



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund

Learning from the second phase of delivery

November 2021

RPC Challenge Fund: Learning from the second phase of delivery

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Executive summary

In 2018, Ecorys, in partnership with Family Lives, was commissioned to manage the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Challenge Fund. The primary aim of the fund was to gather learning on what works to reduce parental conflict. Ten organisations received grants to deliver interventions between April 2019 and March 2020, across two streams of work: projects providing support to particular cohorts of disadvantaged families (Support for Disadvantaged Families, or SDF, projects); and projects developing new ways to digitally engage families in conflict (Digital Support projects). From 1 April 2020, six organisations were invited to continue delivery for a further nine months to 31 December 2020. This cohort included four SDF projects, one Digital Support project, and one project which straddled both strands of work. In total, DWP awarded £2.8 million in grants to the ten organisations across the two phases of delivery.

This report collates and analyses the learning gathered by funded organisations during this second phase of delivery. It also builds upon our '[Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund: Learning from the first phase of delivery](#)'¹ report, which examined learning from all ten organisations funded in the first year of delivery. Phase Two of the Challenge Fund launched as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in England, and the related Government restrictions meant that face-to-face delivery had to be suspended. This meant that all six projects had to move quickly to remote delivery. Throughout this report, we have attempted to highlight where changes and impact arose because of the pandemic or due to other influences.

Challenge Fund projects were tasked with developing projects to engage families where risk of parental conflict is exacerbated by disadvantages. Funded projects were asked to give particular focus to supporting low-income families, and a number of projects developed interventions aimed at engaging specific target groups such as those affected by substance misuse, those leaving prison, and those facing new parenthood. A number of projects also specifically targeted practitioners, offering training and capacity building to embed a focus on reducing parental conflict in other services. Although most projects did not intentionally change their target group in Phase Two, some shifts did occur. There was increased need for relationship support due to the stress induced by lockdown measures, which led to some demographic changes in target groups. Remote delivery also impacted; some projects were able to open up delivery to wider geographic areas, while one project shifted to target service users with lower complexity of need due to the limitations on addressing complex trauma remotely. Reach and engagement of families was challenged by digital exclusion, as well as a lack of privacy in the home, although new engagement mechanisms such as increased social media presence were supported by remote delivery. For those projects supporting practitioners, remote working meant that

¹ DWP, 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-parental-conflict-challenge-fund-learning-from-the-first-phase>

projects were largely able to engage more practitioners than before. However, the demand on other services while responding to crises caused by the pandemic meant that practitioners were less able to focus on embedding learning around parental conflict in their own services than intended. For the Digital Support projects, learning from Phase One informed approaches around targeted advertising, generating high volumes of engagement. However, direct referrals to the digital content from practitioners generated a greater level of engagement with the materials.

Phase Two saw some changes to delivery approaches for the six projects, which could be categorised in three ways: changes resulting in learning from Phase One; changes in delivery mechanisms due to Covid-19; and changes in delivery focus due to Covid-19. All projects were forced to move to remote delivery and adapt their resources for participants to suit this approach. For one, this meant a shift from face-to-face group work to one-to-one online therapy to support safeguarding. Another project, previously delivering a course over a number of group sessions, began offering single-topic workshops online. The new delivery mechanism meant this was feasible, where logistics would have prevented this previously. Meanwhile, another project adapted the content of their Digital Support intervention to reflect the additional pressures created by lockdown measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a test and learn programme, Challenge Fund projects have been encouraged to reflect on learning from their projects throughout. All projects have been evaluated and have gathered feedback from participants on an ongoing basis using a range of mechanisms including qualitative interviews and pre- and post- intervention assessments. Participant feedback in Phase Two suggested that projects were meeting their aims and that interventions were successful in improving awareness of the impact of parental conflict on children, as well as supporting parents to improve communication and reduce conflict in their relationships as coparents. Parents across the programme reported behaviour change in their relationships, which all amounted to better handling of situations which would have previously resulted in conflict. Families involved in the projects appreciated the non-judgemental nature of the interventions. This was particularly the case for those projects supporting families with more complex challenges. In such cases, families commonly preferred to engage by telephone rather than video call. The relative anonymity this afforded encouraged people to open up to project staff.

Across all stakeholder groups, including project staff, parents and external practitioners, there was increased understanding of parental conflict and the impact it can have on children; this latter point was reported as a key driver for behaviour change in a number of projects. The use of language to frame the conversation around conflict was vital; projects adapted their approach to avoid negative connotations and instead used positive terminology such as “improved communication”. A clear understanding of parental conflict (and the difference between conflict and domestic abuse) was particularly important in the context of developing strong and effective referral pathways – as in Phase One, these remained vital to successful engagement in Phase Two.

The projects have generated significant learning; not just in terms of what makes an effective approach to supporting parents with disadvantage to reduce conflict in their relationships, but also in terms of delivering support effectively online or remotely. Although these new delivery mechanisms presented a number of practical challenges, there were also some benefits including greater flexibility to respond to participants' availability, reduced travel time and costs, and wider geographic reach. Indeed, projects intend to retain some elements of their new delivery approaches in the future when face-to-face delivery is possible. However, it is clear that some families would benefit from face-to-face support, not least in cases of digital exclusion where remote delivery is a clear barrier to engagement. The Digital Support projects also generated clear learning around the types of content which affect behaviour change in the target families, and also around effective methods to engage parents digitally. The video content created has been an effective tool for engagement; however, both projects have generated useful learning around how such content can sit effectively in a wider pathway of support.

Over 300 families have been directly supported in the second phase of delivery of the Challenge Fund through participation in programmes, accessing support and contributing to product design processes. More than 500 professionals have received training and participated in learning events delivered by the initiatives. Digital Support projects have been accessed over 30,000 times. The Challenge Fund has met its objective to generate an evidence base on what works to support parents experiencing relationship conflict, and furthermore leaves a legacy of resources including online tools for parents, practitioner toolkits and guidance, and formats for programmes which could be rolled out more widely in the future.

1.0 Introduction

Ecorys, working in partnership with Family Lives, was commissioned to administer the Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions in 2018.

This report presents learning from Phase Two (1 April – 31 December 2020) of delivery of the Challenge Fund.

1.1 The need to reduce parental conflict

Parents play a critical role in giving children the experiences and skills they need to succeed. However, children who are exposed to parental conflict can suffer long-term harm. The [Improving lives: Helping workless families](#)² policy paper included analysis showing exposure to frequent, intense and poorly resolved parental conflict can affect children's:

- emotional and social development
- educational attainment
- later employability
- physical and mental health

Furthermore, the evidence review [What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children](#)³ demonstrated that children who are exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved parental conflict are at significant risk of experiencing poorer long term outcomes. Poor outcomes for children are damaging and costly, not only for individuals (children and parents) but also for the state, as extra support is needed through health care, education, social and employment services to mitigate these problems. Therefore, early intervention to improve the quality of the inter-parental relationship (whether parents are together or separated) has the potential to reduce cumulative costs across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Concerningly, parental conflict is relatively widespread; where a child lives with both parents in the same household, 12% of children have at least one parent who reports relationship distress. This is exacerbated for vulnerable families – for example, children living in workless families are twice as likely to experience parental conflict than in families where both parents are in work.

In response to these findings, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) allocated up to £39 million for the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Programme,

² DWP, 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-lives-helping-workless-families>

³ Early Intervention Foundation, 2016 <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/what-works-to-enhance-interparental-relationships-and-improve-outcomes-for-children>

which encourages local authorities across England to integrate services and approaches which address parental conflict into their local services for families.

The RPC Programme aims to:

- work closely with local authorities and their partners across England, to support them to integrate services and approaches to reduce parental conflict into their local services for families;
- fund training for frontline practitioners and strategic leaders in local areas;
- build an evidence base by testing eight face-to-face interventions to reduce parental conflict in four contract package areas across England;
- deliver a joint £6 million package of support, developed with the Department for health and Social Care and Public Health England, to improve the outcomes of children of alcohol-dependant parents;
- work closely with the Early Intervention Foundation to build and share the evidence base.

1.2 The Challenge Fund

The Challenge Fund sits within the wider RPC Programme, and aims to fund innovative projects to gather learning on what works to reduce parental conflict in two streams of work: projects providing support to particular cohorts of disadvantaged families (referred to in this report as Support for Disadvantaged Families, or SDF, projects); and projects developing new ways to digitally engage families in conflict (referred to as Digital Support projects). Both streams aimed to build the evidence base by gathering learning where:

- there are currently no firm answers;
- parents are living in the same household or living separately; and
- conflict is below the threshold of domestic abuse.

The ten organisations had 12 months to deliver their projects and a further three months to collate all learning and complete evaluation activity. This is referred to as Phase One of the Challenge Fund.

In March 2020 six of the Challenge Fund projects were invited to continue delivery for a further nine months (up to 31 December 2020), referred to throughout this report as Phase Two of the Challenge Fund.

In total DWP awarded £2.8 million in grants to the ten organisations.

1.2.1 About the Phase Two projects

In Phase Two, four SDF projects were awarded continuation funding, along with one purely digital project and one project which straddled both strands of the Challenge Fund. Table 1 provides an overview of the projects which were funded.

