

COMMUNITY FAMILIES

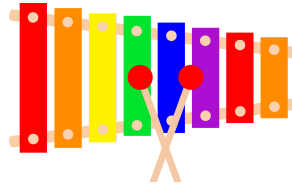


Interim Evaluation
December 2019
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“It takes a village to raise a child”

AFRICAN PROVERB



Community Families (CF) is an innovative program which combines creative activities with pastoral care to support families with under-fives and aims to embed sustainable, self-governing peer-to-peer networks in some the most deprived wards in North Westminster. This independent evaluation assesses the six target outcomes to cover the second year of a four-year program.



of parents said the drop-in enhanced their bonding with their baby/child



of parents felt like the drop-in had a positive impact on their child's wellbeing and self-confidence

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IT SUCCESSFULLY REACHES AND CONNECTS VULNERABLE FAMILIES

The warm, welcoming, inclusive drop-ins foster a strong sense of belonging. They connect excluded and vulnerable parents to their local community, including fathers and parents of twins. This enables them to nurture new friendships across a diverse peer group, significantly reducing their sense of isolation. Parents have set up their own WhatsApp group - continuing the connections beyond sessions.

IT HELPS PARENTS TACKLE CHALLENGES, IMPROVING LIFE CHANCES

Social, musical and school ready skills were developed through these sessions. Parents have become more resilient by acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to help them cope with pressures at home. Local adults' life chances have been improved through recruitment, training and upskilling via the Champions program. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are also able to develop skills for school, which may help their educational attainment.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MONITORING TOOLS

The monitoring tools are capturing certain data well which supports qualitative findings but some areas of improvement have been identified.

IT IMPROVES PARENT'S MENTAL WELLBEING, SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ATTACHMENT WITH THEIR CHILD

Parents are able to learn, connect, be active, give, take notice and nurture their child which are all identifiable factors of improving Mental Wellbeing (Wheel of Wellbeing). The clear information, non-judgemental atmosphere and care of the Maternity Champions (MCs), who even continue to support the most vulnerable mothers outside the session also helps to strengthen self-confidence.

PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Communication, language, physicality, focus, listening, social and music-related skills were developed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the more often and regular the visits, the greater the potential benefits.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MULTIPLE ACTIVITIES

The synergy of Maternity champions and artist practices delivers the outcomes extremely effectively. The talent, skills and musical expertise work in tandem with the individualised care, personal attention and champion's skilled support and are equally beneficial for parents

CHALLENGES

- Encouraging parents to take ownership and lead on the project remains a challenge due to their time pressures.
- Some groups like mobile communities, young parents and certain cultural backgrounds continue to be 'hard to reach'.
- There is room to grow socio-economic diversity. The sessions tend to attract a core group of middle-class parents, which may be deterring more vulnerable families joining.
- Without long term provision and strategy, positive impacts may not be sustainable as many parents face continued challenges of financial hardship and societal inequalities due to race or class.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reviewing the current artistic model to identify possible barriers to engagement, with a view to increasing the socio-economic and cultural diversity.
- Expand arts activities and locations: number of sessions, locations in the Harrow Road & Westbourne areas, more options for creative activities.
- Discrete sessions for fathers and for younger parents.
- Additional professional development for artists (reflective practices) and maternity champions (training in delivering creative/other activities).
- Further research into other peer governing strategies which may involve but not depend on parents leading it.
- Access research funding which can support longitudinal research and an interdisciplinary evidence base to support the positive impacts around Mental Wellbeing, Health and Life Chances with a view to replicating this model.
- Review the internal monitoring and evaluation questionnaires, including scoring.
- Aim for 380 surveys across the four years to increase data reliability.
- Research methods to collect socio-economic indicators.
- Ensure anonymity and framing the questionnaire for the participants.

CONCLUSION

Community Families is proving to be an invaluable program, filling a gap in children's services which faced severe cuts from austerity measures a few years ago. At the time of writing, loneliness and isolation are social epidemics. This program has removed barriers for parents from all backgrounds to meet, connect and build a strong community family. At a time where educational and social inequality is also on the rise, this program champions a model which helps parents tackle everyday challenges and has the potential to counteract many of the negative factors which restrict the life chances of our most disadvantaged communities.

"Many don't have family here in the UK. These sessions are the only time they get to be a part of the community. If it wasn't for the group they would have nowhere else to go meet other parent, share, feel comfortable, and play with their child"

JULIE ISSAC, MUSICIAN

"We don't have a child minder or any other siblings so I see him communicating with others and I don't see that anywhere else. I think that has improved over the time here, he is less hesitant"

MOTHER

"A Champion is a listening ear to help get things off the parents' chest and can link them to services and support that they might be able to get. I think all this really benefits their mental wellbeing."

MARIAM HASSAN
(FORMER) MATERNITY CHAMPIONS PROJECT LEADER

Our survey showed that parents:

