



**The Parent Champion Programme  
Independent Evaluation, April 2013**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

The Parent Champion Programme is run by the Charity 'Every Family Matters', and delivered by the linked organisation, a social enterprise 'Develop Your Child CIC', both directed by Alan Wilson. It is conceived not as a parenting programme focussing on skills and strategies, but as a personal development programme that supports individual parents in developing their innate knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances, through a process of coaching and emotional literacy techniques, underpinned by neuroscience and combined with strong peer support. Parents are empowered to develop self-responsibility and make choices to change themselves, using this influence to improve relationships, communications and circumstances in their families. This is a capacity-building model in which the outcomes for children and families are explicitly intended to be sustained and spread, through individual parents first looking to themselves, then their families, and then becoming advocates and coaches to support others in the local community.

## 1.2 Structure and take-up of the Parent Champion Programme

The Parent Champion Programme was structured into four main stages from April 2011 to March 2013:

1. *Family Coaching Cafés* run in each of two Children's Centres in Medway: Bligh (Strood) and Riverside (Medway);
2. *Parent Champion Level 2 Courses* focussing on personal development for parents, consisting of a series of 8 sessions (2 hours), which ran in the same two settings and is accredited by OCN at NVQ Level 2.
3. *Parent Champion Level 3 course*, focussing on parents taking the approach into their families, consisting of another 8 sessions (2 hours), which ran in Bligh Children's Centre and is accredited by OCN at NVQ Level 3.
4. A *Parent Champion Online Community* which was established in the later stages of the project.

54 parents started the Level 2 course, 30 of whom completed. 21 of these 30 applied to continue to Level 3, of which 12 were selected for the funded places. All 12 completed the Level 3 course and achieved OCN accreditation.

## 1.3 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation considers the evidence in relation to the following intended outcomes for the Parent Champion Programme:

1. Positive impact on parents' innate knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances including employability, in two settings in Medway;
2. Building capacity to sustain the work in these settings and increase the programme's scope to other settings;
3. Raising awareness of the programme's value and potential amongst the professional services for children and families;
4. Achieving positive outcomes for children and families, with resulting impact on schools and local communities.

A Management Information System was designed for the Parent Champion Programme to capture attendance statistics, record outcomes and assess distance travelled using a bespoke questionnaire for each programme. A wealth of qualitative evidence included observations and conversations with participants, OCN Portfolios, case studies written by parents, reports from Managers at the two Children's Centres and information and commentary from the Project Director.

#### **1.4 Outcomes in relation to programme aims**

Parents who chose to engage with the Parent Champion Programme were able to make profound and sustainable changes in their own lives and to influence their children, partners and wider families. Parents developed a repertoire of skills and techniques which they used for themselves and in their families to enhance their confidence, self-belief, ability to take responsibility and effectiveness, as a person and as a parent. They developed self-knowledge and an understanding of their children at a much deeper level, referred to in the Programme as an 'energetic connection'.

This programme can reach parents whose circumstances and behaviours may be particularly entrenched, resulting in lack of confidence to engage with other support. Professionals working with parent participants have seen significant progress in families including a 'stepping down' of levels of support required from Social Care for significant numbers of families. Most participants were more able to make decisions, move themselves into better circumstances and improve their life chances in terms of employment, housing, financial management and relationships, immediately after attending the course. Head teachers, health visitors and social workers have strongly endorsed the programme because they have seen the benefits for parents and families.

Parents' testimonies show that they are interested in carrying the work forward as coaches and advocates, both on a voluntary basis and by training for further education or applying for jobs in the fields of parental support or child care. A wider engagement has been building, particularly with schools, including those working with children with special educational needs and disabilities and with Pupil Referral Units. These partnership models may be the next step so that schools can both work

to transform the support for parenting and shift emphasis to more empathetic approaches with children and young people.

The Parent Champion Programme has an ethos of choice and empowerment and as such it cannot be considered as a 'universal' programme that will suit all parents' and families' needs. However, its approaches are inclusive, tailored and affirming for parents in any circumstances, once they choose to commit. It may therefore reach the most vulnerable of parents and families, in ways that more skills-based and behavioural programmes cannot. These approaches are at the heart of building strong communities and enabling families to face the future with resilience. There may be more work to do in understanding which parents and families, in which particular kinds of circumstances, are likely to engage with and benefit most from this programme, so that professionals who know the local community well can begin to identify those who would be best placed to benefit from the programme.

In relation to outcomes for children and young people, quantitative evaluations show progress with all aspects of family relationships and improved relationships with teachers and schools. Parents, partners, friends and extended families are reported to have noted the marked differences in children's behaviour and attitude. However this is more than a behavioural programme and there are also plenty of examples of children expressing love, care, concern and empathy, with their parents and with siblings at play. There are also very many powerful examples of deeper emotional, perhaps sometimes spiritual connections between parents and children, which within this programme are described in terms of positive energy and connection. Although as yet these remain unexplained in scientific terms and it is easy to be sceptical, the nature and extent of the evidence from this programme demands further exploration. Most importantly, all of these instances are linked to practical, positive change.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the positive outcomes for children is the description in many parents' accounts of children being coached to use the approaches within the Parent Champion Programme for themselves. At the most profound level, children have learnt to coach their parents and siblings, to step back from conflicting situations and to employ relaxation techniques both regularly and to calm themselves down in times of stress and conflict. They have helped parents to set goals for the family and for themselves to improve their lives. Perhaps most powerfully of all, children have applied these approaches on their own in new environments without the direct support of the parents who taught them, for example when visiting a father or grandparent. The evidence gives a strong message that as a society we are underestimating children. When listened to, understood and empowered, they need not be passive recipients of 'behaviour training' but can contribute to loving, caring and the building of positive relationships in their own families and communities. This deserves more attention in further research.

## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1 Background to the programme**

The Parent Champion Programme is run by the Charity 'Every Family Matters', and delivered by the linked organisation 'Develop Your Child CIC', both directed by Alan Wilson. The programme was supported by the Big Lottery Fund for £77,000 from April 2011 to March 2013. It is conceived not as a parenting programme focussing on skills and strategies, but as a personal development programme that supports individual parents in developing their innate knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances, through a process of coaching and emotional literacy techniques, underpinned by neuroscience and combined with strong peer support. Parents are empowered to develop self-responsibility and make choices to change themselves, using this influence to improve relationships, communications and circumstances in their families, and eventually coaching their own children and partners. Every Family Matters claims that this 'transforms the whole family dynamic' such that instead of worrying about children's behaviour, parents and children focus on the quality of relationships, deeper levels of listening and more effective communications and connections between family members (Every Family Matters, 2013; Develop Your Child, 2013).

### **2.2 The distinctive Parent Champion approach**

The Parent Champion approach draws on many strands of theory and practice across a range of themes and disciplines, for example it is based on a coaching model, uses ideas from neuro-linguistic programming, employs psychological constructs and has a strong spiritual dimension. This evaluation is not concerned with evaluating underpinning theories, but examines evidence of what has happened in practice in relation to the intended outcomes of the funded project. It assesses the effectiveness of the Parent Champion Programme, while acknowledging that it is underpinned by a range of models and ideas that may have varying levels of validity. It is important to recognise that the Parent Champion Programme itself may be contributing new theory that requires further, much more extensive research by those with expertise in the relevant academic fields. In the meantime, this evaluation addresses the immediate issues of the extent to which the Parent Champion Programme has built parenting capacity, to achieve positive outcomes for children and families in Medway and the likelihood that this can be sustained.

The vision for the programme is that parents will become 'champions' of the approaches in their local community. Initially this may be through volunteer placements within areas they are drawn to support, for example with teenage parents, those who have children with special educational needs or disabilities, or

parents with a history of sexual abuse or substance misuse. However there are indications that those completing the two-stage course are interested to progress into employment in the field of parental support or child care. A further development that has emerged recently is the potential to work with groups of parents and teachers together to explore the use of these approaches in partnerships between schools and families. This is therefore a capacity-building model in which the outcomes for children and families are explicitly intended to be sustained and spread, through individual parents first looking to themselves, then their families, and then becoming advocates and coaches to support others.

### **2.3 Pilot evaluation**

In 2010, an evaluation of a small-scale pilot of the Family Coaching Café and Parent Champion Level 2 course was conducted (Sesnan, 2010), encompassing two courses with 10 and 11 participating parents respectively and the 'drop-in' café at Bligh Children's Centre, supported by the Centre manager and staff. The distinctiveness of the Parent Champion approach was recognised, including its foundation in recognising and harnessing 'energetic connections', particularly between parents and children. The course was found to be effective in achieving 'transformational results' for individuals. It was also noted that parents who engaged in the Parent Champion course were committing themselves to concrete steps to continue the approaches (referred to as the programme's 'theory of change'). Questions remained about the sustainability of the outcomes in the longer term for participants and the sustainability of the programme as a whole.

### **2.4 Structure and scale of the Parent Champion Programme**

The Parent Champion Programme was structured into three main stages over the course of the funded project:

5. *Family Coaching Cafés* run in each of two Children's Centres in Medway: Bligh (Strood) and Riverside (Medway);
6. *Parent Champion Level 2 Courses* focussing on personal development for parents, consisting of a series of 8 sessions (2 hours), which ran in the same two settings
7. *Parent Champion Level 3 course*, focussing on parents taking the approach into their families, consisting of another 8 sessions (2 hours), which ran in Bligh Children's Centre.

During the course of the funded project, the Level 2 and Level 3 Parent Champion courses have been accredited and assessed by Open College Network (OCN) at NVQ Levels 2 and 3 respectively.

After the first year, Family Coaching Cafes, which ran on a drop-in basis and were not always well attended, were abandoned in order to focus on the successful Parent Champion Level 2 courses. In these two settings, 6 Level 2 courses were run. 53 parents formally started the programme of 8 sessions, of which 30 (56.6%) completed the course.

21 of the 30 parents who completed the Level 2 course applied to continue to Level 3. There was sufficient funding for 12 parents at Level 3 and all 12 (100%) who were selected completed the course, including the OCN accreditation, from January to March 2013. Of these, 3 came from the Level 2 groups at Riverside and 9 from Bligh.

During this time it was realised that there was potential for a Parent Champion Online Community (Parent Champion, 2013) to strengthen the existing links between parents already on the courses and to draw others in. Membership is offered free for those on the Parent Champion courses. This was still in the relatively early stages of development at the conclusion of the funded project in March 2013, so is only included on this basis within the evaluation. It is now known as Parent Champion Level 1, replacing the Family Coaching Café within the programme structure.

#### IMPORTANT NOTE

The original funding application referred to Parent Champion Level 1 and Parent Champion Level 2 courses. When the OCN accreditation was secured at NVQ Levels 2 and 3 respectively, the Parent Champion courses were re-named to accord with the accreditation levels in order to avoid confusion. In this evaluation they are referred to by the *new* levels, 2 and 3, while Parent Champion 1 is the Online E-Learning programme.

## 2.5 Purpose and intended outcomes

The aims of the funded project were as follows:

1. Positive impact on parents' innate knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances including employability, in two settings in Medway;
2. Building capacity to sustain the work in these settings and increase the programme's scope to other settings;
3. Raising awareness of the programme's value and potential amongst the professional services for children and families;



All of these contributed to the overall aim of

4. Achieving positive outcomes for children and families, with resulting impact on schools and local communities.

The evaluation examines the evidence from the funded programme to establish the extent to which these outcomes were met.

### **3. The context: supporting parents in Medway**

#### **3.1 An appropriate and distinctive programme**

This evaluation takes into account the local context for parenting in Medway and in the local settings chosen for the project. It is important to set the Parent Champion Programme within what is known about effective support for parenting to achieve positive outcomes for children and families. In considering these contextual aspects, the Parent Champion Programme demonstrates many of the characteristics identified in effective provision but also emerges as distinctive in particular respects. It was therefore well placed to contribute to the current range of provision in Medway. This section considers the Parent Champion approach in relation to the research-based local context.

#### **3.2 Effective support for parents**

A report entitled 'Review and future development of parenting programmes in Medway' (Roberts, 2009) stated that a 'rich and varied' offer of parenting programmes needed to continue to meet local needs. No one approach was appropriate to meet the different types and intensities of need; instead it was recommended that there should be choice and flexibility for parents and that tailored support would sometimes be needed. Of particular concern was the inclusion of vulnerable families who might find it difficult to access the more generic programmes, either due to practical difficulties (lack of crèche, lack of transport) or because they did not feel that they 'fitted in'. This included the generic programmes that offered a parenting 'toolkit' or were based on developing skills and strategies to manage children's behaviour.

