

An Evaluation of the Family Links  
Nurturing Programme delivered on behalf of  
Parenting Education and Nurturing Support (PENS).

2007

Heather Stringer - Health on the Streets Team (HOTS)  
Bradford and Airedale (teaching) Primary Care Trust.



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## **1.Introduction.**

The Family Links Nurturing Programme originated in the United States as a result of research undertaken in the 1980s by Dr. Stephen J. Bavolek, a pioneer in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and the development of family education (Mountford & Hunt 2004).

Family Links is an independent, Oxford based charity established in 1994. It has exclusive licence to develop, and is the only authorised trainer in, the Nurturing Programme in the UK. The programme is a “tried and tested course that helps anyone involved in bringing up children to think about what we do, why we do it, and how we feel about it” (Hunt 2003).

This document presents the impact or outcome evaluation of the Family Links Nurturing Programme delivered on behalf of PENS (Parenting Education and Nurturing Support) undertaken by Heather Stringer from the Health on the Streets Team (HOTS) between July and October 2007.

It will detail the background to the project, evaluation aims and approach, key findings, summarise the findings and discuss the extent to which aims have been met. The final section presents learning points from the programme that could be transferred to future programmes.

## **2. Background.**

Holybrook School had worked closely with parents over the years and had identified a need for a “parenting course” through this work and their close relationships with other agencies. Their aim was to work more closely with those families struggling with their children’s behaviour as identified by themselves or the class teachers. They brought together a group of professionals including the educational psychologist, school nurses, manager of the Health on the Streets Team (HOTS), a local health visitor along with their own parental involvement officer (PIO) and learning mentor to try to address this need in as timely a fashion as possible.

### **2.1 Demographic details about the area.**

Holybrook School is situated on the edge of Ravenscliffe and Greengates local authority housing estates. These are two neighbourhoods situated on the north east of the city of Bradford, close to the border with Leeds. These neighbourhoods fall amongst the 17% most deprived areas nationally with a population, on average, younger than that of England and Wales as a whole. The

estate is awaiting a large public and private redevelopment following large scale demolition of unfit housing which took place five years ago (Hemming 2007).

*“When you take those really hard edged markers of social deprivation, such as, parent in prison, drug and alcohol dependency, violence in the family into consideration, real markers of turbulence, then we have got lots of parents who fall into that bracket”.* Headteacher Holybrook School.

## **2.2 The Family Links Nurturing Programme.**

Having identified a need, the school and the steering committee had many “parenting programmes” from which to choose. As Mr. Jones, the Head Teacher pointed out; there are a “whole plethora of programmes” now available. However, Nicola McGrath, Educational Psychologist had witnessed the Family Links Programme being delivered in areas where parents were said to be hard to reach. Caroline Walker, Health Visitor, had reviewed the programme with a view to supporting families of prisoners and found it evaluated well when working with vulnerable groups. Judith Sargent from Barnardos and recognised as having expertise in this field had researched available programmes and the Family Links Nurturing Programme came highly recommended by her.

*“When we looked at the content it seemed it was the kind of thing we wanted for local families. It was very much about being supported, caring for parents. It wasn’t a “lets see how we can make you good parents”. It was very much about helping and guiding people but sharing their experience.”* Sue Hodgson HOTS Team.

## **2.3 Facilitation of the Programme.**

Initially the steering committee had thought that Nicola McGrath; Educational Psychologist would be facilitating the group. However, it soon became evident that she did not have the capacity to offer more than support for a couple of sessions. The committee therefore sought help elsewhere. Caroline Walker, Health Visitor with Bradford and Airedale (t) PCT and part time member of the HOTS Team, had close connections with the school through her work with CAMS and her “Coping with Kids” programme. Janet Menebhi, Play Specialist, also a member of the HOTS Team working alongside Sure Start Bradford North East was also well known to the school through her speech and language programme “Chitter Chatter”. Both Caroline and Janet were training to become Family Links Programme facilitators and therefore seemed the obvious choice of personnel to take the project forward.

*“We felt in very safe, professional hands. We went with people who we knew understood how we do things here and I think that is very important”* Mr. Jones Headteacher Holybrook School.

## **2.4 Programme Funding.**

The programme was a multi agency initiative with funding emanating from a variety of sources. David Jones, Headteacher at Holybrook School, had secured funding through Bradford North Area Committee’s Neighbourhood Renewal Allocation for a scheme given the acronym Parenting Education and Nurturing Support (PENS). The purpose of the scheme was to look at parenting and education skills and as part of this, funds were allocated to support the Family Links Programme in providing refreshments, course resources and a final celebratory event which included a pampering session.

*“So my involvement was initially to go out and have the vision really of what would it look like here at Holybrook. Also to think about disseminating whatever we learnt to other organisations because I am mindful that we have been favourably resourced and that other organisations were prepared to go without really in order that we could do what I see as some important exploratory work”* Mr. Jones Headteacher Holybrook School.

Money was allocated by the HOTS team in the form of a £250 start up budget and some additional resources along with salaries for both facilitators.

Sure Start Bradford North East provided the cost of display boards which were specially prepared for the programme.

The Parenting Support Network supported the programme through the provision of handbooks for facilitators and course members.

## **2.5 The Family Links Programme Objectives.**

Objectives set for the programme suggest that parents attending the 10-week course will learn to:

- recognise the value of consistency and set clear boundaries
- maintain positive discipline
- respect their own and their children's emotional needs
- become a more confident, understanding parent

## **2.6 Recruitment.**

The course was planned with the intention of recruiting twelve members. Seventeen parents were identified as potential course members. The outcome was that ten parents attended the taster session and stayed on to form the course membership. All course members were female although men would have been equally welcome participants.

Holybrook School took the key role in recruitment although both facilitators recommended the course to parents known to them. Sure Start Bradford North East and the local Health Visitor Forum were also identified as potential recruiters.

Having discussed whether there should be a target group it was agreed that an open invitation should be issued with the aim of recruiting a mixed group.

*“We have done a lot of work with parents over the years so we had a target population in mind. We had a debate before it began about whether it was for the hardest to reach families or whether those families have almost got overkill in terms of multi-agency support. So we decided we would go for a bit of a mixed bag really, so we almost had sort of mentor parents”.* Headteacher Holybrook School.

## **2.7 Programme delivery.**

The programme was planned to be delivered in term time only over ten weeks as recommended by Family Links. The sessions were to run from 1pm to 3pm in order to fit with school drop off and pick up times. However, three additional sessions were added to the programme. A taster session was offered prior to the commencement of the course and a further session in the Easter holidays as a “catch up session”. To conclude the course, an evaluation/celebratory event took place, which included pampering, and relaxation. The programme therefore lasted thirteen weeks in total.

## **3. Evaluation aims & approaches.**

The overall aim of the evaluation was to investigate whether the Family Links Nurturing Programme delivered on behalf of PENS (Parenting Education and Nurturing Support) achieved what it set out to achieve. There were three key questions:

- ◆ What were the outcomes for the course members

- ◆ What were the outcomes for those organisations funding and supporting the programme?
- ◆ What are the learning points of this Family Links Nurturing Programme for future courses and which are transferable to other groups and organisations.

### **3.1 Approach & methods.**

A qualitative method was adopted for the evaluation. A qualitative approach was seen as most appropriate to enable us to capture the experiences and views of those involved and to gain an in-depth understanding of the how the programme and in particular, the PENS take on the Family Links Programme, worked.

The evaluator has experience of carrying out qualitative research in a community setting and volunteered to undertake this piece of work. In view of the anticipated work and time commitment involved in such an undertaking, her involvement was negotiated with the Health on the Streets Team which works with the local community and is her fulltime employer.