Table 1: Phase Two Challenge Fund projects

<p>Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (SDF)</p>
<p>The Anna Freud Centre aimed to adapt, deliver, and evaluate ‘Family Ties’, a ‘Multi-Family Group’ intervention aimed at reducing the impact of conflict on children that has proved successful in Europe, to test its success for families living in the UK.</p> <p>The project aimed to improve parents’ understanding of the impact of conflict on their children and reduce exposure and involvement of children in parental conflict.</p> <p>In Phase Two, project delivery was adapted to include remote/online support on a one-to-one basis for a wider target group because of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.</p>
<p>Good Things Foundation (Digital)</p>
<p>This project aimed to test what works in reaching disadvantaged families online.</p> <p>Good Things Foundation made use of its network of online centres to conduct user research and user testing with parents. Good Things Foundation collated extensive evidence on how best to engage low-income/workless parents from a wide range of backgrounds.</p> <p>A series of videos and other media were created to form the ‘See it Differently’ campaign. The campaign tested behaviour modelling training by including story-based content. User testing and feedback sessions with groups of parents happened alongside.</p> <p>In Phase Two, Good Things Foundation continued to develop the ‘See it Differently’ campaign, including the creation of new animated content and content for practitioners. In Phase Two some activities, particularly engagement with parents for product testing, were adapted in response to Covid-19.</p> <p>Good Things Foundation worked in partnership with OnePlusOne.</p>
<p>Oasis Project (SDF)</p>
<p>In Phase One, Oasis Project tested the effectiveness of the ‘Parents as Partners’ intervention for parents who have experienced drug and/or alcohol misuse. ‘Parents as Partners’ is an evidence-based, specialist intervention for couples, which aims to strengthen their relationship. Alongside this, the organisation developed the Fathers’ Service to learn how best to engage fathers in preparation for longer-term support. The Fathers’ Service provided therapeutic and parenting support to fathers to strengthen relationships and communication.</p> <p>Oasis Project did not continue delivery of ‘Parents as Partners’ into Phase Two, but continued the Father’s Service.</p> <p>The project also developed a network of frontline professions to share knowledge and best practice on the specific needs of fathers with substance misuse problems. This activity happened across Phase One and Phase Two.</p>

<p>OnePlusOne (SDF and digital)</p>
<p>OnePlusOne aimed to support parents making the transition to parenting by testing an adapted version of a parenting intervention ('Couple Care and Coping Programme') new to the UK online through the 'Baby Buddy' app and the 'Click Relationships' platform and named 'Me, You and Baby Too'.</p> <p>The project tested whether the combination of digital (universal support to parents) and targeted practitioner support was effective in supporting new parents to cope and communicate better, and whether delivering this intervention digitally improves outcomes for parents in the transition to parenthood.</p> <p>In Phase Two, OnePlusOne adapted the targeted practitioner support to be delivered online in response to Covid-19. The organisation also developed new content reflecting the additional pressures new parents faced under lockdown restrictions.</p>
<p>Relate (SDF)</p>
<p>This project was aimed at parent-couples where one of the parents is in prison and due for release or has been released from prison within the past twelve months.</p> <p>The initiative aims to reduce conflict between parents, improve family relationships and improve children's wellbeing and behaviour, while the released prisoner reintegrates into the community and family life.</p> <p>The project included face-to-face family assessments, co-parent counselling sessions and evaluation sessions. New referral routes and partnerships were established.</p> <p>In Phase Two Relate made a series of changes to their project to adapt to the challenges of working with pre- and post-release prisoners while Covid-19 lockdown restrictions were in place. This included some adaptations to their target groups as well as increased flexibility in the support offered to families.</p>
<p>South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLAM) (SDF)</p>
<p>'Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities' (EPEC) is a parenting programme combining peer-led parenting groups with training, organisational support, and supervision.</p> <p>The aim of this project was to develop a refined version of the 'EPEC' programme - 'Being a Parent Together' (BAP-T) - specifically focused on the needs of socially disadvantaged parents at risk of conflict.</p> <p>In Phase Two, programme content and delivery was adapted for online delivery, in response to Covid-19. The organisation also developed a series of 'bite-size' online workshops using content from the BAP-T full course.</p>

As the Challenge Fund has progressed and learning has emerged, we have categorised the SDF projects in two ways in order to support our analysis. Firstly - as

Table 2 shows - by creating typologies of the activities funded, and secondly, by type of target group, as shown in Table 3 (in chapter two of this report).

Table 2: Typologies of RPC activity (SDF strand)

Testing proven programmes which are new to the UK	Testing proven approaches with specific target groups	Adapting existing parenting programmes to focus on RPC
Anna Freud Centre	Oasis Project	SLAM
OnePlusOne	Relate	

1.3 Learning from the Challenge Fund

The ‘test and learn’ nature of the Challenge Fund has meant that gathering learning has been a key feature of the programme throughout. This process began at the launch of the Challenge Fund; grant recipients completed a theory of change for their interventions to focus attention on intended outcomes and impacts and the processes required to achieve them. They also completed a learning plan to determine how evidence for their projects could be gathered. At regular intervals throughout delivery, projects completed a learning report alongside their grant monitoring; these have been reviewed and assimilated into learning reports for DWP. Furthermore, at the end of each phase of delivery, projects were asked to complete a more in-depth learning report alongside their final monitoring reports to DWP.

Most projects also commissioned external evaluations, primarily from universities or independent consultants. The grant recipients who conducted internal evaluations are larger organisations with internal research departments and appropriate expertise in house. All utilised pre- and post- intervention assessments with participants, and for the most part evaluations comprised mixed-method approaches including reviews of data alongside primary research with stakeholders including intervention participants. For digital projects, analytics data proved important for tracking engagement and interaction. Evaluations looked at both process and outcomes and built on findings from Phase One evaluation work to assess distance travelled for project development and participant behaviour change. For example, one project conducted follow up interviews with a small number of research participants from the Phase One evaluation to track whether they continued to see any difference in their relationships.

Learning from the ten projects funded in Phase One was covered in our End of Phase One Learning Report. This End of Phase Two Learning Report focuses on the six projects who received further funding in Phase Two and presents an analysis of the learning that was generated during their second phase of delivery. It explores the characteristics of the target groups reached and engaged by the projects in chapter two. Chapter three focuses on the activities delivered. Chapter four assesses the effectiveness of the interventions, with an exploration of the particular challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the related shift to online delivery for all

projects and finally, our thematic experts Pamela Park and Katie Connolly provide their reflections on the emerging evidence from the Challenge Fund in chapter five.

2.0 Target groups

There are certain life events and disadvantages which are known to increase the risk of parental conflict, such as the transition to parenthood, work pressures, financial problems, health and wellbeing issues, and alcohol or substance misuse. As such, Challenge Fund projects were tasked with developing projects to engage families where risk of parental conflict is exacerbated by such disadvantages. Funded projects were asked to give particular focus to supporting low-income families. It is important to note that families experiencing ongoing domestic abuse sat outside the remit of both the Challenge Fund and the wider RPC Programme.

Tables 3 and 4 set out the characteristics of families targeted by the Challenge Fund projects in Phase Two across the SDF and digital strands of work. As Table 3 shows, a number of projects sought to engage practitioners and professionals in their projects as well as families, through the provision of training and professional development. This work aimed to embed approaches to reducing parental conflict in other support provision such as statutory services.

Table 3: Typologies of RPC target groups (SDF strand)

Target groups with specific characteristics or needs	Families at risk of conflict; lower-level intervention	Practitioners
Oasis Project (fathers, substance misuse)	Anna Freud Centre	Anna Freud Centre
Relate (prison-leavers)	SLAM	Oasis Project
OnePlusOne (new parents, transition to parenthood)		OnePlusOne
		Relate

Table 4: Digital Support projects: architecture and target groups

Organisation	Architecture/Delivery	Target Groups
Good Things Foundation	Video and website	Workless parents / parents on a low income with low digital skills, facing barriers such as people with English as a second or other language, low confidence.
OnePlusOne	App and website	Low-income parents with low digital and literacy skills. Specific focus on people in the transition to parenthood. Focus on parents at risk from stressful life circumstances. The universal element of the service was available to any family, while the blended approach provided families with supported access to the resource via family support workers.

2.1 Characteristics of Phase Two families

The majority of the Challenge Fund projects did not intentionally alter their target group in Phase Two, and Good Things Foundation, Oasis Project and SLAM made no changes to their target group at all. However, projects did report changes in their service user group due to the shift to online service provision and Covid-19 restrictions. For example, SLAM reported that since moving to online delivery, the online cohort had somewhat higher levels of employment, educational achievement, and owner occupation to those recruited for face-to-face provision, perhaps due to altered working patterns of families and increased demand among parents who were not experiencing significant conflict before the lockdown.

Similarly, OnePlusOne maintained the same target group and continued to focus on those in the transition to parenthood. This said, analysis of data from ‘Me, You and Baby Too’ hosted on ‘Baby Buddy’ (universal), indicates that during Phase Two, parents who completed the resource were on average older, of a mid to high-income bracket, first time parents, and in a relationship. This is in contrast to users of the targeted ‘Me, You and Baby Too’ blended approach, where users were on average younger, of a low-income bracket and had multiple children. This suggests that the shift to online delivery impacted on the demographics of the universal users in Phase Two, with many parents working from home due to Covid-19 restrictions, experiencing changes in their home and work lives, and experiencing additional relationship strains.

While some projects did not alter their target group, but nonetheless observed changes in their service users as a result of new online delivery models and continued restrictions, other projects altered their target group specifically to adapt to the change in circumstances. For example, the Anna Freud Centre adapted the

'Family Ties' programme to be delivered online to families experiencing parental conflict during lockdown. As a result of this shift to online delivery, the intervention was opened up to families outside London, and their previous requirement for parents to have been separated for more than six months was removed, opening up the intervention to parents whether separated or together. The Anna Freud Centre decided not to recruit parents who had ongoing proceedings in the family courts, nor ongoing parental substance abuse or child protection issues, due to the limitations of the online format to provide the level of support required for high-risk situations. In addition, children could be of any age (as opposed to aged 5 to 11 in a previous iteration of the initiative).