The report gave a useful overview of messages from research about parenting. It stated that

Confident, supportive parenting has a significant beneficial effect on children's outcomes even after all other factors such as parents' social class and educational background have been taken out of the equation (p.17).

The report went on to emphasise the importance, according to research evidence, of supporting the rapid phase of early brain development with experience of positive relationships: "warm, loving attention with secure boundaries" to enable children to develop "empathy and self-control" (*ibid.*), which accords with Parent Champion principles, although 'secure boundaries' could be subject to different interpretations. Furthermore, the potential for strong positive parent-child relationships to modify the negative effects of social disadvantage is recognised. In order to do this, the psychological needs of parents must be addressed. This endorses the starting point

of the Parent Champion approach, as a personal development programme focussing on empowering individual parents in their own lives, so as to achieve outcomes for their children and families.

In terms of the nature of provision, early intervention was found to be the most valuable. The most effective programmes had a 'strong theory- base', a structured 'curriculum', a clearly articulated model of change and 'measurable, concrete objectives' (*ibid*, p.18), all of which are key elements of the Parent Champion Programme. Further evidence points to the need to be working on all fronts, with parents, children and whole families, which accords with the Parent Champion relationship-based approach, although it is parents who are empowered to coach their own children rather than the children being involved directly. Tailored support, including opportunities for parents to set their own objectives, balances universal provision to ensure inclusion, while involving parents in the development of the provision improves effectiveness and is more likely to ensure sustainability. The flexibility to adapt the programme to meet parents' and families' needs emerges strongly in the evidence presented later in this report and the accounts of those who completed the Level 3 course, in particular, demonstrate the bespoke nature of their experience as they took responsibility not only for its application in their own lives but also for deciding how they could contribute to taking the approaches out into their communities.

### **3.3 Appropriate settings**

The settings in which the Parent Champion Programme has run, Bligh and Riverside Children's Centres in Medway, are situated in communities that are socially mixed and include significant deprivation. The programme has therefore had opportunity to contribute to the support for parents in vulnerable families. Roberts (2009) found that Children's Centres are an ideal focus for provision since they know their local communities so well. The Bligh and Riverside Centres provided an accessible venue with friendly meeting room (comfortable chairs, attractive surroundings, relatively undisturbed location, refreshment facilities and crèche provision funded by the project. They were in a position to make referrals for particular families, promoted the courses more generally and had a means to communicate directly with parent networks and individual families. Furthermore, they could create an ethos to underpin the empowerment within the course, including offering opportunities for progression, for example into voluntary placements working with other parents or into paid work

### **3.4 Parental engagement: choosing to change**

Another issue that was highlighted in the Medway report was that parenting provision needed to attend to recruitment, retention and sustainability – ‘getting, keeping and engaging’ parents. The Parent Champion Programme approached this rather differently, as noted in the interim evaluation where there was an opportunity to compare this approach with the experience of someone who facilitated a more behaviourally-based programme (Appendix 2). Parent Champion relies on parents ‘choosing’ to engage and to change. Sometimes they may choose not to, and sometimes they may find the programme too challenging and feel they are not ready for such a commitment. There is therefore no ‘chasing’ of individuals who do not attend and no reminders are sent out. Instead, parents are asked to take the responsibility to attend and there is no blame attached if they lapse, for whatever reason, or simply stop coming. To balance this, there is always unconditional support and affirmation for them as people and a powerful bond builds between members of the group, such that they develop commitment to one another, communicate via Facebook and other media to offer encouragement and, increasingly, connect via the programme’s online community. This extends beyond messaging, for example the Level 3 group agreed a daily meditation time when all members of the group commit to connecting online or, if they could not do this physically, made space to connect mentally at the allotted time.

One person with a history of substance misuse stopped attending the group for many months, but returned when she felt she was strong enough. She was able to progress to complete the Level 3 Parent Champion course and is now working for a centre helping others to find a way through. The Parent Champion approach takes a long-term view with the belief that the onus is on individuals to decide to change and judge when they are ready. Until such time, other provision may be more effective in addressing family and parenting issues, including child protection. Once parents engage with and commit to the programme, however, the evidence presented later in this evaluation bears out the pilot evaluation (Sesnan, 2010), showing that the Parent Champion approach can be transformational, for adults, children and families.

### **3.5 Beyond ‘delivery’: a capacity building model**

Finally, an interesting distinction emerges with regard to the ways in which parenting programmes are depicted in terms of the ‘practitioners’ who are trained to deliver programmes and the ‘parents’ who attend them. The Parent Champion Programme is tightly structured and directed using a coaching model as opposed to more rigid ‘training and delivery’. It has a specially designed series of sessions and materials and a trained person leading each course. 4 main tools are taught over 8 sessions, giving flexibility for those who attend to be given plenty of individual support. Each session is facilitated to ensure the best outcomes for those attending and is highly

responsive to participants' circumstances whilst maintaining the process of development. Some individual coaching takes place after the formal end of the session.

All participants are conceived as having unlimited potential and capacity building starts from the outset, with an expectation that people will progress to become co-facilitators, then to lead groups to support other parents, whilst in their families they begin to coach partners and children at Level 2 and work on this much more explicitly and intensively at Level 3. Thus there is evidence of partners working more effectively together to achieve consistency with children, of small children (as young as 3) being taught approaches and techniques and putting them into practice, and of children being empowered to offer support to parents in the same ways. Within the Parent Champion Courses, parents who are most engaged may become co-facilitators of sessions after only a few weeks, and some of the most vibrant evidence from sessions and individual accounts was written up for this evaluation by one co-facilitator who wishes to become a Parent Champion coach while personal development continues.

### **3.6 Effective evaluation**

The Medway report (Roberts, 2009) noted that there tended to be a lack of formal and systematic evaluation of parenting programmes against outcomes. Instead they tended to rely on informal feedback from parents' comments. This programme has addressed the issue by designing an integrated, systematic evaluation. The structure and process of the evaluation is discussed fully in Section 5.

In comparison with other provision for families, children and parents, the Parent Champion approach blurs the role boundaries between 'practitioners' and 'parents' and aims to involve everyone, including members of families and members of programme groups, in improving relationships, communications and connections. Goals tend to be expressed less in practical terms, such as children having better behaviour and doing as they are told and parents experiencing less stress and managing conflict better. They tend to be expressed more in terms of children's and parents' 'happiness', 'love', 'voice', 'self-worth' and 'being in control'. Through the Parent Champion Programme, people whatever their age or circumstances aim to become more resourceful and more 'comfortable in their own skin' in order to help others be the same. These might be considered aspects of congruence. It is important to establish, therefore, that it was necessary to ensure that the criteria for evaluating the programmes and outcomes were open enough to extend beyond those for more skills- and behaviour-based programmes.

## 4. Key Concepts

### 4.1 Conceptual development of the Parent Champion programme

As already explained, the Parent Champion Programme integrates a range of ideas and key concepts which contribute to its unique approach. In discussions with Alan Wilson it has become clear that there is continuing conceptual development underpinning the programme. He agrees that the Parent Champion Programme involves practical application of techniques through which have emerged additional ideas for which he is seeking verification in research. This aspect is complex, since the programme crosses academic disciplines, with distinctive practical elements that have been designed for the programme but have their foundations in different fields.

It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to undertake research into the viability of the underpinning theory. As already explained in the introduction, validation of the approach is only possible here in relation to its effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes for parents, children and families over the timescale of the project. This was also concluded in the previous evaluation of the pilot which, although identifying the foundations in theory, was undertaken on the basis that "...what matters is whether it works in practice" (Sesnan, 2010, p.12).

Early discussions have taken place with researchers in the fields of psychology and education at Canterbury Christ Church University, to begin to explore the possibilities of designing and resourcing a funded research project to test the validity of the approaches used in the Parent Champion Programme. This would involve subjecting them to longitudinal scientific scrutiny, taking into account their spiritual as well as humanistic dimensions.

### 4.2 Some key concepts explained

Practically speaking, it is important to explain several concepts that are central to the approach, since they emerge persistently in the evaluation evidence. This is approached without intending any academic judgement, expressing the ideas as understood through immersion in the programme evidence, using the interpretations that are given in the course literature or as explained by Alan Wilson and participants. There is therefore no attempt here to offer academic referencing, since there is no space to do justice to a rigorous conceptual discussion. The aim is to give a 'working definition' of terms that are not necessarily commonly known, as used in the programme, with a brief indication of their origins or terms of reference where appropriate.

**Congruence** (literally 'coming together') is a psychological construct described by Alan Wilson as "...a mixture of authenticity, integrity and

unconditional support without judgement or agenda, which is a huge contribution towards gaining [people's] trust. You can also call this 'energy' or 'love' ...". He believes this exists at a subconscious level and that children are particularly sensitive to energy or being controlled or manipulated. Congruence is linked with humanistic approaches to counselling and therapy. This concept underpins much of the Parent Champion Programme's emphasis on emotional literacy and relationship building. The questionnaire designed to assess 'distance travelled' throughout the programme contained a set of questions (Appendix 1) based on aspects of congruence.

**Resourceful state** is a term used in neuro-linguistic programming which refers to being in a situation where positive and helpful emotions and strategies are available in order to achieve a successful outcome. Parents who are mustering strength to cope with day to day situations are encouraged to work towards placing themselves in their most resourceful state in response to situations, or, preferably, in anticipation of a successful outcome.

**SMART goals** are Specific; Measurable, Achievable; Realistic and Time-bound / Tangible. The setting of SMART goals enables parents to break their goals into manageable steps and they are encouraged to use the technique with their children and families, review over short timescales and share successes in the group sessions. It is important to note that the 'measurement' does have to be by a third party but can be judged by the parents themselves. 'Tangible' is used to represent many participants' need for happiness and love, with parents being coached to recognise what this might mean in tangible terms.

**Descriptive praise** is a way of verbalising details when offering praise such that the praise is more explicit and therefore more rewarding. It tells the child exactly what is good. It therefore has the effect of reinforcing positive behaviour. For example when a child gets her mother's coat, instead of simply saying 'thank you', the mother says 'thank you for getting my coat for me, that was very helpful and sensible, now I will be warm enough when we go for a walk'. If the children are playing nicely, the parent can say, 'It makes me really proud to see you sharing the Lego with your brother and that's an amazing space ship you've made!'.

**Energetic connection** is a form of communication between individuals at an emotional level, which is referred to often in the Parent Champion Programme. This was recognised as the foundation of the approach in the pilot evaluation report (Sesnan, 2010). Alan Wilson recognises that

...children are extremely sensitive to our emotional state and the first step to change things [is] to be aware of this emotional level.  
(Every Family Matters, 2013).

Parents are encouraged to cultivate awareness of this and to tap into these connections with their children, peers and partners, with an explicit aim to achieve positive outcomes. Where they reflect on having done this, they use phrases like 'sending positive thoughts', 'sending love' and 'imagining him happy'. They recall children's sensitivities and responses to their own unspoken feelings (sometimes referring to them as 'vibes'), attributing this to the energetic connections between them. The concept of energetic connection is difficult to explain in physical terms and clearly has spiritual dimensions but is not linked here to any particular religion or ideology. The rationale that people may find for themselves seems to be less important within the programme than the nature of the experience and the discovery that for some it can transform lives.

***Energetic listening*** is the deepest in a series of 5 levels of listening identified by Alan Wilson in the process of developing the Parent Champion programme and is particularly applied to parents who are challenged to listen to their children through an 'energetic connection' (see above). It is an extrapolation from models that define various levels of listening, generally moving towards greater empathy. Energetic listening involves picking up non-verbal as well as verbal cues, being in tune with the other person and overcoming assumptions about what they mean in order to find out what they genuinely feel and are actually trying to express. It might involve asking deeper questions to elicit a thoughtful and honest response. It might involve no speaking at all. Parents are encouraged to practise and encourage this with their children, families and peers and then to draw on the technique in times of need when someone is upset, angry or discouraged. In the Parent Champion Level 3 course, parents are invited to teach this deeper level of listening to their children as well as to practise it themselves.

### **4.3 Authentic language and experience**

These concepts are introduced systematically through the series of sessions using the specialist materials and curriculum. Thus parents are gradually inducted into a new language and vocabulary. Broadly speaking, as they started the Level 2 programme, observations showed signs that the ideas were being adopted but they were not necessarily explained using the specialist language of the course. At the end of Level 2, parents were confidently using the vocabulary derived from the course to describe and explain their experiences. By the end of Level 3, parents were not only continuing this to a greater degree, but were also setting out their goals and aspirations in terms of ideas such as 'energetic connection', 'active listening', 'SMART goals', 'resourceful state' and 'descriptive praise'. Meanwhile, other familiar phrases from the course that had become personally meaningful regularly appeared in their reflections, both oral and written, for example reminding



themselves that they were 'special', 'sending loving thoughts' and recognising 'positive energy' in the room. It was interesting that each person developed a slightly different set of words, phrases and ideas in order to conceptualise their process of development and consequent work within their families.