A problem with any qualitative research report is, according to Cormack (1996), that the understandings of the subjects have been filtered through those of the researcher. It is therefore difficult to tell the degree of distortion that has occurred in the process. Whilst accepting such an occurrence was inevitable, by selecting an evaluator with some experience, knowledge and understanding of the subjects (course members), it was hoped to keep any such distortion to a minimum especially with regard to cultural influences.

The evaluator worked collaboratively with all those involved in the funding, supporting and delivery of the programme throughout the evaluation.

### **3.2 Data collection.**

Data collection took place during July, August and September 2007 and included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three key groups:

- the course members
- the course facilitators
- organisations backing and funding the project.

Initially face to face interviews took place with the course facilitators, both lasting in excess of an hour.

Having met the course members on the final day of the programme when a pampering session and award of certificates took place, face to face in-depth interviews were carried out with six of the ten course members. Of the four that did not take part, one course member was unable to take part due to work commitments, one was un-contactable and two failed to keep appointments. In all cases the in-depth interviews took place in a venue of the interviewee's choice and they lasted up to an hour.

Finally interviews were carried out with those responsible for supporting and backing the programme all carried out in the interviewee's place of work.

### **3.3 Analysis.**

Interviews carried out with all respondents i.e. course members, facilitators, funders and supporters, were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis of the interview data was undertaken. Emerging themes for each of the respondent groups were identified with due attention to individual experiences. The findings are presented with the aim of allowing, as far as possible, course participants to speak in detail for themselves, whilst recognising that this results in a lengthy report. Key themes only are reported on behalf of facilitators and those organisations backing and funding the project.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations.**

Research is based on ethical principles, which guide the researcher's investigation according to Firby (1995). These principles are beneficence, respect for human dignity and justice. It is suggested that ethical issues require as close scrutiny as other components of the research process (Firby 1995). Every effort has been made to ensure that these principles were upheld by ensuring:

- ◆ Informed consent
- ◆ Confidentiality
- ◆ Secure information management

Course members were informed of the evaluation process on the final day of the course when the evaluator met with the group and gave a short presentation. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis with course members willing to take part, being asked to come forward at any point in the day to identify themselves. All participants were interviewed in a place and at a time of their choice. Interviews were recorded with the agreement of participants. All files, including audiotapes, were stored securely. Quotations from course member interviewees included in the report are anonymised. Where family i.e. children's or partner's, names are divulged these are excluded from the report. Burns and

Grove (2001) suggest that it should be explicit to the reader not only that informed consent was gained, but also that the subjects' privacy was respected.

## **4. Findings – Course Participants.**

This section of the findings reports on the semi structured interviews carried out with course participants, a tool chosen in recognition of the differing abilities within the subject group (parents). Conversations are reported as completely and accurately as possible within the confines of a manageable report.

### **4.1 Getting involved.**

The course was recruited to by a number of professionals. Other parents had informed some participants about it.

*"I think it was just Mr. Neen. Mr. Neen told me it was about family, nurturing and stuff. So I thought I would go and see what it was about."*

*"Through Janet. She said we are doing this PENS course do you want to come down? So I thought I'll come down and see."*

Course members had a range of reasons for joining the programme. Some saw it as a means of developing their skills as parents whilst others thought it would be of general interest to them.

*"Mainly because you don't know everything about being a mum. It is nice to know that other parents have the same problems as you really. The kids don't come with handbooks unfortunately."*

*"It was mainly so that I could get some handle on how to handle (child) because we were waiting for a referral to CAMS. We knew it could be a long time before that happened so I think it was ways to deal with that."*

*"At the time I was going through a bit of a hard time with (child) and because of encouragement from other parents as well. The fact that there would be other parents was good for me too."*

*"To see if I could get some help with (child), because they are hard work."*

*"I like to keep myself busy and I've done different things. All different courses and I thought, Oh well it will be interesting."*

## 4.2 Expectations.

Whilst some group members found it difficult to articulate what they were expecting from the course, they were all able to explain what they saw as its purpose.

*“The first week I went I didn’t really know what to expect and then each week they were coming out with different stuff you know about children, and about ways and means of getting round stuff and that, and I thought it was good me, I enjoyed it”.*

*“It was supposed to be about nurturing of the family as a whole but when we actually got into it, it was more like an agony aunt. We was all getting our problems off our chests”.*

*“The aim of the course was to make your family happier”.*

*“It was to try and help parents and grandparents with children’s behaviour.”*

*“It was aimed at parents, reminding them that they needed to nurture themselves. Reminding them to take time out for themselves.”*

*“I hoped to hear views from other parents because at that time I was just like enclosed by myself. So I hoped to hear from other parents and probably pick one or two things to try which worked for me.”*

### 4.2.1 Meeting expectations.

For those whom the course did not meet their expectations, this did not appear to be a negative outcome.

*“One of the things that it said it looked at was behavioural problems and I thought it would help me that way. Even though it was something entirely different to what I thought it was, it still turned out it was a really good course for me.”*

*“I did think originally that it revolved more around children. But I realised it revolved more around the parents rather than the children. So in that respect it wasn’t quite what I thought it was going to be. I’m still glad I attended it though. “*

In some instances the course exceeded the group members’ expectations.

*“Yes, I think it did..... I think it were better really because there was stuff coming out what you think Heh! And then when you went home and you looked through your book and you thought about it, it all made sense”.*

*“Yes it did.”*

Respondents identified their original concerns about the course being formal and inflexible.

*“Yes & no. I thought it was going to be more stricter and more laid out but like I say it was more laid back. It was just a nice setting. It was just nice to be there. It wasn't schooly or anybody wasn't putting you down for what you did.”*

*“I thought it would be more teaching. Although I did learn lots and it was teaching it was a lot more relaxed. You know and games, we played games, it was quite different.”*

Respondents often referred to the supporting literature provided “The Parenting Puzzle”, how much it was appreciated and utilized.

*“Yes, they told us it was a family nurturing course where we'd discuss all problems and the way to deal with problems, and they gave us a lovely big book with it as well to look back on”.*

### **4.3 Management of the course.**

All interviewees commented on the relaxed, informal and friendly atmosphere.

*“I thought it was good and really organised, they knew, they actually knew what they were doing. ‘Cos. when you go into a course you feel uneasy, and you know? But I enjoyed it and I thought they were good at it”*

*“It was very relaxed, it wasn't formal. It was so laid back. It was nicely run and there was no right or wrong to things it was just some people disagreed and some people agreed. It wasn't strict, it was nice.”*

*“It was really good how they ran it. It was informal. It didn't feel like a classroom situation even though the room we were in was, it still felt comfortable. You did feel that you could say things that you wanted to say. You didn't feel intimidated or anything like that. It was very good.”*

*“It was really friendly. It was not like a course where we were learning this, that and the other. It was just everybody sharing their experience, listening to each other, having a laugh and like a coffee morning really. On the way you did learn bits either from the tutors or just advice that somebody else had been through.”*

*“Very well, very friendly. “*

A recurrent theme regarding a lack of time began to emerge early in interviews. However as will be seen, group members took some ownership of the reasons for this and would not have wished their discussions to be curtailed.

*“Very good for the first time. Obviously it was the first time they have done it and it was just a bit rush, rush towards the end”.*

### **4.3.1 Responsibility for the course.**

There was a lack of knowledge amongst the majority of the group with regard to who was responsible for the course. However this seemed of little concern to the group members since they had close relationships and ongoing contact with the facilitators and school staff.

*“I think it is Sure Start but I am not sure.”*

*“I don’t know if it was the HOTS team”.*

*“We had Caroline Walker and Janet Menebhi. I think it was Sure Start and the Children’s Society. “*

*“It’s PENS and its Caroline and Janet”*

### **4.3.2 Course Facilitation.**

The overall impression given by interviewees was one of an enjoyable course with lots of warmth and laughter. The group were made to feel comfortable from the outset which no doubt had an impact on retention.

