that potential anxieties can be allayed. A small number of parents mentioned that they were invited to a pre-programme meeting with past participants. Unfortunately due to other commitments they were unable to attend but nevertheless praised this opportunity to gain insights before embarking upon the full programme. Staff spoke about their eagerness to establish such mechanisms and parental reactions would indicate that this could be a useful exercise, especially for those who are unsure or feeling trepidation.

### *5.2 Motivations, expectations and encouragement*

Parental awareness about programmes is inextricably linked to more general levels of awareness and understandings of parenting support (as well as the specific

explanations received about the Nurturing Programme). Hence, as outlined above the reasons given for wanting to participate principally related to management of child behaviour, increased knowledge of child development, becoming a better parent and sharing experiences with others.

The main aims and goals that parents wanted to achieve were related to improved emotional literacy (although this term was not used). An eagerness to better understand themselves (as parents) and hence improve family relationships was frequently cited. Feeling more confident as parents was a theme to run through most parent narratives. Most believed that greater self-confidence would enhance relationships with their children. The following quotes illustrate this concern:

*'I desperately wanted to be more confident, becoming a mum has been a shock, I have been so used to excelling in my career and now being a parent I just feel so unsure and unconfident and people are always there waiting to judge you...so I suppose what I wanted was to feel more confident and more competent. The issue for me is that I am scared of discipline and so tend to duck out of confrontation with X but that ultimately causes more problems and I wanted to learn what I could do for us to have a nice time together, you know, rather than feeling that I was being controlled by a three-year-old, or by the situation at any rate'*

[White-British, middle-class mother, 45, Group Bii]

*'I didn't have any clue about kids, their habits, and what they can understand and can't understand, and I didn't realise the proper understanding at their age...and also to be honest, before I couldn't manage to explain to them what I am going to do, how I am feeling, how to make them ready, you know?'*

[Iranian, recent immigrant to UK, mother, 23, Group Bii]

Expectations of what would be covered and hence the outcomes that could be achieved from participation, to a large extent depended upon how accurately parents understood the aims and objectives of the programme. This suggests that further work in this area might help to reduce the attrition rate, although the number of parents not to complete the Nurturing Programme is lower than average for parenting support programmes, insights from this group of parents are helpful to understand ways in which to reduce it further. The findings indicate that the combined issues of raising awareness, providing accurate and comprehensive explanations, and therefore managing expectations are crucial to ensure that parents are fully aware of what they are committing to and what they can expect to achieve from the course.

The support that participants received from formal, informal and kinship networks is an important factor to highlight at this juncture. Parents spoke about the important role that the home visitor played in making them aware of alternative approaches to parenting on a one-to-one basis and often this provided the platform on which suggestion/encouragement to enrol on the Nurturing Programme was introduced. For parents (mothers) experiencing feelings of acute isolation the input from the home visitors was vital in assisting them to feel more confident and willing to engage in social activities. Several mothers for whom English was not their first language spoke about the loneliness of parenting in a community where family and friends did not

exist as a support mechanism. The amount of time such mothers spent alone often manifested in destructive self-criticism and contributed towards mental health problems such as depression. The following quote from this young Eastern-European mother illustrates this issue:

*'She was my first child and I was parenting her alone. I desperately wanted to be the best mother I could be to her...when I went on the course it was not because of her that I went, it wasn't about her behaviour at all, it was about me, I wanted to understand her deeply and to know her well'.*

[Eastern-European single mother, 24, Group C]

Another single-mother with a history of mental illness described her experiences leading up to enrolling on the Nurturing Programme:

*'I was emotionally a mess and I was all he had and it wasn't good. For me this was a way of combating that isolation and getting help...one of the biggest things that was depressing me was the feeling that I was a bad parent, I had been able to keep his world together while mine fell apart, but more and more things piled up and eventually I couldn't hold it together for him'*

[Black-British middle-class single-mother, 23, Group Bii]

For the mothers quoted above the Nurturing Programme represented an opportunity for self-reflection, social interaction and a means of addressing the sense of isolation they experienced as single parents. The programme was one part of a wider package of support (as described in Chapter Four), but access to the programme offered an effective means of addressing their goals to improve their emotional literacy and be more nurturant towards themselves and improve relationships with their children.

Other key professionals involved in encouraging parents to attend the course included nursery staff, health visitors and social workers. As discussed above, the levels of awareness and insights that related professionals have of the programme could be further enhanced by awareness raising exercises so that referrals from these sources can ensure that levels of awareness are sound and expectations effectively managed. Inaccurate understandings of the course generally related to the focus and the level of commitment, for example a parent referred by Social Services believed that the course ran for a year and required daily attendance at three-hour sessions. This mother was attending another parenting support group in the borough and therefore felt confused about what the Nurturing Programme would offer above and beyond that she was already receiving. The practicalities of participating in two parenting courses, attending college full-time and taking care of her young child as a single-mother created acute anxiety. During the interview with this parent the researcher urged the respondent to contact Sure Start to gain clarification about the exact details of the programme.

Parents were also encouraged and supported to attend the Nurturing Programme by their families and close friends (some of whom had attended the course previously). For example, partners (mostly husbands) and extended family members (mostly mothers and sisters) were cited as providing encouragement and enthusiasm. In the main these informal sources of encouragement were incredibly positive and helped the participants to stay focused and committed to the programme. Some mothers interviewed reported that they had embarked upon the course with their husbands, either attending the same course or parallel courses. However, most fathers attended

only one or two sessions (reasons for this are explained below, 5.4ii). Despite limited attendance these fathers remained engaged and committed to the course by actively applying the strategies their partners learnt and by working through the accompanying handbook with their partners. Consensus in approach to parenting was stressed as a crucial factor, as such the approaches taken by these parents was felt to be relatively effective, although most stated that they and their male partners would still like to attend the entire programme at some point in the future if they were given assurances that group composition would be more balanced in terms of gender (see 5.4ii for further discussion).

However, one family included in the sample described dissonance in parenting styles as a problematic factor in family life (interviews were conducted with both parents). In this particular case the mother had encouraged her husband to attend the group, precisely because there was limited consensus in the approaches they adopted with their children. She hoped that by attending the Nurturing Programme they would both become aware of alternative ways of approaching parenting, and the authority of the validated programme would act as an external influence, and form the basis upon which they could evaluate the relative merits and weaknesses of their distinct approaches. However, the father ceased attending after the second week, whilst the mother completed the entire course. For this mother, her husband's retraction from the course symbolised a lack of commitment and willingness to reflect on the limitations of his approach. He also refused to study the handbook with her or to support her when she attempted to implement the various strategies promoted within the Programme. This situation acted to further exacerbate the tensions the family experienced due to inconsistency and contradiction. This example highlights the importance of a whole-family approach to reforming behaviours and attitudes. The need to more fully engage fathers in the Nurturing Programme is a key area for development and is therefore discussed more fully in Chapter Six.

### *5.3 Experiences of the programme: practical matters*

The vast majority of parents praised the venues in which the programme was held. For nearly all parents the settings were conveniently located within easy reach of their homes. A very small number of parents travelled from outside the borough to attend the programme run by the Family Support Group facilitator, but they were so enthused by the provision on offer that on balance the travel was considered a small inconvenience. Parents in Group Aii (i.e. those who did not complete) spoke of being escorted to the venue by Sure Start workers, it is likely that these parents were amongst those feeling anxious about the programme, as all had English as an additional language and spoke about their isolated experiences of parenthood. The sensitivity with which Sure Start responded to such needs were praised and generally very welcome.

The availability of childcare was also raised as an important practical aspect that enabled attendance. Again, Sure Start was praised for making on-site crèche facilities available. Many children reportedly enjoyed time at the crèche and mothers were appreciative of the respite it offered from a full-time parenting role. But these benefits were not universal, for some children the crèche experience was the first they had encountered and therefore a sizeable number found it difficult to settle. Whilst some mothers persevered others left their children with partners, extended family or babysitters. Interestingly the fathers cited their child's inability to settle in the nursery

as the primary reason for withdrawing from the course. They did not appear to consider alternative options as the mothers had done. However, further probing of father's reasons for non-completion indicated that this was not the primary reason (the main reasons are outlined below, in section 5.4ii).

The weekday sessions were held between one-and-three in the afternoon, which presented difficulties for many parents, as this was typically the time for afternoon naps. Again, Sure Start was praised for acknowledging this limitation and seeking to find an alternative time slot. Parents also raised inconsistency in crèche workers as a concern, especially where children were attending childcare alone for the first time. Facilitators responded swiftly to this issue and consistency of staff was established. Many cited the availability of crèche facilities as being the single biggest factor enabling them to attend, this was especially true for mothers who lacked external support networks such as close friends and family with whom they could leave their children.