If the programme had had less integrity, this might have become formulaic. It is therefore important to stress the striking individualism and honesty of the parents' accounts and testimonies, many of which were triangulated in several different sets of evidence. At no time did the evidence suggest that parents were writing what they might have felt the course leader wanted to hear, or that they were coerced into particular responses, or at a loss for words. Their written accounts are rich in personal details and raw in their unflinching individual reflections of their own feelings and of the challenges as well as joys of family life. They reflect varying levels of literacy from beautifully crafted prose to short phrases relying heavily on the prompting headings and questions. The case studies give more scope for individuality and have been interpreted in different ways. Conversations during evaluation visits to sessions revealed even more information and conveyed the intensity of experiences and passionate beliefs the programme had instilled for many participants.

## **5. Methodology for the evaluation**

### **5.1 Purpose of the evaluation**

The purpose of the independent evaluation was to ensure the systematic gathering of quantitative and qualitative data and to analyse this in order to determine the extent to which the Parent Champion Programme met its intended outcomes. These were conceived in terms of

- a) the positive impact on parent participants' knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances including employability;
- b) the extent to which the project has built capacity to sustain the work in these settings and increase its scope to other settings through the training programme;
- c) the extent to which awareness has been raised amongst the professional services for children and families.

The evaluation was also concerned with the value, influence and impact of the Parent Champion Programme for participating parents' children and families, with concomitant benefits to schools and the local community, since the outcomes of the project are focussed on achieving this overall aim through parents.

### **5.2 The Management Information System**

A management information system (Salesforce, 2013) was designed to collect and report quantitative data and collect some qualitative information, session by session and course by course, for all participants in each of the two settings. Information collected on this system included

- Family information for each participant
- Attendance information
- Questionnaire data at the start and end of Level 2 and Level 3 courses, using a series of questions against a ratings scale so as to assess parents' perceptions of 'distance travelled'
- Outcomes statements session by session
- Case studies written by individual parent participants
- Measurement of progression.

The Course Director was responsible for updating this information, which was accessed directly by the external evaluator.

### **5.3 Data gathering tools**

An integrated approach to data collection was encouraged in the spirit of the programme, with a series of tools designed to capture evidence and at the same time offer opportunities and structures for formal reflection, sharing and feedback. These were developed by Alan Wilson in collaboration with the evaluator for each stage of the Parent Champion Programme, adjusting where appropriate in response to consultation with participants. They were used actively in the sessions and were invaluable for participants, as well as in the evaluation, for gaining insights into progress and outcomes. The tools included

- forms for recording aims and aspirations at the start of the courses;
- questionnaires using a ratings scale against aspects of congruency to provide a benchmark at the start and assess distance travelled by the end of the course, with additional space for comments;
- session and course review sheets designed to focus on personal development at Level 2 and family development at Level 3;
- 'success diary' sheets to complete between sessions which were similarly designed to reflect the emphasis on personal development at Level 2 and family development at Level 3;
- A set of suggested headings to provide a starting point for individual case study accounts (several people adapted this format to write very creatively about what the course had meant to them).

### **5.4 Formative evaluation and interim report**

The evaluation process had a formative element in that observations and ongoing data analysis were fed back to the Every Family Matters organisation to inform progress. The external evaluator observed two Parent Champion sessions in spring 2012 which included opportunity to talk to some parents. An interim report was provided in February 2012, which identified some emerging patterns from the data and some critical questions to inform the continuing evaluation (see Appendix 2).

### **5.5 Online information**

The Every Family Matters web pages on the Parent Champion courses were updated to reflect developments in thinking and activity. These were extremely helpful in articulating the philosophy, principles and practice underpinning the courses.

## 5.6 Summative evaluation

The final evaluation drew on additional evidence as follows:

- a) The full set of data from the specially designed Management Information System including summaries of attendance evidence indicating extent of take-up and retention and charts showing the extent of 'distance travelled' with regard to congruency questions, from beginning to end of the Level 2 and Level 3 courses. Questions reflected the differential emphasis on personal development of parents at Level 2 compared with taking the approach into homes and families at Level 3;
- b) Notes from the final Level 2 session at Bligh Children's Centre which included a series of brief interviews with several participants as well as general observations of the discussion;
- c) Individual portfolios for the 12 Level 3 participants compiled for their OCN accreditation (Parent Champion Level 3) which included
  - aims and aspirations at the start of the course
  - questionnaire data and their comments on distance travelled
  - reflective comments written at the end of each session, focussed on personal and family progress
  - 'success diaries' brought to each session which had been shared with the group, reflecting on particular achievements within the family
  - OCN assessor's verification of achievement by observation of individual participation within the group session;
- d) Individual case studies written by most participants of the Level 3 course
- e) A report from each of the two Children's Centre managers on the Parent Champion Programme in their settings (Appendix 4 and 5);
- f) Progression data giving prospects (e.g. employment, training or voluntary work) for Level 2 and Level 3 participants;
- g) Detailed and comprehensive notes on the level 3 sessions written by the parent participants who co-facilitated the sessions;
- h) Access to an online community established toward the end of the funded project, which included a discussion forum, blog and motivational quotations and support.

The evaluation therefore drew on a great deal of qualitative information which enhanced the quantitative analysis available from the Management Information System. It gave considerable insights into people's lives, circumstances and progress, while personal accounts of achievements and experiences illustrated outcomes with the benefit of additional layers of reflection and commentary. For each participant at Level 3, the evidence about particular aspects of progress or significant incidents and experiences could be triangulated from several of the sources above, for example the same story about a family incident could be found in the OCN folder, the session notes, the case study and Alan Wilson's own accounts,

where these were completed independently rather than being compiled one from the other. There was also evidence of transition in that some participants were observed in more than one session and their narratives could be traced back through the programme's documentation. Parents were asked to identify when other people had noticed changes, for example in children's behaviour, which although reported by the parents themselves, provided a measure of additional verification beyond the group participants and their coaches.

### **5.7 Allowing for additional and unexpected outcomes**

In developing the methodology and bespoke tools for the evaluation, an openness to the range of evidence was cultivated, which included listening carefully to what participants were saying beyond the answers to closed questions and responses to questionnaires. This included valuing narrative evidence and participants' personal judgements of the significance of events and experiences. In a programme that hands responsibility to parents for their continued development and the choices they make, it is particularly appropriate that their selection of evidence for their success diaries and case studies should be trusted as relevant and personally meaningful. Evidence for additional and unexpected outcomes was found in parents' stories, discussions and conversations, including their own writing. The evaluation allowed new and affirming evidence to emerge where outcomes could not have been planned or foreseen. Sometimes this exceeded even the expectations of the project leader, as well as surprising and delighting parents.

## **6. Analysis of evidence**

### **6.1 Structure of the analysis**

The analysis of evidence begins with a summary of the conclusions from the interim report in February 2012 which was completed when the Parent Champion Level 2 course had run for several sessions. The quantitative and qualitative evidence is then summarised from the Parent Champion courses at Levels 2 and 3, beginning with an overview from the Children's Centre Managers. Finally there are some comments in parents' own words.

### **6.2. Summary of conclusions from the interim report**

The interim evaluation noted that take-up was relatively low in each of the two Centres, involving 4 and 5 parents respectively in the observed sessions, while the Family Coaching Cafes had erratic attendance but were serving a purpose in raising awareness and providing a non-threatening way in. Parents were exercising choice about whether to engage with the formal sessions of the course and were not 'chased' if they did not attend. However, when they committed to the programme and to each other, the benefits and positive personal outcomes were already profound (summarised in Appendix 2, section 2.9). Sessions were found to be well organised and carefully structured, with Alan Wilson displaying considerable skill in the coaching process. Many examples of benefits for parents and families were gathered in the form of a series of anecdotes and it was clear that the exercises and materials were structuring a powerful learning and development process.

There were already signs at this early stage that parents were starting to apply the techniques and ideas from the course in their families, although they were quite tentative about this and nervous of scepticism. The observations raised questions about whether a programme on this scale could have any appreciable impact on more than a handful of people. It was agreed that the particular approaches used would not be effective where people were coerced to attend as the course depends on the development of individual responsibility and commitment to change. It was not clear whether, for those participating, the changes for those who engaged could be sustained in the medium and long term. There were also questions about the extent to which the programme was reliant on Alan Wilson and whether it could be scaled up by involving other coaches. Finally it was recognised that the backing of a range of professionals, agencies and organisations could support and promote the programme and that there was potential in exploring its delivery in other settings.

### **6.3 Overview for the Parent Champion Programme from Children's Centre Managers**

The Children's Centre Manager at Riverside gave an external assessment of the outcomes of the Level 2 course (Appendix 4). Of the parents who attended, 3 were referred within Child Protection Plans and 2 within Common Assessment Framework Plans. The Manager reported that changes were seen in 10 of the 12 participants seen on a regular basis at the Parent Champion Level 2 courses:

The course raised self-confidence and self-esteem in all of these parents week on week and this was observed through their body language, their communication and then staff were able to see it in [other parenting courses] provided by the Centre

(Collins, 2013).

She also noted that 10 of these parents were able to make confident decisions shortly after the course had finished, in dealing with debt (1), moving to a more suitable home (2), returning to work (1), engaging in further education (2), building stronger bonds with extended family (2) and returning to the family home after absence (1). Some parents had never left their children with anyone else so the confidence to use the course crèche was significant in itself, as was the confidence for 3 parents in moving over to Bligh for the Level 3 course, meeting new people in new territory. They would not have done this unless they had already boosted their confidence in the group.

The Bligh Children's Centre Manager reported that this was the only programme where he had experienced head teachers, social workers and health visitors calling to share positive changes in both parents and their children (Appendix 5). Parents were observed as having 'more control over their behaviour' where previously some had issues with anger management. Health and general appearance of some parents and children also improved where there were previously concerns. At Bligh, 12 participating parents had become volunteers at the Children's Centre or joined the parents' forum and 18 had attended further training. 11 participating parents were known by Social Care and of these, 7 have 'stepped down' in the formal assessments of levels of need, through removal of Child Protection or Child in Need designations and many have made progress which can be attributed to sustained attendance of the Parent Champion sessions. These families remain within the Common Assessment Framework for on-going assessment of need, but no longer need the higher levels of intervention. The Centre Manager concludes,

I am an advocate of the Parent Champion Programme and have been a challenger and driver for its continued development and progression. I can honestly and professionally state that the programme has made significant positive changes with those who have attended, with the ripple effect of their learning reaching their children and wider family and community networks.

(Sands, 2013).

## 6.4 Parent Champion Level 2 evidence and outcomes

### *Levels of engagement and completion for Parent Champion Level 2*

6 Parent Champion Level 2 courses were run within the funded project, comprising 8 sessions, each of two hours' duration, at Bligh and Riverside Children's centres. 64 parents had at least some engagement with the programme and 53 formally started the programme, with 30 (56.6%) completing the course. This gives an average group size of 5 completers per group. Remembering the power of the outcomes achieved and the sensitive nature of the discussions, this may be reasonable and it is difficult to imagine the same outcomes for groups larger than about 10, which was the starting point.

Given the challenging circumstances of many of the parents and the unpredictable nature of their lives, this should be considered a good level of retention. It is also worth noting that 10 of the 11 parents who only attended one session reported positive outcomes in terms of improved emotional resilience, learning life and social skills, increased motivation and aspiration and/or greater involvement in supporting children, so although these people did not continue to engage the session was still beneficial and may have sown seeds for the future. It is possible that some of these people would return, if the programme was still available, when they felt able to commit and resilient enough to face the challenges of the programme.

### *Quantitative evidence of outcomes for Parent Champion Level 2*

Parent Champion Level 2 courses focussed on personal development and the evaluation concentrated particularly on the outcomes in terms of parents' knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances including employability. The quantitative data summarised from the Management Information System (see charts, p.27) shows the 'distance travelled' for those completing the course, based on questionnaire data which was designed to focus on aspects of congruence and personal development.