Changes were also made at Relate, where the project initially targeted parents living in East Sussex or Kent who had been released from prison in the previous 12 weeks. However, in response to low referral rates, it was agreed with DWP that the intervention would include parents who were up to six months, and then a year, post release. In addition, the target group was adapted to include families with parents who were still in prison. The referral criteria were expanded to parents of children of any age, living in Sussex or Kent, who were either due to be released within 12 weeks, or up to a year after being released from prison. The referral criteria of no history of domestic abuse was also removed from marketing materials, with Relate recognising that this requirement posed a barrier for referrals. Relate notes that they have mitigated this change to referral criteria through risk assessment on a case-by-case basis, as well as rigorous screening methods to ensure safe working practices. Finally, the organisation noted that they needed to be flexible in terms of defining co-parents to accommodate the fact that the adult taking the parent role in the community may be a grandparent, aunt, or friend for example.

2.2 Reach and engagement

2.2.1 Service users

Reach

Despite the challenges of service delivery during the pandemic, the projects still managed to reach and engage with service users. Reach was facilitated by the projects' ability to adapt to the current situation, and tailor their approach to the specific needs of the target group, as well as employing a range of creative tools to reach potential participants.

Adapting to the pandemic

While the pandemic inevitably had an impact on reach and engagement, this was positive in some cases. For some projects, reach was more stable than in earlier phases of delivery, perhaps due to more entrenched referral pathways and greater awareness of the projects in the community. For example, Oasis Project found that referrals significantly increased in Phase Two, perhaps due to the project now being well-established and the proactive approach of practitioners in building up strong working relationships with referring agencies.

At the Anna Freud Centre, eleven families started the programme across all sites, with five families being seen at the Anna Freud Centre, three families in Hackney and three in Ealing. However, four families dropped out of the intervention, for a variety of reasons. The Anna Freud Centre partly attributed their reach to their ability to adapt the programme to the needs of families. In one instance, it was necessary to shorten the programme as the family's needs were too complex to be able to complete the full programme. The practitioners felt that this adaptation enabled the family to benefit from the most important aspects of the programme and engage in a way that they were able to. In other cases, therapists decided to provide more introductory sessions for families to prepare them for the 'Family Ties' programme or have two therapists work with families in particularly complex situations.

SLAM delivered six full courses and 20 workshops between April 2020 and January 2021. These online 'BAP-T' full courses and workshops reached 169 individual co-parents, almost half of whom were co-parent fathers. A small number of mothers attended online 'BAP-T' courses and workshops unaccompanied by a male co-parent. The co-parents reached accounted for 217 full course and workshop attendances, exceeding the 184 attendances commissioned. SLAM felt that the shift to online delivery enabled them to reach more participants, as they were able to provide the service more flexibly, and participants did not have to travel.

A range of recruitment tools

The projects employed a wide range of tools to reach and engage with participants, and this holistic and creative approach enabled them to maximise their reach. For example, the Anna Freud Centre utilised self-referrals, an outreach programme, and social media communications to reach a wide range of families, including those that would not typically access support at the Centre. By allowing self-referrals, they hoped to reduce the barriers to access that families might face in accessing parental conflict support, such as stigma and shame. Similarly, SLAM found that the pandemic had an impact on family support workers' capacity to roll the programme out to parents. They responded to this challenge by disseminating the resource to other health practitioners as well as the family support workers and encouraged them to mention it in online conversations and meetings with parents, and actively signposting parents to it.

Barriers to reach and engagement

While the projects managed to reach a wide variety of service users, there were some barriers to reach and engagement. These included the tight timescales of the project, increased demands on participants' time and low digital skills.

Project timescales

The Anna Freud Centre noted that for some families, there were other issues that needed to be resolved before they felt able to participate in the programme, such as determining financial responsibilities or going through mediation. The need to resolve these issues before starting the therapeutic intervention offered meant that these families were unable to join the programme during Phase Two. Some families also needed more time with their practitioner at the start of their intervention to establish

the expectations of the programme and build trust, and thus ensure longer term engagement from parents.

Increased time pressure

School closures and the shift to working from home has placed increased pressure on parents as they juggle work commitments, home schooling and other household responsibilities. SLAM found that such time pressures on parents posed a barrier to engagement, as it could be difficult to find a convenient timeslot to talk to parents or engage with them for the full length of a session. In addition, there was little privacy for parents to talk without being overheard by their children.

OnePlusOne found that increased pressures on home life led to more searches for support. While this increased demand might mean they reach more people, they anticipate reduced engagement as people begin to use the resource but not as intended, either because 'Me, You and Baby Too' is not suitable for them or because of additional strains on their time due to home schooling and working from home.

Digital exclusion

SLAM reported that barriers to engagement included low digital skills, which made online delivery difficult. In addition, many parents did not have access to a computer and so relied on their phone, which made it difficult for them to absorb the full benefits of the service. This challenge also presented in the delivery of OnePlusOne's blended offer.

2.2.2 Practitioners

Oasis Project, OnePlusOne's blended approach and Relate all focussed on working with practitioners, and managed to engage with practitioners remotely to provide training and learning sessions. While practitioner training was not the focus of the Anna Freud Centre and SLAM, they also offered training and engaged with a number of practitioners. The shift to remote working at once facilitated reaching a wider range of practitioners more flexibly and posed challenges in ensuring meaningful engagement. Many practitioners experienced capacity issues which made them less able to engage with the projects, as well as competing priorities which could pose a challenge to engagement.

Leadership

Strong internal leadership enabled greater reach and engagement of practitioners. For example, the Anna Freud Centre reported that a major enabler in reaching practitioners had been securing the buy-in of senior managers within sites who understood the aims and purposes of the programme, and who could support practitioners in its delivery. Their support meant practitioners could engage with the programme as their time was freed to attend the training as well as to deliver the programme.

Similarly, Relate engaged with practitioners by contacting all relevant stakeholders in the two counties and asking for referrals from anyone with expertise and interest to work with them. This was useful exercise as they found "champions" in a range of

services who helped promote and support the programme across a range of organisations and sectors.

Remote working

Relate found that the shift to remote working allowed them to engage with a wider range of practitioners than they would have been able to in person. They hosted a webinar which was attended by 60 frontline practitioners. This webinar contained information about the Being Parents First service but also about information on how to identify conflict, the impact conflict has and the importance of families seeking support. Feedback from this webinar was excellent and there were requests for further information. In addition, they inducted and trained four counsellors and one supervisor and supported the training of a number of probation officers, prison officers, family workers, early help teams, teachers, social workers, and substance misuse workers. OnePlusOne also reported that the shift to remote working enabled them to reach a wider range of practitioners. In 2020, they engaged practitioners from approximately 100 local authorities in viewing and browsing the 'Me, You and Baby Too' resource. Practitioners representing around 90 of those local authorities accessed and learnt about the resource in a live demonstration webinar hosted on 2 December 2020.

While the focus on online delivery enabled the programmes to reach higher numbers of practitioners, some felt that this resulted in less meaningful engagement among practitioners. For example, Oasis Project ran a number of Fathers Network sessions, which were designed to function as reflective practice sessions; involving up to eight participants seated in a circle and lasting four hours. An essential aspect of these sessions was for participants to engage in guided reflection on their experience of their own father and how this impacted their professional selves. This approach was not possible using video conferencing, so the sessions were re-structured to draw a greater emphasis on learning. Discussion was not as organic during the online sessions and they found that participants were less inclined to participate and share their reflections.

SLAM found that many practitioners experienced the same challenges with remote working as service users with online delivery. As all training shifted to online delivery, it has been challenging for practitioners and parent group leaders with caring responsibilities and health conditions to dedicate their time and full attention to the sessions.

Capacity issues

Many of the practitioners involved in the various projects experienced capacity issues that prevented them from participating in the interventions as they might have liked. For example, the Anna Freud Centre reported that the main barrier to engaging with practitioners was practitioners' lack of capacity. Senior managers in partner delivery sites reiterated these barriers, as they were unable to free up additional staff time to deliver on the project, due to the pressures of Covid-19 in statutory services.

Similarly, OnePlusOne reported that a major barrier to engaging with service providers has been staff shortages due to sickness, increased workload, and a shift

in focus to more high-risk cases as opposed to early help. While practitioners did come to the practitioner guide, they did not engage with it as hoped, with high bounce rates⁴ (38%) and an average scroll depth⁵ of less than 25%. Consulting practitioners about the reasons for this, it seems that there were a number of barriers to engaging with external resources such as 'Me, You and Baby Too' and the practitioner guide. Unsupported learning from a guide requires commitment and motivation and practitioners currently have limited time for learning and reading. Due to the pandemic and scarce resources in the health system, antenatal work in many areas is reduced, and often targeted to complex families where 'Me, You and Baby Too' may not be appropriate. In addition, many senior staff members who would traditionally promote this kind of work, have been deployed elsewhere due to the pandemic.

2.2.3 Digital interventions

In Phase Two, the digital interventions tested and adjusted based on learnings from Phase One, with further learnings provided, particularly relating to targeting parents online and engagement levels.

Good Things Foundation reported that across both Phase One and Phase Two of delivery, the 'See It Differently' videos received one million views. In Phase Two, they adjusted their goal to point parents to the 'See It Differently' website, where they would be able to not only view the videos but access supporting content as well. In Phase Two, the website saw 17,123 users, (20,000 sessions), with 20% of users being 'engaged' users with sessions longer than 10 seconds. Approximately a third of users (36%) were aged 25 to 34.