The option of weekday or weekend sessions was also a crucial factor that enabled parents to attend. Accommodating the Nurturing Programme sessions into already busy family schedules reportedly involved a careful juggling act. Indeed, the reasons some parents failed to complete the entire course was the result of difficulties encountered in juggling competing demands (of partners, older children, other commitments on that day). For example, one mother with five children under 15 found it impossible to attend the Saturday session; for her the weekday session may have been more feasible. Assessing the feasibility of fitting the commitment of a ten-week programme into already busy schedules could be an important exercise for parents to undertake, and/or for facilitators to explore fully with parents at the time of recruitment. Undertaking such an assessment at the outset could have a positive impact upon the overall rate of attrition.

#### *5.4 Experiences of the group*

##### *(i) Diversity*

As outlined above the group forum was a factor that excited many parents, most perceived it to offer an opportunity to share experiences, exchange ideas and gain affirmation that difficulties were not unique but common to all families (albeit to varying degrees). However, a small proportion of parents (both those who attended and those on the waiting list) were apprehensive about the group setting. Concerns were most often raised where individuals felt intimidated by new social encounters and/or where public speaking is necessary. The findings indicate that without exception the groups were regarded as safe, friendly and non-judgemental arenas where such fears were largely assuaged. Most parents raised concerns that they may be judged upon the basis of their identity; for example the middle-class mothers expressed feelings of guilt at their privilege, they believed that they would be judged for '*wallowing in relatively insignificant matters*' and exercising '*neurotic navel gazing*'. These anxieties were never realised which was attributed to the expertise and skill of the facilitators to equalise the atmosphere within the group (more detail about reactions to the facilitators is provided below). Mothers with English as an additional language were concerned that they would be conspicuous by their difference, but the eclectic mix of parents within each group meant that every member was 'different' in some way. Indeed, the acute diversity within each group was regarded by participants as a significant strength of the entire programme, the opportunities to become exposed

to, and learn from other parents (with different backgrounds, life experiences, family circumstances and cultural identities) was presented as a very powerful and valuable factor. As this young Italian mother stressed: *'being a mother traverses all differences'*. Despite the differences between members of the groups the commonality in parenting experiences was a powerful force and united the group to demonstrate a willingness to be open and honest. This frankness was facilitated by group moderators, furthermore their willingness to lead-by-example and *'give of themselves'* was highly regarded.

As indicated above the composition of each group was diverse in terms of age, social class, ethnicity, education level and cultural background. This heterogeneity was said to be incredibly enlightening for all parents involved. Notably, a number of the White-British mothers commented, with surprise, at the confidence and frankness with which Muslim mothers spoke about relationships and matriarchal power. This challenged previously held stereotypes and dispelled myths that Muslim women are oppressed and timid. These examples confirm the facilitators' claims outlined in the previous chapter that parenting (mothering) is an issue that crosses all boundaries. Notwithstanding this though the groups lacked diversity in terms of gender; as with other parenting support programmes, engaging/retaining fathers on the Nurturing Programme has proved notoriously challenging.

*(ii) Reaching (and retaining) fathers*

Table 4 (on page 28) illustrates that we managed to interview only two fathers (seven per cent of the entire sample) and that this represented half of all the men to have participated on the course over the past two years. As participation has been over 90 per cent female, it is interesting to attempt to shed some light upon what deters fathers, and the reactions from female dominated groups to their participation. Both fathers we interviewed had not completed all sessions in the programme, their particular stories are very different but nonetheless illuminate the issues involved in feeling minoritised, and hence taking on a *'novelty value'* as the only male in a group. The common factor in both these father's experiences was that they both felt compelled to attend, the first father was *'strongly encouraged'* to attend by his wife (as described on page 42).

Meantime, the second father was in the midst of child protection proceedings (his children had been removed and placed in foster care). He was motivated to attend as a means of reforming his behaviour and providing evidence (to the Court and Social Services) that he was committed to change. The first father was probably more *'typical'* in the sense that his wife was enthusiastic and whilst he claimed to approach the programme with an open-mind, the reality of feeling conspicuous in a female dominated group prevented further attendance. Conversely, the second father described similar feelings of discomfort at the outset as a consequence of his minority status, but his motivations to persevere with the course were powerful and hence saw him last until week eight (it was at this point his children were permanently removed and so continued attendance seemed futile). This father's experiences of the programme were extremely positive, the course surpassed his expectations and he found the self-reflective focus incredibly influential, as this quote from him illustrates: *'I was beaten as a child and I would never beat my kids, but my knee-jerk reaction has been to give them a little smack if they are being naughty because that is what I grew up with, but I can see that smacking is not the answer but it was like I learned*

*on the course it was my own childhood, what I saw and had done to me is 'in me', if you know what I mean, umm, my instant, almost unconscious reaction is to smack...but the course, I saw things differently you know?..... I just couldn't get enough of it. My brain is like a sponge but I felt it wasn't coming quickly enough. I can't believe how much I enjoyed it, I could feel I was getting so much from it; I didn't expect that'.*

This father's experiences provide clear evidence of emotional literacy having been learnt, unfortunately due to his family circumstances he, and his wife (who also attended) were unable to translate the theoretical concepts into practical strategies. He described the course as incredibly stimulating and praised for being non-judgemental. A lifetime engaged with statutory agencies left this respondent negative about the support and intervention provided by Social Services. Despite instruction to attend a parenting programme, his social worker was unable to refer him, as she reportedly was unaware of what existed. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the need to raise levels awareness, about parenting support programmes, amongst partner professionals is an important area of work that needs to be undertaken in the borough. This father, and his family's need are profound and multiple, and as such input from the full range of agencies was involved. Therefore the Nurturing Programme sat alongside a range of interventions designed to address need, from psychiatric input to address anger management issues to Social Service assessments of child protection concerns. But what this example illustrates is that fathers, when they persist with the programme, can reap huge benefits. Because this father held potent motivations to participate he was able to put aside feeling self-conscious as the lone male in an all-female group.

Earlier in this chapter reference was made to fathers that had expressed an interest in attending the programme but upon reflection (or having attended one, female dominated session) decided that the programme was not for them. We asked the mothers we interviewed whether they felt their male partners would consider participating in the programme, most indicated that the levels of engagement partners had shown in relation to their involvement would suggest that it was highly likely. However, all added the caveat that their partners would only attend if the gender-balance within groups was more equal, or where the group was exclusively male. The findings from this study demonstrate that fathers can benefit from participating in the Nurturing Programme but that group composition is a very significant factor effecting recruitment and attrition rates. Although an equally mixed group (in terms of gender) was most respondents' preference, suggestions were also made for father-only groups. A group comprising equal proportions of mothers and fathers was thought to be important for several reasons; firstly that it signalled that parenting is undertaken by both genders, and secondly that female dominated groups can act to reinforce traditional, patriarchal constructions of family life and reaffirm traditional conjugal roles. So in effect it was what gender-skewed groups come to *symbolise*, as well as the shape of discussions, that was important to these participants. Father-only groups were suggested by both genders. The father interviewed (who had ceased attending after week one) argued that a single-sex group for fathers would be beneficial, as he believed that fathers face unique issues. For example, he felt that the course could focus upon how fathers can cope with feeling excluded from the maternal bond; and practical issues such as negotiating flexible working arrangements with employers. From these suggestions it becomes clear that this father had not fully understood the focus on emotional literacy. Nevertheless, it could prove fruitful to undertake further

consultation with local fathers to ascertain what they perceive fathers' needs to be and how best they can be catered for.

*(iii) Language and literacy barriers*

As describe above, both facilitators and parents regarded the diverse parental intake onto the Nurturing Programme positively. However, anxieties that some parents (mothers) with English as an additional language experienced have also been highlighted. Given that the Nurturing Programme, like other parenting support programmes, requires parents to read materials, work through written exercises and articulate experiences and emotions, language and literacy are important. A certain minimum level of literacy and command of the English language are necessary prerequisites. Whilst the mothers from non-English speaking backgrounds generally reported positive experiences, the issue of comprehension was raised. Indeed, this factor was prevalent amongst those who did not complete the course, and those on the waiting list who held serious reservations about attending.

The accompanying course handbook '*The Parenting Puzzle*' was widely praised by those with a good grasp of the English language, but it was rendered obsolete for those who faced acute difficulties in this respect. Where respondents also struggled to speak or to understand spoken English the programme became quite frustrating, as they were unable to articulate their emotions and experiences. A number of participants with EAL were enabled to complete the course because they had devised strategies to overcome such barriers, for example by pairing-up with close friends or relatives. Whilst facilitators and other group members were praised for their patience, understanding and assistance, for some parents the situation proved too uncomfortable. At the time the study was conducted, Sure Start was in the process of developing an Arabic-speaking group, as the second most widely spoken language in the area it was hoped that the difficulties described here could be overcome.