The charts for each question show that for the vast majority of participants, the distance travelled was positive for every question, with only 3 of the responses being negative (indicating a lower rating at the end of the course than at the start for a particular question) out of a total of 480 for all 30 participants across all the questions. It was notable that there were no negative responses at all for 13 of the 16 questions. Most questions showing more than half of the participants had recorded maximum or near to maximum improvements compared with their original scores. The greatest distances travelled were in increased confidence, control over self and circumstances, happiness and a sense of meaning and purpose, love and belonging. Slightly lower levels of progress had been made with 'changing



generational behaviours'; although improvements were still shown this may indicate lack of confidence in understanding the question. The small negative values (showing backwards movement) might have been due to changed individual circumstances or possibly heightened perceptions altering people's responses to their own behaviours and feelings.

The quantitative evidence therefore shows very clearly the almost universal benefits of the Parent Champion Level 2 course in supporting every aspect of parents' personal development towards greater confidence, congruence, self-worth and self-efficacy which relate to the first of the aims of the programme listed in Section 1.

### *Qualitative evidence of outcomes for Parent Champion Level 2*

Testimonies from parents at the end of the Parent Champion Level 2 course give considerable insights into how the course has transformed their lives. The difference in the atmosphere in the room between the sessions observed a few weeks into the programme and the final session was palpable. Where previously parents had been concerned with their own stresses, problems and challenges and conversations were quite inward-looking, often confined to the home, this time there was a great deal of positivity directed outwards and into the future. For example parents were talking about outings with their children, inviting friends round, developing their social lives and about their own ambitions for their future, including voluntary work, training and employment. They spoke about improved relationships, gave many examples of better communication with their children and partners and said that family life had improved.

One mother, now expecting her third child, was now managing her challenging job as a carer much more calmly, giving time for her to talk and improve people's lives, where previously she was rushing from one job to the next. She described a poignant episode where she had sat down with a lady with dementia who was confused about her house, to show her photographs and reassure her so that she was calm enough to take her pills. This mother had ambitions to lead a team to ensure the service was managed well, accepting that she would have to interrupt her career for her baby. She felt she was a strong role model for her family and was a great deal calmer and more positive than at the start of the course.

Another mother said that she had joined the group when she was very shy and could not speak but sat still 'inside herself', using her 'phone. At this final session she was joking with other parents about the party clothes she had worn for Christmas. Although at other times she is still quiet, she said the course had given "more time for myself instead of running around after everyone all the time" and wanted to progress to further training.

A third mother from this group was completely different compared with when first observed towards the beginning of the programme. She described herself at that time as an 'emotional wreck' and said she had now changed her life. 10 months previously, any minor problem caused a major setback. Now she had started going out socially, had met a partner and was excited about their shared interest in re-enactments. She and her daughter had collected Napoleonic and World War Two costumes and the family were planning visits to Wales and abroad. She wanted to work with parents who had been sexually abused.

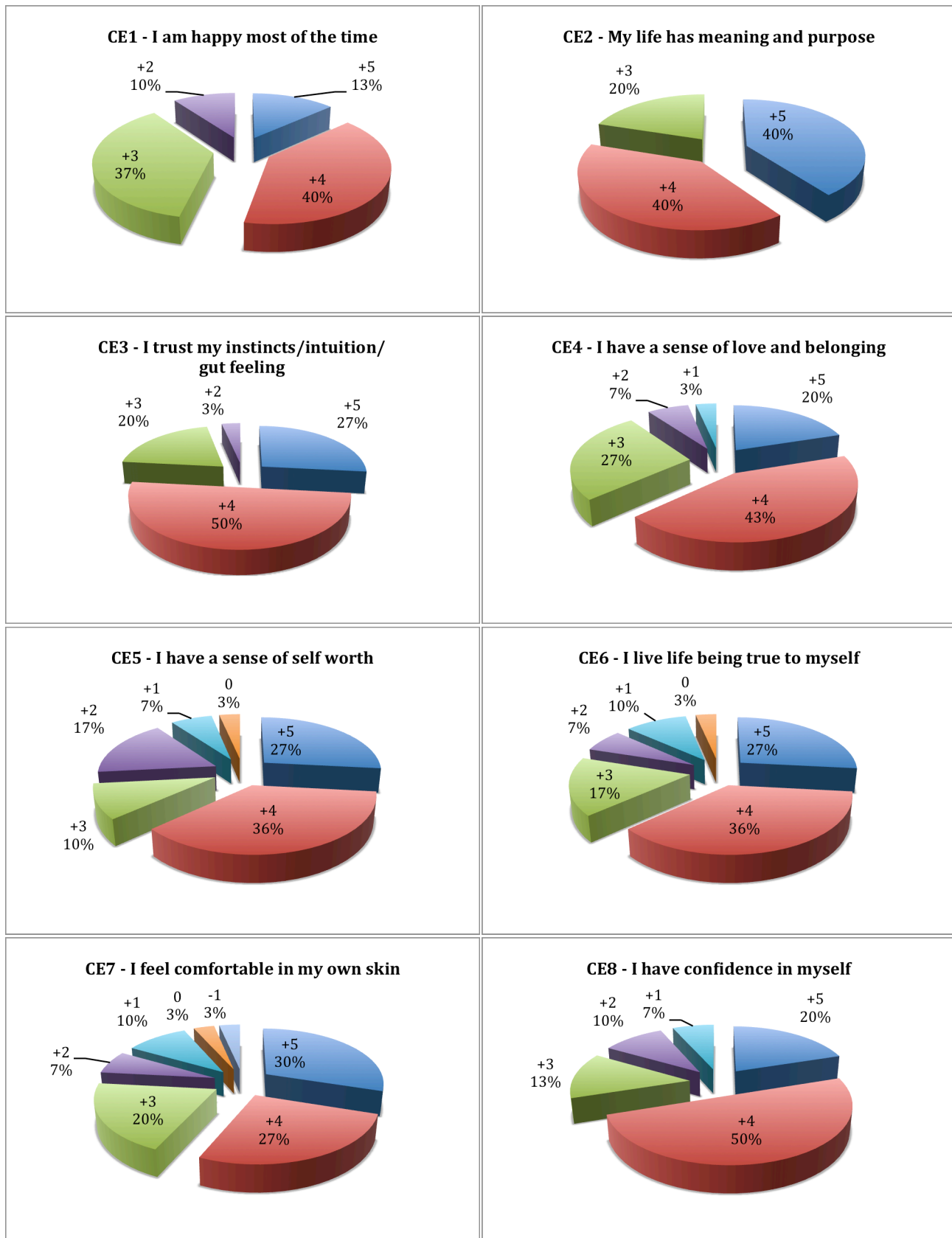
A couple with a young family who were attending the programme together described how their family life had been transformed through better communication, such that visitors commented, bed times were calm, structured and manageable and their relationship had been saved where they were "ready to give up on it". They described in detail the techniques from the Parent Champion Programme that they used together, to manage situations that would previously have escalated into "lots of shouting and muddle". They were now able to empathise, explain their feelings and give each other support. They said it was different at the school gate now because instead of everything being dreadful they would 'spread the sunshine' themselves, say what is good and smile.

Significantly, this couple said that they had tried many parenting courses but this was different. Although quite daunting to start with, it works because "...you don't get told what to do, so you have to work things out for yourself, you work on yourself and you do it for yourself". Parents' accounts, observed discussions and the comments made in reflections and evaluations bear this out, demonstrating parents making choices to move themselves forward and improve the details of their lives step by step, recognising and building on successes until they had much greater control of their lives.

The evidence demonstrates that the Level 2 course enabled personal development that had profound effects for individuals and families. Tools and techniques were found to be effective in enabling parents to improve their lives and then influencing their partners and families in the same way. The positive ethos of the course shone through, not only in parents' accounts relating to the programme, but also in their informal discussions and demeanour. The qualitative evidence gives many insights into how the approaches work in practice in families and authentic, convincing stories of change. The evidence demonstrated universally positive outcomes for individuals and families who chose to commit to the whole course, which spread into communities and schools. These benefits included knowledge, skills, improved health, wellbeing and employability.

## Outcomes: Parent Champion Level 2

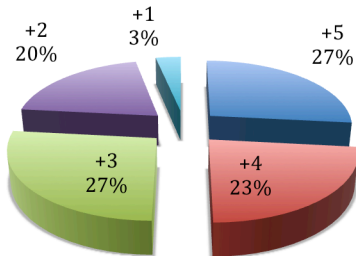
Distance travelled outcomes for the 30 participants scored on a -5 to +5 scale.



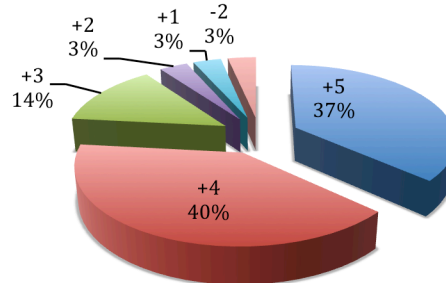
## Outcomes: Parent Champion Level 2

Distance travelled outcomes for the 30 participants scored on a -5 to +5 scale.

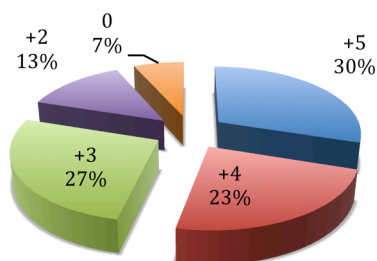
**CE9 - I'm able to resist making judgements about people**



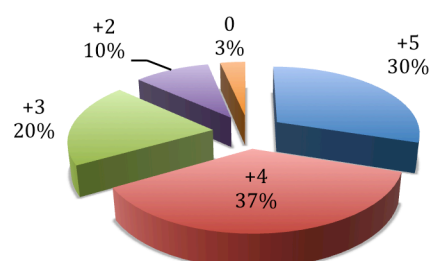
**CE10 - I'm in control of what happens to me**



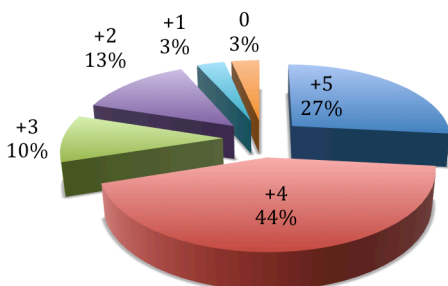
**CE11 - I'm able to build better relationships with teachers/school**



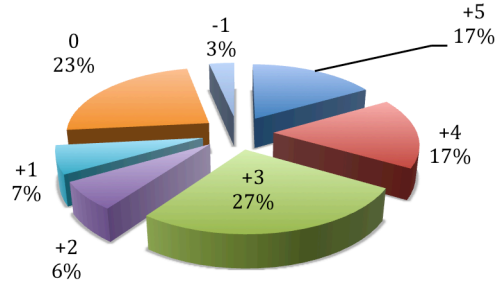
**CE12 - I'm better prepared for education, employment or training**



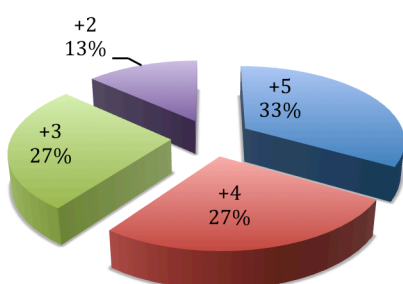
**CE13 - I can break free of reactive behaviours**



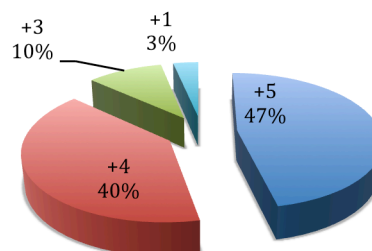
**CE14 - I can change my generational behaviours**



**CE15 - I'm successful in achieving goals**



**CE16 - I have improved deeply connected relationships with my children**



## **6.5 Parent Champion Level 3 evidence and outcomes**

### *Levels of engagement and completion for Parent Champion Level 3*

There were 21 applicants for Parent Champion Level 3. 12 of these were selected as best placed to take up the available funded places and all 12 completed the course and the OCN Level 3 accreditation.

### *Quantitative evidence of outcomes for Parent Champion Level 3*

Parent Champion Level 3 courses focussed on applying the ideas and techniques with children and in families. The questionnaire was therefore lengthened to encompass the additional outcomes while retaining the questions to gather perceptions of distance travelled in relation to personal development, continuing from the Level 2 course. There was not one negative response from any of the 12 participants, indicating that distance travelled was always positive in relation to the 26 questions, with the exception of one person who still felt at the same point in terms of ability to resist making judgments about other people (see charts, p.33).

Greatest personal progress was felt to have been made in terms of parents feeling comfortable in their own skin, trusting their instincts, being true to themselves, having meaning and purpose and feeling a sense of love and belonging. For families, parents had made greatest progress in doing things together and in enjoyment of this, in visitors to homes having a positive experience, in teachers now speaking positively about their children, and in improved relationships with teachers. Communications with children and their ability to calm themselves also showed progress. Parents recognised they had made good progress as role models and now gave their children more space and understanding.

