

# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Issue 11 Summer 2005

## MERTON PARENT SUPPORT

**My colleagues and I have just completed our very first SFSC programme, writes *Tina Jablonski*. We began the programme in Jan 2005 and completed at the end of April 05. We commenced with twenty one parents/carers three of whom were male participants. The parents represented a varied and wide range of, Mum's, Dads, and Grandparents, ages, ethnicities, cultures, religions and races. Throughout the thirteen week period we maintained, on average, an attendance of 14 members. We recruited the parents from each of the projects and we received a couple of referrals.**

I am a Parenting Officer for the London Borough of Merton and operate Merton Parent Support with my colleague Breda Marcel who is also a Parenting Officer. Together we have been facilitating the programme in partnership with Julie Hills who is the Empowering Parents Co-ordinating Worker at St Mark's Family Centre, funded by Merton Children's Fund.

Our venue was a local primary school we were given a room within an independent building within the school grounds to use as a base for the programme.

We initially gave a one hour presentation session to the teaching staff to introduce the programme, make ourselves known to the staff that would be seeing us around for the next 3 months. About one month later, we invited and encouraged parents to a 'taster' session which focused on the progress of the programme through a week by week illustration of a journey. We had 13 parents attend and all 13 registered to commence the programme (none of the final parents had children attending the venue school)

At the end of the session, we handed out a diary page of dates coinciding with each weekly event of the journey. It would appear that this visual analogy captured the imagination of parents who came to the taster, as the feedback we gathered on our last day together as a group made strong references to the journey we had all made together.

*'My thanks and gratitude to all in the group and facilitators who helped me down this road of positive parenting – it's a long journey ahead'.*

*'Thank you to everybody, the group members and facilitators, for helping me on my rocky road journey and I feel more empowered to travel on'.*

Another powerful aspect of SFSC for parents has been the 'Rites of Passage' component. All parents embarked on the tasks and activities with interest and enthusiasm, not only as a vehicle to understand a deeper cultural level of themselves, but also through learning more about their own cultural experiences and structure this enabled them to explore these areas with greater clarity and insight with their child/ren. Parents told us that all ten rites of passage areas were described with great clarity which had enabled them to very quickly identify the subject matter when talking with their child/ren.

This has not only empowered the parent/s to identify themes and capture the imagination of their child/ren but also to explore aspects of rites of passage that also maintain a proactive safe environment within the community.

As facilitators we found an especially powerful part of the programme evident through 'Follow up Activities' which in the first session was introduced as 'Think Questions'. At the end of each session parents were asked to work with their child/ren and these experiences were explored at the beginning of the following session. We continually evaluated the weeks and finally the overall programme Parents impressions and feedback was very powerful:



'If there are Miracles a miracle happened. I tried some of the suggestions from the programme and the other group members. I then talked to my granddaughter and explained the reasons for the bedtime routine and things have been much better'.

'After our discussion last week I managed to get my daughter into school ten minutes early. I wanted to ring and tell you! I am also finding the 'first/then' method really helpful. (Example given of young person using play station instead of doing homework). During special time I am learning to use the Play station'.

'Shared experience has been very insightful'.

'I have felt inspired by coming here every week, it's like my fix. I am really trying hard not to shout and it's working. I am proud of myself and I consider myself a work in progress'.

And last but not least this very honest and slightly melancholy observation was admitted.

'Firstly, I wish I had done the homework to follow and go along with the group on the journey. Secondly, I think it has been really good that facilitators have been there to talk to before the group started'.

Before we started the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* programme we were nervous, unsure we could deliver the vast amount of information, worried about attendance and as such we spent many weeks beforehand planning the venue, food (very

important), session plans, role plays etc . Tina constantly reminded us throughout this process and running the programme that Marilyn says "Trust the process, just trust the process" throughout the duration of the training course, and we did... even when we had doubts individually or collectively!

The enthusiasm, honesty and wonderful sense of humour from the whole group were always ever present as we journeyed together on the SFSC excursion. We had a two week break for the Easter holidays in the middle of the programme. When we all met in the room again the atmosphere was full of energy and fun as members caught up with each other since the previous session.

Their honesty and genuine pleasure as they met as a group again was humbling and their energy was inspiring which is why it gives me great pleasure in ending this article by saying whole heartedly and letting Marilyn know 'I do trust the process, I just trust the process'. Some of the parent's final thoughts of the programme were:

'I am proud of myself and I consider myself a work in progress'

'I am looking forward to re- reading the manual and doing it in my own time and the journey continues'.