*“I think the atmosphere of both of them made you feel more comfortable. Because I’m one of these if you go somewhere and you feel uncomfortable, I’ll give it a couple of weeks and then I’ll step back and think this isn’t for me, but no.”*

*“They were really friendly, really welcoming. They handled the way they talked well even though sometimes they, well I don’t think they were 100% it was like a learning curve for them as well.”*

The flexible and participatory style of both facilitators was commented upon.

*“They were both friendly and if we were talking about one situation and something else came up, they would stop everything and go back and talk about what you wanted to ask or talk about.”*

*“I think they did brilliant work because we were all given chance to participate and there was lots of laughing. The way they acted was quite encouraging as well as giving examples as well as all parents sharing as well. It was more comfortable rather than thinking you were going there and everyone listening. It was more friends, rather than one person talking and everyone listening.”*

*“Not you must do this but well you could try this and you could try that. And people who had done it could say oh well that didn’t work so I tried this. So...”*

Previous encounters with the facilitators were identified as reassuring.

*“And I think because the people who run it, I know them both from the Gateway it makes you feel more easy, and the people on the course have met Janet & that, and they’re more down to earth and that helped”*

*“Caroline and Janet helped a lot, because I like them as people. I think that helps as well because they are both quite open, as well as us being open.”*

A recurrent theme was initial concerns that one of the facilitators was a Health Visitor. Any anxiety was soon dispelled and all course members described a warm and friendly relationship with both facilitators. This was seen as important to members continuing on the course.

*“They were both really nice. I thought that Caroline would be strict and Health Visitory but she wasn’t, she wasn’t like that at all. I said that to her.”*

*“I also enjoyed the fact that Janet and Caroline also told us their problems about their family. Because when we came in someone said to me “have you seen Health Visitor?” they were right daunted. But because she opened up and said her problems it were more laid back. And it’s nice to know that health visitors do have problems with their children, because I didn’t.”*

*“It was very relaxed, it wasn’t formal. Caroline was a Health Visitor and she wasn’t telling us what to do. You know you think of Health Visitor as being oh! strict Health Visitor. But she wasn’t like that at all.”*

All interviewees had been able to fully participate in the programme irrespective of differing abilities and learning styles.

*“When they first started coming out with like these words I didn’t understand but once they explained everything about it and you knew better what you were into*

*then. They used some big words and that but Janet & Caroline were good, they explained everything.”*

*“I think it was very easy to understand. Also the tutors would explain whatever it was that we were learning about.”*

*“No it was good, it was up to you whether you chose to use it or not, but it was easy to understand”.*

#### **4.4 Course Content – the Programme.**

There was no clear consensus regarding the course content. However interviewees agreed that it was appropriate to their needs and everyone could identify how they had benefited from taking part.

*“Building a good family I thought. It was helping with time out with the children, behaviour. Any problem I had, I discussed it and it was solved, well it wasn’t solved, but they helped me with ways to solve it.”*

*“It was a few Mums and we were all talking about how we deal with our children and we punish them. Well not punish them as such, but how we react if they do misbehave. How we deal with things and how we can improve when dealing with things. Dealing with family life really.”*

*“I think in the family set up we are all trying to do our best. But we get to think more of other people. When you come together as many parents you discuss things and you think I could try this. I think it was more about hearing from other parents what they think, sharing ideas.”*

*“Well it was all about one thing really, it was about getting help and talking about behaviour. It was nice just to have someone to talk to”.*

#### **4.4.1 Course Content - Supporting Activities.**

Interviewees found it difficult to contain themselves when talking about games carried out on the course and would be reduced to fits of laughter. Even those who expressed initial reservations admitted enjoying these activities.

*“Some of the things I thought, this is well daft! But it was good at the same time as being daft. Just to do something you wouldn’t normally do. Because we all felt silly at the same time it helped the group to come together.”*

*“We always did at least one game each session. We did sort of icebreakers. Sometimes it was a little bit daunting when you realised what you were going to be doing. We thought it was a bit silly sometimes but when everybody got involved we enjoyed it, it was good fun.”*

*Laughter ...” It was brilliant yeh! I think the one where we were throwing the dice was good. They helped you to relax. They were enjoyable because we all joined in and laughed.”*

The value of the games to group dynamics did not go unnoticed by course members.

*“We enjoyed ourselves because we used to do some games and that, you know, it made us more relaxed and we used to listen to music. Trouble is I used to be nodding off because I was that relaxed with it all”.*

*“The games that we did, it got everybody in the spirit then, about what we were talking about. It was like, we were all happy together. Instead of having to talk and get on, you had this game and then you were all talking anyway. I thought even the conversations we had were fun”.*

Distraction tools used to keep the programme on track were seen as fun and effective. They were also seen as giving some control to the group members.

*“Every time we were getting carried away with what we were speaking about we had these dog toys. They made funny noises and so every time that you got too carried away we pressed one of those and that was it then we moved on.”*

*“I think it was all fun. I mean there were parts of it that were hard like when I said about the praising. But there was always something fun in each session. We had these things that if we were running over or being noisy we could pick them up and make a squeak or something like that. There was always something different there.”*

Relaxation and massage which was integrated into the programme had mixed reviews.

*“I’m not keen on the massage stuff. Even when we did hand massage I just joined in but I asked (course member) not to do it too strong like”.*

*“The relaxation I wasn’t over keen on that. It would be fine if I was going to get another 6 hours after 3pm to be able to relax and go to sleep but we were relaxing and then I had to go outside and deal with (child) and I was really tired. But it does work!”*

*“Yes the games, I enjoyed the games and the relaxation. I try it at home, especially when I am so worked up in my head and I think oh! God I need some time out.”*

A supporting activity carried out by the school involved parents working with their children to produce an ornamental planter. This was identified as one parent’s surprise.

*“We did this planting. The kids did a plant pot for us. We went in and helped them. It was just there one day and they said oh yeah you can do this planting and it’s in my garden now and it’s got loads of flowers in it and it’s lovely. It’s nice just for that little something you don’t expect”.*

## **4.5 Resources.**

The course appeared well resourced and Interviewees commented upon the effort with which the programme had been planned and delivered.

### **4.5.1 Resources - the learning environment.**

Familiarity with the environment appeared important to the course members’ confidence.

*“At Holybrook School, it was alright because I knew the teachers and the head teacher so I felt comfortable”.*

*“It was good because my little girl goes to the school so I have been to the school. It wasn’t like unfamiliar places going to meetings about my little girl and school. “*

*“I found it quite good coming from that school. I think for other people whose children didn’t go to that school it might have been a bit out of the way”.*

Parents commented on the effort that had gone into transforming the classroom into an appropriate environment for the programme.

*“It was lovely was the room, yes, it was nice. It was airy you could hear the kids but it was just, they were still there but you were just, you know?”*

*“It was very nice. It looked like it was a nurturing room. I wasn’t right keen on the chairs because they were a bit stiff but apart from that it was nice. “*

*“It was a relaxed room. Some rooms can be too big or too small. It was just a nice smallish room.”*

The fact that course facilitators and the school staff were available to welcome course members each week was seen as important. It was appreciated that this occurred even though some of the parents were in school regularly with their children.

*“As soon as you walked in it was all set up, it made you welcome because they were always there to greet us. Though they knew us they always greeted us every week so atmosphere was good all the time”.*

*“It was welcoming. Fran was the teacher and she was down there and like I’ve done Speakeasy as well. But even if they didn’t know you they were still quite welcoming as well.”*

Children playing immediately outside the room in the playground were commented upon. Efforts on the part of facilitators and the school to minimise any distractions caused by this were appreciated.

*“It was quite a nice room. It was bright and colourful. I think the only downside was the children played out behind where we was and it was sometimes distracting. A couple of us, our kids are in there. Some of the mums, there kids were getting in trouble on Tuesdays the same as mine and it was a case of we were always looking out to see if they were playing out. To see if they were in trouble or not. Janet actually said if it is too distracting for you do you want to have a quick look to see what they are doing.”*

#### **4.5.2 Resources - support materials.**

The handbook, “The Parenting Puzzle”, was valued by all course members and they appreciated being able to keep this for future reference.