It was not possible to derive anything other than an overwhelmingly positive conclusion from this data, both in terms of personal development of parents and in relation to positive outcomes for children and families. It indicated empowered parents, better family experiences and perceptions of greater self-worth, even where the personal circumstances of some participants remained challenging, showing that what had changed was not environments or situations but perceptions, approaches and mind sets. The set of data indicated something much deeper than behavioural change, because the questions focussed not only on what parents were *doing*, but also on how they *felt* about themselves and their situations.

### *Qualitative evidence of outcomes for Parent Champion Level 3*

The parent participant on the Level 3 course who began to co-facilitate and document sessions gathered much qualitative data as the session progressed,

including powerful case studies of individual experiences and progress. She concluded that the impact on families is as follows:

- Parents become aware of the impact on children of their own emotional state and also that their children, as young as 2 years old, understand what is happening to them in the family relationships and tend to take responsibility for the issues.
- Children's behaviour changes dramatically ... and is noticed by teachers and school staff.
- The family dynamic becomes more harmonious.
- In some cases where there is a partner they start to work in harmony together.

All these points are supported by narrative evidence and illustrative examples from discussions, conversations and case studies. The accreditation portfolios are particularly striking in their individuality and detailed, honest accounts, showing that parents have developed considerable skills in self-knowledge and reflection. The Learning Outcomes achieved by participants, all of whom completed the Level 3 course, are as follows:

The learner will

1. Understand own motives and abilities in developing own child
2. Understand the links between thoughts, emotions and behaviour
3. Understand different types of listening skills
4. Know techniques for motivating others
5. Be able to sustain changes made
6. Know how to care for self.

Each of these learning outcomes is broken down into statements of what the learner demonstrates they can do, which include use of the techniques from the programme, for example they need to provide evidence of setting two SMART Targets for themselves and two for other people.

Parents at Level 3 set out their own personal aims for the course and for their lives. These included

- wanting children to explore their life and be more confident and aware of others' feelings and relationships;
- financial security and a family holiday;
- confidence, voice and inner strength;
- creating and promoting energy that allows children to thrive;
- connecting to family;
- happiness.

Some parents had ambitions beyond themselves and their families, often building on their life experiences, for example wanting to work in counselling, education or child care.

The evidence shows that as the course progressed there was a clear transition from personal development that was the focus on Level 2, to coaching families in the techniques and approaches in the programme, to working with other parents, children and families.

Very specific techniques were learnt, practised, applied, taught and embedded by parents:

*Energetic listening* had encouraged much deeper connections and improved relationships, particularly with children. This included allowing children to express themselves and taking what they said seriously instead of assuming or overriding their feelings. There are many examples of this transforming situations, for example in a long traffic jam, travelling late, a father asked his 4 year old daughter why she was crying and was able to develop the conversation to explain that he and her Mum were frustrated too, then to start a discussion about the 'rules of the road'. He said it was the "Best traffic jam ever".<sup>4</sup> Buried in the evidence of one folder was an account of a mother encouraging her daughter to tell her anything, whereupon her daughter disclosed a situation that required the police to be called by the mother. While details are not given, it is sufficient to say that deeper listening may in some cases ensure children's safety.

*Giving children choices* had been beneficial in many situations that would previously have caused conflict. Success diaries recalled examples such as children being asked whether they wanted to play a game before or after tea, or being given a choice of where to go for an outing, and accepting the decision that they had helped to make. This developed greater tolerance and harmony in families.

*SMART goals* began to be used habitually by families and there are some impressive examples of this working collaboratively. One boy converted his goals into an intricate diagram with a football goal, the steps being taken drawn as players on the pitch. Another boy who was not able to play football with friends as he was overweight sat down with his mother to construct a healthy eating plan for them both and eventually played football again. Partners were also encouraged to use SMART goals, for example to recover from ill health.

*Relaxation techniques* were often used initially in stressful situations but became part of people's regular routine. One family had their small children practising meditation which improved their behaviour and demeanour. Children learnt techniques to calm themselves down and some remembered

to advise their parents to use them when stress is rising. This required children to be receptive to parents' emotional state. An interesting development was the use of the online community by parents who committed to meditate together at the start of the day.

*Achieving a resourceful state* was particularly meaningful to parents who recognised their tendency to be brought down by circumstances and situations. One parent describes moving himself into this state when the car broke down, while others used the concept and technique to deal with toddler tantrums or boredom in shops. The accounts show it is something that can be learnt and practised until it becomes easier to achieve quickly in order to diffuse situations but can also pre-empt stressful situations. A number of parents used this approach to gather the confidence to take their small children out, for example to a restaurant. Some parents would never have taken their children out for pleasure before they started the Parent Champion Programme.

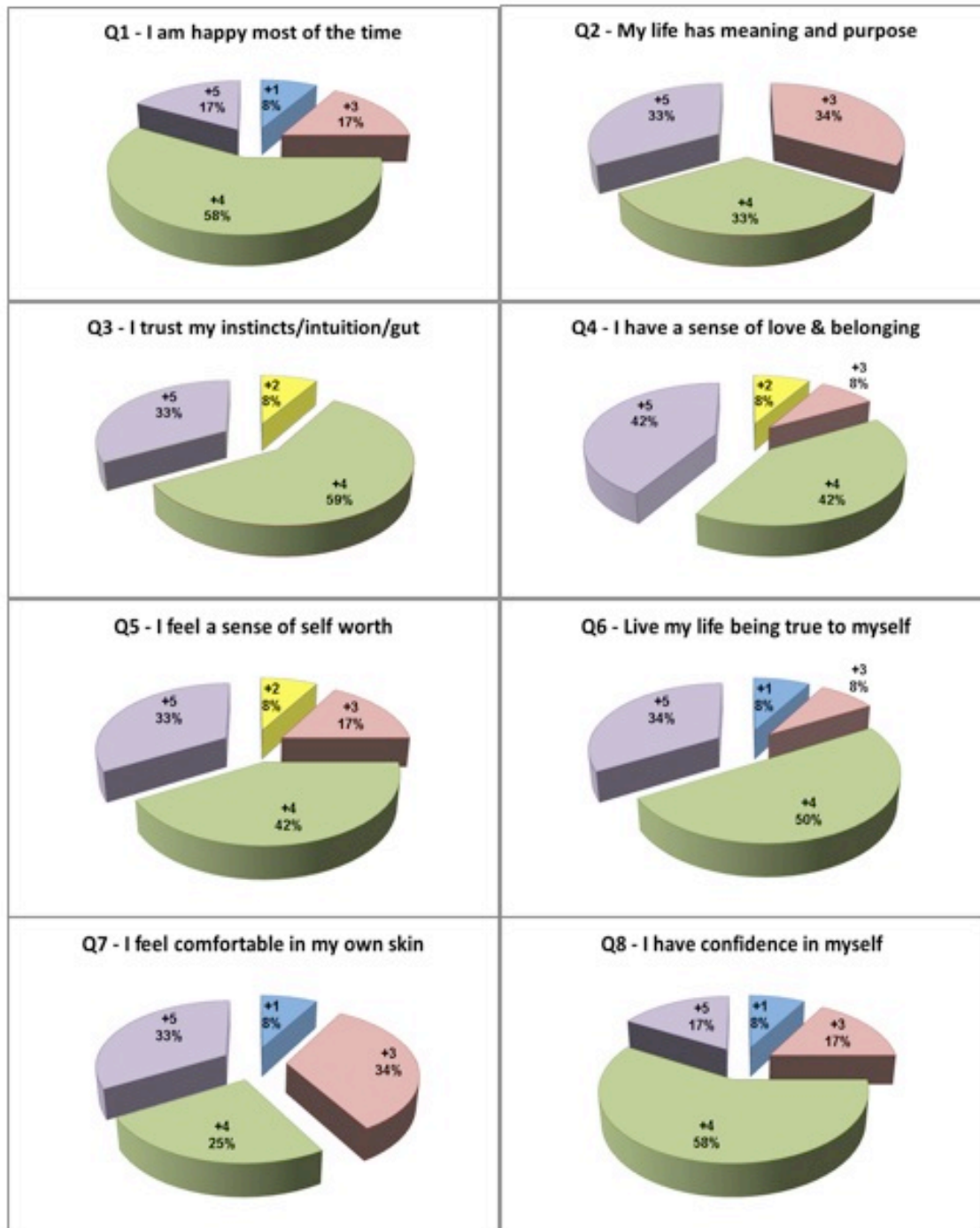
*Energetic connection* was particularly powerful for many parents who developed deep relationships, involving non-verbal communications, with their children. One parent described visualising white light around her child, others 'sent love' or sent 'positive energy'. As already explained, it is difficult to rationalise the many accounts of what could be described as positive forces in action. Parents describe being amazed that children responded verbally to thoughts, feelings and ideas that had not been expressed. One parent who concentrated on sending her child loving thoughts while he was at school was greeted by the teacher who said what a good day her son had had and commented on the way in which he had changed, which was sustained. Whatever the reason, a positive and loving mind set seems to have been communicated very explicitly to enhance relationships within families, making people more receptive to one another's feelings and improving behaviour and sense of self, even in the very youngest children.

As would be expected in a programme that focuses on recording success and emphasising positivity, no negative evidence was recorded, although parents did acknowledge with raw honesty the challenges and setbacks they faced. One parent summed up the positive philosophy thus: "Two steps forward and one step back is still progress". The overwhelming impression given by the wealth of evidence available was that whatever happened, parents had developed knowledge and skills to deal with it and were confident in their ability to move forward. Moreover, they had inculcated this ability in their children and partners. They also offered peer support within the group, were encouraged and motivated to hear others' successes and had a strong sense of developing together.



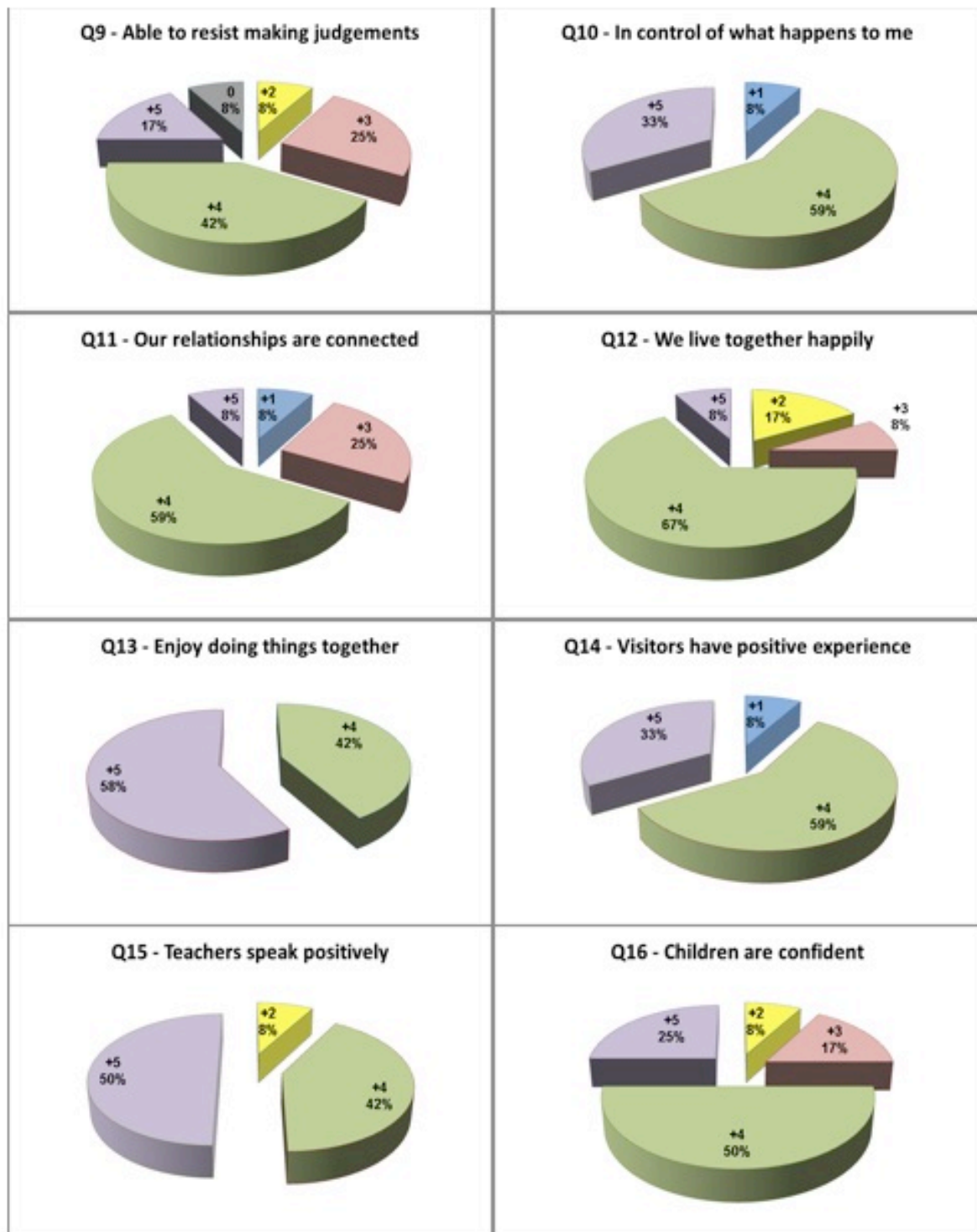
### Outcomes: Parent Champion Level 3

Distance travelled outcomes for the 12 participants scored on a -5 to +5 scale.



