

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Issue 4 Spring 2003

Making a difference: the SFSC Conference

The last issue of this newsletter reported that the Strengthening Families Conference would be taking place in June of this year. The programme has now been confirmed and includes keynote speeches by Marilyn Steele and Jabeer Butt, as well as by the Minister responsible for family policy, Beverley Hughes.

There will be an opportunity for each delegate to attend three workshops during the day, many of which will focus on innovative practice with black and minority ethnic families and with SFSC. These include delivering the programme to teenage parents; to Asian fathers; to parents on parenting orders; and to refugee parents. In addition there will be an opportunity to attend workshops around improving facilitation skills, evaluating parenting programmes; and supporting parents to take up accreditation.

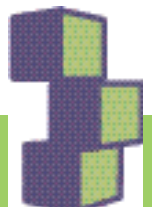
Throughout the day there will be many opportunities to network and exchange information. The Marketplace will have a number of agencies exhibiting including Sure Start, Coram Family Support, Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources and Parentline Plus. These should be a source of additional information of use to parents and professionals.

There will be some entertainment provided to lift spirits during what will no doubt be a busy day. This will be provided by young people from a project called Entwine and from one of our own SFSC facilitators Julian Brown.

Further information is available from Leandra Box on 0207 619 6226



Jabeer Butt, one of the keynote speakers



SFSC and parenting orders

Adisa Ekundayo

Why parenting orders?

Poor school attendance has long been a cause for concern for schools and local authorities. Poor and irregular attendance has many negative consequences.

- Truancy and unauthorised attendance have been linked to many of the increasing anti-social behaviour offences being committed by school aged youngsters;
- Continuity of learning is critical to educational progress;
- In addition, children who do not attend school on a regular basis are at risk of long-term social exclusion, being unable to gain employment and the opportunity to support themselves and their family due to limited qualifications and skills.

In an attempt to reduce the adverse affects associated with poor attendance, the Government have outlined preventative actions which schools and LEAs can take to reduce levels of unauthorised absences (Circular 10/99). These include providing clear procedures and criteria for schools on what to treat as authorised absences.

Parenting orders

These parenting orders can consist of two components. The first will impose a requirement on a parent or guardian to attend counselling or guidance sessions where they will receive help in dealing with their children as directed by the responsible officer appointed by the courts. This component will normally form the core element of any parenting order and is imposed on parents whose children have poor attendance at school. It is imposed in all cases when an order is made, with one exception - when the parent or guardian has previously received a parenting order. Through the parenting education component, the parent(s) will be able to learn, for example, how to set and enforce consistent standards of behaviour, and how to respond more effectively to challenging adolescent demands. Legislation provides that parents can be required to attend a counselling or guidance session no more than once a week for up to three months.

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Other helpful approaches for raising attendance are:

- Raising the profile of attendance among parents through home-school agreements, parents evenings, school newsletters, or other communications;
- Providing pupil with passes giving permission to be out of school
- Group work with irregular attendees and their parents.

However, many parents do not respond to school-based actions and poor attendance persists. The LEAs have a duty under the 1996 Education Act to ensure all children of compulsory school age (5-16) receive suitable education. If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend school regularly the LEA can prosecute the parents.

In 2000, more than 1500 parents were put on parenting orders for classes, either because of their children's poor attendance at school or as a result of criminal activity. This has resulted in LEA's and Youth Offending Teams providing parenting courses to meet the requirements of the orders.

The second component, which is discretionary and is imposed when the child has committed an offence, could be a requirement on the parent(s) or guardian to exercise control over their children's behaviour. Amongst other options this could include seeing their child gets to school or appointed place of learning every day, or ensuring that he or she is home by a certain time at night. This component can last up to twelve months.

The responsible officer will supervise the requirements of the order. This will be an educational social worker, a probation officer or a member of the youth offending team.

Delivering *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* as part of parenting orders

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is one of several boroughs adopting the *Strengthening Families* programmes for clients receiving parenting orders issued

by the local magistrate.

Tower Hamlet's education department has five accredited facilitators and since 2002 has run four thirteen-week courses, two for Bangla and English speaking parents respectively.

Most of the parents attending the Tower Hamlets run courses are ordered to attend typically due to persistent poor attendance, although, several referrals have come via the youth offending team. The team liaises with the responsible officers and co-ordinate programmes to meet the needs of the client group. Referrals are received following a court hearing. However, before making a parenting order, the court must explain to the parent or guardian of the child in ordinary language the effect of the order and the requirements proposed to be included in it. It is the duty of the responsible officer to co-ordinate the provisions set out under the parenting order. Therefore, effective multi-agency co-operation is essential. Timetabled meetings deal with non-attendees and follow-up sessions to assess the programme's success are being developed.

It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme regarding the statutory element. However, listening to comments made by parents during and after the course completion, many have expressed feeling that they are more able to deal with many of the

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problems that at the start appeared unmanageable.

Significant changes take place around the negative perception of the parent towards parenting courses and the general misconceptions held. Initially the parents are furious at the court order. Many feel they are being punished for situations that are out of their control. However, their reluctance to participate disappears very quickly. Many parents enjoy the opportunity to discuss their concerns with other parents. The course builds up their communication and confidence. They soon recognise that things are getting better at home and their feelings of powerlessness and isolation are reduced.

Adisa Ekundayo is employed by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as part of the Behaviour Support Team. She is currently running her third Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities programme with parents on parenting orders.

The accreditation process

The Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Programme has been accredited by the Open College Network. This means that parents who take up the programme can also opt to build a portfolio and submit it for assessment in order to gain qualifications.

REU has produced an accreditation guide which provides facilitators with all the information and guidance they should need to support parents through the accreditation process.

The SFSC programme is divided into three units: Cultural and Spiritual Rites of Passage; Relationships, Behaviour and Discipline; and Child, Family and Community. Credits are available at levels one and two for each unit. Methods of assessment will include journals and portfolios, written, taped, photographic or video evidence, role play, and facilitator observation.

The National Open College Network consists of 29 regional bodies that award qualifications. The accreditation framework is designed to address the needs of learners whose achievements have not been formally recognised or have remained outside the existing qualifications framework. OCN's also provide advice and information to support facilitators through the process of accreditation and assessment of parents. This includes a written document which is a Guide for Tutors and a range of free training events designed to help facilitators through the process and which REU recommend to those who are interested in supporting their parents to take up this opportunity. Relevant training workshops include: Introduction to Assessment Practice and Introduction to Evidence and Record keeping. Further information about these is available from REU

In addition, there will be opportunities at this year's SFSC conference on June 23rd to explore the issue of accreditation and get firsthand advice from OCN and REU staff as to how to support parents to gain a qualification from their participation on the programme.

If any facilitator would like further information on the accreditation of SFSC, including the REU guide and the OCN manual; or would like to sign up for any of the training, please contact Janette Bryan on 020 7619 6223.

Young people graduate

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.

The Start Young People's Programme that we reported on in the last newsletter has now completed its pilot stage. The three programmes have come to an end with 31 young people taking part. Twenty three young people graduated having attended 70 percent or more of the sessions. Each programme had a graduation ceremony attended by young people and their friends, family members and others involved in delivering the programme. Each ceremony involved a prize giving and certificate presentation, as well as a meal. Two of the groups also organised an end of programme trip where they took part in bowling and ice skating.

We now begin the review process which should see the programme more readily available in the Autumn. It is also hoped that facilitator training to deliver this programme will be run later on this year.

Further information is available from Leandra Box at REU. Young people and facilitators will also be presenting this programme and running workshops at this year's Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Conference.

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.