

# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Issue 3 Winter 2002-2003

## Conference announcement

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This year REU will be holding another **Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Conference**. Many of you will remember the 'Do Black Families Matter?' Conference back in 2001. This was a great success, providing opportunities for discussion, debate, learning and networking around the subjects of black and minority ethnic families, parenting and family support. We are hoping for a similar success with this year's event which is scheduled to take place on 23rd June 2003.

We would hope that a number of SFSC trained facilitators and agencies running the programme will attend. We would also hope that many of them will be involved in providing workshops to showcase some of the work they do with families.

We would like to hear from anyone who would be interested in running a workshop on the day. We will be encouraging parents to attend the conference and would also welcome their involvement in workshops (resources will be available to facilitate this).

Further details of the event and conference programme will be available soon. Please contact Janette Bryan or Leandra Box for further details on 0207 619 6220

## Running the SFSC programme with teen parents

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Anne Braithwaite Project Worker



**A Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities programme to work with teenage parents was initiated in early 2002 and planned in May/June 2002. It was a dream-ticket partnership, put together by the REU with Sure Start, Sure Start Plus (SS, SSP) and the sports development manager at the Brixton Recreation Centre.**

The two Sure Start/Sure Start Plus workers focused on recruiting the teen parents - all mothers, while REU co-ordinated the other aspects such as recruitment and providing programme materials, space, creche, and refreshments. The programme took place at Brixton Recreation Centre.

The programme got off to a good start on 7th August 2002 with 12 participants. They were recruited by the SS and SSP workers from pregnant/young mothers with whom they already had professional contact.



It quickly became apparent however, that retention, completion and the smooth running of the programme would be a big challenge. Of the 25 who attended over the duration of the programme, only five graduated by attending the majority of the sessions, several of the others received participation certificates recognising their attendance at some of the sessions. A great deal of interest was clearly generated in the programme but there appeared to be a range of reasons, which made attendance at all of the sessions difficult. These included:

- Transportation issues - such as driver unfamiliar with clients' pickup arrangements; long waits for some young people; vehicle capacity (young people unwilling/ unable to fold pushchairs); bringing friends or withdrawing at the last minute without notice.
- Venue issues- such as creche only open for restricted times or closed without notice; disruptions (e.g. fights, fire evacuation); busy venue with staff not always aware of programme arrangements.
- Inappropriateness of some of the SFSC programme materials to teenagers (pregnant and/ or with young children). The programme is aimed at parents with children aged 3-18.
- Appointments- hospital, antenatal, prison visits, other agencies.
- Birth of babies.
- Baby's or toddler's illness.
- Attending college in September.
- Not wanting to attend if friends not attending.
- Obtaining work.
- Conflicting options for young women (e.g. when a hostel manager/ worker arranges another activity for residents on that day/ time).
- Family commitments.
- Low level of motivation- presentation of ideas/ materials not exciting enough; unable to perceive immediate relevance/ benefit to their lives; the incentives offered by the programme not up to the levels common in the borough; attachment to a particular SS/ SSP worker and being disheartened when that person was not there; being shy and unaccustomed to speaking up in the seminar style discussions.

This meant that although there were initially three facilitators working on the programme, organising the programme from week to week took a disproportionate amount of time and effort. Also the emotional impact of a look into the lives of such young people should not be under-estimated.

It has however been a learning experience and the facilitators were able to develop ways of minimising difficulties encountered, and think about how things could be done differently for future programmes.

Many of the avoidable issues such as transportation and venue were minimised by time-consuming planning and negotiations with participants, the transport person, venue staff and the other co-facilitators. Also a revised set of ground rules were worked out and agreed with participants and facilitators.

The role of planning and organising (participants, childcare, materials, transport, the venue, refreshments, speakers, certificate ceremony etc.) on an ongoing basis - including reminders to participants and following up non-attendance - is an onerous one, but critical to the successful completion of a programme. How this is done, and by whom, needs to be part of the formal planning process, and then closely monitored with quick corrective action taken as necessary.

To increase the level of motivation and fulfilment for participants, much thought and effort went into the informal adapting, planning and presentation of the programme material to make it more appropriate for the age and profile of participants. In addition, special efforts were made to raise the profile of a certificate ceremony at the end, and refocus participants' efforts on enjoying it and making a positive contribution. The services of an accomplished and conscious local rap performer and recording artist were secured.