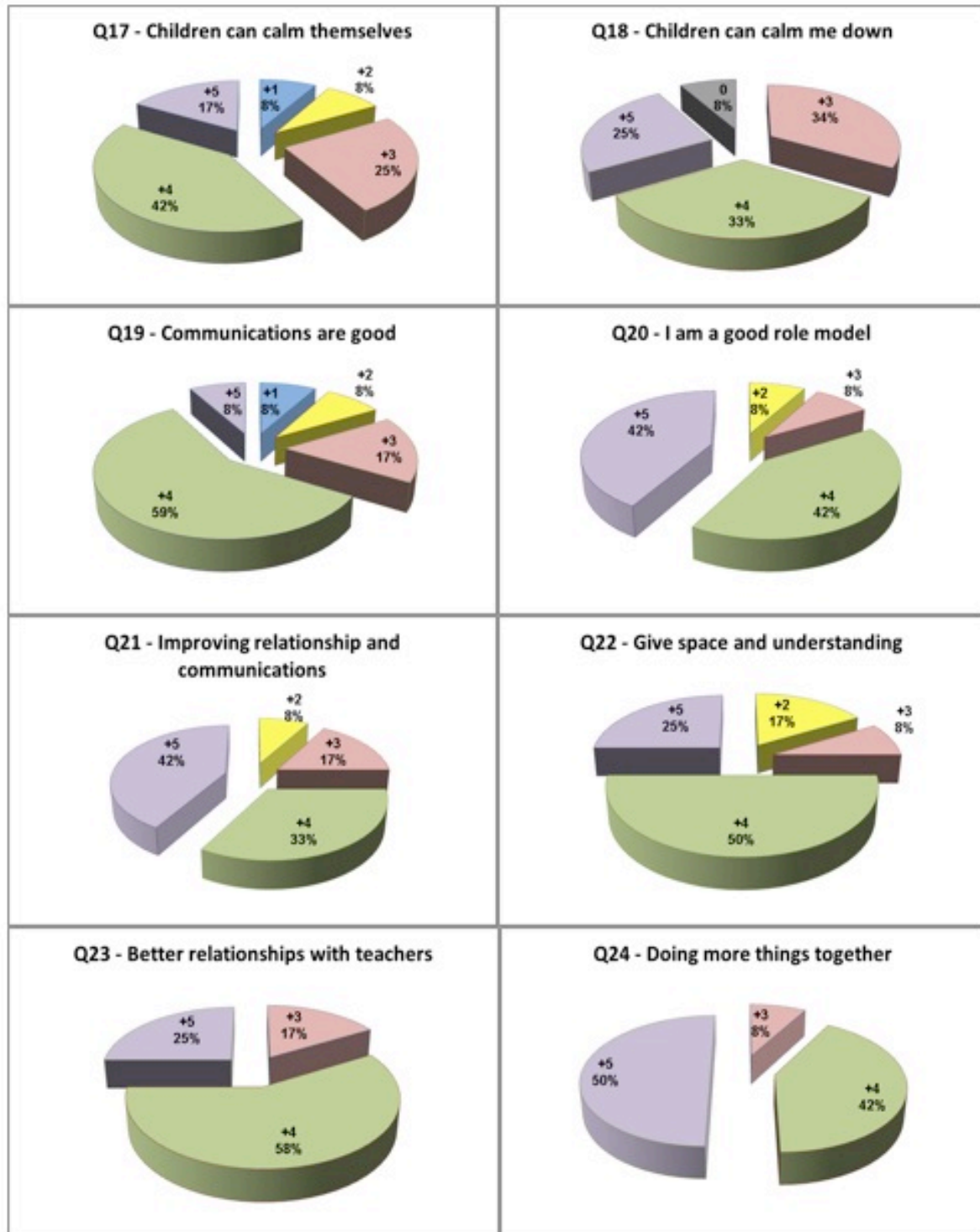
### Outcomes: Parent Champion Level 3

Distance travelled outcomes for the 12 participants scored on a -5 to +5 scale.



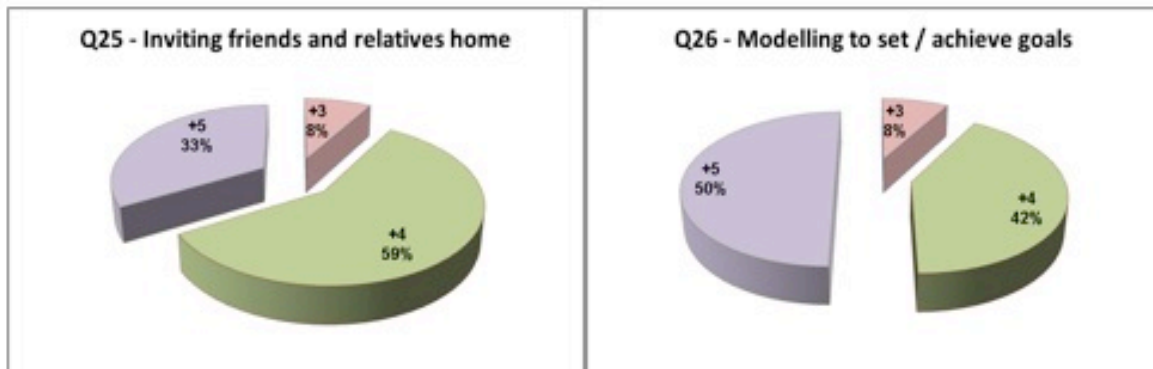
### Outcomes: Parent Champion Level 3

Distance travelled outcomes for the 12 participants scored on a -5 to +5 scale.



### Outcomes: Parent Champion Level 3

Distance travelled outcomes for the 12 participants scored on a -5 to +5 scale.



## 6.6 In their own words

It is not possible to include all the many powerful stories of change but these statements, taken from individual case studies written by parents, represent summaries of some of the benefits and the nature of the progress made by the end of the Level 3 course, in parents' own words<sup>1</sup> and it is hoped that these will give a flavour of the programme better than any further analysis. There is no commentary as it is clear that these parents can speak for themselves.

If a challenge presents itself, I can deal with it without feeling low and with a healthy life perspective. The kids' behaviour improves daily and we are both constantly and continually amazed with their progress.

I listen to my children and treat them as equals in terms of their capability. They have learnt to remove negative energy from their surroundings (or remove themselves from the negativity), make their own choices and take responsibility for their decisions / actions, and deal with bad situations in the right way by getting into a resourceful state (as much as a 3 and 6 year old can!).

Through learning to trust my own judgement, I gained the confidence to approach my ex- partner and make it clear to him how I felt best we could progress with contact arrangements which would be convenient for everybody and would benefit my son most. I also learned the importance of preparing myself and getting into a resourceful state before facing any challenges that may arise, in order to be more productive and find positive in all situations.

Parent Champion is about recognising what we can control and learning to deal with what we can't. It's having trust within our own instinct, it's becoming our own most resourceful selves, reaching our own potential and deeply connecting with our children to allow them to do the same.

Over the past few months we have achieved things which I would never have believed would be possible and our lives seem to be heading in a much more positive direction as a family.

Being a member of the Parent Champion Community is good as it means meeting people all wanting to achieve a similar goal. Also putting their children first and accepting each other. It is a non-judgmental place where I can say how I truly feel.

There is great truth in the saying 'rose tinted spectacles' tinting our vision of reality as rosy, pretty, serene and lovely. Well up until recently I have been wearing heavy, thick dark spectacles making my life seem dark, dreary and

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<sup>1</sup> These extracts are direct quotations from case studies, but a few very minor adjustments have been made to the original wording so that the statements make sense when they 'stand alone'.

depressed with very little hope of light. Embarking upon Level 3 of the Parent Champion course has been like visiting the optician. It has not changed my physical environment or personal circumstances but it has allowed me to view it in perspective and with less self-doubt.

Of course there are ups and downs in life but I have found by just letting go of the issues that upset me, I don't get drawn into the negativity. Now I'm very excited about what life will bring our way – I'm confident that we are ready to face it.

These tools and methods of coaching can literally transform your life, therefore transforming your children's. My son seems to have flourished and is so much more articulate and better connected to me; it has made both of our lives easier and more enjoyable.

Finally, the following testimony is included in full as it illustrates powerfully the holistic nature of the changes supported by the programme, in a mother's transition from extreme need to one of capacity to change her own life, improve her family and support others.

My life before I knew about this course was in one word, chaos. I was battling an addiction and was losing. I had lost a partner who had died through his own addiction and was on the verge of losing my son. Because of my behaviour my son was showing signs of anger, out of control, swearing...he had only just turned 3!

The first time I attended the course I didn't stay. It hurt me too much, the damage I was causing to my family was too great for me to accept. I was in denial. I returned a few years later and completed Level 2, then went on to Level 3.

My outlook on life and the understanding changed almost immediately. I've learnt so much on how my children's behaviour starts with me. I have seen a massive change in my son's behaviour, especially on the days when I use the energy connection. There was an occasion recently when his teacher pulled me over to one side when I went to collect him and said how much of a fantastic day he had... at one point when his usual group of friends became disruptive, he took himself away from them and played with another group of children.

While on the course, I've applied to train and volunteer with the local substance misuse centre. I have just heard that I've been given my own groups to work with. I plan to enrol on a counselling course that starts in June. Without Parent Champions I would still be stuck like a hamster on a wheel – wanting change but not having the confidence to move for it.

I would like to say to anyone thinking about this course, who's still in the place I was – it is most definitely worth attending. You will find the tools that you need to make that change for the better, in Parent Champions.

## **7. Conclusions in relation to intended outcomes**

The evaluation considers the evidence in relation to the following intended outcomes for the Parent Champion Programme:

5. Positive impact on parents' innate knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances including employability, in two settings in Medway;
6. Building capacity to sustain the work in these settings and increase the programme's scope to other settings;
7. Raising awareness of the programme's value and potential amongst the professional services for children and families;
8. Achieving positive outcomes for children and families, with resulting impact on schools and local communities.

These are considered in turn below.

### **7.1 Positive impact on parents' innate knowledge, skills, wellbeing and life chances including employability, in two settings in Medway**

There is powerful and irrefutable evidence from this project that parents who choose to engage with the Level 2 course are able to make profound and sustainable changes in their own lives and to influence their children, partners and wider families.

Parents developed a repertoire of skills and techniques which they used for themselves and in their families to enhance their confidence, self-belief, ability to take responsibility and effectiveness as a person and as a parent. Many participants were able to work with their partners to improve all aspects of family life as they learnt to apply the approaches. The most important knowledge that they developed was self-knowledge, along with understanding of their children at a much deeper and more emotional level.

It is recognised that this programme can reach parents whose circumstances and behaviours may be particularly entrenched, resulting in lack of confidence to engage with other support. It does this through developing parents as 'experts', taking control of their own lives within a trusting group. Professionals working with parent participants have seen significant progress in families including a 'stepping down' of levels of support required from Social Care for significant numbers of families who sustain engagement with the programme.

There is strong evidence of parents having clearer goals and longer term aspirations for their lives. As well as expressing these themselves, professionals who knew the parents affirmed that most participants were more able to make decisions, move themselves into better circumstances and improve their life chances in terms of employment, housing, financial management and relationships, immediately after attending the course. It was clear that parents were empowered to take more control of their lives as a result of the confidence built on the programme. Many have



become volunteers at the Children's Centre, joined a Parents' Forum and committed to further training and development.