During the interviews parents were asked for their thoughts on ways to overcome literacy and language difficulties. Concerns were raised that homogenising groups by cultural background or language spoken could be quite limiting and act to reinforce artificial social/cultural boundaries. Although the value of overcoming language challenges was welcomed, it was felt that the strengths of eclectic group composition and all the benefits that brings in terms of enlightenment about different cultures, ages, social class would be lost. Others suggested that parents (mothers) may feel more inhibited in discussing certain issues when in a group with other people from the same cultural background, for example the frankness with which the Muslim women reportedly spoke about power-relations in Muslim marriages may not have been possible in a mono-culture group. A number of practical solutions were presented including recording the handbook into various different languages so that parents could revisit and reinforce what they had gleaned from the session at their own pace. Indeed the suggestion that the book should be available in recorded format in English was also suggested to meet the needs of very busy mothers who find little time to digest the book. Interestingly, interpreters were seen as wholly inappropriate for this type of programme, mothers with EAL indicated that they would not want to relay their thoughts and stories via an interpreter. The emotional focus of the course rendered this approach inappropriate. Sure Start invest considerable energy in providing culturally sensitive services to local parents, the findings presented here would indicate that careful consideration is given to retaining diversity within the

Nurturing Programme whilst addressing the needs of some parents where language is an acute barrier to participation.

*(iv) Effects of attrition*

As evidenced, the reasons for non-completion are many and varied. However, whilst not wishing to denigrate the seriousness of practical obstacles, such as ‘co-ordinating large families’, ‘other commitments’, ‘children unable to settle in the crèche’ deeper analyses of such narratives indicated that these explanations often provided a mask to other factors, such as feeling conspicuous/minoritised, fear of judgement and language/literacy difficulties. Parents who committed 100 per cent to the course were sympathetic to the challenges and barriers others experienced. However, a degree of frustration was expressed. Sporadic attendance and attrition rates were reputedly irritating.

One mother described her feelings of trepidation at the outset, and concerns that her levels of spoken English might present challenges. She was quite vocal about the ‘disrespect’ (as she constructed it) of others who ‘couldn’t be bothered’. Using her own case as a benchmark she failed to understand the reasons others were failing to fully commit to the programme. 100 per cent attendance was not typical; most parents missed at least one or two sessions. This resulted in the need to allow less frequent attendees to ‘catch up’. This particular mother was annoyed, because she felt compelled to provide a verbal explanation of what had occurred the previous week. As someone with anxieties about speaking in English, she felt the situation was detrimental for more committed members of the group. The lack of commitment and hence need for reiteration at every session created disjointedness for regular attendees.

This finding resonates with Campbell’s (2004) concerns that parents fail to grasp the high degree of commitment necessary to reap the benefits of the programme. Bavolek’s research has shown that attending all 10-sessions, and undertaking the additional tasks at home, ensures that the Nurturing Programme has the greatest effect. So whilst sporadic attendance has negative implications for those who fail to complete the course in full, this research has demonstrated that it is also detrimental to other group members that are entirely committed to the programme. The importance of full commitment could be stressed at the time of recruitment. Whilst a number of parents were initially alarmed by the length of the course, most found that 10 weeks passed very quickly and seemed an insignificant commitment in relation to what they had learnt and taken from the course, as this mother explained:

*‘Without meaning to sound cheesy, it has totally transformed my life and totally transformed the way I think. Just ten weeks and it is incredible the difference it has made...I approached it with the attitude of ‘oh I don’t need it, I’ll just pop my head in and see what it’s all about’ but then as I got further and further into it and I look back now and realise ‘oh my god, I really did need it!’*

[White-British, middle-class mother, 30+, Group C]

*(v) Reflections on content*

Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences of the sessions that they attended and to highlight specific factors that left an impression upon them. Nearly all referred to the first session as particularly memorable and important. Given the earlier findings relating to levels of awareness and expectations the first session proved important with respect to clarifying the focus and scope of the programme. Parents spoke about time spent during this session on establishing rules for the group around

confidentiality and respecting each other. A series of ‘ice-breaking’ activities were incorporated and whilst some parents found these ‘cringe-making’ they were nevertheless able to appreciate the value of the exercise, or as this mother described: *‘I wasn’t too enamoured by the hippy dippy nurturing stuff to begin with but I was prepared to work through that to get to the more interesting and useful sessions later on in the course... whilst I don’t necessarily like touchy-feely approaches I could appreciate what was going on and as it turned out that session was really important for us all to know what parameters we were working within if you know what I mean?’*

[White-British, middle-class mother, 40+, Group Bii]

Like the above respondent, the majority of parents also appreciated the chance to establish clarity around precisely what the programme involved and what would be expected of them. For parents that felt apprehensive about the course the first session was crucial in making them feel more comfortable and assured.

Session four also left an impression on many participants; although self-reflection is built into the entire course this session involved a specific exercise in empathy. Reflecting upon their own childhoods was extremely powerful and emotionally intense for some. One mother, having received therapy for mental health issues prior to the course likened the Nurturing Programme to a form of cognitive behavioural therapy (due to the focus upon learning to be nicer to oneself, changing behaviour through self reflection and having more positive relationships as a consequence). She gained a great deal from the course and felt considerably more emotionally literate but nevertheless found the course exhausting, as she explained:

*‘I came away from those sessions feeling absolutely shattered, I was lucky that my husband came to collect me; I don’t imagine others were that lucky, but the prospect of just getting back into everyday routines was unthinkable for me, I just took my self to bed. The fact that it was so powerful, I mean it was exhausting in a psychological way and I think that additional time to bring everybody back down would have been good, some of the stuff that came up in that session about people’s childhoods was gruelling...’*

[Black-Caribbean, middle-class mother, late 40s]

The cathartic effect of this session signalled that whilst the Nurturing Programme can appear quite simplistic on the surface, deep emotional changes were occurring. Feelings of relief were apparently quite common, in re-visiting childhood experiences parents claimed to be able to understand their attitudes and behaviours more clearly and hence work towards altering them. These reflections provide evidence that parents were working through Goleman’s (2005) five elements of emotional literacy which are outlined in Chapter Two.

The other session to which parents referred was that which focused upon sex. By this stage of the programme (week eight) the sporadic attendees had apparently given up. It was not clear whether parents found the prospect of this session daunting and hence provides an explanation for the relatively low attendance. Parents who did attend this session felt that it was really valuable, and praised the facilitators for approaching the subject matter in a confident yet sensitive manner. It was assumed that the Muslim mothers found this session uncomfortable but data from interviews with this sub-sample of parents did not confirm this. Although, it must be noted that Muslim

mothers were over-represented in Group Aii i.e. non-completion, when asked for reasons why they had not completed the course none cited the sex session, instead (as discussed above) most attributed their attrition to practical barriers and language difficulties.

The content of the course was judged to include an appropriate balance between theory and practice. The group format meant that discussions of the concepts and strategies ‘came to life’ and were therefore readily understood. As discussed above language barriers meant that some parents did not make use of the accompanying handbook, whilst they claimed to have got a great deal from the sessions alone other participant stressed the importance of working through the book independently of the group. Several interviewees noted the ‘subtext’ of the book, the following quote is indicative of this:

*‘It’s quite deceptive, it looks very simplistic and light-hearted but the concepts and content is actually very sophisticated and incredibly powerful. I am not sure that you would get as much from the programme if you didn’t study the book alongside the sessions’.*

[White-British, middle-class mother, 30+, Group Bii]

At the time the research was conducted it was standard practice to issue *The Parenting Puzzle* on week four, by week five there was a noticeable drop in attendance. The manager was aware that this practice was having a detrimental effect upon attendance and a proposal to issue the book upon completion of the course was being mooted and it is likely that such a strategy may have a positive impact.

#### *(vi) The facilitator(s)*

Without exception all facilitators received praise from the parents included in this research. As already alluded to in this chapter the willingness to disclose information about their own lives and life experiences was appreciated and seen to create an atmosphere of openness and respect. Facilitators were said to be ‘supremely confident’ but sensitive, and to demonstrate high levels of professional expertise as well as intuition. The ability of the facilitators to ‘keep the atmosphere quite light’ whilst dealing with sensitive issues carefully and thoroughly was an observation to run through many of the parent narratives. Furthermore, the groups were felt to be facilitated in ‘democratic’ ways so that they resembled co-operative learning encounters as opposed to a ‘jug-and-mug’ approach, where the moderator (the full jug) is the expert with specialist knowledge to impart to the parents (the empty mugs). The skills needed to manage inclusively were evidently on show, many parents identified the way in which facilitators identified particular needs (such as literacy, or time out when a parent became emotionally distraught) and catered for them in a discrete way. In essence, the conclusions reached by the parents in this study indicate that the facilitators effectively embody the nurturing approach that is the foundation to the entire programme. Furthermore, parental appraisals of the facilitators would indicate that the aims of the Family Links training have been effectively achieved.

#### *5.5a Outcomes*

As well as endeavouring to reveal the intricacies of delivering the programme and the experiences of parents who became disengaged, this research study was also designed to provide evidence on the effectiveness of the programme. Revisiting the main findings of other research (as outlined in Chapter Two) is helpful at this juncture to

establish the degree of success the programme has for families in North West Kensington and Golborne.