There was a reported difference in the viewing figures of the 'core' video content (developed in Phase Two) on the 'See It Differently' website versus the additional animation content developed in Phase Two, provided to address perceived barriers to action for parents. 4,700 videos were played on the site during Phase Two, with the further support animations accounting for 400 of those views. There was, however, a strong completion rate for those who watched the animations.

Only in the region of 1.5% of traffic visited the 'Get more help' page. However, the rate of those visitors who did visit that page, that then clicked links for onward help, was high.

Good Things Foundation took their findings from Phase One and focussed their digital marketing efforts on Facebook, where they could test multiple targeting techniques and the effectiveness of using the Facebook pixel (enabling more advanced features such as retargeting previous visitors). Different techniques trialled included postcode targeting, demographics targeting and 'lookalike' targeting. Of these, lookalike targeting – targeting Facebook users who share characteristics with

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⁴ Bounce rate is the percentage of visits to a website where only a single page is accessed, measured against total visits to a website.

⁵ Scroll depth is the percentage of a web page that a visitor has seen.

those known to have lower digital skills – was the most successful. Through testing and adjustment, Good Things Foundation’s Facebook ads in Phase Two saw a 17% increase in link click-throughs compared with Phase One. Interestingly Good Things Foundation note that while Facebook ads were the most successful marketing tool in terms of volume, in terms of engagement with the content, other forms – such as email and direct referral (for example, via practitioner) – were more successful.

OnePlusOne reported a total of 9,200 page views of the ‘Me, You and Baby Too’ resource on ‘Click Relationships’ in both Phase One and Phase Two, with 5,824 of those achieved in Phase Two. On the ‘Baby Buddy’ app there have been 13,700 total users, including 6,528 in Phase Two.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 initially had an impact on family support workers’ capacity to roll the programme out to parents, but OnePlusOne reported that this changed as the project progressed: with family support workers as well as other health practitioners signposting parents to the content in meetings or online conversations with parents.

3.0 Delivering RPC Challenge Fund projects

This chapter of the report explores project approaches to delivering their Challenge Fund projects, and primarily focuses on adaptations that were made to service delivery during Phase Two. The Covid-19 pandemic began around the same time as Phase Two launched, and lockdown measures meant that all face-to-face support had to cease. Although plans for Phase Two were, to some extent, shaped by learning from Phase One, in reality it was the pandemic which had the primary influence over delivery.

This chapter also explores the development of the digital products in more detail.

3.1 Activities

As Table 1 in chapter one of this report highlighted, the Challenge Fund projects all had different focuses for their interventions, ranging from raising awareness of the impact of parental conflict, through to intensive counselling. The delivery mechanisms were equally varied, ranging from videos and social media campaigns through to multi-family group work, through to one-to-one support for parents. This section of the report examines changes made to delivery models and activities during Phase Two of the Challenge Fund, while the efficacy of those activities is explored in Chapter Four.

3.1.1 Changes to delivery models during Phase Two

All the funded interventions saw shifts in their delivery during Phase Two of the Challenge Fund. These changes can be broadly categorised in three ways.

- Changes which resulted from learning from delivery in Phase One.
- Changes to delivery mechanisms due to Covid-19.
- Changes to delivery focus due to Covid-19.

Change resulting from previous learning

At Relate, learning from delivery in Phase One meant a significant shift in their approach to delivery. The intervention was extended to provide more work with families, building on learning that participants needed more support than the six to eight sessions on offer, primarily due to the complexity of their circumstances. In Phase One, children had been routinely included in delivery, but feedback showed that this was not necessary in all cases; in Phase Two, children were engaged in pre- and post- intervention sessions only when requested by the family. Finally, as noted in chapter two of this report, Relate were also more flexible with their target groups, broadening the definition of a parent to acknowledge the role other adults might play

in parenting when one is in prison. Relate noted that going forward, it would be important to consider this when creating marketing and engagement strategies for this target group.

Changes to delivery mechanisms due to Covid-19

All Challenge Fund projects ceased face to face delivery in March 2020. For some, this meant that delivery models and content stayed the same but shifted in their delivery mechanism. For example, at the Oasis Project, sessions shifted to delivery over the phone to follow parental preference after experimentation with video calls. At Good Things Foundation, user testing and co-design sessions moved online (explored in more detail later in this chapter).

At SLAM, the 'BAP-T' group sessions moved to online delivery. Although the referral pathways established in Phase One were maintained, the shift to digital delivery also allowed the organisation to augment referral pathways with digital and social media recruitment. Additionally, SLAM began to offer 'BAP-T' workshops – shorter, standalone sessions focusing on one particular topic, rather than as part of the wider course. The online delivery vehicle made this feasible, as face to face engagement in workshops would have been more complex and time-consuming to execute.

Change in delivery focus due to Covid-19

For two organisations, the pandemic meant a shift in the focus of their activities as well as the delivery mechanism for the intervention. For example, OnePlusOne developed new activities for Phase Two which focused on understanding the additional pressures faced by parents as a result of the social distancing restrictions. This led to the development of new animated content to support parents in their new circumstances, reflecting the findings of parental feedback on the subject, as well as updated design of 'Me, You and Baby Too'. OnePlusOne also developed two work strands related to gathering feedback from parents and practitioners about the impact of Covid-19 on implementation, as well as the efficacy of the intervention.

In Phase One, the Anna Freud Centre's provision, the 'Family Ties' programme, was delivered through a multi-family group model. At the outset of the pandemic, the organisation shifted from this mode to delivering a one-to-one, online therapy model. This was primarily because of challenges related to safeguarding online groups which did not meet the organisations' safety requirements. The Anna Freud Centre also felt that the dynamics needed for effective group work would be more challenging to achieve in a virtual setting. However, this shift to online services allowed the project to expand its geographical reach, facilitating provision of support to families living outside of London. As with SLAM's experience, the Anna Freud Centre also found that the service could be advertised more widely, using professional networks and social media.

3.2 Digital product development

3.2.1 User needs

Good Things Foundation and OnePlusOne used their findings from Phase One to inform key user needs to be addressed in Phase Two of delivery.

Following Phase One, Good Things Foundation identified an unmet user need: “I need to learn ways to overcome the obstacles that get in the way of putting what I’ve seen into practice.” To address this, Good Things Foundation’s goal in Phase Two was to expand the content to help users to implement skills in different contexts, based on the key finding that many parents would find it easy to dismiss advice without a context that directly related to them. Good Things Foundation therefore focussed in Phase Two on providing content representing likely contexts that parents would face – for example, where a parent believes there is no point in trying because their partner won’t engage with them.

OnePlusOne included parent input throughout the development of their programme in order to identify and address user needs. Working with charity Parents 1st enabled them to connect with parents, ensuring the user voice was present in all stages of development. This approach worked very well in Phase Two, particularly with more parents at home who were able to be mobilised quickly to participate in sessions.

3.2.2 Design

Good Things Foundation approached the design of their project in Phase Two through development that built on their Phase One findings: to produce new digital content to help users to implement skills in different contexts, improve the ‘See It Differently’ website, and further rollout of the digital practitioner guide.

Animations were produced to provide further information for parents who, based on user research, had revealed perceived obstacles relating to their own family situations or that the advice in the original videos would not apply to them. The animations were storyboarded to show parents voicing concern at not being able to apply the skills represented. One of the benefits of using animation was the opportunity to create a diverse range of characters, addressing one of the challenges from Phase One – the relatability of families featured in the four core videos for parents seeking advice.

Development of the ‘See It Differently’ website in Phase Two focussed on providing a user journey that answered the question: “What now?”. Developments included video content, a discussion board and signposting to further help. In Phase Two Good Things Foundation made the decision to switch their video hosting from YouTube to Vimeo, as users had found YouTube’s automatic recommended video feature a confusing part of the user journey.

Following the success of practitioner training in Phase One, Good Things Foundation developed a digital practitioner guide in Phase Two to allow wider distribution of the

resource to those working with parents in conflict. The guide included practical activities to help practitioners familiarise themselves with the content; downloadable interactive materials and videos; and guides for group work and case studies. A key piece of user feedback from practitioners was the need for flexibility – in how the guide was delivered and in how resources were shared with parents.

OnePlusOne's design focus in this phase was improving access, usability, and data collection methods in their course content, achieved by changing platform of 'Me, You and Baby Too' (MYBT) to a dedicated site. Separating the content from Click (the platform on which MYBT was hosted until December 2020) meant easier access for parents.

3.2.3 Analytics

Switching their focus from Phase One to focus on the 'See It Differently' website, Good Things Foundation used Google Tag Manager and event listeners to get more data on particular activity and made changes to content based on the data.

Monitoring of the 'chat with other families' function on the site showed that take-up was low, and Good Things Foundation attribute this to a number of factors, particularly the need to login, which from user testing was shown to be a barrier, as well as possible hesitation by users to comment on an inactive forum.

On their web content, OnePlusOne used Google Analytics for tracking traffic, alongside Google Tag Manager for detail about specific interactions. On their own platform, they were able to use submitted user data from registered users. This data helped OnePlusOne develop and improve their content – for example, addressing an initially high drop off from their landing page by altering the wording on the page.

4.0 Effectiveness of Challenge Fund projects

Although facing unprecedented challenges in the delivery of their interventions during Phase Two, Challenge Fund projects continued to assess the success of their interventions throughout. As highlighted in Chapter One, all interventions are being evaluated at an individual project level, and all had gathered feedback from parents through a number of mechanisms; participant views on the support they received are explored in Section 4.3. This chapter also unpicks the challenges faced by the projects during Phase Two, and reviews project fidelity to their original Theories of Change.

