MY STRONG FAMILY CENTRE (MSFC)

Annual Review 2012/2013
£230,387 income from training and consultancy

£1.5 million grant from BIG Lottery for Realising Ambition Project

13 Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) 10-14 (UK) level 1 trainings

460 SFP10-14 (UK) facilitators trained

Over 1800 additional families helped throughout the UK

Development of a Strengthening Families curriculum for families of 6-10 year olds

Expansion of new and strong community partnerships to produce greater SFP10-14 (UK) impact

Co-directors’ introduction

It is 10 years since David Foxcroft and colleagues published their up-dated systematic review of interventions aimed at long term prevention of alcohol misuse in young people (Foxcroft et al 2003) that identified the SFP10-14 as a promising approach. Much has happened since 2003 regarding the implementation of the programme in the UK and Europe and we think that it would be fair to say that the SFP10-14 has moved from being “promising” to being an important evidence based tool in the prevention of many problems faced by young people and their families. Also, we think it would be fair to say that during the last 10 years, MSFC has grown into being a major provider of practitioner training, research and delivery of services to families.

But it has not been all plain sailing. The last three years have seen significant reductions in budgets in the public sector accompanied by major reorganisations of services for young people and their families. Whilst it must be recognised that aspects of the rebalancing of public finances has been necessary following the global recession, organisations working in the field of prevention have found the financial climate created by the...
austerity programme extremely difficult. During 2011/2012 the sustainability of MSFC as a provider of services was in question because of lack of core funding.

So, it is with great pleasure (and relief) that we can report on a successful year for MSFC. In May 2012 we were successful in obtaining £1.5 million BIG lottery funding to replicate the SFP10-14 (UK) with new populations and in new areas. Lynette Basha has joined the team at MSFC as project manager for the Realising Ambition work. We have continued to deliver SFP10-14 (UK) training throughout the UK and we have also provided post training support to SFP10-14 (UK) teams in several areas. Dr Debby Allen and colleagues working in Oxfordshire Council have developed a Strengthening Families curriculum for families with 6-10 year olds and have piloted it successfully locally.

Finally, this past year has seen important achievements by MSFC and we would like to take this opportunity to thank all our stakeholders for their continuing involvement and support during the year. These are very challenging times and we will continue to work together to ensure that families are at the heart of everything we do.

Debby Allen and Lindsey Coombes
Co-directors MSFC

My Strong Family Centre (MSFC)

MSFC is a knowledge transfer unit based in the Department of Psychology, Social Work and Public Health, Oxford Brookes University. MSFC was started with the aim of preventing teenage substance misuse and other behaviour problems, strengthening parenting skills and building family strengths in the communities served by the centre through delivery of the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) 10-14 (UK). The emphasis of the centre has been on providing a complete specialist service to families based on the best available evidence. The following items are highlights of the work carried out by MSFC 2012/2013.

**SFP10-14 (UK) Trainings 2012/2013**

The SFP 10-14 (UK) resulted from an adaptation of the original programme developed in the United States. The SFP10-14 (UK) is designed for families with pre- and young adolescents, from age 10 to 14. The programme consists of seven core sessions delivered weekly, followed by an optional four booster sessions delivered six months to one year after the initial seven sessions. The SFP10-14 (UK) is appropriate for all families and includes specific activities designed to:

- Help parents/caregivers learn nurturing skills that support their young people
- Teach parents/caregivers how to effectively discipline and guide their young people
- Give young people a healthy future orientation and an increased appreciation of their parents/caregivers
- Teach young people skills for dealing with stress and peer pressure

MSFC carried out 13 SFP10-14 (UK) level 1 trainings to prepare facilitators to deliver the programme to families in the UK between 1st September 2012 and 31st August 2013.

We have also continued to deliver level 2 trainings to support facilitators during SFP10-14 (UK) delivery and monitor programme fidelity over the year.

In September 2012 we conducted a top up training for practitioners who had trained in the SFP10-14 (UK) (level 1), but who had never delivered the programme to families.

We have also continued to train appropriately experienced SFP10-14 (UK) practitioners to Level 3 (trainer of facilitators).
We published two articles related to the SFP10-14 (UK) during the year:


What the Families say about our work

Each time the SFP10-14 (UK) is delivered families complete an evaluation. The following are some highlights from these evaluations over the year.

Young people said

That me and my Mum can have a conversation without arguing.

My mother really loves me and I’m her wee (name) and I will listen to her most often.

To tell when my Mum is stressed and how she feels.

When I’m stressed I know I can talk to someone about it.
The parents/caregivers said

That a lot of problems at home could be avoided by the way I handle situations, being patient and respectful to my son has gained his respect.

Learn to keep calm and listen to their point of view.

My child is an individual person with feelings and worried and concerns and that I should listen more instead of talking.

That my opinion and shouting solved nothing. To listen and talk and work things out together.

What the facilitators say about our work

80% of SFP10-14 (UK) facilitators trained during 2012/2013 were satisfied or very satisfied with: the presentation of the course, being equipped to perform their job/role, explanations of topics, course content and meeting the facilitators aims and objectives.
The Realising Ambition programme is a £25m investment by the Big Lottery Fund to replicate a portfolio of 25 evidence-based and promising interventions designed to help children and young people aged 8–14 avoid pathways into offending, giving them a better chance to realise their ambitions and their potential. The investment is characterised by a focus on replication rather than innovation. The programme is outsourced from the Big Lottery Fund and delivered by a consortium of organisations led by Catch22 and including the Social Research Unit at Dartington, Substance and the Young Foundation. Twenty-five projects (out of 200+ that applied) across the UK are being supported, over five years (although the Strengthening Families project is over three years), to refine and faithfully replicate evidence-based or promising interventions so that more children and young people benefit.

