

# Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder Evaluation

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Background*

The well-being of children in the UK is being compromised with large numbers of children experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. This is a significant issue for society since the long term consequences of these problems include impaired educational development, later adult mental health problems, early entry into crime and high social and financial costs. Since parents are fundamental to their children's development there has been considerable interest in the development of programmes that support the parent role including those that are intended to enhance the understanding and skills of parents through direct training. There is now considerable evidence to suggest that such programmes do have benefits in improving antisocial behaviour in children and the psychological and social functioning of parents. However there is a need to examine the effectiveness of such programmes in the real world as opposed to optimal conditions and also to provide evidence for the use of non-UK programmes in this country.

This report presents the evidence of the evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder (PEIP). The PEIP was a DCSF funded programme over the period September 2006 – March 2008 at a cost of £7.6 million in DCSF grant payments to LAs. PEIP funded 18 local authorities (LAs) to implement one of three selected parenting programmes with parents of children aged 8 – 13 years: Incredible Years, Triple P and Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities, selected as having a sound evidence base for their effectiveness. The main aim of the study was to explore the roll out of these three programmes on a large scale across a substantial number of LAs: to examine parent and child outcomes, cost-effectiveness and the processes that optimise (or impair) the delivery of parenting programmes.

This is the final report of the evaluation; details of interim reports are provided at the end of the Executive Summary. It provides an overview of the whole study but focuses mainly on two strands: the outcome data on the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of PEIP and the process data exploring how and why the PEIP has achieved the results that it has. Three interim reports provide fuller information on earlier phases of the study.

## **Main Findings**

- The Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder has been successful in rolling out three evidence-based parenting programmes across 18 LAs with high levels of positive gains for parents and their children.
- The PEIP increased the pool of trained facilitators: approximately 1100 additional trained staff.
- PEIP provided parenting training for 3575 parents on 425 courses of which 338 courses finished by the end of the PEIP and 87 were continuing.
- Parental course completion rate was good and similar across programmes: 73% of parents overall.
- The training was very successful as measured by improvements in the parents' mental well-being, their parenting skills, their sense of being a parent, and also in the behaviour of the child about whom they were concerned.
- The three programmes produced comparable outcomes on all measures of improvement.
- Cost effectiveness varied greatly between LAs using the same programme indicating the importance of local policy and organisational factors.
- Cost effectiveness also varied between the three programmes: the average cost per parent completing was £2955, with Incredible Years courses being the most costly.

## **Detailed findings**

### ***General Outcome***

- There was universal enthusiasm for the project from all groups involved in terms of the success of the roll out and the outcomes.
- The outcome measures suggest that the programmes had very positive effects on the parents' mental well-being; their perceptions of themselves as a parent and their parenting skills; and their perceptions of their children's behaviour.

### ***Programme Differences***

- Although the three programmes all include a focus on parenting, based upon social learning theory, they differ in:
  - length of sessions;
  - length of courses;
  - intensity of focus on parenting;

- their specific training methods;
  - the style of training;
  - additional issues included (e.g. culture, violence, parental mental health problems and relationship difficulties);
  - and the system context; only Triple P specify an integrated intervention system.
- All three programmes provided similar facilitator training programmes and specified supervision and accreditation procedures, with the Incredible Years being the most elaborate.
  - All programmes have considered or are in the process of considering the extent to which their training meets the National Occupational Standards for work with parents.

### ***Management of Roll-out***

- Although DSCF were perceived as supportive and helpful, the set up timescales were seen as unrealistic and not allowing enough time for the complex organisational task.
- There were wide variations in how long it took local authorities to be in a position to run their first groups and in a small number of LAs very few had finished by the time the project ended. Delays resulted from the recruitment and training of facilitators, setting up the infrastructure, and identifying and recruiting parents. Implementation was particularly delayed in areas that did not already have established systems and an existing pool of facilitators. In addition some LAs extended the training of facilitators, so delaying implementation.
- The Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder was successful in rolling out these three programmes (Triple P, Incredible Years and Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities) on a large scale, across 18 local authorities with comparable benefits from each programme.
- The scale and complexity of the roll out resulted in a number of operational challenges including:
  - the realisation that setting up was a longer process than expected;
  - the limiting effects of the short timescale of the pilot;
  - the need fully to engage managers of facilitators drawn from local authority departments;
  - the late recognition that coordination was crucial and the importance of setting up the coordinator/operational lead role as quickly as possible;
  - difficulties associated with arranging training for facilitators;

- and supervision issues.
- A problem particular to the Incredible Years sites was the decision to put together a course specifically for the PEIP in order to meet the needs of the age group (8-13 years) and likely problems to be encountered. Changes to the course, DVD material, manuals and handouts caused some concern, increased the length of the course and delayed facilitator training.
- However, this particular issue amongst others illustrated the need, emphasised by the programme leads, for consultation between programme leads and central and local government before beginning the project, in order to ensure a clear understanding of what implementation involved and to avoid unrealistic expectations (e.g. of time-scales, training and supervision issues and numbers to be trained).