4.1 Effectiveness of the interventions and activities

Projects reflected on the feedback provided by parents and practitioners engaged in Phase Two of the Challenge Fund. Across all the projects, feedback from participants appeared to evidence that the projects were reaching their aims and that the interventions developed were successful in improving awareness of the impact of parental conflict on children, as well as supporting parents to improve communication and reduce conflict in their relationships as coparents.

For example, parents and practitioners alike reported that they found the 'Family Ties' programme (provided by the Anna Freud Centre) to be effective in reducing the impact of parental conflict on children in the family. Practitioners reported that generally, the families they were working with appeared to find the programme impactful and helpful, particularly in helping them find new ways to communicate and work through co-parenting issues. Feedback from parents themselves chimed with this, as did feedback from children (which was collected in the form of pre- and post-intervention questionnaires).

“...I would say that things are a lot better, we are a lot happier because they are a lot happier. People are actually saying what they feel now and it's not like we have all this passive aggressive stuff around all the time.” [Child]

When reflecting on their predicted outcomes, the project believes that in the short term, the project has achieved a positive change in families by reducing child exposure to, and involvement in, parental conflict, as well as promoting better co-parenting, and improvement in parent and child wellbeing. Importantly, the project has also upskilled other practitioners working with families in conflict. In the medium-

term, the intervention has now been established in two statutory settings⁶, as well as being piloted at the Anna Freud Centre. The organisation hopes to continue working with the two pilot local authorities in the future.

At the Oasis Project, users of the Fathers' Service flagged changes which the organisation categorised along a number of lines. These included support for mental health and recovery; improved identity as a father; improved wellbeing; and improved relationships.

“...it's helped me, again, believe in myself and believe that I am still a dad and I am still here for [my child], just not at the moment, and it's given me a little bit of self-belief back that I'm not useless and I was a good dad to her while I was there and I'm still her father...” [Parent]

Similarly, Good Things Foundation also set out to measure the success of their intervention along a number of key indicators. These included:

- engaging and maintaining interest amongst the target group;
- enabling parents to identify parental conflict and its impact on children;
- upskilling parents in terms of relational capability;
- encouraging parents to seek further support; and
- effectiveness of reach.

It appeared that the latter point had been very successful, with 17,123 users accessing the 'See It Differently' website during Phase Two. There was key learning during this phase about the effectiveness of targeted advertising via Facebook, with 'Lookalike' targeting (targeting users who share characteristics with those known to have low or limited digital skills) proving to be more successful than postcode or demographic targeting. Feedback gathered from parents to date suggests that the project was also successful in achieving the other markers of efficacy. Parents highlighted how their behaviours had changed in relation to arguing in front of their children, and in terms of managing communication with their partners.

“I wanted to argue with my husband. But what I do, I took my baby to another room. So, I want to start to argue. And he looked at me and he laughed. What do you...? I said, I don't want to argue with you in front of my baby. I have to take care of him. So, I'm not going to.” [Parent]

For OnePlusOne's digital initiative, the pre- and post- intervention monitoring forms used with parents showed little evidence of improvement in parent's own satisfaction with their relationships. However, the project did see stability in relationship satisfaction reported; this is positive at a time in people's lives (new parenthood) when relationship satisfaction commonly decreases significantly. The project also

⁶ In Phase One, Family Ties was piloted within the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in Hackney and was also offered in the Social Care department in the borough. In Ealing, the project was piloted in the borough's Supportive Action for Families in Ealing (SAFE) service, which is a multidisciplinary offer bringing together a range of local authority teams.

identified a significant reduction in reports of parental conflict from pre- to post-intervention, which suggests that for universal users who engage with the content, there is a significant reduction in conflict. As one user noted,

“I have learnt to listen to my partner more and techniques to cope with stress for me and my partner.” [Parent]

Those users who completed pre- and post-test questions but did not use the app resource in line with anticipated project pathways had higher levels of conflict and lower relationship satisfaction at the beginning than those who followed through with the resource. This suggests that ‘Me, You and Baby Too’ universal, without additional practitioner support, is most appropriate for universal users as an early intervention resource. Those with higher levels of relationship conflict might benefit more from a blended approach with support from a practitioner to make the most of the app.

Relate flagged that self-reporting of outcomes by participants could be problematic, with families finding it hard to see progress in terms of conflict themselves. However, the project reports that progress in terms of the relationships between family members was apparent in clinical meetings. This was primarily as a result of the time given and committed to exploring relationships and supporting parents to see conflict through the eyes of the child improved the relationship between parent and child. Relate’s intervention has a target to reduce the rate of reoffending amongst their participant cohort; this outcome needs a longer-term view to determine success, but at the point of writing none of the families engaged had gone on to reoffend.

At SLAM, in Phase Two the intervention included an offer of shorter workshops as well as the full ‘BAP-T’ courses. Parents attending both approaches completed pre- and post- intervention questionnaires; 29 parents in total completed follow-up measures and 105 completed the questionnaires at the start of the intervention. Learning from the project provides an interesting analysis and assessment of the efficacy of the workshops compared to the full course. The analysis of the impact of the full course suggests that it resulted in co-parents improvements in parent conflict, relationship satisfaction, parenting knowledge, confidence, skills and confidence, and reduction in concerns about child emotional and behavioural well-being; these findings were consistent with the impact recorded for parents in Phase One of delivery. Meanwhile, evaluation results indicated that online ‘BAP-T’ workshops were successful at significantly improving co-parent cooperation, parenting satisfaction, knowledge, and skills, and helping parents to achieve individual and shared parenting goals. Effect sizes were similar in magnitude to those achieved in Challenge Fund Phase One ‘BAP-T’ face-to-face format course.

Importantly, impact data showed that parents reported increased parenting knowledge and confidence; many parents reported the highest rating for improved understanding of positive parenting, better skills, greater confidence, and an expectation to use new skills in everyday family life. There were no cases where there was no intervention impact on parenting knowledge, confidence, skills, and implementation outcomes.

Parents attending online 'BAP-T' workshops reported a statistically significant increase in parenting satisfaction after completion of 'BAP-T' and parents became significantly closer to achieving their parenting goals after completing the workshops. The majority of parents reported the highest rating for improved understanding of positive parenting, better skills, and an expectation to use new skills in everyday family life.

When comparing parent satisfaction between the workshops and the full online 'BAP-T' course, co-parent satisfaction and acceptability was high for the workshops, but consistently lower than rates reported by full course co-parent participants. In particular, workshop co-parents reported lower levels of satisfaction with topic coverage compared with all other aspects of participant satisfaction and intervention acceptability. This may not be surprising given the restricted topic content covered in each two-hour workshop session compared to the longer nine-session full course. However, almost one-third of workshop participants attended more than one workshop, which may suggest high levels of satisfaction with the provision.

4.1.1 Efficacy of remote delivery

Projects reflected on the efficacy of delivering their interventions remotely, and the extent to which the new delivery formats facilitated positive outcomes for participants. For a number of projects, it appears that the new approaches to delivery had had positive outcomes for participants and the projects themselves. For example, at the Oasis Project, where sessions were provided by phone, a number of benefits were observed. Providing the service by phone eliminated travel time for staff compared to working face-to-face, allowing for much greater flexibility in providing the sessions. For example, sessions became possible in parents' lunchbreaks from work, or in the evenings. Staff observed that an evening phone call felt less intrusive than a home visit at the same time of day and had the added benefit of flexibility and convenience for the participant. Indeed, the organisation intends to retain an element of blended delivery in their interventions going forward, finding it a useful way to engage with clients who may struggle to access physical sessions due to geography or other barriers.

Oasis Project had initially intended to deliver their remote sessions via video call. However, this quickly evolved into support being provided exclusively by phone as preferred by the fathers engaged. The project reflected that phone contact may have had the advantage of ameliorating some guilt and shame where there was significant social care involvement or drugs/alcohol misuse; they could be heard, though not seen by the support practitioner. One father noted,

"No offence to [the facilitator] but they are a disembodied voice at the end of the phone...I'm at home so I just made myself comfy, made sure I had privacy and we'd just kind of talk through stuff." [Parent]

The same benefits were also experienced at Relate, working with a similarly complex target group; although there were challenges associated with not being able to read body language for example, some clients preferred not to be seen and were able to open up and share more over the phone.

At SLAM, the demographic profile of co-parents recruited for online 'BAP-T' full courses and workshops was broadly similar to the parent cohort recruited during Phase One, when 'BAP-T' used a face-to-face recruitment and delivery format. However, the online cohort had somewhat higher levels of employment, educational achievement, and owner occupation. Interestingly, the online format appears to have encouraged greater retention on the programme; SLAM reported that co-parent intervention completion rates for both the 'BAP-T' full courses and workshops were exceptionally high. Indeed, 92.5% of participating co-parents completed the online 'BAP-T' full courses, a figure which was significantly higher than the completion rate for the face-to-face course format in Phase One. One-third of workshop attendees completed more than one workshop, and some used the format as a gateway to completing the full 'BAP-T' course. This suggests that the lower level of commitment required from signing up to a workshop could act as a useful hook for engagement.

Co-parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the all aspects of online 'BAP-T' delivery including course content and parent group leader facilitation. Encouragingly, for those completing the full course, this was comparable to satisfaction and acceptability rates reported in face-to-face 'BAP-T' group courses delivered during Phase One.

As with Good Things Foundation, at OnePlusOne user testing had to be carried out remotely. Although these sessions posted some additional challenges such as technological considerations, and the presence of young children at home, the smaller groups of three to four parents (which were necessarily scaled down for online interaction) provided some unexpected benefits – smaller groups meant each parent could contribute more, and the convenience of an online session over a physical one was noted. Parents reliably attended the groups, providing useful insights and views. The flexibility offered by remote delivery was a benefit also experienced at Relate, where the geographic boundary of the project could be lifted thanks to digital engagement.