## **7.2 Building capacity to sustain the work in these settings and increase the programme's scope to other settings**

The Parent Champion Programme is a capacity building model. Alan Wilson's persistence in following initially small groups at Level 2 through to much higher levels of completion at Level 2 and 12 parents completing the Level 3 course, over a relatively short timescale, has been remarkable. The OCN accreditation is highly significant in recognising participants' achievements. It is not clear whether, if funding had allowed, all 21 applicants for Level 3 could have completed the course. If selection is used to identify those most likely to succeed then this selection was extremely effective, resulting in 100% completion.

One of the Children's Centre Managers reported that this is the only programme that has prompted partner agencies to call to share the positive benefits, not only for parents who attend but also in their children (Sands, 2013; Appendix 5). This advocacy of head teachers, health visitors and social workers as well as from the Children's Centre staff, along with testimonies of parents who have participated, should be powerful in sustaining the work and extending it further.

Parents' testimonies show that they are interested in carrying the work forward as coaches and advocates. As well as working within their families, each has identified an area of interest, normally in line with their own life experiences, for example wanting to work with supporting families where children have special educational or health needs, parents who have been sexually abused or are affected by substance misuse or teenage parents. This could be on a voluntary basis but some parents have already made moves to secure employment, or are aiming for training for further education in the fields of parental support or child care, where they will undoubtedly make full use of the knowledge, skills and approaches learnt, as practitioners and as coaches.

The funded programme in two Medway settings has shown not only that the model works to build capacity to sustain this work, but also that it is sustainable into the future and in other settings. The case study and detailed documentation by the parent who became co-facilitator of the Level 3 course at Bligh demonstrates her capacity to take the work forward on her own and others have been involved as co-facilitators and coaches at Level 2.

Also encouraging is the early development of the online community. This does of course have the potential for global reach, and for connecting the Parent Champion approaches with programmes with similar ethos and structure. Building a wider evidence base should help to achieve greater validity. However it is important not to

lose the local focus on families in community and the current use of the online community to reinforce and extend the work done face to face in trustful and supportive groups may be key to the success of the web-based developments, into which others could be inducted. However, one concern is that parents may self-select on the grounds of ability to pay membership if not accessing as part of the Parent Champion course, which is likely to exclude the least confident and most vulnerable parents. It is too early to say how this will develop in future.

A wider engagement has been building, particularly with schools, including those working with children with special educational needs and disabilities and with Pupil Referral Units. The Parent Champion Programme has been adapted for groups of parents working alongside teachers to use the approaches and techniques with children both in school and at home. These partnership models may be the next step so that schools can both work to transform the support for parenting and shift emphasis to more empathetic approaches with children and young people.

### **7.3 Raising awareness of the programme's value and potential amongst the professional services for children and families**

The Parent Champion Programme has an ethos of choice and empowerment and as such it cannot be considered as a 'universal' programme that will suit all parents' and families' needs. However, its approaches are inclusive, tailored and affirming for parents in any circumstances, once they choose to commit. It may therefore reach the most vulnerable of parents and families, in ways that more skills-based and behavioural programmes cannot. It is about changing mind sets; its applications stretch far beyond the early years of parenting to enable a more positive outlook and build self-efficacy and choice. These approaches are at the heart of building strong communities and enabling families to face the future with resilience.

The Children's Centre Managers that had the most direct contact with the programme became advocates, recognising the value of the approaches to parents and seeing evidence of improvements for families. It is vital that the distinctiveness of the Parent Champion approach is communicated carefully, which is probably best done through professionals observing and listening to parents' testimonies, as concepts like congruence and energetic connection are not necessarily straightforward to understand and envisage. There may be more work to do in understanding which parents and families, in which particular kinds of circumstances, are likely to engage with and benefit most from this programme, in order to target them more clearly (although then allowing them to make a choice). Although no patterns were discernible, it might be possible to investigate this with professionals who know parents within the local community well and can begin to identify those who would be best placed to benefit from the Parent Champion

Programme and consider how to reach them most effectively, by referral and by local advertising.

It was clear from discussions with parents as well as from the Medway review (Roberts, 2009) and Bligh Children's Centre Manager (Sands, 2013; Appendix 5) that there is a range in provision and support for parents and families, that parents may move from one programme to the other seeking support that is helpful to them and that it is challenging to find the 'right' kind of support that is relevant to them and will enable them to make positive changes. This may be inevitable to a certain extent in complex and changing situations, but while the need for a range and choice of provision is recognised, a coherent and co-ordinated approach would help parents toward the most appropriate provision. This means that raising awareness has to develop in Local Authorities and across the professional services and cannot rest with individual organisations and agencies. The need for co-ordinated multi-agency working was noted in the pilot report (Sesnan, 2010).

#### **7.4 Achieving positive outcomes for children and families, with resulting impact on schools and local communities.**

Although this evaluation was not able to access the families directly, the positive outcomes for children were abundantly clear from parents', peers' and professionals' accounts. This includes reduction of risk in relation to Social Services indicators. Parents were referred to the Parent Champion Programme as part of their Child Protection and Common Assessment Framework plans. It is highly significant that families known to Social Care who engaged with the Programme have 'stepped down' from Child Protection and Child in Need procedures to the Common Assessment Framework. At one Children's Centre, 11 of the families were known to Social Care and 7 of these stepped down, with progress directly attributed by the Centre Manager to consistent attendance at the Parent Champion Programme, where they were able to gain appropriate support.

Quantitative evaluations of 'distance travelled' show progress with all aspects of family relationships and improved relationships with teachers and schools. This is borne out in every parent's narrative in which there are many, many examples of a completely different approach relying on listening, connecting, talking and making choices together. Parents, partners, friends and extended families are reported to have noted the marked differences in children's behaviour and attitude. Strangers in shops have commented on the excellent way that parents have handled potentially stressful situations.

However this is more than a behavioural programme and there are also plenty of examples of children expressing love, care, concern and empathy, with their parents and with siblings at play. There are also very many powerful examples of deeper emotional, perhaps sometimes spiritual connections between parents and children,

which within this programme are described in terms of positive energy and connection. Although as yet these remain unexplained in scientific terms and it is easy to be sceptical, the nature and extent of the evidence from this programme demands further exploration. Most importantly, all of these instances are linked to practical, positive change such as a teacher commenting on better behaviour, or a child comforting an upset parent with a kind word and a hug.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the positive outcomes for children is the description in many parents' accounts of children being coached to use the approaches within the Parent Champion Programme for themselves. Children as young as 2 and 3 have shown amazing levels of understanding which are evidenced with quotations and descriptions of significant incidents that have taken their parents aback. At the most profound level, children have learnt to coach their parents and siblings, to step back from conflicting situations and to employ relaxation techniques both regularly and to calm themselves down in times of stress and conflict. They have helped parents to set goals for the family and for themselves to improve their lives. Perhaps most powerfully of all, children have applied these approaches on their own in new environments without the direct support of the parents who taught them, for example when visiting a father or grandparent. The evidence gives a strong message that we are underestimating children and that, when listened to, understood and empowered, they need not be passive recipients of 'behaviour training' but can contribute to loving, caring and the building of positive relationships in their own families. This deserves more attention in further research.

## **8. Recommendations**

The analysis of the programme suggests a number of ways forward for the Parent Champion Programme and more broadly for the approaches developed and promoted through Every Family Matters. These recommendations are by way of suggestions for further discussion.

1. Secure funding to sustain the Parent Champion work and expand to other localities and settings, making use of the significant capacity already built at Bligh and Riverside.
2. Ensure that the distinctiveness of the Parent Champion Programme and Every Family Matters approach is clarified within the range of support provided for children and families where it is being offered, building in new ideas that have emerged during development over the last two years.
3. Work strategically with professionals already engaging with children, young people and families to promote the programme. Explore whether it is possible to identify parents and families who are most likely to benefit from this programme, and could therefore be targeted with referrals, encouragement and advertising.
4. Develop the online community further, exploring models that are inclusive and can reach the most challenged parents and vulnerable families.
5. Develop a theoretical framework that expresses the integration of ideas from different disciplines into the Parent Champion Programme and continue to explore how this might be verified by research.
6. Continue to build the case, with policymakers and professionals, for positive, connected, emotionally intelligent approaches that affirm parents and children as people and empower them as agents of change in their own lives, to make choices that improve their life chances and wellbeing.

## References

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Sands, A. (2013) 'The Parent Champion Programme at Bligh Children's Centre: Report, March 2013'.\*

Sesnan, I. (2010) 'An evaluation of the Parent Champions Pilot: empowering families courses and the Family Coaching Café' (funded by Awards for All). Every Family Matters, May 2010.

\*These reports are included in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 respectively.

## Appendix 1

### Parent Champion Programme Level 3

#### Attendance

All the parents who attended Level 2 training were invited to participate in the Level 3 training. We had 21 applications of which we were only funded for one programme of 12 parents. The course was a similar content to Level 2 which focused on personal development and Level 3 was to take the approach into the home and work with the children and partners if there was one, 50% had partners.

#### Evaluation

We asked what was the level of change (scored on a -5 to +5 scale) you experienced during the 8 weeks (2 hours) of the course with the following questions:

- 1) I am happy most of the time.
- 2) My life has meaning and purpose.
- 3) I trust my instincts/intuition/gut feeling.
- 4) I have a sense of love and belonging.
- 5) I feel a sense of self-worth.
- 6) I live my life being true to myself.
- 7) I feel comfortable in my own skin.
- 8) I have confidence in myself.
- 9) I am able to resist making judgements about people.
- 10) I am in control of what happens to me.
- 11) The relationships in our family are loving, trusting, respectful and connected.
- 12) We live together happily in our family.
- 13) We enjoy doing things together as a family.
- 14) Other people who visit our house have a positive experience.
- 15) Teachers or playgroup leaders speak positively about my children.
- 16) My children are confident in themselves.
- 17) My children can calm themselves down when they are upset or angry.
- 18) My children can calm me down when I am upset or angry.
- 19) Communications are good in our family.
- 20) I am a good role model for my children.
- 21) Improving the relationships and communications in my family.
- 22) Giving one another space and understanding.
- 23) Building better relationships with teachers/playgroup leaders.
- 24) Doing more things together as a family (in the home, going out and about).
- 25) Inviting friends and relations to our house.
- 26) Modelling to my children that we can set and achieve our goals.

## Appendix 2

### Notes

'Level 1' in this document refers to the current Level 2 Parent Champion course and 'Level 2' in this document to the current Level 3 Parent Champion course. The levels were changed to accord with the OCN Levels awarded.

The appendix to this interim report is not included here.



### Every Family Matters External Evaluation

Interim report<sup>2</sup> based on evidence from correspondence, Management Information System and two observation visits, February 2012. Judy Durrant, Canterbury Christ Church University.

#### 1. Summary before observation visits in February 2012:

- 1.1. In autumn 2011 there was much activity around designing a system to record evidence from the parent groups. Evidence is available by individual, by centre and by session over time. This is now running and provides valuable quantitative information on attendance, characteristics and outcomes from Family Coaching Cafes and Parent Champion Courses.
- 1.2. There has been much discussion about how to record outcomes in relation to 'congruence' which is a central concept for the project team. While this project does not have the scope to develop a formal scientific measure of congruence as a psychological construct, a questionnaire has been developed with reference to various similar work. This captures progression and outcomes at the start and end of Parent Champion courses in relation to a range of indicators: self-efficacy, resilience, wellbeing and so on. Parent participants also complete self-reflection sheets at the end of each session to capture qualitative information in response to more open-ended questions which, as well as reinforcing the quantitative evidence, will also pick up any additional unexpected outcomes.
- 1.3. It is clear that the project team is committed to capturing a range of data session by session and this is being recorded carefully.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a snapshot part-way through the first year of the project. Although the data is accurate it is partial. This report cannot therefore be considered as an evaluation at this stage, it is a consideration of selected evidence.



- 1.4. It is worth noting that there is an additional related body of work supporting parenting in the local area that is outside the scope of this particular project and evaluation, so it is important that the work in these two centres should be considered in that wider context.
- 1.5. At February 2012, the evidence indicated that the courses at the two centres in question, Bligh and Riverside, were small in scale, with numbers slow to build from summer to autumn 2011 but picking up more recently. However, powerful outcomes were already being recorded for parent participants who had engaged.
- 1.6. Possible factors affecting attendance were suggested by Alan. Some were practical - bad weather (snow), illness and half term - but some were to do with people being challenged and taken out of comfort zones. It was clear that people who continued to attend had to be willing and committed to change. If completely resistant to change, then the programme would not be worthwhile for them.