### ***Facilitators***

- Each programme managed to train a reasonable number of facilitators with by far the most training done by Triple P whose facilitators had frequently trained on a number of different intervention levels, formats and groups. Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities trained 356 facilitators; Incredible Years trained approximately 300; Triple P trained 430.
- Facilitators were recruited from a wide range of professional backgrounds across all sectors. However, a number of areas successfully included parents without relevant qualifications, and in one Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities and one Triple P local authority parents were highly valued as facilitators.
- Facilitators were in general very positive about all three programmes, including the quality and relevance of the training they received, the processes of co-facilitation, and the outcomes.
- Issues raised by facilitators and operational leads as problematic included:
  - the amount of work involved in preparing facilitator materials;
  - the amount of training involved beyond the initial training;
  - accessing training quickly since in the case of Triple P it involved trainers from Australia;
  - keeping facilitators' motivation going when their day jobs crowded in on their time;
  - the amount of time facilitators need to plan their programme;
  - that facilitators were put forward without sufficient consideration given to whether they were the best candidates to deliver the programme;

- and that facilitators had insufficient information in advance about what would be involved in the role.
- Although most local authorities were satisfied with the numbers of facilitators recruited and trained and the way in which this was done, none expected to have the capacity to train significant numbers of new facilitators following the end of the PEIP programme. Most facilitators were expected to remain in post, yet there were concerns in some authorities about not having enough to continue, because of high demand for courses, managers' reluctance to release workers from their usual roles, and loss of staff through natural wastage.

### ***Facilitator Supervision***

- The majority of facilitators were satisfied with the level of support provided.
  - All local authorities using the Incredible Years programme had regular supervision from accredited mentors with additional supervision from local sources.
  - The situation was more varied for SFSC and Triple P in quality, level and type.
  - This included peer supervision, which was seen as of varying usefulness and effectiveness, supervision from line managers, which was mostly doubted in value because of their lack of specialist expertise and support from programme leads, which was usually valued.
  - However, some facilitators had received no one-to-one support and had difficulties accessing supervision at all.
  - Supervision frequency was higher in Incredible Years than the other programmes, but there were questions about whether there were the resources to maintain it at this level.
- Supervision was less of an issue for operational leads, although they had concerns about its unusual time requirement, not being equipped to deal with the issues arising themselves and the need for supervision crossing professional boundaries.

### ***Parent Recruitment and Course Allocation***

- Parent recruitment methods were diverse:
  - through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS )only;
  - self-referral advertised through road shows, local press, schools, libraries, various centres and web sites;
  - courts and professionals throughout the agencies.

- There appeared to be two major methods of deciding whether a parenting course was appropriate, either by frontline workers, who in some cases were given training to do this, or by the use of a central coordinator. It was unclear however to what extent parents were involved in this decision making, but the process of matching was in some cases linked to the Common Assessment Framework.

### ***Parenting Courses and Participants***

- The number of parenting courses completed by the end of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2008 was 338: Incredible Years ran 70; Triple P: 185; SFSC: 83; in addition 87 courses were still underway: Incredible Years (6), Triple P (45), SFSC (36).
- The number of parents who started was 3575 overall: Incredible Years 721; Triple P: 1418, SFSC: 1436.
- Differences in numbers of parenting groups and numbers of parents trained reflected the different programmes but there were also local variations including in particular LAs, for example, substantial delays in starting the PEIP and a decision to add extra training for the facilitators to improve their preparation.
- Differences in numbers of groups conducted during the PEIP using the different programmes also reflected the different number of sessions required to deliver each programme.
- The completion rate overall was 73% and very similar for each of the programmes: 72% Incredible Years, 70% Triple P and 76% SFSC..
- Recruitment of fathers was low (12% of the participants were male) and only two groups had been run specifically for fathers. All local authorities were aware of this as a problem and related it to: timing of courses, “parent” seen as meaning “mother”, the lack of male facilitators and suitable venues.
- Otherwise programmes were targeted appropriately. At the start of the parenting courses:
  - parental mental well-being was significantly lower than expected from norms;
  - the majority of the children were judged by their parents attending the courses to show very high levels of emotional and behavioural problems (62% classified in the clinical range on the SDQ compared to the national expectation of 10%);
  - the majority of parents had not continued their education beyond 16 years and earned less than £200 per week, although recruitment was from the whole socioeconomic range;

- courses had been accessed by a wide range of minority ethnic groups who comprised 23.9% of the total (76.1% were White British).
- the mean age of the children was 9.2 years with 64% in the target 8-13 year age band, although the range was 1 to 18 years;
- two-third were boys and 17.7% of the children overall had statements of special educational needs, about six times higher than the population as a whole.

