

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

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FAMILY PATHFINDERS AT OLD OAK CENTRE, EAST ACTON

Nicky Case, Centre Manager at Old Oak Centre, describes the impact a SFSC programme has had on a group of parents. The participants were so empowered by their participation in the programme that they set up their own self help group that aims to provide support and impact on their community.

This newly formed parent support group has grown out of parent participation in the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* course they attended this year. The programme was delivered by Hammersmith & Fulham Coram Family Support Project, and funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Each member has gained strength, confidence and new ways to approach the every day challenges of parenthood. R. looks forward to the 'special quality time' with each of her daughters. N. realises that she is not the only one to have been through the "desperations of motherhood" and is developing new responses to the demands of her young children. Each of them appreciates their new supportive friendships within the group, which is a motivating force to continue and reach out to other local families feeling alone whilst raising their children.

During the course the group put together a paper called *Community Vision* and presented it to two local councilors who responded positively. As a result of this, there has been an increase in Parks Police and in community education offered locally. The group knows that they can really make a difference!

The graduation day on May 21st was a great occasion for the group, their families and friends. We were very fortunate to have the Mayor of Hammersmith & Fulham, Cllr Charlie Trellogan presenting their certificates. Cllr Reg McLaughlin was invited to give the keynote speech, because he had met the group previously to discuss the *Community Vision*. He spoke of the achievements of the group and recognised the immense value of the course in empowering parents.

Building on this success, the group meets weekly, with two prime objectives - to continue with learning opportunities, assisting with both their personal development and in their role as parents; and to recruit



other families in need of support, reducing isolation. Plans for a programme of Health Workshops, and a community participation course are well underway. They will be applying to various trusts and charities to expand their work.

The group is being launched at the Family Pathfinder Funday on Saturday 31st July, from 12pm-4pm at the Old Oak Centre, 76 Braybrook St, W12 0AP. You are all very welcome to come and join the fun!



South Asian Mothers Parenting Skills in Inner-City Bristol

Awaz Utaoh, a Bristol based agency working with South Asian Communities, recount their experiences of delivering SFSC for the first time. Their programme came about as the result of an REU Parenting Fund project which aimed to develop the capacity of agencies within Bristol to provide group based parent support programmes.

Poor housing and jobs, increasing crime and some of the lowest achieving youths in British society today. This is the picture for many South Asian communities that have experienced deprivation in the UK. In inner-city Bristol, our project identified one of the concerns of the South Asian community as the family and how to ensure our children are happy and successful.

The parenting skills project is one of several projects administered by Awaz Utaoh, a small black minority ethnic community safety voluntary organisation located in inner-city Bristol.

Six months ago, what did parenting skills mean? More importantly, what did they mean to our South Asian mothers? They didn't mean anything, until we began our workshops supported by the REU, which have been so successful that we have been taken by surprise. Every week, between 18- 20 South Asian mums attended, which wasn't the only surprise. The astonishing outcome was that they all completed their coursework; those involved in grass-roots community work will agree; what a result!

The REU parenting skills manual was almost God sent; it guided trained local tutors through tackling the most difficult of topics.



and old alike, identifying their shortcomings and anxious to develop their parental relationships.

Our approaches in delivering these workshops were unique. Along with activities we provided a culturally appropriate environment with language support, and made the parenting skills course enjoyable as well as

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The workshops led to some interesting discussions on issues such as pressures on parents to ensure the academic achievements of their children; and the inequality of parenting support in families where boys are given priorities over girls.

Throughout our workshops many mothers shed tears and reflected on the impact their own actions may have had on the behaviour of their children. A striking incident within one of the workshops that remains in the hearts of those who were present, was of a mother who felt that by parenting her child in the way she had been parented may have inadvertently contributed to her son's drug addiction and criminal activity. It was not until the end of the course that she stated that:

"If I knew what I know now, I would have brought my son up differently and maybe he wouldn't be a drug addict."

It was heart warming to see South Asian mums, young

accessible to the most isolated South Asian communities. We acknowledge that indicating to a parent that they may need some help and support can be taken as deeply offensive, it is for this reason that our track record within the community has helped the success of this programme.