Aligned to the findings from the study undertaken by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) parents in our study reported that they felt supported by other parents, and this including a mirroring of problems. In addition to mirroring was the learning that occurred as a result of the diversity within the groups. Parents were approaching their role from different cultural and social backgrounds and there was also a wide age range and as such a variety of perspectives were brought to the programme. The following quote from this young mother illustrates that whilst she found much in common with the other mothers on her course her age was a mark of difference that she thought important to mention:

*'Because of my age it was a bit difficult for me to adjust.....it doesn't really matter, but I was the youngest, there wasn't any classmate like me, everyone else was in their late 30s or 40s, I was only having one child and they were having four or five children, and most of their children were really grown up, and being 22 that was a bit hard for me'.*

[Asian, single-mother, aged 22, Group Bii]

As discussed above the feelings of displacement that fathers experience also represent a challenge to commonality within a group. The middle-class mothers also expressed a sense of relief when they identified 'someone like me' within the group. This in part alleviated some of the guilt they claimed to feel at 'taking somebody else's place who needs it more'. However, they went on to describe the friendships they developed with others in the groups that did not match them in terms of cultural, educational or social background. With these caveats in mind it remains the case that the common experience of being a parent acted to overcome difference, and for many added to the richness of their experience.

Many parents stated that at the outset their principal motivation for attending the Nurturing Programme was to regain of a sense of control in the parental role. There was considerable evidence that through calmer thinking and new tools of parenting this had been achieved. As outlined above, the development of emotional literacy and all that that entails (identifying and managing emotions, self motivation, empathy and relationship management) was powerfully experienced by most parents that completed (all, or most of) the course.

Parents were asked to reflect upon changes they had noticed in themselves as a result of participating in the programme, most frequently reported were recognising the importance of nurturance (of both self and others), becoming more self-reflective, exercising empathy, and increased self-confidence. These findings clearly resonate with previous studies conducted by McNeill (2005), Campbell (2004) and Barlow & Stewart-Brown (2001). Parents were also asked to provide examples of the strategies they had learnt and used with their children and to assess the degree of success. Amongst the most frequently highlighted strategies were Time Out, boundary setting, choices and consequences, reward and praise, ignoring the behaviour not the child. Whilst parents experienced varying degrees of success with these approaches, having a 'set of tools' which were founded upon positive discipline helped them to feel more in control and able to spend enjoyable times with their children, and achieve more harmonious family relationships.

Previous research also pointed to better communication within families. This research study also found evidence of this. However, related to earlier discussions about involving fathers the extent to which the Nurturing Programme can reach an entire family rests upon the commitment of both parents where dual parent families exist. The situation described on page 42 illustrates that where a partner is reluctant to, at the very least, support his partner in implementing the strategies and principles this can exacerbate already tense situations. Many of the mothers in dual-parent households spoke of their partner's willingness to engage in the programme (albeit by proxy) and to ensure that they were approaching parenting from a consensual standpoint. Where this was occurring the degree of success that the programme had upon family life appeared to be noticeably higher than where there was dissonance. Furthermore, where children had attended parallel sessions (the Family Support Group run separate but complementary sessions, as described in Chapter Two, for both parents and their children) the effects were more noticeable. The quote from this mother demonstrates her strength of feeling about the effectiveness of parallel courses:

*'While we were being taught how to treat ourselves, and our children, meantime our child was learning how to react to us and how to understand their parents, it was really good having the two things in one hand...she was a child, 60 per cent she was good, but the course means that now the other 40 per cent, you know, it has helped me achieve a lot'.*

[Asian, single-mother, 20+, Group Bii]

Others stressed the importance of a whole-family approach, for example:

*'My son did the children's group and that was so important because he came to understand what I was trying to do, the behaviour I was trying to modify...there's no doubt in my mind that the quality and intensity of the attention he received made all the difference. That coupled with the fact that my husband was interested and willing, you know to consider other ways, in effect we were all working towards the same goals'.*

[Black-Caribbean, middle-class mother, 40+, Group C]

Previous research pointed to the effect the Nurturing Programme had upon reducing isolation and improving social integration. Whilst this is confirmed by the findings of those parents who participated in all (or most) of the sessions, it was not the case for parents who ceased attending after only a few sessions. Earlier sections in this chapter have highlighted the debilitating and isolating effects that having English as an additional language can invoke. For the mothers in Group Aii (non-completion) the Nurturing Programme had not positively impacted upon their sense of isolation. These mothers cited the very valuable one-to-one support they received from home visitors as being effective in this respect. Previous research in the area (Osgood and James 2005 a and 2005b) illustrates the lengths that home visitors go to in helping isolated mothers become more socially integrated. For example, chaperoning mothers to various Sure Start services (drop-ins, Baby Café, etc) as well as making links into community organisations (KIDS, Family Friends, Al Hasinya, Arabic Family Service and Women's Refuge) appear to be more aligned to the needs of this group. Mothers (with English as an additional language) who completed the groups had relatively advanced levels of English compared to those we interviewed in Group Aii, therefore invitations to the Nurturing Programme may have felt premature. A staged approach

to integrating mothers with limited English, or indeed invitation to the courses aimed at groups with specific languages (i.e. Arabic) could be more fruitful. It should be noted though that Sure Start are attempting to deliver the Nurturing Programme to a far more diverse range of families than was the case in the research populations included in Barlow & Stewart Brown (2001) or McNeill (2005).

#### *5.4b) Long-term effects of the programme*

Group C comprised parents that had completed the course between six months and a year prior to the research being conducted. This group were asked to reflect upon the longevity of any benefits. In general these parents reported that the skills/strategies that they had learnt and the attitudinal changes they experienced were effective over time. Although, some strategies that seemed irrelevant at the time they attended have now taken on new currency as their children have developed. For example one mother stated that many of the strategies were unworkable when her twin children were one, but a year on they are frequently throwing tantrums and she feels confident in applying the tools learnt on the Nurturing Programme to address them, and the strategies reportedly work to great effect. A similar experience was described by another mother who has been able to effectively address sibling rivalry; her second child was not born when she attended the programme so much of the course relating to ways of managing sibling behaviour had not been relevant. But since having her baby she has recognised the value of these sessions. A third participant, who attended in 2004, has maintained contact with other members of her group and they regularly 'compare notes' on how the strategies work and effective ways to develop them.

All respondents emphasised the value of the handbook, *The Parenting Puzzle*, which they had referred to frequently to refresh themselves of the concepts and strategies. It is important to note that all but one of these mothers had attended the vast majority of sessions and had self-referred and during the interviews stressed their level of commitment to the programme. The sixth mother in this group attended a series of other Family Support Group courses and activities such as confidence building courses as a precursor to the Nurturing Programme. She has four children aged from three to 21, and her main parenting concerns were with her older children. Whilst she was able to implement many of the strategies with her youngest child, the demands of her older children tended to overshadow those of her youngest. So whilst the programme has been effective she reflects that it is 'too late' to address the relationships with her older children. She described feeling troubled at not being able to 'undo what I did wrong with them'. At the time of interview she was keen to attend a course that catered specifically for parents with teenagers. This is an important finding as many of the parents in our sample had older children, and expressed similar concerns to this mother. They reported that the Nurturing Programme, as it was delivered through Sure Start, focused upon the needs of younger children. The capacity to refer parents who are experiencing particular difficulties with teenagers should be reflected upon, since parents seemed to suggest that their experiences of the Nurturing programme (evaluated here) had limited value with older children.

#### *5.4c) Parental appraisals and recommendations*

As part of the interview all parents were asked to provide an overall indication of how effective they felt the programme had been for their families, whether their expectations had been met and if they would recommend the Programme to others. The overwhelming majority of parents who attended the course expressed positive

views about its value and effectiveness. For most it had met or exceeded their expectations and had a demonstrable impact upon the quality of their family lives. Unsurprisingly, these positive reviews translated into parents recommending the course to others. As outlined in Chapters Two and Three, the reputation of the course has grown significantly as it has been extended to more parents. Enquiries about the course and self-referrals have increased significantly as a result of these parents (and others not included in the research) having disseminated their positive experiences.

The issues around mixed gendered groups have been extensively rehearsed earlier in this chapter and so will not be revisited at length. In short, parents (both mothers and fathers) felt that recruiting and retaining fathers on the Nurturing Programme should be a priority for Sure Start. However, they acknowledged that this was a significant challenge which would require considerable work with a notoriously hard to reach population. The findings from this research demonstrate that there is a groundswell of interest and providing that fathers feel they are not alone in attending such courses the benefits from whole-family approaches could be more widely experienced.

