

**An evaluation of Family Links
training in the
Nurturing Programme**

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Executive Summary

Much of the research in the parenting field has concentrated on the content of parenting programmes, with little consideration given to the training of the practitioners who will be expected to deliver it in the real world. As Moran et al (2004) highlighted in “What Works in Parenting Support”, a critical factor in the success of parenting groups lies in the quality of parent group facilitators. Family Links viewed that they, and commissioners of services, need to use an effective programme plus provide training that will equip parent workers with the skills and confidence they need to deliver the programme. Family Links therefore commissioned Young People in Focus to examine the quality of their training and its impact on trainees.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the Nurturing Programme Parent Group Leader training run by Family Links, from the perspective of the trainees. The focus was on understanding trainees’ hopes and expectations for the course, the knowledge and skills that they gain from it, levels of confidence in running parenting programmes before and after the training, and key ‘take away’ messages for their work with parents.

All those undertaking Nurturing Programme training over a three month period between January 2011 and March 2011 were invited to take part in the research. Trainees could opt out of the research if they did not wish to take part. Three rounds of data collection were undertaken – before the training, immediately after the training, and 2-4 months later. 14 of the follow-up questionnaires were undertaken as telephone interviews. In total 258 trainees completed pre-course questionnaires, 257 completed post-course questionnaires, and 132 completed follow-up questionnaires. Question formats were both quantitative (for example yes/no and 1-5 scales) and qualitative (write-in answers).

The main findings from the research were as follows:

➤ Pre-course questionnaires:

- The majority of trainees were experienced family workers, with 75.7% having 1.1-10 years experience in the field
- Although the trainees were experienced in working with families, only a third (38.8%) had run a parenting course before
- Participants attended the training for five main reasons, with most participants mentioning two or three of these:
 - for career progression / to improve their CV

- because training and professional development is a good thing, and a way to improve their practice
 - to develop specific knowledge and skills
 - because the Nurturing Programme has a positive reputation
 - they were told to attend by their manager / organisation
- Trainees were looking to get a variety of things from the training, including:
 - a qualification / training certificate
 - evidence and research information in relation to parenting support
 - new ideas, 'hints and tips' in relation to running parenting groups
 - greater personal awareness and understanding
 - learning how to run a parenting group for those who have never run one, or learning how to run them better for more experienced practitioners
 - a holistic, whole family approach
 - Levels of confidence in running parenting programmes, and addressing particular issues with parents, were low-medium prior to the start of the course – ranging from 2.6 – 3.4 on a 1-5 scale where 5 was 'extremely confident'

➤ **Post-course questionnaires:**

- Trainees rated the Nurturing Programme training very highly overall – 80.1% rated it 10, on a scale of 1-10 where 10 was 'extremely useful'. The average for all participants was 9.7.
- Trainees reported gaining a range of knowledge and skills from the training, as follows:
 - knowledge of: specific techniques and ways of working with parents; the importance of self-esteem and valuing people; knowledge about evidence and 'what works'; and 'hints and tips' in parenting work
 - skills in: specific methods and techniques (such as group dynamics, time management); empathy and interpersonal skills; using a nurturing and holistic approach; self-awareness and personal development.
- In response to a question on whether the training met expectations, all 247 trainees (ie 100%) said that it had. Many added that the training surpassed their expectations, was 'life-changing', 'transforming', and the best training they had ever attended.

- Participants' confidence in different aspects of running parenting programmes increased between the start and end of the training, with pre-course averages of 2.6 – 3.4 and end of course averages ranging from 4.0 to 4.3 (on a scale of 1-5 where 5 was 'extremely confident').
- Participants considered the course facilitators to be extremely good modellers of how to run courses for parents – 94.4% rated the facilitators as 5 (on a scale of 1-5 where 5 was 'extremely effective')
- Participants compared the Nurturing Programme favourably with other training they had attended. It was described by many as much better than other training because of:
 - the focus on the family rather than individuals, ie a more holistic approach
 - the emphasis on reasons behind behaviour, and on understanding human behaviour
 - the focus on emotions and well-being, of parents, carers, and children
 - the fact that it is evidence-based.

A small number of participants felt that it compared less well to other training because of an insufficient attention to issues of culture/race, and the impact of class and poverty on parenting.

- Trainees reported using the learning from the course in other areas of their work and personal lives. This included:
 - in one-to-one work and casework
 - in the practitioner's general approach to their work, and with their colleagues
 - in other group-based work
 - in their personal lives and relationships.
- Just under three-quarters (72.1%) of trainees expected to run a Nurturing Programme course in the next six months
- All the trainees said that they would recommend the Nurturing training to others who were working with parents.

➤ **Follow-up questionnaires and comparisons between time points:**

- Participants assessed the training as have been very useful to them at the follow-up point, 2-4 months after the training. 81.9% of trainees rated it as

- A quarter of the sample had run or were currently running a Nurturing Programme course, since the completion of their training. Of the remainder, most expected to run a course in the next six months.
- Trainees reported having used the learning from the Nurturing Programme in other areas of their lives, including in one-to-one work, with colleagues, in other group-based work, and in their personal lives.
- Levels of confidence in running parenting programmes had increased, from pre-course to follow-up. Changes in mean scores were as follows between these two time points (on a 1-5 scale, where 1 is 'no confidence' and 5 is 'very confident'):
 - confidence in running a parenting programme in the next few weeks: 2.6 to 4.2
 - confidence in supporting parents with difficulties or issues with their children: 3.4 to 4.3
 - confidence in supporting parents with their family relationships: 3.1 to 4.3
 - confidence in promoting the emotional health of children and parents: 3.1 to 4.4.

Overall, the four day Nurturing Programme training is considered to have met its objectives, and to have a very positive impact on the knowledge and skills of parenting practitioners, enabling them in turn to support parents and families.