4.2 Understanding of parental conflict

All the interventions reported that generally, understanding of parental conflict had developed and evolved for all stakeholders (parents, staff and partners) through the course of delivery. While the distinction between parental conflict and domestic abuse remained ambiguous at times, the interventions had developed tools and training sessions to refine practitioners' understanding of parental conflict. For example, the Anna Freud Centre found that discussion of coercive control, parental conflict and domestic abuse often came up in training sessions, workshops, and supervisions, as the team developed a more nuanced understanding of conflict through their work with different families.

A focus on children

The impact of parental conflict on children's outcomes formed a key component of the projects' understanding of parental conflict. Many projects understood parental conflict in terms of poor communication and sought to improve communication

between parents to improve child outcomes. Some found that focussing on child outcomes motivated parents to address the conflict in their relationship. For example, SLAM found that fixating on the threat of conflict does not facilitate engagement among parents. Instead, they found that focussing on child outcomes, the value of mothers' and fathers' involvement in parent and the child's life and improving teamwork to be more effective and engaging to parents.

Similarly, the Anna Freud Centre conceptualised parental conflict as a breakdown in communication and sought to demonstrate how such conflicting family dynamics can impact negatively on children. Their approach focussed on working with parents and their social networks to understand the impact of their parental conflict on their children. They supported parents to think about family dynamics across several spectrums, including how they support their children's relationship with their co-parent, how exposed their children are to conflict, and how close they are with their children.

Addressing the underlying causes of parental conflict

The interventions supporting parents with complex needs understood parental conflict as the product of multiple factors and vulnerabilities and sought to address these underlying causes of conflict to improve parental relationships. For example, Oasis Project's approach to reducing parental conflict and poor communication was underpinned by an understanding of a range of vulnerabilities like substance misuse, poverty, trauma, and childhood abuse, and how they impact on relationships. They adopted a trauma-informed approach which takes these experiences into account and provides fathers with holistic support to address multiple support needs. Similarly, practitioners at Relate focussed on understanding the various complexities of clients' lives before trying to address the conflict in their relationships. The practitioners had little prior experience of this client group and understanding the impact of imprisonment on their intimate relationships has been an integral factor in supporting these families.

The importance of language

Language played a key role in how the different programmes defined parental conflict and communicated with service users. Many programmes sought a new vocabulary with which to describe parental conflict that held fewer negative connotations. For example, OnePlusOne decided to avoid the term "interparental conflict", and instead replace it with "arguments." This approach of using more accessible language helped establish trust and a better working relationship with parents. Similarly, Relate emphasised the importance of language in facilitating parents' understanding of parental conflict. Like OnePlusOne, they chose to avoid the word "conflict", and instead used of videos depicting normal family's life and examples of conflict to demonstrate conflict through real life scenarios that families could identify with.

Oasis Project adopted a similar approach and used the term "improving communication" as opposed to "reducing conflict", as many service users felt that the term "conflict" sounded negative and failed to capture the particular circumstances of the family. In addition, practitioners were careful to consider their language when

discussing domestic abuse. For example, when appropriate, the term 'perpetrator' (a term largely associated with the criminal justice system) could be substituted for "people who have subjected their partners to domestic abuse".

Good Things Foundation echoed this feedback and reported that practitioners found it most effective to adapt their language on a case-by-case basis to engage with each individual as effectively as possible. One practitioner noted that as a result of concern about one of her service users' home situation, she avoided using the word conflict and framed the conversation in terms of improving communication skills. Sensitivity about parents' home circumstances and being flexible in how they approach the topic of conflict has ensured that practitioners were able to retain parents who are otherwise hard to reach.

4.3 Feedback and user experience

4.3.1 Collecting feedback

All the projects involved made concerted efforts to collect feedback from service users, yet the Covid-19 pandemic has inevitably impacted on the mechanisms for collecting feedback due to increased demands on parents' time and the shift to online delivery models. Projects have been compelled to adapt their methods of collecting feedback and focus on online methods, yet still managed to collect feedback from service users and incorporate this into the design of interventions. OnePlusOne ran user research sessions in May 2020 to help identify areas of improvement. They incorporated parent feedback into the design of 'Me, You and Baby Too', which was further tested with parents. They then developed script outlines and storyboards and tested them with parents before creating final versions. All sessions with parents took place via Zoom, where they were able to speak with four to five parents in each session and demonstrate proposed content ideas through screen-sharing.

Adapting to online life

The Anna Freud Centre initially aimed to collect feedback with a mixed methods approach, conduct post-training questionnaires with practitioners and collect ongoing feedback from therapists working with families. They aimed to collect standardised parent and child-report questionnaires before and after the intervention, in combination with semi-structured interviews with parents after the intervention. While Covid-19 restrictions and transferring all of the parent and child-report questionnaires online posed some initial challenges, the Anna Freud Centre adapted to this new online delivery model using Microsoft Forms, and asked therapists to collect feedback during their sessions. Parents were receptive to completing the questionnaires, as well as participating in online interviews.

Similarly, Good Things Foundation had initially planned to collect feedback from parents face-to-face. The shift to online methods was challenging particularly at the beginning of the lockdown in March 2020, as people were still adjusting to the restrictions, and juggling work and childcare. It was difficult to reach people without digital access or limited digital skills, yet they did observe that many parents with low

digital skills had managed to improve these during the lockdown and learnt to use Zoom with the support of an online digital skills centre. In total they managed to speak to 18 individual parents including 12 parents from BAME communities and seven dads from five community centres from Sunderland to London.

Parents with complex needs

The projects targeting parents with complex needs encountered more challenges in collecting feedback from service users. For example, Relate reported that the stigma associated with being a prisoner made it particularly difficult for them to access service users. They attempted to engage with the prison service user forum, but with limited success due to time pressures and Covid-19 restrictions. Relate were then able to set up an advisory group with service users with the help of non-statutory agencies with good relationships with the families, such as children and family support groups. They held evening meetings with families affected by imprisonment, which enabled them to gain direct feedback from service users. Similarly, Oasis Project found that collecting service users' feedback in Phase Two of delivery was made much more challenging by remote working. Many people only attended a few sessions before disengaging, and so never had an opportunity to provide their feedback. SLAM also reported that they managed to collect high levels of feedback for the online 'BAP-T' full course. They collected less feedback in Phase Two of delivery and suggest that this may be due to a lower level of emotional connection generated by attending a one-off workshop compared to the nine-session full course.

4.3.2 Service user experience

A non-judgemental approach

All the projects received some very positive feedback from service users about their experience of the interventions. Many parents valued practitioners' non-judgemental approach, and this was particularly salient among parents with complex needs. One parent supported by the Oasis Project found the facilitators to be very helpful, and said "I liked them both, it made it so much easier for me to share and be open, because I felt like – not even at one point I was getting judged at all..." Similarly, families supported by Relate almost unanimously felt that it was beneficial to have someone to listen to them who was non-judgemental and non-directive. Although the voluntary nature of the service meant that some clients dropped out, they appreciated the time to share their thoughts and feelings about their relationships.

This appreciation for a non-judgemental approach was echoed by parents at the Anna Freud Centre. One parent disclosed:

"I think it's been really useful considering the process by which we communicate and having regular slots to talk purely about the kids and feeding back to each other. Just yeah, just feeling more collaborative about that and even things like the parenting agreement, which we've kind of done various drafts of and [project practitioner] has helped us through.... So it's a blame free type approach, more constructive." [Parent]

Focus on child outcomes

Parents involved in the Anna Freud Centre programme found the focus on child outcomes particularly helpful, as this helped parents work together for the benefit of their children. As one parent said:

“I thought it was very good and it was extremely helpful to focus our interest on the children, which is what it's all about. And to understand the issues that they were going through and to alleviate as much as possible the conflict that [co-parent] and I have and still have, obviously, so it doesn't have... it's always going to have an impact obviously... but minimizes the impact on our children.” [Parent]

Improving communication

The majority of parents felt that participation in the various interventions had helped with to improve communication in their relationship. For example, a parent supported by the Anna Freud Centre said:

“I'd say it's worth it, and I think both parents need to want to do it. It's not an easy thing to do, but I think it really helps, put the children back in the centre of what's needed and it takes the heat away from being about a relationship between two adults and more about a collaboration between two parents.”

Similarly, parents at Oasis Project found the focus on improving communication to be useful

“We were having issues in our relationship because we started growing apart because [of parenting] we were so stressed out... It got to the point ...where we weren't even talking to each other, we were literally [parenting], and would spend the rest of the time isolating ourselves to calm down.” [Parent]

In addition to improving communication between parents, parents at OnePlusOne felt that the intervention was very effective in communicating with them. Five of the six mothers we interviewed liked how easy ‘Me, You and Baby Too’ was to use, with the programme praised for being “easy to follow, simple to understand”. All mothers reported that the videos were the most helpful part of ‘Me, You and Baby Too’ – “I think they were making complicated ideas simple”. In particular, the clips were described as helpful because they were relatable, especially the “daily settings” with “real-life scenarios”.

Areas for improvement

While most of the feedback from service users was very positive, the feedback collected also identified some areas for improvement. Parents supported by Oasis Project felt that the work to improve communication between parents needs to involve both parents. One parent said “... like it was on your views and you'd look at your partner's side as well...I think if you're going to do couples work, the couples should do it, not do couples work individually.” Similarly, Relate found that often only one parent wanted to engage, which made it challenging to improve the communication between two parents. They decided to offer clinical supervisions sessions to single parents where one had opted out, working around the conflict that

was present in the parent/ child's lives even though the co-parent was absent. However, participating parents felt that this was ineffective as they could not improve the situation without the engagement of the other parent.