The needs of parents with EAL have also been extensively addressed earlier in this chapter. The main messages to come from the findings indicate that diversity within the groups that participate in the Nurturing Programme are incredibly important and valuable and should be retained where parents hold basic levels of English. Availability of *The Parenting Puzzle* in recorded format (both English and the other main languages spoken in the area) was offered as a suggestion. Such a practical supplemental resource could alleviate stress and make 'homework' more accessible for the widest range of parents. For those with limited/no English language skills it might be beneficial for them to either be eased into the programme following a series of preliminary activities to help build confidence and language skills. Alternatively (or in conjunction with these suggestions) parents with limited English might well benefit from the proposed Arabic-version of the programme. Although dangers of segregating parents by language (and therefore cultural group) could have implications for community cohesion.

The issues raised above (in relation to various hard-to-reach groups) have been extensively debated by the Sure Start programme, and previous research (Osgood and James, 2005 a and 2005b) illustrates the high priority that is placed upon delivering culturally sensitive services in North West Kensington and Golborne, however further consultation with BME parents and with fathers could be very valuable to ascertain how (*they* feel) their needs might best be met in respect of the Nurturing Programme.

The following quote from a parent who recently completed the programme is indicative of the overwhelming enthusiasm and support for Bavolek's model of parenting support in North West Kensington and Golborne:

*'Thinking about it why would you not do a parenting course? You do a driving course before you go it alone on the road. When I think about it, for pretty much every new thing I have ever done in my life I have attended a course and read a book on how to do it. So why is it assumed that parenting is any different? You don't come to parenting with intrinsic, innate know-how, we all, regardless of who we are, come to this with only the sketchiest of ideas, so a parenting course can only be a good thing. Everybody should go on one regardless!'*

[White-British, middle-class mother, 30+, Group C]

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions & Recommendations**

This final chapter endeavours to summarise and synthesise the main issues to have emerged from this research study, and to present a series of recommendations. The preceding chapters have outlined the extent to which, and the ways in which the Nurturing Programme that is delivered in North West Kensington and Golborne has met its intended aims. The main aims, which are outlined in Chapter Three, were two-fold; the evaluation was focused upon both outcomes for families; and service delivery. Throughout the report the main considerations that the service might want to consider have been presented. The specific focus in Chapter Four upon implementation and delivery should provide valuable insights on how to shape future service delivery. Chapter Five complements and extends the findings and discussion presented in earlier chapters by presenting the views, experiences and insights of a cohort of parents who have been affected by the Nurturing Programme. Therefore this chapter attempts to deconstruct and further summarise the key messages from this study. It is organised around a number of key themes, which appeared most significant and pervasive in the analyses and presentation of the data, and include a specific focus upon:

- Formative monitoring and evaluation,
- Joined-up service delivery: the importance of partner agencies;
- Raising parental awareness and managing expectations;
- A ‘whole-family’ commitment;
- Identifying and addressing the needs of ‘special populations’; and
- Maintaining diversity through universalism.

### *6.1 Formative monitoring & evaluation*

Whilst this research study provides an in-depth investigation into the effectiveness of the Nurturing Programme to families in North West Kensington and Golborne and is able to provide insights into delivery issues, Sure Start and Family Support Group would be in a position to track the longitudinal benefits of the service if means to formatively monitor and assess were in place. Resource limitations (not least in terms of woman-power) have been highlighted in earlier chapters and it is important to note that a wealth of monitoring data have been collected, however it remains unprocessed and unanalysed. Whilst this internal human resource constraint is important, the role that Family Links could/does play in this respect is also worth highlighting. As outlined on page 32, Sure Start and Family Support Group are required to monitor the courses that they run and provide course evaluation feedback to Family Links. However, a cloud of uncertainty existed as to precisely what happened to these data, and indeed whether Family Links undertake any form of analyses. In the absence of internal formative evaluation, this exercise could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the programme.

We would recommend that enquiries be made into whether Family Links undertakes any sort of analyses of the data that are provided from parents in North West Kensington and Golborne. It is likely that a form of meta-analyses or comparative analyses is undertaken, since the Nurturing Programme is founded upon an evidence-base and prides itself on demonstrating effectiveness through systematic measurement. In addition to this, we recommend that internal mechanisms should be established for on-going collection and analyses of data to be undertaken. This should be accompanied by opportunities for regular reflection to be built into the delivery of

the programme. By acting upon this recommendation credibility would be added to what is undertaken and it would also aid strategic development. Given the innovative approach that Sure Start and Family Support group have taken to extending the programme to the widest range of parents it is important to ascertain the issues that exist in relation to the unique way in which the programme is being delivered.

### *6.2 Joined-up service-delivery*

Chapter One outlined the present policy climate in which professionals working with families and young children are currently operating within. The introduction of the Common Assessment Framework is a significant factor impacting upon the professional considerations of all agencies. Previous research in Sure Start (Osgood, 2003; Osgood and James, 2005a, 2005b) has demonstrated that in many respects local programmes are 'ahead of the game' in that, firstly multi-agency teams deliver a joined-up front-line service to families, and secondly formal arrangements exist for that multi-agency team to work with partner professionals and identify/make appropriate referrals. In relation to the Nurturing Programme this model is particularly effective. Most parents are made aware of the parenting course through Sure Start staff, be that through outreach activities, such as home visiting or in community services such as drop-ins. As outlined earlier (page 33) the knowledge that related professionals hold of the Nurturing Programme is important to ensure that parents are accurately informed and prepared for a course focusing upon emotional literacy. It was noted that where a professional lacks first hand experience of delivering a programme, explanations provided to parents differ considerably to those from staff more actively involved with the programme.

Furthermore, throughout this research study examples were provided of related professionals appearing to lack even rudimentary knowledge of the Nurturing Programme. On pages 44 and 45, the experiences of one father were recounted and acted to highlight the limited knowledge and awareness that a social worker possessed about the provision of parenting support programmes in the entire borough, and furthermore her dismissal of the value of the Nurturing Programme to meet his family's needs. Whilst this example represented a family with an acute level of need, this father's experiences of the programme were overwhelmingly positive. He was profoundly affected by the course and saddened that he had not be referred much earlier in his parenting career.

Chapter One outlined the range of parenting support available and different aims that specific programmes have. However, the Nurturing Programme as it is delivered in North West Kensington and Golborne served to act as both a preventative and an interventionist model, that was extended in equal measure to 'special populations' and more universally. The degree of 'fit' that the programme aims have with Sure Start principles is a significant factor in its success. However, precisely what the programme can achieve, and with whom needs to be fully understood and appreciated by professionals working alongside Sure Start to support families. Whilst this report has highlighted that the Nurturing Programme should be considered as part of a wider 'package' of support for families with multiple and/or profound needs for other parents it is sufficient as standalone guidance. Assessing the needs of parents is clearly vital to ensuring that the right level, intensity and range of support is provided. Therefore, we would recommend that (more) awareness raising exercises are built into the Nurturing Programme in North West Kensington and Golborne (and more

widely in the borough). The full range of professionals working to support families must be fully informed of the range of provision available, the aims and scope of parenting programmes and how they complement/supplement other interventions and other provision. A number of parents on the Nurturing Programme were 'eligible' because they had young children and so fell within the Sure Start remit. However, it became clear that the more significant challenges they faced in their parenting role was with their older (usually teenage) children. So whilst such parents benefited from the Sure Start programme they still had unmet needs. Methods of referral (to more suitable programmes aimed at parents with teenagers) did not appear well developed and we would therefore recommend that this is an area for further work. The degree of complementarity and overlap of the Nurturing Programme and other parenting programmes in the borough should be considered so that parents can be directed to programmes that can best serve their needs.

### *6.3 Raising parental awareness and managing expectations*

Related to the points raised above, a degree of work needs to be undertaken in communicating the aims, focus and intended outcomes of the Nurturing Programme to parents as well as other professionals working with families. In 2004, Campbell raised the suggestion that careful recruitment practices were needed particularly in respect of providing opportunities for potential recruits to talk to facilitators and meet past-participants in order that expectations are managed, familiarity with the language used and a basic understanding of the course is achieved. The findings from this research highlight that Campbell's recommendation still needs to be acted upon. On page 39 reactions to the letter received from Sure Start revealed that that it could have included more detail. Parents waiting to attend the programme lacked clear understandings, as the letter was insufficiently detailed and no further explanations were provided. This failure to manage expectations undoubtedly contributes to attrition, either a complete failure to attend any sessions or the majority of sessions. Bavolek (1983-2005) and others researching the effectiveness of the programme point to the importance of a high degree of parental commitment. Careful preparation of parental expectations at the outset could ensure that a lower rate of attrition is achieved. Home visitors were cited as important in providing greater clarity about the course. In respect to the letter, expectations were better managed where the home visitors talked parents through the structure of the course and stressed the level and nature of commitment that would be required.

Opportunities for parents to make contact with Sure Start and Family Support Group facilitators early on is clearly vital to ensuring that parents have accurate understandings, and so that potential anxieties can be allayed. Staff spoke about their eagerness to facilitate pre-programme meetings for prospective and past- participants. Parental reactions to such mechanisms indicated that this could be a useful exercise, especially for those feeling uncertain.