'My thanks and gratitude to all in the group and facilitators who helped me down this road of positive parenting-it's a long journey'

We completed the programme with 15 parents and we are to have our grand graduation ceremony on June 18th.

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## The facilitator experience

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**I am Kath Holmes and I would like to share my experiences of delivering the SFSC parent programme to families in the North of the country, in Bradford. I attended one of the first facilitator training, in London, as a Family Support Worker, from Sure Start Barkerend, which was the trailblazer for the Sure Start programmes in Bradford. I was only there to make up the numbers! As there was a spare place available (my incentive was a week in a hotel in London!) so I saw it as a little break from the routine of life.**

However my first impression of the content of the programme and of Marilyn's unique style of delivering the training soon changed that! The "Marilyn experience" is difficult to describe to anybody who has not met her, so can only be described as a "wow"! we all began on a journey of greater appreciation of our children, their "unique characteristics" and an even greater understanding of their "temperament" (because we know there are no "good" or "bad" characteristics!) made them very special to us.

When we got back (up north) to Bradford we were dazed by the experience for some time to come. The pace of life at Sure Start Barkerend, at that time, was so very hectic that it was over a year before we had the capacity to plan and deliver our first programme. What a nerve racking

experience that was! Nobody can equal the "Marilyn experience!" or her unique style of presentation. Three of us came together and a group of parents were very patient whilst we fumbled our way through the sessions week by week. Crèche was provided (a must to enable parents to attend) and drinks and chocolate biscuits were our lifeline throughout the sessions. Janette was on the other end of the phone to inspire us and keep us motivated ( thanks Janette).

Miraculously we survived the programme (as did the parents!) Feedback from the parents was really positive! (maybe we had brought back some of the "Marilyn experience" to Bradford!)

From that the only way was onwards and upwards, in

terms of more programmes to more parents in more communities. I joined forces with Beverly West, who worked at On Track, in Bradford and we began rolling out the programme across the city! As word spread between different organisations the demand for programmes increased and I went to work for Family Service Unit (FSU) Bradford, as a Parenting Support Worker, so the city was my oyster!

We continued to co-work the programme throughout the city of Bradford and we found we had a waiting list of parents wanting to attend and there was an increase in the demand from schools and local Sure Start programmes offering to host one for us. (This was 3-way working at its best!) We quickly realised the only way was to meet the demand was to offer 2 programmes per week-which we did! Sure Start Barkerend hosted both programmes, and provided us with crèche workers, FSU Bradford provided taxis to transport parents from all communities of the city, to enable them to attend and yes there were more chocolate biscuits to ensure the parents came back the following week!

By this time Beverley and I had become rather a good double act! (one of us hummed the tune and the other sang the words!) The parents received an incentive each week, in the form of a laminated poem and an On Track “goody” – a pencil, rubber, magnet, ruler, coaster etc as well as a “smiley face” sticker for attending. The parents looked forward to receiving their incentives and it was our way of modelling praise to them for attending the programme ( as well as encouraging them to come back the following week!) incidentally, laminating can be quite therapeutic after a stressful day – we do recommend anybody to give it a try!

We have agencies, such as Bradford Women’s Aid (BWA) and other professionals who are keen to attend and talk about the services they offer. As a “thank you” to BWA we gave 2 places to their Children’s Workers in the refuge for them to attend the programme, both gained certificates for their portfolios and the feedback from them was very positive! We have also given places to Social Work Students and Parental Involvement Offices from local schools, all of whom have given us excellent feedback and have said they will use the skills they have learnt as a model of good practice in the future.

Now, again, it is a time of change for Beverley and myself. I have embarked on Social Work Training and Beverley will take over my role at FSU Bradford. We intend to carry on the good work facilitating programmes in the future, but we will be looking at different ways of doing that. We welcome Amina, our Regional Parent Programme Officer and look forward to meeting her in the near future! We are glad this post has been created, in terms of accessibility for training and support for us and other facilitators in the north of the country and we wish her well in developing these links.

Our current programme started in April 2005, we have also had interest from other organisations about hosting programmes in the future.