## **2. Summary of observation visits**

- 2.1. Two sessions were observed, with 5 parent participants in the first and 4 in the second. Normally the second group would have 6-7 participants. This is therefore very much a snapshot of the programme in mid-course (5<sup>th</sup> session).
- 2.2. The environment was carefully considered with a comfortable and private room, a circle of chairs, a kitchen for refreshments which they made for themselves or Alan made for them, a screen and a toilet accessible nearby. The crèche in the Children's Centre was essential.
- 2.3. The ethos of the groups had clearly been built over time. The start was informal but the groups quickly settled into a clear structure facilitated by Alan. Participants were friends and confidantes, they trusted one another, were mutually supportive, forgiving and non-judgmental. They were willing to learn and were using the approaches learnt in the course to support each other and modelling them in their families.
- 2.4. There was progression and reinforcement from previous sessions with a great deal of cross referencing that was impressively personalised. Alan remembered what people had done and how they had felt and used these as reference points. He used names every time he spoke to individuals. He was clear in what he wanted from each person. Although the work is always in a group, the interactions are in the form of Alan coaching individuals, although by this stage sometimes moving towards some peer coaching.
- 2.5. The planned inputs were extremely important in providing structure and 'emotionally neutral' material to complement the wealth of experience and sharing that participants brought to the sessions. These included some aspects that were used time and again, such as the video with song and the relaxation work. Phrases were used frequently so that participants were starting to repeat them back, for example 'breaking the habits of a lifetime', 'setting the intention' and so on.
- 2.6. Session programmes were decided on the experience of the previous session although they did follow a broad pattern around the set materials. Alan made clear decisions about when to spend more time and when to move on. This meant there was no wasted time or descent into anecdote or negativity. and Careful skilled questioning coached participants to add value to their decisions, for example

‘What are you going to do this week?’

‘How likely is it that you will do this?’

‘What else can you do?’

2.7. Positivity was emphasised throughout the sessions, balancing this extremely carefully so as to allow participants to share problems, disappointments and anxieties. There is a deliberate intention to counteract the deficit discourse and problem-centred activity which Alan feels is prevalent, for example in social work. The way to turn round the negative aspects was modelled, including both challenge and self-forgiveness. Participants all understood the importance of making the right choices. Success was greatly praised but I cannot remember failure being mentioned.

2.8. The record sheets and reflective episodes added great value to the sessions, capturing thoughts and experiences in the moment and giving a record to look back on. Participants clearly took this aspect seriously and used the tools outside sessions. Their progress was a source of great pride both individually and collectively.

2.9. Outcomes were very evident from the early stages of each session and much rich data was collected in the form of stories and anecdotes with some confirmation of changes recognised by other participants in the group. The outcomes reported included:

- greater confidence and feelings of empowerment and self-efficacy
- ability to manage situations and take control, particularly calmness and ability to stand back without getting stressed or losing temper
- ability not to be overwhelmed or dragged down by disappointments or apparent setbacks
- better relationships with family members especially children
- more time for children, less telling, more praise and more quality and one to one time
- kindness to self and forgiveness, less blame and guilt, ability to accept self and others as they are
- ability to live in the moment, be happy and stop imagining things that might not happen
- ability to distinguish things that mattered from things that did not
- more positive approach, seeing the good in situations and making situations better
- relaxation and achieving better deeper connections with children
- active listening to others and teaching this to children
- renewed commitment to families and children and greater self-belief in this as worthwhile
- lots of laughing
- happiness.

### **3. Commentary: emerging patterns**

3.1. The observations and other evidence show that depth is more important than breadth in this programme. It is designed for working with a small number of committed individuals who attend regularly, form a strong mutually supportive unit and have the intention to effect change. It would be inappropriate to work with much larger numbers in each group, with conscripts or with people who dip in and out of the programme.

- 3.2. Participants follow a clear and structured programme which is led flexibly in response to group needs. It is therefore essential to understand the values and principles and know the elements and structure intimately in order to enable this responsiveness, whilst adhering properly to the programme. Alan demonstrated this extremely effectively in these two sessions.
- 3.3. Participants learn to recognise not only *what* they have done but *why* it has worked, so as to apply the ideas in new situations. This is done through questioning and reflection. There were numerous examples of parents entering into this kind of reflective discussion as they recounted incidents in their success diaries (see Appendix) and considered the ways in which new approaches and attitudes had improved reactions and behaviour and then set new goals for the following week.
- 3.4. The sustainability of the programme rests on participants' ability to apply the ideas not only between sessions but beyond the programme, in other words they need to have changed their attitudes, approaches and behaviours. This is clearly a continual process of seeing and doing differently; it is challenging and does not come automatically but participants in these two sessions testified that it can have profound effects.
- 3.5. As the programme progresses, participants are asked to practice the approaches with children and partners, and to coach each other so that they not only reinforce for themselves but also spread the understandings into their families. There were a few indications that this was already happening for participants in these two groups who were on their 5<sup>th</sup> session.
- 3.6. Some participants will progress to the Level 2 programme and will have opportunity to co-facilitate groups. Determining who is ready for this can be complex and delicate and needs clarity and firm handling to ensure that neither these potential leaders of new groups are vulnerable.
- 3.7. It is essential that the focus for change is on *children*. It is likely that these approaches would work on any participants given the conditions outlined above, but this is a personal development programme for parents which leads to improving relationships and making things better in families. This is stressed throughout the programme and is always the focus of discussions, goal setting and outcomes.

#### **4. Some critical questions**

- 4.1. To what extent is the programme reliant on Alan? Could anyone else lead it and if so, what training and support would they need?
- 4.2. Stories of impact are reliant on participants' testimonies; is it possible to reach families and others to hear their views of the differences made?
- 4.3. What happens when people leave the group? Are the changes really sustainable? What is the much longer-term impact – does this programme really help people to 'turn their lives around'?
- 4.4. How well does the approach transfer into schools and other settings?

- 4.5. Which groups of professionals could benefit from the insights gained from this programme?
- 4.6. Small numbers are inevitable if recruitment depends on people making personal commitment. Would some more encouragement to attend (without coercion) enable more people to benefit or would it undermine the principles of the programme?

## Appendix 3

### **Progression for 11 of the 30 participants who completed the Level 2 Parent Champion course at Bligh or Riverside Children's Centres**

- Started training for Youth Offending Team
- Started training in child care
- Started a teaching assistant course
- Going to train to become a midwife
- Going to a local college to start counselling and psychotherapy training
- Applied and was accepted to work at a substance misuse centre, and volunteered at Sure Start
- Applied for and obtained manual employment
- Taking up work experience at a centre for disabled children, also taking an introduction to child care course
- Asked for and achieved a promotion at work
- Helped to clarify which way to progress existing career
- Became open to new ideas that had a profitable effect on an existing business project

In addition,

- 3 parents co-facilitated the Level 2 course and want to become a Parent Champion coach
- 21 parents applied to continue onto the Parent Champion Level 3 course and 12 were accepted
- 2 parents became more social, met new partners and are engaged to be married.

## Appendix 4

### **Report for Parent Champion courses for Riverside Children's Centre**

The initial coaching café sessions allowed parents to see what Parent Champion was about. It received a mixed reception with some parents feeling that the approach was not for them and others that were struck by the fact that it was a different way to view their lives.

Level 1 saw 15 parents complete the course. 2 of the participants went on to aid in facilitation of the next group helping to boost confidence and esteem further still. Within this group 3 parents had been signposted in through Social Services as part of their Child Protection plans and 2 by the Centre as part of their Common Assessment Framework plans.

The Riverside Children's Centre team saw 12 of the parents on a regular basis and were able to observe significant changes in 10 of these. The course raised self-confidence and self-esteem in all of these parents week on week and this was observed through their body language, their communication and then, staff were able to see it in universal sessions provided by the Centre.

The ability to make confident decisions was apparent in 10 parents. These ranged from dealing with debt (1), moving home to a more suitable property (2), returning to work (1), engaging in further education (2), building stronger bonds with extended family (2) and returning to the family home (1). All of these decisions took place fairly shortly after the course had finished.

The crèche facilities allowed for those parents without childcare to participate easily in the knowledge that their child/ children were being looked after. For some, they had not left their children with anyone other than family members so this was a profound decision in itself. As a Centre Coordinator, I believe that this part of the service was integral to the successes displayed by the parents.

Level 2 saw 3 of the Riverside parents move over to the Bligh Children's Centre. Again, the decision to travel to somewhere new and take part in a group with new people would have been troublesome had these parents not taken part previously and boosted their self-esteem.

The sharing of information between Alan Wilson and the Centre was suitable and appropriate. I do think, though, that other forms of building self-esteem and confidence such as counselling must not be disparaged as different ways help different people.

In conclusion, the Parent Champion course was well received by those who took part and observable changes were able to be seen in our parents.

Should any further information be required, please do not hesitate to call Martha Collins.

## Appendix 5

### **Bligh Children's Centre Vision Statement**

"We support the children, parents and carers in our community by providing accessible, life-long learning opportunities that promote positive relationships and happy families."

### **The Parent Champion Programme at Bligh Children's Centre**

When approached by Alan Wilson of Every Family Matters to run a Parent Champion Programme at our centre I was excited to find that there was 'something else out there' in terms of support for our local parents and carers. When reading the aims and objectives of the programme I could see that this was a programme that was different from the 'norm' and a something that had massive potential.

Early steering meetings with Alan proved to be prosperous and as a centre manager I felt that the needs of our centre and the families within our community were taken into consideration when discussing the implementation of the programme here.

We, as a wave one centre, have historically worked with parents and carers requiring varying tiers of support depending on their individual needs. We had found it a growing challenge whilst working with parents and carers with varying needs, to match them with the 'right' or relevant support that would help to make positive changes in their and their family's lives. For some parents and carers there was a lack of trust or confidence that they had in some providers, in others there was a difference in what they wanted to change about their lives compared with what the services wanted them to change about their lives, and finally many of these parents and carers didn't want to look at where to start due to low self-esteem and/or confidence due to entrenched issues and cycles of behaviours.

This is where the Parent Champion Programme showed it had the potential to make positive changes with 'all' parents and carers who attended, because the parents and carers were seen as the 'experts' in identifying their own needs and starting points for change—taking control of their own destiny. The programme empowered the parents and carers to begin to take control of their own 'issues' or 'concerns' as individuals, but within a trusting group environment that often sought to robustly find solutions from within the group within the safety net of a 'coaching model'. 'Homework' also consisted of not just putting into practice positive changes and actions linked to this new found confidence and self-esteem, but actually recording all 'success's' in a 'Success Diary', which was also shared at the start of sessions.

We have accommodated 3 Parent Champion Level 2 courses here at our centre attended by 38 parents and carers, with 7 progressing onto the OCN accredited Level 3 course, and have also piloted a Family Coaching Café.

Impact for this kind of programme is sometimes a challenge to 'measure', but I can share some of the success that I am aware of within our centres continued work with some of these parents and carers.

1. 12 of those parents/carers who attended the Parent Champions Programme have either become Volunteers with the centre or joined the Parents' Forum, both groups requiring further training and the opportunity to gain employability skills and experiences.
2. This is the only 'programme' we have had at the centre where significant partner agencies (Head Teachers, Health Visitors and Social Workers) have called to share the positive changes that they have observed in the parents and carers attending/attended the programme AND their children.
3. Some of the parents/carers since attending the programme have 'stepped down' from being CP or CIN 'cases' to CIN or CAF 'cases'. For example; 11 families at the start of the programme were 'known' by Social Care. At the time of writing each of these families have now made significant progress, including 7 of which who now have CAFs open which were previously CP or CIN. Sustainability of progress linked to levels of 'appropriate support' is often key to continued progress, with some of these parents making progress during their consistent attendance at Parent Champion.
4. 18 of the parents/carers have attended further training courses.
5. Behaviour and anger management for some of these parents / carers was a concern prior to attending the programme, but since completing the programme they have been observed being more 'in control' of their behaviour.
6. The general appearance and health of some of the attending parents/carers AND their children has improved.

The Parent Champion Programme has shown potential to continually change and evolve, something that parents and carers living in our ever-changing society benefit from. Due to this fluidity it isn't a 'one shoe fits all' provision and all attendees have the capacity to make positive changes during attendance, if they are willing to look at themselves in the first instance.

I am an advocate of the Parent Champion Programme and have been a challenger and driver for its continued development and progression. I can honestly and professionally state that the programme has made significant positive changes with those who have attended, with the ripple effect of their learning experiences reaching their children and wider family and community networks. I would be happy to share further successes I have witnessed on request.

Anthony Sands  
Bligh Sure Start Children's Centre  
Children and Families Services Manager  
MA Early Years  
NPQICL  
March 2013