*“We was given a book to read right from the beginning and it had some useful tips in”.*

*“The handbook was good because even now I still go back and look at it. I think it was a brilliant idea that you had it to keep because you pick one, two or three things and forget about the rest. But when you go back and look you think I could try this, and that was good.”*

*“The book that we got, a parenting handbook, that was good to keep referring back to. I kept on showing my partner then. This is what we have done today. Do you want to have a read through? To try and get him to read it as well because it*

*is no good just me doing it. He has read bits and bats of it. I think I will keep referring back to it because there is some good tips in there.”*

The quality of the book, its printing and presentation style was commented upon as adding to its acceptability and usefulness.

*“We got a big Family Nurturing Book and that’s a spiral bound, hard backed book. It covers everything they taught on the course and more, with little diagrams. It was step by step and it even acted it out for you with all cartoon characters. It was a good book and we get to keep it. They gave us hand outs every week and evaluation sheets, also star charts and time out information with advice how to carry it out”.*

*“The hand book, the print was quite big which was good. I don’t like small print. I get bored. Large print is easier and I think you’re not reading as much then.”*

*“You try and follow what you have learnt each session. I started trying to do that and it worked. Then I took a back step with (child). And it felt like Oh I’ve gone back to the beginning now but you know that you have got that book where you can always go over it in your own time and start again. That book has been good. It is easy to read because it has got cartoons and things like that so it is not just reading. It has got little tasks for you to try and do so it breaks it down step by step.”*

Small gifts to course members, flowers, candles and toiletries were greatly appreciated by Interviewees but for differing reasons be it the surprise, the pleasure afforded by the gift itself or being valued.

*“I don’t pamper myself very often. My partner gives me flowers and says “here’s your flowers” and I put them to one side, I’m not really a flower person. It’s just weird to have things given to you without no reason. It was about people valuing me. That was the nice part.”*

*“All the freebies that we got. We got our names picked out once a week for a bunch of flowers, and then one week we got some emery boards, another week we got a little flower with a candle holder in, and I just thought they were good, I enjoyed them”.*

Asked if there were any surprises on or resulting from the course:

*“You always got a little freebie at the end of each session. Like a little bottle of bubble bath or moisturising cream and we had a few games where there was a little prize. That was quite a nice surprise and somebody got flowers each week.”*

*“We got lots of little freebies which were sought of towards helping us relax. I must admit it did because I am one of these, like bath time, I’m in bathed and out.*

*With the freebies that I got I did find that I was relaxing more, using them more. So that was quite nice.”*

*“Something as simple as flowers. We had flowers. Put our names in a hat and the person picked out got to take the flowers home. Everyone looked forward to it.”*

#### **4.5.3 Resources - refreshments.**

All Interviewees responded enthusiastically when asked were refreshments provided.

*“Lots and lots of refreshments. There was tea and coffee, then there were juices as well. Some days it was quite warm so you wanted a glass of juice so it was nice.”*

*Yes there was always plenty of refreshments. Your teas and coffee and fruit. There was also something nice that we shouldn't be eating such as flapjack and buns. I sort of looked at everybody else just to see if they are getting something that they shouldn't be eating. I'll pick at the grapes for a bit and then I think they look nice so I'd go for the muffins. We got to the stage where we said I'm getting a muffin and somebody else would say I'm going to have two I think! It got to the stage where we weren't bothered after a bit.”*

Group members reported an attention to detail with regard to providing refreshments.

*“Oh yeah! We were well fed and well looked after and they saw to my needs because I'm gluten free so it was actually good because when I go places I think I can't go out for meals because nobody provides for me”.*

Much as the “treats” were appreciated, course members commented on the importance of parents being able to enjoy a simple cup of tea and to share it in adult company.

*“Yes, all sorts, we had fruit juice, normal tea and coffee, buns, cakes sweets, fruit. I loved walking in and there being a bun there for me. Because I had time to sit down and have a pot of tea and a bun instead of having to share half with (child). I like it when you go in and there is something there. They also asked us what we would like for the week after”*

*“Yes there was. Ha! Ha! Ha! It's nice when you treat yourself to a biscuit and things. It was important because it is not so much about the biscuit it's about sharing with other people, other parents. And you're having a chat as well. It is*

*like when you have a cup of tea with someone else it feels good. Whereas when you have a cup on your own you just finish and put the cup down.”*

*“I think they are important for when you have your breaks. Because then you’ll go to the table and start to chat amongst yourselves rather than if you were just sat waiting for the Tutors to carry on.”*

## **4.6 Group Dynamics.**

Being a group member was reported to be a positive experience by all interviewees.

*“I enjoyed it because we actually knew through taking (child) to school I’d met people at school anyway so we knew each other and even if we didn’t know them we soon got to know them”.*

*“Like we said it was all private and confidential and we were all there for the same reasons”*

*“Every one got on well”.*

The good relationships within the group enabled members to be open and to express their concerns.

*“It was nice. We gelled as a group. There wasn’t just one group here and one group there. We all talked about stuff and we were all open with each other. It was nice. We all just basically told each other what was happening in us lives.”*

*“I felt quite good - comfortable. The group was very good and the tutors were good it was more relaxing and it was easy to share. Good to be there.”*

The importance of making new friends with the opportunity to continue to support each other was mentioned in relation to group dynamics and elsewhere in the interviews. Parents said they were reassured by the fact that other people were experiencing similar difficulties.

*“Very nice, everybody was really nice. When you see them out of the group, out and about or at school, it is like you have made a new friend.”*

*“It was brilliant. I knew quite a few of them anyway but I did make a couple of new friends. It was good that way and it was good knowing that they had all got similar problems even though we think sometimes we are on our own we do realise that I have got the same problems that you have.”*

*“The majority of people on the course I didn’t even know. I’d seen them in school but not spoke to them. But now I talk to them in the playground. It was a good group. There were different people on the course to me who I didn’t think I would have spoken to like friends and family, but then we all just gelled together”.*

The importance of having a closed group without onlookers or members joining at a late stage was identified by interviewees. Although individual members of staff were identified when examples were given of anxiety regarding none participating members, relationships with these individuals were seen as positive in their day to day role.

*“The first day of the course we also had the Speak Easy in the same room on the same day. They were doing their homework and Mr Nean was sat at the back of the room and I thought watching us. And I thought if he wants to be in the group then do, but don’t sit and watch, you know. And after that though he never turned up because of the nature of the course you can either join in or you can leave the room”.*

*“I think Fran was going to be in the group at first but I think Caroline and Janet decided to say “ Look” because we did actually know them so well, they decided to say the session was our session and we didn’t actually want them in there. If you want to speak about your children you can be speaking about the teachers and we did feel a little bit... You know.”*

## **4.7 Difficulties or problems posed by undertaking the course.**

All Interviewees gave a very positive impression of their experiences of the Family Links Programme both with regard to content and delivery.

### **4.7.1 Difficulties or problems - access.**

Interviewees identified very few difficulties or problems posed by accessing the course. Those anticipated with regard to childcare appeared to be easily overcome.

*“I had to reorganise time for me to go there. At first I was taking (child) with me. But as her behaviour was in school and all there were times when I couldn’t go because she couldn’t go into school so sometimes I missed out and I was annoyed really because I didn’t have that time and that day was the only break I got from her”.*

*“Just child care really. I like (child) to have set people. He gets used to a face so he’ll go up to them. He will willingly go. I can say I will come back for you later*

*and just leave him. He doesn't get distressed when I leave him. We had a crèche in the school and it was the same people which is good."*

*"There was a bit of a rush on that day because there is an older lady I usually help on that day. But being held at the school the kids go to anyway it was easy."*

*"They had a crèche and my little boy is in school so it was fine, and the time fitted in".*

One parent who lived outside the immediate catchment area found travelling to the course a challenge but persevered as she did not wish to miss any of the sessions.