For further information we can be contacted on our e-mail’s: [Elephantkath@aol.co.uk](mailto:Elephantkath@aol.co.uk) or [bwest@orange.net](mailto:bwest@orange.net)

## Good parenting

***Gloria Lebbie writes: I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the authorities for organising the parenting course in Bradford; more specifically I thank Kath Holmes and Beverley for their patience and for creating a relaxing atmosphere during this course. Kath and Beverley were very supportive and made the course very exciting. The following were some of the items covered during the course;***

- Circle of interdependence
- Praising and appreciating the child
- Spending more time with your child
- Time of sharing our experiences with one another and learning from each other a wealth of good parenting practices; bad parenting practices were also shared and suggestions for improvement discussed

Kath simply explained in detail every topic we covered in the manual. Some of these things I personally have been practising with my family but the training has put me in an advantage position to do things better. I praise my children more often than I used to do and I encourage my husband to do likewise. I have been sharing with my husband and children most of material covered in this course and there has been much improvement in how we relate to each other as a family.

## Peer support

As many of you will be aware, REU is in the process of setting up regional peer support groups that facilitators can attend four times a year to

- gain support for their delivery of SFSC;
- explore challenges, and;
- share good practice with one another.

These groups have so far been established in London and the north west, and are being set up in Yorkshire, and in the South West. These groups are facilitated by the parent programme officers, Janette Bryan and Amina Lone.

Dates for the next set of meetings are as follows:

<b>London</b>	<b>15th July</b>
<b>South West (Bristol)</b>	<b>29th July</b>

For the above groups please contact Janette Bryan on 020 7619 6223

<b>Yorkshire (Bradford)</b>	<b>15th July</b>
<b>North West (Liverpool)</b>	<b>27th July</b>

For the above groups please contact Amina Lone on 0161 839 9799

# Training News

**The Parenting fund has supported REU to develop two new skills development programmes to support existing *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* facilitators.**

## **The new programmes help you explore:**

- how best to implement co-facilitation;
- how to implement SFSC in a flexible manner, at the same time as ensuring the integrity of the programme;
- what steps should be taken to ensure SFSC is sensitive to the needs of a range of parents, for example black and minority ethnic fathers, or teenage parents;
- how to ensure you are safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children in supporting parents.

The programmes have been designed to help you meet the requirements of the forthcoming national occupational standards.

## **What are the skills development programmes about?**

The first programme will focus on co-facilitation and how to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children in the support you provide parents. The second programme will focus on implementing the SFSC programme flexibly as well as ensuring the programme is sensitive to the needs of a range of parents.

Both programmes will draw on best practice and on our experience of delivering SFSC programme. The programmes will build on your existing skills and experience by using experiential exercises, providing

information and signposting you to other resources. The programme for each day has been designed to be stand alone. However, they do complement each other and facilitators would benefit from attending both. Those completing the programmes will receive certificates.

## **Who should attend?**

The programmes have been devised for facilitators who have delivered at least one SFSC programme and are looking to further develop their skills.

## **When and where will the programmes be delivered?**

The first two days are taking place in London on 5th July and 14th July. The programmes will be repeated in the North West and in the South West.

## **What will the programmes cost?**

Each day will cost £100, inclusive of materials, lunch and other refreshments.

There are bursaries available to meet the cost of attending the programmes for voluntary organisations

*For further information or to book, contact Bendu Walker on 020 7619 6220.*

## Celebrating 10 years of strengthening families and communities

**Dr Marilyn Steele, author of *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities*, and facilitator trainer *extraordinaire* announces the long awaited launch of the website - [www.parentingacrosscultures.com](http://www.parentingacrosscultures.com).**

I am pleased to announce that the web site for, the *Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities (Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities)* Program was launched in April under my new company name, *Parenting Across Cultures*.

I never envisioned that 10 years after it's creation (in our living rooms), that this Program would have a web site, would be having it's 3rd Annual Conference in England (Sponsored by REU), or that it would have over 3,300 trained facilitators, impacting families and communities in different parts of the world, speaking many different languages, engaged in parenting from many different perspectives.

The Program's phenomenal success is directly related to the hard work and dedication of all the administrators, facilitators, and parents who have promoted, funded, implemented, participated, and evaluated the Program. My hope is that the web site will be a way to support

administrators and facilitators in their continued efforts to support families in the difficult job of raising children in today's world.

Although the site now contains basic program information, as well as the Certified Facilitator's List, it is still far from complete. I not only hope to document the program's wide-spread use with different organisations and with different parent populations, but to "highlight" specific projects, and present evaluation/research results. (The Program's first research" article will appear this fall.) I am also asking facilitators to give me their ideas on how I might use the "Facilitator Section" of the site to assist and support them in networking, and sharing ideas, experiences, and resources.

So – check out the site. Be patient, understanding more will be coming. Fill out the Facilitator Questionnaire. And for those facilitators trained in 2004 – make sure you check out the Photo Gallery!