The findings from this study indicate that the combination of raising awareness, providing accurate and comprehensive explanations, and therefore managing expectations is crucial to ensure that parents are fully aware of what they are committing to and what they can expect to gain. Again, resource limitations were cited as constraining the availability of Sure Start staff to provide fuller explanations, the need for a designated role in co-ordinating recruitment of parents and providing reassurance/explanations pre-programme is therefore strongly recommended.

#### *6.4 Whole family commitment*

Chapter Five provided compelling evidence of the important effect that external support and encouragement to parents participating on the course can be. On page 42 an example was provided that clearly demonstrated the vital importance of a whole-family approach to reforming behaviours and attitudes. In dual parent households the support of the non-attending parent (typically the father) was frequently cited as important in implementing the strategies learnt and presenting a united voice to children. Absence of this support and involvement, or worse still total resistance to developing emotional literacy and exercising empathy, can act to exacerbate already tense situations. Children in such situations were reportedly confused by the mixed messages they received, and disharmony they witnessed between their parents. The parallel child course that Family Support Group provide was notable with regards to a 'whole-family' approach. The findings indicate that implementing strategies, changing behaviour patterns and so improving family relationships were enhanced where children attended the Nurturing Programme in tandem with their parent. We would recommend that the value of the programme is translated to non-participating parents. Whilst fathers are notoriously hard-to-reach, the importance of translating the value of the Nurturing Programme to family life could be a worthwhile exercise to undertake.

#### *6.5 Identifying and addressing the needs of 'special populations'*

Chapter One outlined the range of parents that can be reached through parenting support programmes and Moran et al (2004) pointed to the needs of 'special populations'. This research has demonstrated that whilst the parents that attend the programme occupy a range of points along a continuum of need (from Social Service referrals, to confident/competent parents in need of little more than affirmation). With this continuum in mind, the study has highlighted that that the Nurturing Programme can represent an end in itself or a means to an end when it is provided in conjunction with a range of other support. As such the Nurturing Programme in North West Kensington and Golborne represents a universal service to the widest of populations. However, a degree of targeting is also occurring; some parents were more strongly encouraged to attend than others.

Although designed to be a universal service, two main 'special populations' were identified through the research: fathers; and parents (mothers) with English as an additional language. The precise issues relating to recruiting and retaining fathers are rehearsed in section 5.4ii and so will not be fully covered here. But the main conclusion pertaining to fathers is that there is a latent interest in parenting programmes that could be usefully tapped into and that father-only groups, or equally gender-mixed groups might assure greater participation. However, our recommendation would be that further (comprehensive) consultation with local fathers be undertaken to ascertain what they perceive *their* needs to be and how best they can be catered for. Also the work undertaken by organisations such as Fathers Direct, could usefully inform how to take forward this area of development.

With regards to parents with EAL, the findings from this research resonate with Campbell's (2004) findings related to language and literacy; she found that a proportion of parents experienced difficulty with the language of the programme. This factor was found to negatively impact upon continued attendance. We discuss this

issue extensively in section 5.4iii, and the main conclusion reached was that Sure Start provides culturally sensitive services to local parents and are committed to developing and extending this aspect of the Nurturing Programme. However, the findings from this research would indicate that further consideration is given to retaining diversity within the Nurturing Programme whilst addressing the needs of some parents where language is an acute barrier to participation (i.e. mixed groups and single-language groups). We would recommend an extension of the staged approach to integrating mothers with limited English that was identified in the narratives of some parents we interviewed. It is important to note that Sure Start is attempting to deliver the Nurturing Programme to a far more diverse range of families than was the case in the research populations included in Barlow & Stewart Brown (2001) or McNeill (2005). As such identifying and catering for the needs of diverse groups is both innovative and challenging. As with fathers, we would recommend that consultation is undertaken with members of this 'special population' to ensure that the provision extended meets the aim of being culturally sensitive and is attuned to what parents 'want' as well as to 'perceived needs'.

#### *6.6 Maintaining diversity through universalism*

Campbell (2004) stressed a commitment to de-stigmatise parenting courses. She pointed to the considerable efforts of both facilitators and parents to dispel the myth that parenting courses are exclusively designed to address 'problem parents'. The universal nature of the provision was believed to go some way to address this concern. Campbell felt that the increased proliferation of courses would increase the profile/reputation of the programme due to the increased proportion of local parents reached. The findings from this research demonstrate that the Nurturing Programme has indeed grown in popularity and the dissemination of its effectiveness has principally come from parents recounting their experiences of the programme to other parents. The points raised above, about managing expectations and engaging a diverse range of parents whilst avoiding segregating some 'special populations' from the mainstream, are important considerations for the future development of the Nurturing Programme. The vast majority of parents in this research viewed parenting programmes generally, and the Nurturing Programme specifically, in a positive light. The increased media attention to parenting has helped to popularise the belief that *all* parents can benefit from guidance and support in their role. The growing willingness for parents to accept that 'good enough parenting' requires self-awareness, reflection, empathy and a set of skills to positively manage children's behaviour has seeped into the conscience of a diverse range of parents in North West Kensington and Golborne. Societal changes in attitude about the role of parenting have undoubtedly worked to de-stigmatise the Nurturing Programme but the focus of the programme (upon emotional literacy and a nurturing appraisal of oneself and one's relationships) also works towards a positive understanding of the course. However, as Chapters four and five generally, but section 5.4vi in particular, demonstrate the role of the facilitator in delivering the programme to parents in a non-judgemental and incredibly skilful way is vital to achieve a non-stigmatising experience.

In summary, the Nurturing Programme in the context of North West Kensington and Golborne is very well received and clear evidence of effectiveness has been identified. Sure Start and Family Support Group have approached the delivery of the programme in a reflexive and creative way and as such ventured into uncharted territory. Therefore, it is hoped that this study, and the recommendations presented here can

help in the development and strategic direction of the programme in this specific local context.

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**Sure Start Golborne & NWK  
Parenting Programme Evaluation: Facilitator Interview Schedule**

**Introduction**

Outline aims of research  
Assure anonymity and confidentiality  
Tape recording

**1. Respondent Background**

Professional background and role  
Professional involvement in parenting support/programmes  
Personal views on parenting support – what it can achieve, strengths and limitations

**2. Programme principles, aims and objectives**

What are the programme principles, aims and objectives  
Do they feel that the parenting programme and SS compatible – any tensions  
Is the programme suitable for parents with very young children (i.e. the SS target population)  
Is the programme suitable for *all* parents  
What are the intended outcomes of the programme  
Are the outcomes monitored or assessed in anyway

**3. Practicalities of delivering the programme**

Views on the suitability of venues *probe* accessibility, fitness for purpose

Views about the mode of delivery :  
does 10 week model present any challenges  
How do parents react to this format

Views about the timing:  
How effective is weekend and weekday combination – coverage, attendance etc  
Is there anyway the programme could be more accessible  
Are any groups dissuaded from attending because of the timing

Views about a group setting:  
Views and experiences on group setting  
Do all parents respond well to this situation  
Any challenges/problems encountered to group setting  
What are the benefits

Views about recruiting parents:  
What are parents told about the programme, how are they invited to participate  
Are particular groups of parents:  
targeted e.g. lone parents, teen parents, fathers  
excluded/ not eligible for inclusion (i.e. illiterate, EAL)  
Are any parent groups under-represented – why and are there any plans to address this *probe*  
*for those with Special needs, EAL* do they have access to similar support through other  
channels

Views about referral:  
What referral mechanisms are in place?

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**Appendix 1: Facilitator Interview Schedule**

Who refers? On what occasions?

Are referrals recorded/monitored – how are referral arrangements set up, what aims are being met

Views about retaining parents:

What happens if parents find programme difficult/uncomfortable

Do parents not attend or withdraw part –way through

What is the approximate rate of non-participation

What are the reasons

Are there measures in place to cater for these parents

#### **4. Staffing the programme**

How did they become involved

What training is available to them: who provides it, quality, appropriateness

How are they supported in their role, do they share experiences/good practice

What qualities/skills/background are useful to facilitate the programme

Do different facilitators bring different skills to the role/programme – what impact does this have, is it intentional, is standardised approach applied

How are lessons learnt:

Monitoring/evaluation/assessment of their role

How can they develop professionally as facilitators

#### **5. Effectiveness of the programme**

Views about effectiveness:

How far does the programme meet the needs of parents

What skills do parents gain, do all parents get the same benefits

What explains variation in outcomes for parents and how is this catered for

How effective is the programme for parents/families, in relation to the aims of programme.

Do they feel that parents are (better) enabled to:

Recognise the value of consistency and set clear boundaries

Maintain positive discipline

Respect their own and their children's emotional needs

Feel more confident and understanding as a parent

How are judgements about these developments in parenting skills made?