Highly developed inter-personal and improvisation skills, in addition to additional resources (sound equipment, catering, performer), were required to achieve a successful conclusion. Personal flexibility by facilitators was also a key requirement.

## Conclusion

The programme was successfully concluded on 6th November. In spite of awful weather and practical difficulties, a well attended and moving certificate awards event left everyone uplifted. The popular recording artist who performed is arranging to record two of the young women's poems written for and performed by them at the awards. Feedback from the young women participants was very encouraging and valuable. They enjoyed the food and role-playing most, but wanted the programme content to be delivered in a way that was more engaging, vibrant and fresh.

Feedback from participants and facilitators highlights the urgent need to develop more lively, fun and accessible materials e.g. using current popular culture, as an indirect way into the concepts of the standard SFSC programme in order to enhance motivation and retention on the programme. Feedback also highlighted the possible use of incentives (such as shopping vouchers) to encourage attendance and completion.

In order to consider some of these issues and look at ways REU can support the delivery of future programmes to young parents, we are arranging a discussion group with facilitators who have experience of delivering SFSC to young parents or who are interested in doing so. It is hoped that we may be able to produce some good practice recommendations and possible supplementary material to support facilitators and aid the delivery of the programme.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Leandra Box or Anne Braithwaite on 020 7619 6220.

# Experiences of delivering *Start*

*Julian Brown* Facilitator

**During the last year, REU has been developing and delivering a programme for children and young people based on the principles and ethos of the Strengthening Families Parent Programme. The Start Programme is for use with 10-18 year olds and aims to increase self esteem and reduce risk taking behaviour. It is currently being piloted in three areas, and once it has undergone a thorough review and evaluation process, we hope to roll the programme out making it a valuable resource to those working with both young people and SFSC facilitators.**

**Julian Brown is a member of the review and development group overseeing this project, and is a facilitator delivering the programme in one of the pilot sites. Below he writes about his experiences as a first time facilitator and in delivering the Start Programme to young people.**

truly a pleasure to work alongside others to challenge the forces at work, which undermine, oppress and attack the positive spirit of young black and minority people.

The young people's programme has been my first real venture into youth work. Before this, I volunteered on a summer scheme in West Norwood and helped out assisting facilitators in arts-based workshops at the Albany theatre in Deptford. This, however being my first time as workshop facilitator actually delivering a programme. Initially I was terrified by the thought of running workshops with young people, thinking of all the potential problems that could arise, and telling myself that I wasn't the right person for the job. Now as I write, my fellow facilitator and I are on week 10 and things are not going too badly at all. We both agree that there is a lot of room for improvement in the programme itself to be able to more effectively meet the needs of its target group - young black and ethnic minority people. Often there is a lot more that we can do as well, as facilitators, to ensure that needs are met.

I have felt very connected and supported as a facilitator. Regular meetings with either Leandra or Jabeer at the REU to monitor/assess progress; Talking with Leandra before and after sessions every week; The invaluable support from Tipu at the Coram Family project in Whitechapel, not to mention the support from photography tutor Adrian and my co-facilitator Amina. Any queries, ideas that need discussing and there is a friendly and efficient voice at the end of a phone.

*"It can be really rewarding when you feel that young people have gained from their time on the programme"*

These are very confusing and distressing times. There has never been so much information, and therefore, so much misinformation available to young people before. We are currently in the transitional period between two ages. As the industrial age slowly but surely comes to an end, the digital age speedily replaces it. There has probably never been so many 'casualties of war' in the form of rising numbers of mental illness cases, increasing homelessness and rising crime levels, particularly in gun crime. I believe these ills are produced in response to the general confusion surrounding the crazy times we live in. People do not know where and how they fit in as they did once upon a time.