Parents at Relate felt that practitioners focussed too heavily on the experience of imprisonment and the needs of the person coming out of prison, rather than the needs of the whole family. In contrast, parents at Oasis Project felt that the service could focus more on substance misuse and offer more signposting to specific services. One parent said:

“I feel like they should maybe target [substance misuse] as well, because some people don't necessarily have help...and...it would be nice if they could offer some way to either help or talk about that subject.” [Parent]

While parents at OnePlusOne appreciated the app's user-friendly interface, a couple of parents suggested ways in which the resource could be improved. One suggestion was to include more written content within the resource that provided context and detail around the videos, “...a little bit more text and a little bit more explanation on things, maybe just to a little bit expand each section. I found it a little bit short... or, if there's a source linked to, that could be added, or just, yes, some more text.”

4.3.3 RPC Standardised measures

The majority of the interventions did not use the RPC measures. The interventions that did utilise the RPC standardised measures generally found them to be a useful screening tool, as well as tool to help to evaluate conflict between parents. Oasis Project used the tool to evaluate family relationships and found positive outcomes. Similarly, OnePlusOne used the RPC standardised measures in the evaluation of the first phase of 'Me, You and Baby Too' and continued to do so in the extension. They found that the measures were an effective way of evaluating the kind of conflict that they were addressing within our resource with non-separated couples.

The Anna Freud Centre included the RPC standardised measures as part of the quantitative data collection phase for all families participating in 'Family Ties' online sessions. For this phase, they chose to use the measures as a screening tool for families ahead of participation in the programme. However, it was found that the RPC did not always pickup conflict between self-referred parents. Many families scored very low on the conflict measures but were in fact experiencing subtle forms that the measure did not capture, such as avoidance of the conflict in the relationship, which was associated with ineffective communication rather than conflict. Thus, while the RPC measures can serve as a useful tool in measuring broad changes over the course of a programme, they seem to be less effective in larger samples of self-referred but appropriate referrals.

4.4 Issues and challenges

Throughout the lifetime of the Challenge Fund, projects have been encouraged to explore any issues and challenges faced during delivery in order to support wider understanding of what works, for who, and why. In Phase Two, this was particularly

the case as delivery models shifted entirely. In the projects' final reporting, it was clear that having to rapidly change delivery models posed a number of challenges, which are explored later in this section of the report. However, some challenges remained that were not related to delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.4.1 Engagement

A number of projects witnessed a high complexity of need amongst their participants. At the Oasis Project for example, a high number of referrals came from Social Care. As such, the fathers who participated had relatively complex needs (such as substance misuse, relationship conflict, separation from children), but would also likely have a child subject to a Child Protection or Child in Need plan. While the therapeutic offer from the project was embraced by some participants, others were not “therapy ready” – that is, they were not yet in a place to be able to reflect on their own (often traumatic) experiences. At the Anna Freud Centre, families with more complex needs often needed more time than was originally on offer from the programme to build a trusted relationship with their therapist, and at Relate, the nature of the family dynamics often meant that counselling was delivered separately to co-parents rather than to one holistic family unit. This had not been anticipated and the project reported that this affected the ability to resolve conflict when strategies could not be discussed or rehearsed together with both parents. Relate also highlighted the importance of working flexibly with families to support their engagement. They noted that their original model of counselling was too inflexible, and that they needed to respond to family needs around timing and regularity of meetings, as well as methods of communication.

Phase One of the Challenge Fund highlighted the importance of strong referral pathways and in Phase Two, this was again evident. For example, at OnePlusOne a partnership with another parenting organisation proved vital for supporting the recruitment of a cohort of parents to participate in the user testing. At Relate, challenges arose when referral pathways were muddied by a lack of understanding of parental conflict amongst partners; there was a lack of clarity as to how to refer parents in, in part because of competition from other RPC services.

The need for clear messaging when dealing with partner agencies was highlighted at the Oasis Project. In Phase Two, the organisation redefined the Fathers' Service as “therapeutic and parenting support for dads” in order to support engagement and widen access to the project by encapsulating a range of potential needs. However, the project reflected that this broader definition has not necessarily been a good thing, sometimes meaning that referrers were not clear on the exact nature of the intervention. Indeed, they note that building on this learning, they would seek to 'tighten' the description of the service in the future.

Relate noted in their reporting that because there is a lack of statutory requirement to address conflict in parental relationships, referring bodies are often less aware of need in relevant families. However, at the Oasis Project, referrals from social care presented a complex dynamic between the project, the father, and the social worker. For example, fathers sometimes felt that they had been sanctioned to engage with

the project when referred by their social worker. The project provided fathers with a supportive and confidential therapeutic space, but this could create friction between the safeguarding processes and monitoring which they were simultaneously engaged with. In such cases, the Fathers' Service Practitioners saw benefits in supporting fathers to orient themselves in the process and understand it more clearly.

It has already been noted that due to their complex backgrounds, some fathers referred to the Oasis Project were not therapy-ready. This also had potential to create friction between referring agencies, the project, and the father; referrers were sometimes dismayed when fathers struggled to engage when they were keen for them to engage in reflective processes to take responsibility for their own actions.

4.4.2 Delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic

The practicalities of moving delivery online presented challenges to all the Challenge Fund projects, and these presented in a number of ways. Common examples of challenges included:

- adapting existing materials and resources (and developing new ones where needed) to be suitable for online delivery;
- providing training for practitioners delivering interventions online, and freeing up the staff time required to set up new technology and approaches;
- digital exclusion was a common problem for families – a lack of access to technology or the knowledge to use it effectively was a barrier to effective delivery;
- family stressors and causes of conflict increased. The pandemic created circumstances which were likely to increase parental conflict in both the short and long term. Projects reported seeing the focus of their work shift to stressors arising from Covid-19, rather than pre-existing issues within a family;
- parents often had little privacy when at home to engage in sessions uninterrupted, as school closures meant children were at home too.

These practical challenges manifested in concerns that families who most needed support were not able to engage. For example, Relate highlighted that a number of families were not comfortable with video or telephone counselling and fear that some of these families went unsupported. A lack of digital knowledge or access to devices was also an issue; the organisation noted that in calls with both parents, often only one could be seen on screen creating a challenging dynamic. At SLAM, although participants in online groups tended to be less socially disadvantaged, digital exclusion was still a significant issue for participants.

In our Phase One reporting, we noted that the tight timescales associated with the delivery of the Challenge Fund had presented a number of issues for projects. In Phase Two, this was still an issue to an extent, with families with complex needs needing more time and support. The Anna Freud Centre noted that they had adapted the programme where necessary to accommodate this, while retaining fidelity to their original model. However, additional stressors on capacity came from the move from

group work to individual sessions, which meant more staff time was required for delivery. On top of this, practitioner capacity in delivery partner organisations was also a challenge as the pandemic pulled their focus in other directions; as such, the project and partners had to work creatively to maximise capacity. The organisation noted that there could be value in exploring where there are components of the programme that could be delivered with one parent rather than both, potentially increasing the number of families that could be supported at any one time as sessions could be run more flexibly.

Engaging with community partners was also an issue for Good Things Foundation, who have previously relied heavily on community organisations for engaging parents in co-design and user testing for the videos. This was particularly problematic in the first three months of lockdown, when community organisations were heavily focused elsewhere, so the project had significantly less time to work with parents on their content. Equally problematic was conducting user testing online, particularly given that a key target group for Good Things Foundation are parents with low digital skills – without the support of community organisations, the parents with greatest need were the least likely to be able to engage or contribute.

4.5 Fidelity to theories of change

Despite the huge amount of change seen during the lifetime of their delivery, projects reflected that their approaches had largely remained faithful to their initial theories of change; while adaptations had been made to delivery, it largely seemed that the short- and medium- term outcomes planned have been and would still be achieved. These outcomes primarily focused on raising awareness of the impact of parental conflict on children, supporting parents to keep their children at the forefront of their minds and improving co-parenting whether parents are still together or separated. In terms of working with partner agencies, the reporting showed that projects had become well established in the wider networks they operated in, largely developing strong referral pathways. Where practitioners were trained, they were well engaged and ready to take learning back to statutory and partner settings to embed in their own delivery.

Some projects used their final reports for the Challenge Fund to reflect on the enabling factors, or conditions for success for their interventions. These examples were particularly interesting considering the unprecedented circumstances projects faced in Phase Two which could not have been anticipated at the start of Phase One. For example, Good Things Foundation predicted that having an agile approach to project development would be an enabler for success and this was certainly the case during Phase Two. By working in sprints, the project has been able to avoid going too far along the journey that things could not be changed – this was particularly vital during the pandemic when the approach to creating content had to evolve.

Two other examples of predicted enabling factors support other evidence presented in this report, which purports that embedding projects in a wider network of practice is vital. At OnePlusOne, when developing their theory of change they predicted that

family support workers would be an enabling factor in engaging parents to participate in evaluating the intervention, and this held true. At Good Things Foundation, the Advisory Board for the project provided essential advice and challenge which supported project delivery, as well as ideas for taking the project forward.

5.0 Reflections on learning from Phase Two

This chapter provides reflections on learning from each strand of the Challenge Fund, written by the programme management team's thematic experts. It also provides an overarching conclusion.