What are judgement based upon

Is feedback gathered from:

Parents

From children

Other professionals working with the families

– how, when, what is done with the data gathered

How satisfied are parents with the the programme

Any follow-up

#### **6. The Future**

Could anything be done to improve the programme

Anything else to add/any questions

**Thank & Close**

**<sup>a</sup>Sure Start Golborne & NWK  
Parenting Programme Evaluation:  
Manager Interview Schedule**

**Introduction**

Outline aims of research  
Assure anonymity and confidentiality  
Tape recording

**1. Respondent Background**

Professional background and role  
Professional involvement in parenting support/programmes  
Personal views on parenting support – what it can achieve, strengths and limitations

**2. History of Parenting Support in area**

Why was there felt to be a need for a parenting programme  
How the Nurturing programme fits with other strands of parenting support  
Why this particular (Family Links) programme  
what informed decision-making, were other programmes considered  
who was involved  
what was the process  
When and how was the programme implemented  
Has it changed overtime

**3. Programme principles, aims and objectives**

What are the programme principles, aims and objectives  
Does the programme satisfy the aims/objectives of Sure Start – are the parenting programme and SS compatible – any tensions  
Is the programme suitable for parents with very young children (i.e. the SS target population)  
Is the programme suitable for *all* parents  
What are the intended outcomes of the programme  
Are the outcomes monitored or assessed in anyway

**4. Practicalities of delivering the programme**

*Venue:*

Where are the sessions held – what catchment area is covered, how universal  
Accessibility, suitability, secure/safe etc  
How were decisions reached to use the venues

*Frequency:*

Any variation in mode of delivery  
Does 10 week model present any challenges  
How do parents react to this format

*Timing:*

How effective is weekend and weekday combination – coverage, attendance etc  
Is there anyway the programme could be more accessible  
Are any groups dissuaded from attending because of the timing

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**Appendix 2: Manager Interview Schedule**

*Group setting:*

Views and e<sup>A</sup>xperiences on group setting  
Do all parents respond well to this situation  
Are alternatives offered  
Any challenges/problems encountered to group setting  
What are the benefits

*Recruiting parents:*

What criteria are used for identifying suitable parents  
How are parents invited to participate  
How do parents react to being invited to attend  
How are they persuaded of the value of the programme  
What are they told about the programme  
How open-access, parent-led, universal is the programme?  
Are particular groups of parents:  
targeted e.g. lone parents, teen parents, fathers  
excluded/ not eligible for inclusion (i.e. illiterate, EAL)  
Are any parent groups under-represented – why and are there any plans to address this *probe for those with Special needs, EAL* do they have access to similar support through other channels

*Referral:*

What referral mechanisms are in place?  
Who refers? On what occasions?  
Are referrals recorded/monitored – how are referral arrangements set up, what aims are being met

*Retaining parents:*

What happens if parents find programme difficult/uncomfortable  
Do parents not attend or withdraw part –way through  
What is the approximate rate of non-participation  
What are the reasons  
Are there measures in place to cater for these parents

**5. Staffing the programme**

*Management & Direction*

How is the programme managed – who is responsible for  
Directing  
delivery  
planning  
implementation  
supporting staff  
addressing additional needs/ developing the programme  
monitoring effectiveness etc  
How is this done – any challenges  
Could this be improved in anyway

*Facilitators:*

How do they become involved  
What training is available to facilitators, who provides it, quality, appropriateness  
How are facilitators supported in their role

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Can facilitators share experiences/good practice  
What qualities/skills/background are useful to facilitate the programme  
Do different facilitators bring different skills to the role/programme – what impact does this have, is it intentional, is standardised approach applied

How are lessons learnt:  
Monitoring/evaluation/assessment of their role  
How can they develop professionally as facilitators

## **5. Effectiveness of the programme**

### *Effectiveness:*

How far does the programme meet the needs of parents  
What skills do parents gain, do all parents get the same benefits  
What explains variation in outcomes for parents and how is this catered for  
How effective is the programme for parents/families, in relation to the aims of programme.  
Do they feel that parents are (better) enabled to:  
Recognise the value of consistency and set clear boundaries  
Maintain positive discipline  
Respect their own and their children's emotional needs  
Feel more confident and understanding as a parent  
How are judgements about these developments in parenting skills made?  
What are judgement based upon  
Is feedback gathered from:  
Parents  
From children  
Other professionals working with the families  
– how, when, what is done with the data gathered  
How satisfied are parents with the the programme  
Any follow-up

## **6. The Future**

Are there plans to maintain/develop/extend the programme in the future  
Could anything be done to improve the programme  
Anything else to add/any questions

## **Thank & Close**

**<sup>a</sup>Sure Start Golborne & NWK – Parenting Programme Evaluation:  
Parent Interview Schedule**

Group Ai (non-participant) cover topics in sections 1, 2, 3, 4 & 7  
Group Aii (non-completers) cover topics in section 1,2, 3,5, 6 &7  
Group Bi (participants, pre-programme) cover topics in sections 1, 2, 3 & 4  
Group Bii (participants, post-programme) cover topics in all sections (1,2, 3 & 4 retrospectively)  
Group C (past-participants) cover topics in all sections

**Introduction**

Outline aims of research  
Assure anonymity and confidentiality  
Tape recording

**1. Background**

Outline of their family – parenting/caring arrangements – i.e. with partner, single etc  
Number of children, ages, any specific needs,  
About their relationship with their children  
About sibling relationships (if relevant)  
Engaged in activities locally – Sure Start services

**2. Awareness of parenting support**

Had they heard about parenting courses before – what ideas did they have about parenting courses?  
How did they become aware of *this* programme – was it from a professional, written information, friends/family/neighbours, other source?  
Were they referred to the programme? – if so, by whom and why? How did they feel about it?  
What were they told about it?

**3. Understanding of the programme**

What did they think the programme was about?  
What did they think the course would cover? What informed this understanding?  
What form did they think it would take? – about the format, timing, venue etc  
Did they understand it would be group based?  
Did they think it could be helpful to them, in what ways?

**4. Motivations & Expectations**

Why did they participate?  
Did anyone encourage them to participate – probe for:  
who,  
why,  
how and  
when?  
Did they think they *needed* to attend?  
What did they hope to get from the experience?

---

**Appendix 3: Parent Interview Schedule**

What were their aims/hopes/goals of the course?

### **5. Experiences of the programme**

How they found the sessions? Was it as they had expected?

About the trainer/facilitator? – confidence, competence, sensitivity

Reactions to the group setting – did they feel un/comfortable? Supported? Encouraged?

Judged?

How did they feel about the level of commitment required – weekly sessions, ten weeks?

Extra time at home?

Likes/dislikes

Reasons for continued attendance/non-attendance

### **6. Skills gained**

What did they learn during the course?

Did they find most useful?

Were any parts of the course unuseful/unhelpful?

Do they feel different as a parent, in what ways? *Probe for examples*

What do they know/think about the following factors:

Setting boundaries (i.e. clear and consistent)

Positive discipline (i.e. fair, firm, consistent, kind)

Respecting their own emotional needs

Respecting their child(ren)'s emotional needs

Confidence as a parent

*What things that they learnt on the course have they put into action at home?*

*Probe for examples and degree of success (e.g. praise, rewards and penalties, do's rather than 'don'ts, ignoring mildly annoying behaviour)*

Did they encounter any difficulties? How did they overcome them?

Have relationships in the family improved? *Probe for detail/examples, between whom, in what ways*

Have other people noticed any change in their behaviour/parenting?

What changes?

Who has noticed the changes?

*probe neighbours, friends, relatives, professionals?*

*Probe for examples of when/how they have behaved differently*

### **7. Recommendations**

How could parenting support/parenting skills best be delivered *probe* one-to-one, through home visits, group setting etc

Could the programme have been improved in anyway

What would be most useful to them in terms of parent support – *probe for reasons*

*For those who attended the course:*

Have your expectations for parenting support been met

Would they recommend the course to friends/neighbours/family – what would they say

Could the programme have been improved in anyway

What did they least like/find most unuseful – *probe for reasons*

Would they attend a similar course again

Anything to add, any questions, **Thank & Close**

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## Appendix 4: Sure Start invitation to parents



**Dear Parent**

**The next **Parent Nurturing Programme** will be starting in early March 2006.**

The nurturing programme is relevant to anyone involved in bringing up children. It recognises the importance of parenting and valuing all parents and carers to enable their children to blossom.

The programme is run over 10 weeks and consists of two and a half-hour sessions once a week.

A crèche facility is provided for children under the age of 3.

**If you answer yes to any of the following questions then this course is for you:**

- **Would you like a calmer household?**
- **Would you like to have more fun with your children?**
- **Would you like to share your experiences as a parent?**
- **Would you like to explore new parenting ideas?**
- **Would you like to meet other parents?**

**If you would like more information about the Parenting nurturing programme please do not hesitate to contact Sue Curry on tel: 0208 962 0554.**

## Appendix 5: Opt-out letter sent to (Group B) parents



Group B

Dear Parent or Carer,

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study of the Parenting Course run by Sure Start and The Family Support Group. This letter explains what the research involves, so that you can decide whether to take part. Please read this information and discuss it with others if you want to. We are also very happy to answer your questions about the study. Our phone numbers are at the bottom of this letter.