Life is hard for people in general, but there is a particular strain of evil affecting young black and ethnic minority people trying to find their way in this western society. The prospect of poverty, unemployment, racism, discrimination, disproportionate school exclusions and representation in crime statistics all point to a potential bleak future for young black people which needs to be seriously challenged head on. I am very glad to be part of a team, which is dedicated to doing something about this problem. Attacking it at its very roots - working with young people themselves. It is

My experiences delivering the programme have ranged from being fun and fulfilling to being difficult and challenging. When an exercise goes well, or a spontaneous debate is sparked that you are ready for, a facilitator can get a real buzz from working with young people. Especially since you know that many aspects of life close to home to young people, (for instance, exercises on 'temperament' using the Eminem CD, and on drugs and sexual health.) are covered by the programme. In effect, we are daring to step into their world, attempting to succeed where many teachers, carers, parents and other workers have failed or only got so far.

It can be really rewarding when you feel that young people have gained from their time on the programme. I think my co-facilitator and I have succeeded in providing an environment which supports young people's efforts in school, while at the same time giving them a learning space which is not school. We talk quite frequently about their experiences in school. In the feedback at the beginning of sessions and in breaks, young people express their concerns about exams and coursework commitments, as well as problems that may have arisen at school.

Experiences of delivering the programme have also

ranged from being challenging to difficult. At times one of the hardest hurdles to clear is discipline. For the first time, I have some insight into what it must be like for a teacher in the classroom. You don't want to be too hard on young people, yet at the same time you must show them that you are not to be taken for granted. The last thing you want to do as a facilitator is kick young people off the programme, especially since this is the target group we are trying to reach - those who are vulnerable to social exclusion. Although increasingly I am thinking that many a lesson can be learned from discipline itself.

Finding the balance is difficult and admittedly discipline is one of the areas I need to work on in workshops, my co-facilitator being much more effective in this area. It is also very difficult seeing members of the group decide to leave the project due either to the programme itself, or a fault on our behalf as facilitators. This is another reason why discipline is so important - to prevent or deal with any form of bullying. This can be verbal and subtle, yet still have the traumatic effects of bullying that is more violent and blatant. If young people feel as if they are under attack in the workshops, as if they are being laughed at or picked on by others, they will not want to come back. Another challenging and difficult area is racism. Bullying among young people often involves racism and making fun of somebody because they may be different. Young black and ethnic minority people bear the brunt of racism in British society. We try to find ways to help young people understand that it does not make sense for them to be racist themselves, towards others who are 'different', and that it is a more healthy response to challenge racist attitudes rather than reproduce them.

## Monitoring and evaluating the programme

In order to receive certification as an official Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Parent Programme Facilitator, you must implement the curriculum, and administer the programme evaluation. Facilitators must continue to submit this information for each programme that they run. (See below).

		Data Required
Pre-course	Course registered with REU at least 3 weeks before start date	Course registration form
Session 1-3	Initial Support visit by the REU	(a) Parent Registration Form to be completed by Facilitator (b) Pre-Parent Questionnaire
Session 6-8	Mid Programme Observation Visit of group in action (Mandatory for first course run)	Observation checklist (REU)
Session 10-12	End of Programme Support Visit	(a) Parent Post Questionnaire (b) Facilitators Class Summary
Post Course	Certificate Ceremony	Participants and facilitators Certificates (REU)

## About the REU

The REU (formerly the Race Equality Unit) is the leading national agency working to develop appropriate social care services to Britain's black and minority ethnic communities. The REU does this through training; consultancy; research; publications; workshops and conferences. The REU has published reports and good practice guides on subjects such as user involvement, child protection, social work and social work education, and ethnic record keeping and monitoring.

## SFSC Team profile

**Leandra Box** is the SFSC Programme Manager. She joined the REU in 1996 as part of the research team to carry out a study of the use of family centres by black communities. She has worked and written extensively around black and minority ethnic families, including adapting the Strengthening Programme for use in the UK. More recently she has been supporting the development and delivery of a Strengthening Families Young People's Programme.

**Janette Bryan** is the SFSC Parent Programme Officer and has been delivering this programme to parents since 2000. In addition to running parent groups, Janette supports facilitators and agencies in the delivery of SFSC, organises regular facilitators training and oversees the registration of programmes and the collection of evaluation data.

**Anne Braithwaite** is the SFSC Project Worker. Anne was trained as a SFSC facilitator in 2000 and has extensive experience of delivering this programme with groups of parents. The current focus of Anne's work is to support the delivery of SFSC in the London Borough of Lambeth, particularly with voluntary sector organisations.