### ***Programme Fidelity***

- In general there was clear awareness of the need to maintain programme fidelity amongst facilitators. Changes were made to courses, but mostly within the guidelines.
- Facilitator satisfaction with materials was generally high, although there were criticisms of American English, predominance of Australian culture shown, wordiness and complexity of language, and high literacy demands.
- Literacy challenge was generally addressed by facilitators adapting their language as necessary, adapting transparencies and other written materials and providing help with literacy. As a consequence these were not major issues as far as parents were concerned.
- Courses were tailored to some extent in terms of time:
  - For Incredible Years this involved lengthening some topics as allowed in the guidelines, but cutting others.
  - For Triple P and SFSC, there were difficulties fitting the content into the time available and sessions were for example lengthened by facilitators being available before and after sessions, and contacting parents if they missed sessions.
  - There were some problems with telephone contacts and at least one Triple P facilitator replaced them with face-to-face sessions.
  - Rites of passage as a topic was often cited as problematic in Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities; as a result the emphasis given to it was reduced or it was omitted.
  - The response to role play varied in parents, and was associated with both increased and decreased use by some facilitators.

### **Course Outcomes**

- All courses were effective in improving parental mental well-being, parenting behaviour, parental efficacy and satisfaction as measured by self-report, with moderate to large effect sizes on all 7 measures.
- The parenting courses were effective in producing statistically highly significant improvements in the parents' perceptions of the emotional and behavioural functioning of the children on all scales of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire with effect sizes in the small to moderate range.
- The percentage of children rated in the clinical range on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Total Difficulties score reduced from 58% to 33%.
- In spite of the differences in the characteristics of the three programmes, they were all equally effective in terms of the majority of outcomes.
- Changes the parents reported included being calmer with their children, more confident in parenting, and giving more time to talking and listening to their children. They thought their relationship with their children had improved, as well as their behaviour, well-being, self-esteem and interest in school, although this was not universally the case.
- Parents overall were extremely favourable in their evaluation of all three programmes; they valued the content, the group experience, the qualities of and relationship built up with the facilitators and the practicality of child care, refreshments and transport. Some parents, however, suggested that their course was too short and too intense.
- Since social support and community building is such an important issue, the extent to which parents continued to meet after their course was explored. Although three local authorities had encouraged and enabled this (e.g. by providing rooms in schools) and it was apparent that some parents might have formed lasting friendships, operational leads were generally unclear about the extent to which this happened.

### **Cost effectiveness**

- The average cost of a PEIP parenting group was £17961. The average cost of an Incredible Years group was comparatively high reflecting the small number of such groups held during the PEIP;
- The average cost of engaging a parent on a PEIP course was £2135 while the cost per parent completing a course was £2955 because drop out increased the unit cost. The cost per parent who completed an Incredible Years course was high compared

with the other two programme types, reflecting the comparatively small number of groups delivered;

- Differences in cost effectiveness within programme types (i.e. between LAs using the same programme) were equally as large as differences between each programme type. This intra-programme variation was related to differences in the number of groups delivered and the size of those groups, differences that were more likely to be associated with the effectiveness of the team delivering a programme (management, prior experience etc.) and the social context within which they sought to deliver PEIP (the level of need within the LA) rather than with differences in the content of programme itself.
- Some intra-programme differences were due to local context (e.g. the number of previously trained facilitators) and/or local policy decisions (e.g. to provide additional training for facilitators).
- Inter-programme variation was related to the number of sessions needed to run each programme and the consequent practical effect of organising groups during the period of the PEIP.
- The estimated cost-effectiveness of PEIP was less (that is the costs relative to outputs was higher) than estimates of earlier studies but it is likely that such earlier studies only consider incremental or marginal cost and did not take account of the full costs of providing parenting programmes.

### ***Extended Schools***

- In terms of the extended schools agenda, although there was variability, some schools were very positive about parenting programmes and were involved in the identification of families, the provision of premises and staff as facilitators. Non-teaching staff such as PSAs and learning mentors were seen as particularly useful in recruiting and engaging parents
- Facilitators saw considerable gains for schools, children and families from working in schools, but this depended upon the welcoming and helpful attitudes of relevant staff. Barriers were practical (e.g. inappropriate space allocation, school shut down in holidays, Ofsted inspections) and attitudinal (e.g. tensions between educating children vs. parents and standards vs. inclusion).

