



Integrating the Nurturing Programme into an early intervention project The Hertfordshire Experience

Hertfordshire County Council promotes the use of the Nurturing Programme throughout its 82 children's centres as a central component of its early intervention project. The project was devised in 2009 to counter an increasing number of referrals into children's social care services by providing specialist support to parents. Of prime importance was that it would also improve the emotional and developmental well-being of their children. The council's multi-agency parenting strategy group considered the Nurturing Programme to be the most appropriate evidence-based parenting support programme for this task. It also complemented another part of the project strategy: to train parenting practitioners in the nationally-recognised Level 3 Work with Parents qualification.

Training

Initially Hertfordshire took advantage of the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) free training offer for Parent Group Leader training to fund 40 places. Staff from all partner agencies who delivered parenting support programmes were encouraged to apply including children's centres, school and voluntary, private and independent organisations.

Demand to attend this training was high from the outset and has continued to remain high. As demand increased, places had to be prioritised towards children's centre community areas that had the highest rates of referrals to children's social care, so a number of children's centres jointly funded additional training places. 110 parenting practitioners had completed training in the Nurturing Programme by November 2011. There is a waiting list for ongoing training.

Project Outcomes

Referrals to social care have been significantly reduced. The percentage of children's centres with less than 10 referrals to social care per 1,000 0-4 year olds increased from 40% of children's centres in 2009 to 71% in 2011. The Nurturing Programme is seen as being one of the reasons for this reduction.

At least two thirds of those trained are still delivering the programme to parents in the county and it has hugely helped workforce development. Service managers speak enthusiastically about their experience of delivering the programme, the good retention rates, impact it has on the families and how well it is accessed by ethnic minority families.



Parents also provide very positive feedback. One credits the Nurturing Programme with improving her confidence as a parent and helping her get a job. *“A friend of mine saw how effective it’s been for my family and she too signed herself up on the course,”* she wrote. Another long-term unemployed single parent with a learning disability and major confidence issues gained a part-time job. Her programme facilitator wrote: *“She is less fearful about the future... Her grooming has changed and she is dressing differently, has more self value and feels safer and happier.”* The relationship with her two sons has improved and she is taking steps to improve her financial security.

Hertfordshire’s vision is that the Nurturing Programme will be available throughout the county for parents to access in their locality. The aim behind this is two-fold:

- to continually promote the principles and values of the Nurturing Programme as it has such a successful impact on parents and children
- to normalise delivery and enable the council to continually challenge the stigma around attending parenting support programmes.

Reasons for Success

- The project was carefully thought through and involved multi-agency involvement from the planning stages.
- The Nurturing Programme’s versatility fits well with the early intervention project model.
- To ensure that trainees went on to deliver the programme, the application process requested a commitment to deliver the programme to parents within six months of training; the hypothesis being that if the person did this their confidence to deliver would be retained.
- Small grants were offered to help fund initial delivery costs, such as providing a crèche.
- Continual monitoring and evaluating of the courses’ progress was maintained and shared within the council, Family Links and wider audiences to raise awareness and impact of this programme.
- As a result of the training, parenting practitioners feel more confident in their role of empowering parents to better support their children.
- A list of tips to help facilitators share good practice regarding the delivery of the programme is shared between workers in Hertfordshire.
- Co-facilitation between partner agencies is encouraged and supported by a centrally held list of trained practitioners, thus facilitating the frequency of programme delivery and efforts to de-stigmatise attendance.



Additional Outcomes

With permission from Family Links, Hertfordshire trialed a different delivery model for parents with diagnosed and undiagnosed learning difficulties, with a crèche running alongside. The programme was run over a longer time period, with a co-facilitator who had expertise in learning difficulties. The parent group is now meeting as a regular support group and the model is being replicated in other parts of the county.

Parent Group Leaders can access further training when they have run at least three 10-week courses. Some facilitators are training to offer Open College Network accreditation to parents, which is equivalent to NVQ or GCSE grading. This can improve parents' chances of finding a job and links well with Hertfordshire's child poverty strategy.

Many children's centres now schedule a Family Learning programme to start a few weeks after the last session of the Nurturing Programme as parents have stressed a wish to retain the network established by the programme and are eager to learn new skills.

Some crèche workers have gained an overview of the parenting programme and practise the programme's techniques in the crèche, and as a result have witnessed positive changes in the children

Taking the Programme forward

Hertfordshire County Council will continue to use the Nurturing Programme as an early intervention tool in its overall strategy for the foreseeable future. This is partly due to how well it has slotted into the project and because it is so well-loved by practitioners and parents. The hope is to add to what is already being delivered, by commissioning voluntary and private sector providers to deliver a range of group-based parenting support programmes, including the Nurturing Programme, in the new financial year.

Additionally Hertfordshire County Council will help school family workers access the 2-day training for using the Nurturing Programme one to one with parents and will deliver taster sessions for those who signpost parents to the course.

For more information on Hertfordshire's early intervention project contact Sue Haynes, Development Manager, Childhood Support Service at sue.haynes@hertscc.gov.uk or Sarah Darton, Director of Programme Delivery sarah.darton@familylinks.org.uk.