



Family Links

transforming schools and families

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Our remit is to train and support Primary School staff in the 71 schools across the city who are working with children finding it difficult to learn because of social, emotional and behavioural reasons.

In June 2009 a new member of staff joined the team who had been trained as a Parent Group Leader (PGL). She was so enthusiastic about the Nurturing Programme that when the chance came for myself and 2 colleagues to be trained in November 2009 we jumped at it. I had run one of the 18 Nurture Groups for children in Stoke On Trent and the Nurturing Programme for Parents was the logical next step for me.

With 4 PGLs trained we ran our first programmes in January 2010. In the summer term another programme ran. We were so impressed by how it helped parents with their families that we began contacting schools and colleagues in Children and Young Peoples Services to gauge interest in training PGLs. As we are a small team we knew we couldn't reach all the schools and also felt that parents would interact better if they had at least 1 teacher or home school link worker co-facilitating a parent group. In order to do that we would need to organise a team training based in Stoke as they wouldn't be able to travel elsewhere.

There was such demand that in November 2010 we were able to train 16 PGLs in Stoke including 2 members of our team, Learning Mentors, Home School Link workers, Educational Psychologists and staff from the Local Authority's first day provision for children with fixed term exclusions. In March 2011 another 16 school staff trained as PGLs - our Family Links team is growing rapidly!

Meanwhile our Area Co-ordinator Carli Stair began network meetings allowing us to meet with PGLs who work within the voluntary sector. This was so we can support each other and share ideas, but it also led to some co-facilitating of parent groups too. Multi-agency work - our team and voluntary organisations, Educational Psychologists and school staff – is working well and we can all share in each others expertise.

In future we all plan to deliver the Nurturing Programme on a regular basis, either as a second facilitator in schools where only one member of staff is trained or in



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pairs in schools where no-one has been trained. The possibility of OCN accreditation is currently being looked at.

I have used Family Links Parent Programme to support parents in 5 of my 20 schools. The parents were chosen by the school staff and included positive role models, parents of children attending Nurture Groups, parents who are involved with Social Care, and those who just want to make a change and improve their family life. The idea was that the parents would support each other, share ideas and build relationships with the schools and it was soon obvious that this was the case.

I have been privileged to witness many changes in the parents both huge and small. They begin telling us how their children comment on how much more fun and relaxed they are, that partners are taking the lead from them and that family life is improving.

I love the way the groups bond and support one another and the fact that the parents become open and honest with each other. They feel more empowered to make changes in their lives. Many evaluations include the fact that they feel good to know they are not alone in having problems. All of the groups continue to meet informally after the programme has finished.

Many of the strategies we learned as Parent Group Leaders have had an impact on our daily practice in schools. We have taken strategies from the Programme into schools. Choices and Consequences and Feelings statements have been particularly useful to introduce to staff.

I find the programme so useful because it's so clear, for example, **the steps for...** which look at how to give such things as praise or choices and consequences enable everyone to have a go without fear because it's simple! The **Time to Have a Go** section and feedback the following week allows parents to try it and ask for clarification, support or share their successes and their self esteem grows. The idea that it's a toolkit is also powerful, reminding parents that just because you are not using that tool now doesn't mean you can't use it in future.

I use the programme at home and it has had a positive effect- I don't feel as frazzled and I don't get through many days without using choices and consequences!