### **What is the study for?**

We are looking into parents' and carers' experience of the Parenting Course. We rely on parents' feedback, to find out whether the course is helpful and to see how it could be improved.

We work at London Metropolitan University and we are independent researchers, not Sure Start staff. We are carrying out the study on behalf of Sure Start, who will look at our report to see how useful the course is to people in the local area. Other researchers might also be interested in finding out about the course.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

We are keen to involve you because you are about to begin the Parenting course. We would like to ask you about your views of the course before attending. 30 parents in total have been asked to take part.

### **What's the point of taking part?**

We think you will find it interesting, and you will get a chance to give your views about local services. Also, your opinions might help improve the course for other parents.

### **How long will it take?**

We would like to speak to you before the course begins, in an interview which will last approximately 30 minutes. We know how busy you will be with work or family

life, so we can speak to you over the phone. However, if you prefer we can come to talk to you at home or at a drop-in. We will be happy to fit in with your day.

If you need or prefer to speak in a language other than English, we can arrange an interpreter. These interviews will be done face to face.

**How will my feedback be used?**

We will write a report for Sure Start, and maybe a paper for other researchers. The report for Sure Start will come out this summer. You will not be identified or identifiable, and all of the information you give is confidential to the research team. It will not be possible to link your information back to you.

We will contact you soon to ask whether you are happy to take part in the study. If you know already that you would like to take part, or don't want to take part, please feel free to contact us. Otherwise, Andrew will ring to arrange a time for Jayne or Kathy to interview you.

We look forward to speaking to you, and thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Jayne Osgood  
020 7133 4020

Kathy James  
020 7133 2435

Andrew Craven  
020 7133 4022

## **Appendix 6: Secondary Data**

To inform sampling decisions (and as a source of background), we asked facilitators to supply registers of participants from past courses (i.e. January 2004 to January 2006), with details of course dates, venues and timings. We also asked facilitators to add demographic notes on participants, which might be salient to parents' outcomes and experience, and which had been relevant in past research. These included family structures, ethnicity of parents or language spoken, where the family lived (proximity to venues), use of crèche, any special health needs, and extent of attendance over the 10 weeks. The intention was to study whether patterns emerged (particularly in terms of those who attended, completed or dropped out of courses) and to explore these in the qualitative data.

The data has limitations as an accurate reflection of the parents who have contact with the NP in SSNWK. We estimate 50 parents were on course registers during this period but eliminated four records, where participant details were minimal or where it was considered unethical to include parents in the research. Some of the remaining 46 records were incomplete as facilitators were being asked to recall some participant details from over 12 months ago, in some cases for parents who registered but did not attend. Regarding ethnicity details, facilitators were asked to designate ethnic classifications (rather than these being supplied by respondents themselves). However we were able to make some tentative observations from this secondary source, to be further explored in our qualitative data.

### *Parents registered on the Nurturing Programme*

In Sure Start North West Kensington and Golborne, the Nurturing Programme is being accessed by a diverse group of parents. In contrast with other research contexts, the total proportion of parents from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds (55 per cent Black, Asian, Mixed, Chinese and Other) outnumbered White parents (45 per cent White British and Other White or White European). Where family structure was known, almost as many single parents were registered (26 per cent) as those who are parenting with a partner (30 per cent). There were no data on the family structure of 34 per cent of parents who registered. To an extent, the registered group are representative of local ethnic mix. The majority of parents registered were parenting under 5s; 13% were also known to have teens. No parents-to-be accessed the course in the research period. Very few men were registered on the course. Crèche facilities were used by 17 per cent of those registered. Highest non-completion rates were on the summer weekday course (57 per cent non completion), and the September weekday course (55 per cent non-completion).

<i>Parent category</i>	<i>Number of parents registered ( n = 46 )</i>
<b>Family Structure<sup>4</sup></b>	
2 parent family	14 (30%)
1 parent family	12 (26%)
Adoptive parent/s	1 (2%)
Attends with friend/relative	2 (4%)
Both parents at same course	6 (13%)
Both parents separately	2 (8%)
Pre-natal	0
Known to have teens	6 (13%)
No data	16 (34%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	4 (9%)
Female	42 (91%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Black African	4 (9%)
Black Caribbean	9 (19%)
Asian	5 (11%)
White British	12 (26%)
Mixed	1 (2%)
Chinese	1 (2%)
Other	3 (6%)
Other White	6 (13%)
No data	5 (11%)
<b>Attendance</b>	
Completion	28 (61%)
Early drop out (Week 2/3)	10 (22%)
Late drop out (Week 5+)	1 (2%)
No attendance	5 (11%)
Asked to leave	1 (2%)
No data	1 (2%)
<b>Creche use</b>	
Yes	8 (17%)
No data	38 (83%)
<b>Course timing</b>	
Jan 04 weekday	5
Jan 04 weekend	8
May 04 weekday	14
Oct 04 weekday	10
Sept 05 weekday	9

**Table A6i:**  
**Parents registered on course between**  
**Jan 04 – Jan 06, by categories of**  
**research interest**

[

<sup>4</sup> Figures do not round to 46 due to double-counting on aspects of Family Structure

*Parents completing the Nurturing Programme*

The data suggests a good completion rate amongst parents from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Black Caribbean, Asian and Other White participants are well-represented amongst the group who complete the course (i.e. the proportion completing was higher than the proportion who were registered). In this data, completion was less likely amongst Black African and White British parents.

Although parents from single and two parent families are registered on the programme in equal proportions, secondary data suggested that parents from two parent families are 2.5 as likely to complete the course as single parents. The majority of those known to have teens completed the course. None of the men who registered dropped out of the course. Drop-out rates are approximately 30 per cent, which is higher than those observed by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001), but in line with the 28 per cent observed in other programmes reviewed by Forehand et al (1982). It is worth noting the range of completion rates (80 -55 per cent) over the research period.

<i>Parent category</i>	<i>Number of parents ( n =28 )</i>
<b>Family Structure</b>	
2 parent family	13 (46%)
1 parent family	5 (17%)
Adoptive parent/s	1 (3%)
Attends with friend/relative	0
Both parents at same course	6 (21%)
Both parents separately	2 (7%)
Pre-natal	0
Known to have teens	5 (18%)
No data	4 (14%)
<b>Gender</b>	
<i>Male</i>	4 (14%)
<i>Female</i>	24 (86%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Black African	1 (3%)
Black Caribbean	7 (25%)
Asian	5 (18%)
White British	6 (21%)
Mixed	1 (3%)
Other	2 (7%)
Other White	6 (21%)
No data	2 (7%)
<b>Creche use</b>	
Yes	5 (18%)
No/no data	23 (82%)
<b>Course timing</b>	
Jan 04 weekday	4
Jan 04 weekend	5
May 04 weekday	8
Oct 04 weekday	8
Sept 05 weekday	5

**Table A.6ii**  
**Parents completing courses**  
**between Jan 04 – Jan 06 by**  
**categories of research interest**

*Parents who did not attend any sessions*

Little was known about the family structures of parents in this group. Particular courses (May and October 2004) registered these parents. Four of the five parents faced difficulties in getting to the venue.

<i>Participant Details</i>	<i>Number of participants ( n= 5 )</i>
<b>Family Structure</b>	
2 parent family	0
1 parent family	1
Adoptive parent/s	0
Both parents at same course	0
Both parents separately	0
Pre-natal	0
Known to have teens	0
No data	4
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	0
Female	5
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Black African	1
Black Caribbean	1
Asian	0
White British	1
Mixed	0
Other	0
Other White	0
No data	2
<b>Creche use</b>	
Yes	N/a
No data	
<b>Course/timing</b>	
Jan 04 weekday	0
Jan 04 weekend	0
May 04 weekday	2
Oct 04 weekday	3
Sept 05 weekday	0
<b>Course/venue</b>	<b>Distance from venue</b>
Venue Swinbrook	Sutton Way (distant) Dalgarno Gds (distant) Staff transport provided (distant) Out of SS area
Venue Dalgarno	0
Venue Oct 04	No data
Venue Sept 05	0

**Table A6iii**  
**Parents who did not attend any sessions of courses Jan 04-Jan06 by categories of research interest**

Despite the limited reliability of this information, an additional outcome of compiling secondary data has been that facilitators have decided to incorporate similar profiling into future registration, for the purposes of course monitoring.

For further information about the research study contact:

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London Metropolitan University  
166-220 Holloway Road  
London  
N7 8DB

Telephone: 020 7133 4020  
e-mail: [j.osgood@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.osgood@londonmet.ac.uk)