The result has been that we have begun to give priority to the needs of our future society and the needs of our local youth. To ensure that the parents of today have the appropriate skills to lay the foundations that develop their children as individuals who contribute positively to their communities. No doubt, demand for this programme has blossomed throughout the country and here in inner-city Bristol, we look forward to building on this success.

For more information contact: Awaz Utaoh Ltd, 404 Stapleton Rd, Eastville, Bristol. BS5 6NQ. Phone 0117 935 45 28

Adolfo Gaspar Alvarez writes about his experience as a father participating in an SFSC programme delivered at Body and Soul, a project supporting families living with HIV/AIDS.

I want to share with you my experiences of living with HIV/AIDS and how this affects my family. My name is Adolfo, I am a 42 year old Spanish man. English is not my first language and I have been living in central London for several years.

I get vital peer support from a charity called Body and Soul. I have attended Body and Soul's Family Support group every week since 1998. I am currently volunteering there with the computers, building my confidence and strength as I just started back on anti HIV medication having been given an AIDS diagnosis.

After another volunteer in the children's centre trained to be a facilitator on the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* facilitators course, we started an SFSC parenting programme at Body and Soul in March 2004. I really bonded well with the REU trained facilitator Maria, as we shared a lot in common with our childhoods.

My heart aches as I really miss my 11 year old son, who I have not seen for the last 6 years as he lives with his maternal grandparents in Spain. I have also just ended a long term relationship where I helped bring up my partner's daughter and will continue to support her educationally. So

my experience of parenting is done over long distance phone calls. I felt that doing this course would prepare me to be reunited with my son and I want him to visit me in London during the summer holidays.

To be honest, for me the course was quite difficult as I was the only man among ten women, but with time I felt comfortable. We had big discussions, followed a manual and invited inspirational speakers from outreach mentoring projects.

Despite the isolation I feel living with the secret of HIV my extended family have learnt to be very supportive. I am very close to my mother – we are honest and I trust her, which has brought us closer together as an adult that when I was a child.

I would like to spend more time with my son, who is doing very well in school. I want to encourage him to trust, have confidence, love himself, respect people, to prepare him to accept his father and that it is never too late to strengthen families through hope. I will be ready to disclose my HIV status to him when we can be honest with each other. Thanks to SFSC for assisting me and equipping me with skills on the journey to make this dream more possible.

SFSC at Wai Yin

Mei Yuk Wong, Parenting Project Co-ordinator from Wai Yin Chinese Women Society writes about the SFSC programme that she has been delivering in Manchester with a group of Chinese parents. This programme is the first in the country to run with an all Chinese group and has been doing so extremely successfully.

I attended the SFSC Facilitator's Training last November and my colleague, Chi Kin Wong finished the training in Feb this year. He was recruited especially for delivering the programme with me. We started to deliver the programme to our members at Wai Yin Chinese Womens Society from May and are the first Chinese community project to use this programme. We had eleven people enrol on the programme originally, and ten parents are still in the group. Two of them



are fathers (who are usually very hard to recruit), and most of them are first or second generation immigrants that are either from Hong Kong or China. The participants have one to three children from two and a half to over 16 years old.

We are now in the middle of the programme and can see from the high attendance of the group that the parents are very eager to improve their relationships with their children. They want to learn as much as possible for their family. For most of them, attending a parenting course is a new experience. After learning some new skills and attempting to utilise them, the participants discuss how the tips work. I am sure it is not only their children that have improved but they themselves as parents. We can see joy among their faces. Some parents may have a more difficult or critical situation, but the important thing is that they do not give up their children; that they find all possible ways and resources to 'save' their children and try to support them to have a better future.

Whether the parents are out spoken or not, they have all shown their participation within the group and this is a really positive outcome of our project. In fact, there are a number of parents who are potential facilitators for our community, and we are hoping that they will lead their own parent support group and set good modelling for the next SFSC group to continue this legacy.

This is the first time that Chi Kin and I have delivered the programme. We find it a new challenge that requires very good co-working, understanding and communication. We really want to send a big thank you to Rehana from REU who has given us tremendous support and advice in the preparation and delivery of SFSC.

This is our experience: when parents learn, we learn, when parents grow, their children grow.

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.

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)