*"It was so far away, because with me living up here and it was down in Ravenscliffe. I used to walk down and catch the bus back because it was time when I had to pick up (child). But it I liked it all really."*

Interviewees expressed initial anxieties about joining the group but nobody identified that these persisted beyond the first meeting. Knowledge of the venue, school staff, facilitators along with the welcome extended all were cited as instrumental in allaying any initial reservations.

*"I think when I first went I was nervous at actually meeting different people because I laugh all the time with nerves. But because I knew quite a few people from the course plus the people running the course it made you feel better, and really from day one it was comfortable"*

*"I think you always feel a bit nervous when you first walk in. It wasn't too bad for me because I knew the school and I knew the teachers and things like that. Plus I also knew Janet and I had seen Caroline and I knew some of the parents. But you always feel a little bit nervous, you know, what should I be saying, what shouldn't I be saying."*

*"I felt quite relaxed to be honest. I didn't know what to expect but when I went there I knew that's what I needed."*

*"I always feel really nervous going anywhere for the first time. Once I'm in there, I can go in and sit down, I feel much better, even if I didn't know anybody."*

*"No I didn't have any problems to be honest. I didn't go for the first session but when I went they made me feel so welcome I didn't even realise I didn't know things."*

#### **4.7.2 Difficulties or problems - content & delivery.**

As already identified the limited amount of time available for the course was a recurrent theme. However respondents were quick to say that they were mentioning this due to lack of other negative remarks to make.

*“The timing. A bit towards the end it was rush, rush, but I enjoyed it other than that.”*

*“It would have been better if it had been longer. Each session could have been over two sessions instead of having to cover so much in one session. So that you could go back to something if you wanted to go over it again.”*

*“There was certain areas that some of us would have liked to have covered it in more detail. In one way it was structured and one way it wasn’t. If it ran over it ran over but to fit everything in you had to be sort of aware of what you still had to cover. So I think if it had been a little bit longer we could have covered certain areas in a bit more depth.”*

*“The only thing that I do regret is that it wasn’t slightly longer. I thought we could have gone into things more in depth.”*

Comments in general were all very positive even from an interviewee who had left the course prematurely.

*“I can’t say there was anything I didn’t like. I enjoyed it from beginning to end”.*

*“It was a really nice course and I really do wish that I could have carried on.”*

#### **4.8 Outcomes - learning.**

Interviewees were asked if they could identify anything learnt by taking part in the Family Links Programme. Consistency was a recurrent theme along with the importance of listening to children.

*“I think it made me actually a bit harder, I needed to be a bit harder because I was too soft and I gave in all the time. I actually stood my ground, which I wasn’t doing. To me it felt better, because you know, it wasn’t one sided all the time”.*

*“To listen to my children. Because doing the course, you don’t think you’re a bad mum but you think oh well I’m doing that wrong. But I mentioned on the course about (child) and he would shout, shout, shout. Janet pointed out to me I wasn’t listening. When he said “Mum” I should have said “What.....” and dealt with it in 5 minutes and then got on with what I was doing. Instead I was having Mum, Mum,*

*Mum and lots of shouting. It's a lot more placid now. I'll answer him if he needs answering".*

*"I think I am a better listener. You can listen to someone rabbiting on all day but it doesn't mean you are really listening. I am taking time now to listen to him instead of just quickly saying yes that's nice."*

*"Managing the behaviour of my kids. If I said you are not doing this then just sticking to it instead of thinking oh alright go and do it anyway. Just sticking to what you say."*

*"I did learn a few tricks of discipline I would say. I am quite soft but I did try a few and they did work."*

The importance of having time for oneself, stepping back from situations and being less self critical were all seen as important to improving relationships in the home.

*"Giving time for ourselves. Because as parents we do so much and spend time thinking about others. We forget about ourselves, Mothers especially. It is so important because as you feel better yourself you are able to have a better relationship with your children and your husband as well."*

*"I try and make time for myself now. Even if it is just sitting down and doing nothing for an hour, I do, do it now. I wasn't making no time for me."*

*"The time out for both of us, not just children's time out. Normally I'd say right I've had enough and shout. Now I just leave, calm down and come back. Before I'd start shouting, then feel really bad. Then I'd have to make up for it. So all the shouting and stuff which would make them think well I won't do that again ....."*

*"We did learn relaxation. Something as simple as taking more time out in a bath. Some of the behavioural things, we talked about having more empathy with them for the reason why she was doing what she was doing it helped me realise that some of it was through copy cat behaviour from how I reacted with her. But a lot of it I was actually blaming myself and I learnt that even though it was copy cat behaviour and it wasn't just my fault. So we learnt to deal with that more."*

*"I learnt so much about giving myself time out. My little girl she can have tantrums. By giving myself time out it stops me from getting angry. I am more calm dealing with her. Because when I go out and then come and start again I am more calm and patient with her than I had been."*

Giving and in particular, receiving praise were obstacles for some course members which they are still learning to overcome. The impact giving and

receiving praise had on their relationships with partners seemed a most notable and enjoyable spin off.

*“Praising. There were a couple of them, like me who found it hard to praise themselves. I found it easy to praise the kids but when it came to someone praising me I’d sort of shrivel! It’s knowing that it is OK to get praise. I think that was the big thing, finding something to praise about ourselves. “*

*“When you look at yourself and think I don’t think there is anything I can praise myself for. But still you can praise yourself for being, just being. That was good because at the end of the day and probably the frustration you don’t think oh have I done something that is really good. Now I can talk with the children and think what have you done good today and give praise. So much about myself and my husband as well, giving him praise as well, for me he seems more relaxed than he was before, and appreciated, both of us. So both of us appreciating one another and that is enjoyable.”*

*“The behaviour I found with (child). Trying all the different stuff out. The praising chart. We even started praising each other me and (partner), you know he’d cook the tea and I’d say “I’ll give you a star for that”, even though we were taking the mick, you know we had a laugh, it was good”.*

Interviewees were able to identify the impact that their own experiences of being parented had on their parenting practices.

*“The learning to take time out for yourself. Learning as well to praise yourself. Which is what I always found quite hard when it came to things like that, I’d go sshh quiet. It was one of the things that some of us found quite hard. Or even accepting praise, I always found quite difficult. But it is surprising that we started to realise that a lot of it is to do with our past and it is nought to do with how we are reacting now. It was sort of to do with how we had been brought up.”*

*“I came from a background of strict parenting where you were not allowed to go out much. I think I was starting to do the same with the children. So that was a bit of a surprise. I started thinking am I doing this because of what happened to me?”*

Course members identified what they now did differently having completed the course. Once again listening, consistency and time out were recurrent themes.

*“I listen to my children more. I stick to my guns. When I ground (child) I stick to it. We used to argue all the time (partner) over (child).He’d play one another off each other but it’s a lot more easy now. We stick together. If (Partner) says he’s grounded I stick with that. Since the course there has been no arguing really, as a family there has been no shouting”.*

*"I have got a stool in the front room that he has to sit on for a couple of minutes and then he goes off and does whatever. He is getting better with that. He does sit there and he will say "sorry Mum" and he knows that he has calmed down now and he can go off and play. But if he hasn't calmed down he has to sit there still. It does work."*

*"Trying to relax, more being aware that you can take time out and that you need time out as well. On a Friday night I go to rug making it gives me an hour away from the kids and then I do it Saturday afternoon as well so it gives me another couple of hours. It gives them a little bit more structure as well and these holidays seem to have flown this time."*

#### **4.8.1 Outcomes - changes to family life.**

All interviewees were able to identify how life at home had changed following the Family Links course especially the relationship between them and their partners.