### ***The Future***

- Most authorities will continue to work with their allocated PEIP programme, but with the addition of a range of other programmes, in order to take account of different levels of need.
- A major concern was with sustainability once the DCSF funding came to an end.
- The PEIP programme seems to have been an important ingredient in the development/revision of local authorities' Parenting Strategy, presumably because of its being one of the most important developments in this area.
- In terms of continuation of the PEIP programme once it came to an end, a third of the local authorities were not fully decided, but the majority intended to use a core team, perhaps with additions. They were going to do this with a combination of approaches including: facilitation by PEIP trained people within their existing roles; using the voluntary sector; within the extended schools services or children's centres; and via a core team of parent support staff.

### **Main recommendations**

- Systematic parenting support should be rolled out across the UK.
- In terms of *outcomes* for this particular group (i.e. 8-13 year olds likely to be antisocial) any of the three programmes used in the project may be selected as they show comparable effectiveness.

### ***Specific recommendations***

- Local Authorities should also consider the *cost effectiveness* of the programmes as the present study indicates that these vary, with Incredible Years the most expensive.
- LAs should also recognise that a substantial element of the cost effectiveness of the delivery of *any* programme is within their control: this concerns issues of organisation, planning and implementation.
- Given the multiple differences between the three programmes yet the same outcomes, it follows that other home grown courses might be equally effective, and priority should be given to the search for and evaluation of alternatives.
- Extended schools have the potential to play an important role in the delivery of parenting support including parenting programmes.
- The search for alternatives should focus on support that is based upon broader and more explicit models of parenting than are available currently and evaluative research should be concerned to explore process as much as outcome.

- The notion of fidelity which is considered so important by programme leads might need serious thought given the fact that similar outcomes are produced by very different programmes.
- Local authorities should know that rolling out such programmes is time consuming and complex; they should therefore include in their plans: consultation with programme developers at the earliest opportunity; a designated local and knowledgeable programme coordinator; and engagement and training of the managers of staff recruited as facilitators.
- Recruitment of facilitators is crucial and needs to be done carefully, yet more attention needs to be given to making selection criteria appropriate and explicit. Since parents can be effective, research is needed to explore the personal qualities and interpersonal skills needed to be effective as a facilitator and not just to base this on previous experience and qualifications.
- Facilitator training requires time and care and should involve clear and detailed accreditation procedures.
- Knowledge of parenting and how to support this should be embedded in all parts of children's services and it is suggested that this would be helped by facilitators being recruited from and working within all service areas.
- Facilitators should be given the time and resources to run parenting courses and this should always include ongoing and regular supervision from people who have the knowledge and training to provide it.
- Parents should be recruited for parenting programmes by all means possible, not through single services. Decisions should be made in partnership with parents, preferably by practitioners with whom they already have a relationship and who they trust.
- All personnel should be trained to identify families with problems, to engage them, and to provide first level support, and to decide intervention requirements in partnership with them.
- The provision of parenting courses should be appropriate to the developmental stage and needs of children and families and set within an elaborate and coordinated system of care in which there are a range of support options and not just parenting courses.
- Particular attention should be given to involving and recruiting fathers onto support programmes, taking into account a growing knowledge of how this should be done.

- Care should be taken to engage and retain families once recruited onto courses. Funded crèche provision is essential to this and on-going contact with parents between sessions where necessary, as well as transport facilities and refreshments.
- Explicit attention should be given to the building of social support and community building with systematic policy put in place to aid the continued mutual support of groups once formal courses have come to an end.
- Systems for maintaining the benefits of parenting programmes beyond the period of the courses should be developed.

### **Previous Reports**

Lindsay, G., Band, S., Cullen, M.A., & Cullen, S. (2007). *Parent early intervention pathfinder 1st interim report*. Coventry: University of Warwick, CEDAR. (14pp).

Lindsay, G., Band, S., Cullen, M.A., & Cullen, S. (2007). *Evaluation of the parent early intervention pathfinder 2nd Interim report*. DCSF-RW035. London: DCSF. (59pp). <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW035.pdf>

Lindsay, G., Band, S., Cullen, M.A., & Cullen, S. (2007). *Evaluation of the parent early intervention pathfinder: Additional study of the involvement of extended schools* DCSF-RW035. (50pp). London: DCSF. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW036.pdf>