5.1 Reflections on learning from the SDF projects

The projects supporting disadvantaged families faced two key challenges during the life of the Challenge Fund. Firstly, reach and engagement: projects needed perseverance, tenacity, and creativity to overcome existing stigma around help-seeking help and reluctance on behalf of both parents and practitioners to discuss private matters relating to couple conflict. Projects worked hard to choose language which was acceptable and engaging when describing their projects, they invested time in training practitioners to have the confidence and skills to discuss relationship issues with their clients, and they built strong relationships with referral partners as parents are more likely to access programmes when recommended by people they already know and trust.

The unexpected challenge to hit all projects in Phase Two of the Challenge Fund was the Covid-19 pandemic. Projects worked hard to adapt their programmes to online or telephone delivery and reassess their referral pathways – including embracing social media and self-referrals. Importantly, they provided additional support to their staff teams, recognising that providing support to couples in conflict can bring additional strains when delivering from one's home in the context of a stressful pandemic. Organisations worked hard to provide additional supervision and well-being checks for their staff.

Despite the challenges, the events of 2020 provided opportunities for learning which were not foreseen at the outset. The Oasis Project, SLAM, Relate and Anna Freud Centre were all able to compare their original face to face delivery in Phase Two to the adapted online or telephone support of Phase Two. Although there were drawbacks (less peer interaction, fewer body language cues, challenges of digital exclusion, childcare/privacy challenges), there were also substantial benefits to online/telephone delivery:

- Greater flexibility to respond to clients' availability
- Eliminated travel time and venue costs
- Wider reach as no geographical restrictions

- Ability to maximise social media marketing
- Clients share more as they are in the comfort of their own home.

Based on the learning above, projects plan to retain some of the adaptations which they made to their service delivery because of Covid-19, moving to a blended model post-pandemic. The Oasis Project reported: 'A blended model allows projects to reach clients who may struggle to access physical sessions due to geography or other barriers.' OnePlusOne concluded: 'Following a survey conducted with practitioners at our 'Me, You and Baby Too' live demonstration event in December 2020, 78% of respondents said they now use digital methods as part of their everyday practice. In our opinion, this blended approach to delivering support is an effective and desirable method of supporting the needs of parents and practitioners – an indicator of the sector's future direction.'

Blended models allow opportunities for greater accessibility and costs savings – with staff meetings and practitioner training sessions moving virtual saving travel and venue hire.

5.2 Reflections on learning from the Digital Support projects

Both Good Things Foundation and OnePlusOne developed their interventions following learnings from Phase Two, further confirming earlier findings and refining their methods for reaching and engaging parents.

Key learnings during Phase Two include:

Types of content to affect behaviour change

Both Good Things Foundation and OnePlusOne found video content to be an effective tool for engaging parents, which they confirmed via the numbers of parents engaged and from user testing and feedback. Good Things Foundation have now seen more than one million views of their video content, and OnePlusOne found that video content was consistently the most engaged with within their programme content. An interesting reflection is how video content sits as part of a wider user journey that provides optimal support for parents. In Phase One, both Good Things Foundation and OnePlusOne recognised the importance of using trusted channels to deliver their interventions, and of taking content to the parents, rather than the creation of stand-alone websites or tools – using channels such as YouTube, Facebook, or existing parenting apps to deliver content. However, after Phase One the limitations of using *only* these channels was apparent. Good Things Foundation found that the ability to provide context and further support was limited using these channels alone, and OnePlusOne found that content was harder to navigate when housed with other parenting content. For Good Things Foundation, the result in Phase Two was to develop the stand-alone 'See It Differently' website, where further contextual advice and signposting could be developed as part of the user journey.

Developing the onward journey of support

Good Things Foundation focussed on developing a series of animations in Phase Two to deliver impactful behaviour change for parents. The animations were produced to address contextual barriers in parents' minds – identified as the biggest potential barrier to parents implementing the skills they had witnessed in the 'core' videos. Of the 19,704 sessions on the 'See It Differently' website in Phase Two, the supporting content was opened about 1,000 times, with the animations viewed 400 times. Although this may seem like a significant drop-off, completion rates of those watching the animations were high, suggesting highly engaged users following a journey of further support. Good Things Foundation note that a large portion of users chose not to scroll beyond 25% depth on the page. With more time and development, it would be interesting to see if placement or style of further support content affected viewing rates.

Volume versus engagement

Good Things Foundation found Facebook ads to be the most effective channel in terms of volumes of users directed to the 'See It Differently' site. However, in terms of engagement, it was direct shares, referrals, organic searches, and email that resulted in higher engagement from those who visited, suggesting that those who were sent a link or had prior knowledge of the site engaged more than those who came directly from an advert. This makes the case for blended digital/practitioner provision in terms of higher engagement with digital interventions. However, there may also be some benefit – such as raising awareness of the issues surrounding parental conflict – from engaging a cohort of parents who have briefer interactions with the content.

Parents sharing their experiences

Good Things Foundation, based on user testing and feedback in Phase One, developed a community chat function on the 'See It Differently' site. However, this was not taken up. Good Things Foundation identified themselves that parents would most likely be hesitant posting on an unestablished, low-use forum on an unknown website. It seems that parents may be willing to share their experiences online, but in very particular circumstances. An interesting test could be to partner and provide expertise within established existing forums, such as Mumsnet, to see if parents are more willing to share their experiences in these spaces.

Digital resources for practitioners

Both Good Things Foundation and OnePlusOne further developed digital guidance for practitioners in Phase One. Although engagement with the resources was mixed, having a digital resource was found to be the best alternative to delivering in-person training. Flexibility was found to be key for practitioners, both in how they accessed guidance and how they delivered and shared resources with parents.

Importance of testing and adapting content

Both OnePlusOne and Good Things Foundation learnt that even small changes to their content made a difference to user engagement. Often this was related to the

language used – making it more understandable or making instructions more direct. OnePlusOne reported that a small change to language used on their landing page had a positive effect on engagement. This highlights the importance of ongoing review with users in development, as even small changes can make a big difference as to whether parents engage.

6. Overarching conclusions

While learning in Phase Two has built on the information generated by the projects in Phase One, the new challenges faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have created a raft of knowledge related to remote delivery with disadvantaged groups. Remote delivery has allowed projects greater flexibility and has facilitated wider reach as physical / geographic barriers are removed. However, it is clear that while engagement has remained strong, the families engaged have not always been those who could benefit most from the interventions; those facing highest levels of disadvantage. Increased interest in the interventions from families with less disadvantage may be due to the increased pressures being faced by a wider range of families but could also be due to the change in delivery mechanism self-selecting who can be supported. Learning from the Challenge Fund project delivery in Phase Two suggests that those with the most complex needs are not best supported online, and digital exclusion in lower-income families is a significant barrier to engagement.

A number of projects have expressed an intention to maintain some aspects of remote delivery going forward, given some of the benefits that the model brings. However, it remains clear that for the most vulnerable or complex cases, face to face delivery still has much to offer in terms of addressing trauma effectively, and indeed for easing access in cases of digital exclusion.

In Phase One, the projects worked hard to develop strong referral pathways and partnerships with local referring organisations. While these remained vitally important in Phase Two, projects expanded their approaches to engagement using other mechanisms such as social media. There were important lessons learned related to digital marketing and targeting adverts; digital marketing generated volume and breadth of reach, but more direct referral mechanisms such as via a practitioner generated more engagement with the content.

The pandemic meant that the projects working with practitioners were able to reach greater numbers through online delivery of webinars and training, though the engagement was sometimes less meaningful than it would be in person, with less discussion generated. Furthermore, services which have been highly stretched during the pandemic have struggled to embed practice related to reducing parental conflict to the extent they might have liked.

Testing new models has been an ongoing theme through the lifetime of the Challenge Fund, and in Phase Two new learning is still emerging about what works to engage parents. Projects have attempted new models of delivery such as bitesize workshops rather than full parenting courses, which appeared to be a good hook for parents with many going on to do other workshops or indeed the full course.

Importantly, there has been evolution in terms of the understanding of parental conflict and how to communicate with both parents and practitioners about it. The terminology around conflict is of vital importance, and projects found the language

they used impacted on engagement and behaviours; couching conversations in more positive terms such as improved communication, child outcomes and family dynamics was important. For parents, understanding the impact of conflict on children impacted on their motivation to address conflict or change behaviours.

Challenge Fund projects have been well received by parents and feedback suggests that they have both improved their understanding of conflict and changed their behaviours as a result of their participation. Where concrete data on outcomes exists it is positive, indicating that parents have achieved a reduction in conflict as well as higher levels of parenting satisfaction and improved confidence. Where children have been involved in delivery, feedback is also positive.

Overall, the Challenge Fund has left a strong legacy of learning across the two phases of delivery.

- Expanded evidence base of programmes which are effective in reducing parental conflict.
- Evidence that programmes can be tailored to reach targeted groups.
- Broader understanding of 'what works' in supporting parents in conflict - including specific work around prisoners' families, dads and BAME groups.
- Trained practitioners able to continue delivering programmes in local areas.
- Clear evidence that parents do seek support in the digital space – with Good Things Foundation videos reaching over one million views.
- Evidence that proper support for separating couples can reduce court proceedings (and produce better outcomes for families).
- More practitioners skilled and knowledgeable about couple conflict: more confident to speak to families about this 'private' area and intervene early.
- Greater awareness of early intervention – supporting couples in conflict before escalation to domestic violence or abuse.
- Greater understanding of the opportunities presented by virtual/digital delivery including greater reach and costs savings.

In summary, the Challenge Fund has met its objective to generate an evidence base on what works to support parents experiencing relationship conflict, and furthermore leaves a legacy of resources including online tools for parents, practitioner toolkits and guidance, as well as formats for programmes which could be rolled out more widely.