*"It has made a difference because we can have fun together all part of the family. Whereas before everybody was just doing their own things. I was just working with the children and my husband was doing his own things. But now we tend to do things together."*

*"I have found that when I appreciate him (partner), he seems to appreciate me which means our relationship is a lot better."*

*"My partner & I get on a lot better. It used to be me that shouted. He's really patient and I used to be always shouting. But now I realise what he actually does do for me. He does a lot. Since doing the course I realise that other partners do nothing. So now I have changed. When he says he has done something I say "Oh have you love, cheers"! "*

*"Family life is totally different, it's more placid and me, myself, I pamper myself a bit more. Now I stick to my guns, my personal power, I've said that so that's what I'm doing".*

The importance of communication between the adult members of the family was recognised.

*"We do discuss more now with both of them, with both the children. We do discuss how to deal with them instead of me saying one thing and then she goes off and asks Nana and she says something and then (Dad) says another. She used to fight us all off against each other. We don't do that no more. I say no your not having , go up and tell Nana, go and tell Dad and that's that then. All of us know that she is not allowed to do that. It works better within the house because the house is more organised."*

Relationships with children were seen as improving even where difficulties had not previously been identified.

*"I had a good relationship any way but now I listen to the children more. They seem more placid and they're not at me as much. They come to me when they really need me".*

*"The younger one, he listens to me more now and we have a lot more eye contact, whereas before he wouldn't give that eye contact."*

*"I listen to the children more and when (child) asks to go places I do try to get him there because it doesn't cost much. When he has been there then we have a good couple of days because he has been out and done what he wanted to do".*

#### **4.8.2 Outcomes - personal changes.**

Most notable was the improved confidence and self esteem expressed by course members with regard to themselves and others (Appendix 1).

*"I feel, I feel like myself a bit more. Taking time to do things for myself I have regained self esteem. You know I think I had let myself go. You know, thinking about others rather than myself. I can go out now."*

*" I think it has made me feel better about myself rather than do this, don't do that and then shouting I can explain and then if they don't do it I can explain again and then I can go on one. But I think I am more calm."*

*"Yes....I have stopped thinking that I am a bad Mother."*

*"Yes I have changed, I am more confident in myself."*

*"I don't feel as guilty because I don't do as much shouting. I have got more understanding about why they are doing something."*

*"I really, really enjoyed it. I am much calmer now. I'm happy in myself."*

*"A couple on the group, towards the end you could tell in themselves they were more blooming. It was just yeah! And they were trying stuff out from the book on their children."*

## 4.9 Final Thoughts.

Interviewees were given the opportunity to express any thoughts regarding the Family Links Programme which had not arisen elsewhere in the interview. Some chose to make recommendations for other parents.

*"Maybe the time out thing because I never used that and a lot of my friends say I sat them on the naughty step. Well now I could say I would recommend the use of time out instead of just blasting off and not listening anyway."*

*"I am glad I did it. And I have said I think they should do it again as well. I have been telling other people to get yourself on it".*

Interviewees were encouraged to look to the future. What did it hold for them?

*"At the moment I am preparing for the Community Parent Course. I wouldn't have been able to do it before. Now I feel much better to go out and do something for myself."*

*"I would like to do other courses, similar sort of thing. I like doing the courses because it teaches you more about what to do, how to cope with stuff."*

The interviewee who left the programme prematurely took the opportunity to express her regret at having to do so.

*"Just the whole thing and the whole atmosphere. I enjoyed going. I would think oh I've got my course today. I did enjoy going, the atmosphere and the people."  
"I am glad that I did go. I would have carried on and finished it if it hadn't been for other circumstances."*

The impact of the programme on participants' wellbeing was, for all interviewees, reflected in their final comments.

*"I feel much better because I had forgotten so much about myself and now I can take time for myself and do something just for me. It helps me to relax and be calm with the children plus my husband as well."*

*"I think it was always knowing... well you actually looked forward to going, and it wasn't just for the freebies. It was welcoming. It was sort of like a nice afternoon. You did feel towards the end of it relaxed when I came out of it. I always thought I had learnt something from each session."*

*"Just being able to talk to people and to know that you are not alone in the world of child!"*

## **5. Findings - facilitators, host and funding organisations.**

This section reports on the semi-structured interviews carried out with group facilitators and representatives of those organisations hosting and funding the programme. Questions were aimed at enquiry into findings relevant to all stakeholders. A selective account of these interviews is reported with the aim of accurately reflecting the key features identified within the confines of a manageable report.

### **5.1 Choice of programme.**

All respondents agreed that Family Links had been the appropriate choice of programme for the intended client group.

*“When we looked at the content it seemed it was the kind of thing we wanted for local families. It was very much about being supported, caring for the parents.”*  
Sue Hodgson HOTS Team

*Mr. Jones, Headteacher said of the programme “It was life affirming and enhancing for the parents themselves. Their expertise is in recognising where people are rather than where you want them to be.”*

*Caroline Walker Facilitator said of her preparation as a facilitator by Family Links, “it is a very carefully considered programme and has been delivered in a very comfortable way by absolutely brilliant trainers.”*

### **5.2 Group participants.**

All parties involved with the programme took some responsibility for recruitment. However Holybrook School were the prime movers in ensuring the course was fully subscribed.

*“David Neen (Learning Mentor) was very helpful in helping us to recruit and also between them they tried other methods of recruiting before giving us a list and we just invited people”* Caroline Walker Health Visitor.

Although there were families it was hoped would join the course, it was agreed that the recruitment should be open to all.

*“We wanted a mixed group. We didn’t just want people we felt would benefit more. We wanted some that would be mentors or act as role models if you like”*  
Fran Wood Parental Involvement Officer (PIO) Holybrook School.

This approach had very positive spin offs with some group members being seen as providing a supportive influence on the group, and families taking part who might have been thought unlikely to do so.

*"We did engage with some of the hard to reach parents, some of the parents we might not have got before" Fran Wood (PIO) Holybrook School.*

*"Some of the families who worked on the programme were both the most hard to reach and the most troubled" Mr. Jones Headteacher.*

### **5.3 Group attendance and participation.**

According to the group facilitators, attendance was consistent throughout the course. Those members unable to attend informed the facilitators of their intended absence and gave "valid" reasons for their absence.

*"It had been thought that a ten week course was a lot to ask parents to commit to but they did attend regularly" Janet Menebhi Facilitator.*

### **5.4 Partnerships - Inter agency working.**

All representatives of those facilitating, funding and backing the programme spoke positively of their partnerships with other agency representatives. As Janet Menebhi (Facilitator) said, *"it was all very much interagency"*.

*"Sue (HOTS) has been a tremendous support as she always is both practically in terms of getting us money and help but also in terms of what this can offer for the community" Caroline Walker Facilitator.*

*"The school have always been really accommodating" Janet Menebhi Course Facilitator*

*"David and Fran were fantastically supportive at getting us going and recruiting with us and we could not have asked for more help. They were also delightful to work with" Caroline Walker Course Facilitator.*

The links made were seen as positive for the future even where there had not been any measurable outcome on this occasion.

*"Now some of it didn't actually come to any, at this point, tangible partnership and activity but I think the seeds have been sown" Mr. Jones Headteacher.*

A Champion of the course was identified as important within the host organisation to lend support.

*“Whoever the course providers are, if it is in a school it is important that the Head Teacher gives it that currency by showing interest, going in talking to people seeing what is going on and valuing what people are doing” Mr. Jones Headteacher.*

## **5.5 Funding.**

An overall cost plan was not addressed by the steering group. Holybrook School had agreed to provide accommodation at the outset, along with refreshments and help with recruitment. All parties agreed that Mr. Jones had been very generous with funding secured on behalf of PENS. Other agencies assisted with funds for specific items e.g. facilitators salaries were provided by the HOTS Team, display boards by Sure Start Bradford North East, and books by Barnardos.

