



Reaching out to families

An impact evaluation of Families Going Forward
training course for outreach practitioners

Executive summary

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“Self-reflection is a very important part of the course. I think more about how I leave families and how I follow up with them. I think more about working in partnership with them, and empowering families. I think differently about success. I feel I’m acting more professional, whereas previously I was more relaxed about that sort of thing. Now, I’m behaving more professional and being recognised as such.”

Volunteer outreach practitioner, urban children’s centre, a month after completing Families Going Forward training course

The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC), working with partners, developed a bespoke training course to meet the development needs of outreach practitioners, based in or linked to Sure Start children’s centres.

The training course, called Families Going Forward, was designed to enhance and develop the skills and capacity of outreach practitioners in delivering an effective and comprehensive outreach service to all families and communities, including disadvantaged families. The training course was based on an accredited unit from the Work with Parents Level 3 qualification, Build and Maintain Relationships in Work with Parents. The training was funded by the Department for Education between April 2010 and March 2011, and more than 1200 outreach practitioners accessed this training.

CWDC commissioned Cordis Bright to evaluate the impact on outreach practitioners’ behaviours and practice as a result of the training. The evaluation ran concurrently with the delivery of the training programme. As a result, CWDC sought to evaluate the intermediate impacts on children’s centre outreach practitioners’ behaviours and practice as a result of this training based on evidence about what makes a difference to children and families.

The evaluation aimed to address the following high level indicators:

- How practitioners’ behaviour and practice have changed generally as a result of the training.
- How practitioners’ behaviours and practice have changed specifically in relation to outreach principles and standards
- The extent to which the environment in which the children’s centre outreach practitioner works with families contributes to the sustaining of positive change to behaviour and practice.

This final report sets out the results of the mixed method intermediate impact evaluation. The final report was able to meaningfully explore impacts from practitioners' participation in Families Going Forward for different populations and so also offers some potentially useful information for programme design and development.

Key findings

Motivations and expectations in undertaking the training

1. Most staff accessing the Families Going Forward training appear motivated by the desire to improve their understanding of their role as an outreach practitioner and to improve ways of working with families.
2. For more than one in five outreach practitioners, a primary motivator for accessing the training was that the training offer related specifically to children's centre outreach.
3. For close to one in ten practitioners, the primary motivator for accessing the training is because their manager requested this.
4. For just over one in twenty practitioners, the offer of accreditation for existing knowledge, understanding and skills was the primary motivator for accessing the training.

Intermediate impacts on outreach practice and behaviour following completion of Families Going Forward

Practitioners derived significant benefit from participating in Families Going Forward according to the results of the post-training evaluation.

1. Every participant at the Families Going Forward training could identify likely positive impacts on their outreach practice and behaviour as a result of the training. This is an excellent outcome and suggests that the Families Going Forward training offers the potential of contributing to improvements to children's centre outreach practice and behaviour.
2. The areas practitioners identified as potentially having the greatest positive impact were in relation to an increase in their:
 - Confidence about reflecting on their own efforts in engaging with families to improve their practice.

- Confidence that the skills and knowledge they have developed will help families to move forward.
 - Belief that they have developed skills and knowledge of how to provide support to families.
 - Confidence about how to work alongside families, including vulnerable families.
 - Confidence that they will have good relationships with families.
 - Confidence about what support they can provide to families.
 - Clarity about what support they can provide to families.
 - Belief they will see more positive changes in the families they work with.
 - Clarity about what their role is within the children's centre.
3. Most practitioners felt much more confident about working alongside families and believed they would undertake more reflective practice. Moreover, more than four in five practitioners were likely to be more satisfied in their roles and thought they would see more positive change in the families they work with.
4. Most employers validate the practitioners' perspectives about improved outreach practice and behaviour. Most employers also recognise the contribution of Families Going Forward in supporting these improvements.
5. Over 90 per cent of learners chose to seek accreditation for their learning.

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) supports local areas to drive sector-led improvements so the millions of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children, young people and families' workforce to be respected and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We work in partnership with lots of different organisations, support workers and employers who want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

For more information please call 0300 123 1033
or visit www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Or write to CWDC, 2nd Floor, City Exchange
11 Albion Street, Leeds LS1 5ES
email info@cwdcouncil.org.uk

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