Many of the resources purchased were seen as a long-term investment since they will be used to support future programmes. However, as pointed out by Sue Hodgson (HOTS Team), any first time course is bound to incur unexpected costs and this was no exception.

None of those funding or backing the course put unreasonable restraints on how their funds should be spent. There was the expectation from all parties that these would however, be accurately accounted for with any evaluation process demonstrating value for money.

*“It is a big investment time and money wise but on the other hand those families have stayed with that programme and if they have benefited from it the cost is more than justified” Sue Hodgson HOTS Team.*

It was hoped that as a direct result of this initial programme a clearer view of potential costs relating to future courses could be calculated and disseminated.

*“At the end of this year I will see this as part of my job and I will say look this is what you get for your money” Mr. Jones Headteacher Holybrook School.*

## **5.6 Resources.**

The course facilitators described the Family Links Programme as a complete package containing all teaching plans and resources. However, all parties saw additional resources as a major part of the programme, especially the nurturing element. These included varied and interesting refreshments, well produced display boards, flowers and small take home gifts, distraction tools and a good quality textbook. As Sue Hodgson (HOTS Team) pointed out, these were all

about valuing the participants and their experience and should not be viewed as extras but as essential.

*“With the resources that we were given, the other thing that we were able to do was to provide a really good stimulating environment. So that when parents are looking at how they can work with their children, and I have always said there needs to be a wow! factor, you should want to play in their yourself” Mr. Jones Headteacher.*

### **5.6.1 Resources – Crèche.**

Provision of Crèche facilities, although costly in terms of time and money, was seen as essential by all those involved with the course. The fact that the school was able to accommodate this was seen as a bonus by the course facilitators. Due to unforeseen circumstances, staff sickness at Holybrook and staff changes at Sure Start, the crèche did not run as smoothly as anticipated and this fell outside of the facilitator’s control. However, with much good will, and the flexibility of staff members, childcare was provided.

### **5.7 Venue.**

Holybrook School provided a room for the duration of the course. The Parental Involvement officer (PIO) described this as a play/working classroom utilised by the younger children in school. It was a large, warm and sunny room and was adapted for the purpose of the course each week with the aim of making it, according to Caroline Walker, “a softer environment”.

The school purchased new, colourful chairs, voile to cover the windows and was happy for children’s displays to be covered in order to provide an adult friendly setting. A reception area was formed which had a welcome sign and flowers on display alongside a small treat such as a bowl of sweets each week. Everyone recognised the importance of providing a setting in keeping with the programme philosophy of nurturing.

*“The course providers really concentrated on providing the appropriate environment, it was spot on” Mr. Jones Headteacher.*

The large windows in the room overlooked the play area, which could result in distractions when children were outside. However, as Janet Menebhi said, the school was very accommodating and provided freestanding blinds prior to purchasing voile curtains.

Fran Wood (PIO) pointed out that ideally the room should have been allocated solely to the course, especially as it was often in use for other purposes prior to the Family Links Session. However since this was not possible it involved additional time and work each week preparing and returning it to its former

purpose. For the majority of participants, the use of this venue was seen as an advantage since they were familiar with the location and available to collect their children following school and this outweighed any inconvenience to staff. Initially, members of school staff continued to enter the room when the Family Links Course was under way. The facilitators saw this as understandable since other groups running in the school did not require confidentiality and perhaps staff members were “curious” about the group and its progress. The facilitators felt that it was vital, however, that this should be a closed group if members were to feel comfortable sharing concerns, experiences and making disclosures. Once this was pointed out to staff members the privacy of the group was respected.

## **5.8 Facilitation.**

Experienced Facilitators were seen as key to the success of the course.

*“Talking to Caroline and Janet the other thing is an ability and a willingness, and I think that is born of expertise really, to depart from the script sometimes and they said that some of the most powerful stuff they did was by running with it. I think that experienced course providers that have got the trust of the group will be able to do that without taking them into territory where they feel vulnerable. It is getting that right balance between challenge and support.” Mr. Jones, Headteacher.*

*“We drew on a lot of pre existing skills and knowledge which is required in order to be able to deliver the programme”. As Janet Menebhi Facilitator pointed out, “One couldn’t expect someone with limited experience to field some of the questions asked by parents“.*

Both facilitators described their good working relationship with equal division of work and responsibility, support for each other and an emphasis on trust. Due to other work commitments, they were not always able to plan alongside one another as recommended by Family Links or give the time to reflection and evaluation that they would have wished. However both identify that this needs to be included in planning for future programmes. There was a general consensus that co facilitation was important to this kind of programme.

The fact that both facilitators already had links with the school and its community was also seen as positive by all parties and important to successful interagency working.

*“It just fitted in with how we all felt support should be offered to parents and would also be about two people who were well known and obviously had good relationships with families running it. It wasn’t a stranger coming in. we thought it would be more attractive to families and we had a good relationship with Holybrook and we certainly wanted to keep that and progress that” Sue Hodgson HOTS Team.*

Being well prepared involved a large time commitment from both facilitators and those staff supporting the programme within the school. A realistic view of the commitment required was seen as imperative by all respondents if the programme is to run smoothly and participants are to stay the course.

*“It was a big time commitment for Janet and Caroline. Because they were running it for the first time they had to have everything in place. That involved an awful lot of preparation and planning time. And I know they have done a lot of additional reading to make sure that they felt comfortable about what they were delivering. Next time we would be more prepared about preparation time. Anyone who is going to run one of these courses in the future, that is something they really need to be aware of and to commit to” Sue Hodgson HOTS Team.*

Everyone agreed that arrangements needed to be in place for ongoing support where necessary. Simply to deliver the course and then withdraw was not seen as realistic if workers are aiming to bring about change in behaviour.

*“Because we all know your confidence wavers at times, different situations, so people might want to come back & ask for more. They may want to talk things through and get reassurance that what they are doing is fine. That will continue and I think other courses need to think about that. You can’t come in deliver and disappear and expect people to have no worries afterwards because life is not like that. As we have said a lot of families have a lot going on in their lives and will need support for a bit longer” Sue Hodgson HOTS Team.*

Janet Menebhi (Facilitator) suggested that this had not been a commitment she had anticipated although she knew that support would be available through school.

### **5.8.1 Facilitation - the programme.**

The programme was delivered in a very visual way and incorporated group discussion, role-play and the use of the group to answer many of their own questions. All the material derived from the Family Links Programme and the scheme of work was based on their format with the facilitators participating as group members. Both Facilitators acknowledged that the Family Links Programme was complete with everything required for the course. Minor modifications were made to ensure that the group’s needs were accommodated i.e. time to discuss issues, the opportunity to recap as necessary. Also some of the terminology used by Family Links had to be modified for this mixed ability group to ensure inclusion and understanding. The Facilitators found that the programme did rely on everyone having some literacy skills.

## **5.9 Outcomes.**

*“Mental health, the obvious less stress that the parents were expressing. In the future I would like to work with those parents in school and look at how they can be skilled up to help their children with their learning. I think they have kind of reached base camp really and now we mustn’t lose them” Mr. Jones Headteacher.*

*“The relationship between the school and the parents is just so much more positive”.*

### **5.9.1 Outcomes - examples of good practice.**

Several examples of good practice, which became evident as a result of the Family Links Programme were alluded to. These include the support network set up for workers by Judith Sargent from Barnardos. With direct reference to the course, the welcome, nurturing, attention to detail, confidentiality, safe delivery and respect for people’s feelings were all identified. This example of partnership working brought together a range of experience, skills and access to funds, which may not otherwise have been available.

### **5.9.2 Outcomes – surprises.**

When asked if they had had any surprises as a result of being involved with the programme, respondents referred to the course retention rates as being a surprising measure of its success.

*“I would say that I was surprised that they kept everyone. It is unusual to start a course, particularly when it is an unknown. This is the first time it has run and people come with different expectations. For people to come on the course, and stay with the course, this is a real achievement. It speaks volumes for both how it has been delivered and also the content. People have found it genuinely useful. The people who were targeted to come on it have a lot of things going on in their lives. It is not straightforward and they are not used to coming on courses. For them to stick at it, I would suggest, means that they really have valued it” Sue Hodgson HOTS Team.*

*“The only surprise was some of the people who engaged with the course which I wouldn’t have thought they would have done” Fran Wood PIO Holybrook School.*

From Mr. Jones’s perspective (Headteacher), *“People rose to it and that didn’t surprise me. What I find is that people who come to something like this just lap it up really once they have got over the anxiety. In a way that they all came out at the other end beaming and keen wasn’t surprising.”*

### **5.9.3 Outcomes - participant feedback.**

Unsolicited feedback from course participants was reported to be very positive. The group had been described as incredibly supportive and one in which members could talk freely without fear of being judged. The opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other had been greatly valued.

*Mr. Jones Headteacher described visiting the group to award certificates, "They looked like professionals on a course, sitting in this professional, yet calming, atmosphere and being praised for what they had achieved. And accepting that praise and owning it and it was the pride that they obviously felt that they had gone and done something that was worthwhile and challenging and a risk and they had come out the other end and probably seen some benefits"*

The programme involved every session being evaluated. This proved problematic for those with difficulty expressing themselves in writing. Comments would be brief e.g. "good", "enjoyed it", "love Tuesdays". Verbal feedback was often lost because of the lack of opportunity to record it. The Facilitators therefore had to be flexible taking feedback on flipcharts or offering to help with the evaluation form.

## **6. Evaluation conclusions, limitations and recommendations.**

In conclusion, this evaluation has attempted to answer three key questions:

- ◆ What were the outcomes of the Family Links Nurturing Programme delivered on behalf of PENS for the course members? (Section 4 of report)
- ◆ What were the outcomes for those organisations funding and supporting the programme? (Section 5 of report)
- ◆ What are the learning points of this Family Links Nurturing Programme for future courses and which are transferable to other groups and organisations? (Section 6 of report)

A qualitative method was adopted for the evaluation. Data collection took place during July, August and September 2007 and included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three key groups course members, facilitators, funders and supporters. The evaluator worked collaboratively with all those involved in the programme throughout the evaluation. Every effort has been made to ensure that recognised ethical principles relating to qualitative research were upheld.

It may be concluded that, as already identified, this example of partnership working brought together a range of experience, skills and access to funds, which may not otherwise have been available. All agencies involved were generous within the limitations of their own budgets and demonstrated a genuine commitment to the success of the programme.

The Family Links Programme had been selected from a “plethora” of courses now available based on research carried out by Judith Sargent from Barnardos, and the experience of practitioners. The consensus amongst all those involved was that the programme was well suited to the intended client group despite requiring minor adjustments to account for limited literacy skills and a structured time frame.

Facilitators were already known to the partnership organisations and were familiar with the participant group. This proved beneficial in forming working relationships, which were based on a genuine understanding of the local cultures. Their existing experience was also recognized as being important to the effective management of the course and their ability to offer the required support to course participants.

The programme was not planned within a set budget and new funds became available through PENS as planning progressed. This had the positive effect that the course was well resourced and could be modeled on the nurturing principles of Family Links. There was however a general consensus that this was money well spent with some resources being seen as investments for the future.

Despite minor drawbacks in locating the course in school, the advantage of it being a friendly, flexible and welcoming setting seemed to outweigh these. Added to which, most participants benefited from the school being easily accessed, familiar to them and convenient at the end of the school day.

## **6.1 Conclusions - meeting course objectives.**

The outcomes identified by participants may be said to exceed those, which may have been expected. The pleasure and enjoyment expressed by course members no doubt was a major influence on the attendance and retention rates.

Course objectives:

- Recognise the value of consistency and set clear boundaries.

Time and again, group members were able to identify how a more consistent approach adopted since attending the course had a positive influence both on their relationship with an identified child and also on the family as a whole.

- Maintain positive discipline.

Parents were able to give examples of positive discipline now adopted and recommended to friends and relatives as being effective.

- Respect their own and their children's emotional needs.

The improved insight into the emotional needs of all family members and how respect for these had changed family relationships in such a short space of time came over as immensely powerful.

- Become a more confident, understanding parent.

“I no longer think I am a bad Mother” along with similar statements from participants suggests that group members did grow in confidence and understanding as a result of taking part in the course. This change was also commented on by facilitators, staff members at the school and course members about their colleagues.

## **6.2 Evaluation limitations.**

No formative evaluations of the course were available to the evaluator and therefore prior knowledge of the progress of the course in no way influenced the planning, execution or findings of this report in either a negative or positive way.

Within the scope of this evaluation there was not the opportunity for a pilot study to be carried out. Had this have taken place emergent themes, such as changes within the family, might have been explored in more detail through changes to interview schedules.

In keeping with qualitative research and the methods adopted, the amount of information gathered was extensive. The reported findings were limited however, to key points only in order to provide a manageable report within the time and resources available. Every effort has been made to ensure that any bias was avoided in attempting to identify said key points.

## **6.3 Evaluation recommendations.**

Recommendations are made based on the findings of the evaluation of the Family Links Nurturing Programme delivered on behalf of PENS with a view to identifying learning points for future courses which are transferable to other groups and organisations.

### **6.3.1 Recommendations - funding.**

A more structured budgetary plan would be recommended for future programmes despite the fact that the lack of one on this occasion did not appear to negatively

influence the outcome of this Family Links Programme. Accessing funding is generally easier if a clear account of intended expenditure is available. Also all parties are aware of the financial boundaries in which they are required to function.

It is recommended that those funding courses should take a generous approach towards the supply of resources. The nurturing element of the programme, a vital component, is reliant upon a suitable environment, good learning materials, refreshments and small gifts.

### **6.3.2 Recommendations - evaluation.**

Planning of an evaluation strategy should take place alongside planning of the course. In that way formative evaluation can be used to inform strategies for that carried out summatively. This gives the opportunity for adjustments to be made for example for group literacy levels, evaluator suitability and availability without delaying the outcome.

### **6.3.3 Recommendations - group recruitment.**

Future course group sizes should also be of a moderate number i.e. approx. 12 to promote close group dynamics and to enable all members' issues to be discussed and explored. A group of members with mixed academic abilities appears to work where facilitators have the skills to allow flexibility in their approach.

### **6.3.4 Recommendations – facilitators.**

Facilitators, who are well trained, experienced and are in tune with the intended participant group have proved to be invaluable. It is recommended that two such facilitators working closely together with time for planning, reflection and evaluation be appointed to future courses.

### **6.3.5 Recommendations – inter agency working.**

The benefits of sharing experience, local knowledge, expertise, funding and resources cannot be over estimated. This model of inter agency working would certainly be recommended for future programmes. It was concluded that a champion within the host organisation helped to ensure that plans were carried forward. It is recommended that additionally a champion of the programme be identified within all the partnership organisations to promote good communication

and timely execution of plans, with a lead person being identified to oversee the rolling out and delivery of future programmes.

### **6.3.6 Recommendations – final thoughts.**

There can be no doubt that the findings of this report suggest that further courses of the Family Links Nurturing Programme be warranted. A final comment from Mr. Jones Headteacher at Holybrook School should be considered by any organisation thinking of embarking on the Family Links Programme and working alongside other agencies to deliver it.

*“Do it. Have a go. Talk to each other. Be aware that we are doing work that I think is very much in its infancy but that it will become central. We are on the front line. It is not additional it is part of the partnership. It is time consuming, as all these things are, and sometimes it is one more thing. However it’s better than just bemoaning “us and them” really. And if you have a go at it the relationship between the school and the parents is just so much more positive”.*

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