The Strengthening Families project consists of a consortium of three organisations: Oxford Brookes University (lead member), Dorset Youth Association and Lifeline Project. Oxford Brookes University is delivering the SFP10-14 (UK) to Muslim families in Luton, Tower Hamlets and Newham. Dorset Youth Association is delivering the SFP10-14 (UK) to families in a rural setting in Dorset where there is deprivation and issues with transport. Lifeline Project is delivering the SFP10-14 (UK) to families where there is a parental substance misuse use problem in Central Lancashire and Manchester. The consortium is aiming to deliver the SFP10-14 (UK) to 514 young people over a three-year period.

Quotes from trainees

The trainers have been outstanding. They have made the training interesting and enjoyable and engrossing.
Level 1 trainee
Manchester

The whole programme is brilliant and will benefit the families I work with.
Level 1 trainee
Plymouth

The focus on communication and respect between parents and young people is a valuable reminder of what is important.
Level 1 trainee
Stafford

Realising Ambition Project

The Realising Ambition programme is a £25m investment by the Big Lottery Fund to replicate a portfolio of 25 evidence-based and promising interventions designed to help children and young people aged 8–14 avoid pathways into offending, giving them a better chance to realise their ambitions and their potential. The investment is characterised by a focus on replication rather than innovation. The programme is outsourced from the Big Lottery Fund and delivered by a consortium of organisations led by Catch22 and including the Social Research Unit at Dartington, Substance and the Young Foundation. Twenty-five projects (out of 200+ that applied) across the UK are being supported, over five years (although the Strengthening Families project is over three years), to refine and faithfully replicate evidence-based or promising interventions so that more children and young people benefit.
As the team responsible for Oxford Brookes University’s SFP10-14 (UK) delivery to Muslim families, Changing Lives are running programmes in Newham, Luton and Tower Hamlets. The first year of the project has been a resounding success in terms of surpassed targets and lessons learned. We delivered the SFP10-14 (UK) to 47 young people in Muslim families.

The variety of cultures within the Muslim community has meant that surface adaptations of the SFP10-14 (UK) have had to be made by facilitators. For example, some scenarios portrayed in the SFP10-14 (UK) parent/caregiver DVDs have been perceived as reflecting typical Muslim family situations. Also, language barriers can hamper engagement with families and may affect understanding of parenting concepts. In response to these issues, we have developed role play and discussion materials and have translated these into Bengali, Urdu and Somali. Furthermore, we are constructing the most realistic and effective role plays and DVD scenarios that resonate with English-speaking Muslim families, with the aim of developing a culturally adapted version of the SFP10-14 (UK).
Helen had led a very chaotic and unmanageable lifestyle for many years, with a variety of substances including alcohol, cannabis and amphetamines.

Lisa’s behaviour at school was very unmanageable due to her refusal to do as she was asked and verbal abuse towards both teachers and other classmates. Lisa’s behaviour at home was very changeable and this seemed to be due to the time spent with her Father as she lived only with Helen. Helen stated that when Lisa would come back from visiting her Father “all hell would break loose when she comes home”

At the start of the SFP10-14 (UK) Lisa was on the Child Protection Register, and had many underlying issues which stemmed from Helen’s chaotic lifestyle. Helen stated ‘I struggle to show love and affection to Lisa’.

In time, the children’s behaviour at school began to improve. It was also noted by all concerned agencies that there had been a marked improvement in Helen’s maternal instincts. She became a vital part of the group, contributing regularly and developing friendships. The progress she was making did not go unnoticed. Due to the huge improvements in the home and at school, the children were taken off the Child Protection Register.

One thing that has really shown the progress made by Lisa is that she has volunteered to come back and be a mentor to other young people attending the programme and be part of any activities that require support from a young person’s mentor; this has provided support for both Lisa and Helen on an on-going basis.

In November 2012 we commenced delivery of the SFP10-14 (UK) to families where there is a parental substance misuse problem in central Lancashire and Manchester. The first year of the project has been very successful with facilitators working with 26 young people and their families. Part of the success of this part of the project has been down to additional engagement activities used by facilitators (e.g. family outings, home visits, text message follow-ups, coffee mornings and informal ice-breaker meetings) to maintain engagement.
In November 2012 we commenced delivery of the SFP10-14 (UK) to families in rural Dorset. Dorset Youth Association, our project partner, is delivering the SFP10-14 (UK) to relatively smaller groups of families in hard-to-reach, rural areas. The success of the programme has grown and grown, and feedback has been very positive. During the first year of the project 26 young people have taken part in the SFP10-14 (UK). Here are a few things the families have said:

“We have learnt to listen, talk, value and understand things from each other’s point of view and to solve problems together as a family, also that there are ways to show your children that you do care and you can have fun laughs (and no arguments)”.

“I now know that I am not alone in the hard task of bringing up children. This programme has allowed me to look at situations differently and how they can be dealt with”

“Our family meetings have given us time to make decisions together as a unit. This has been the start of our journey together and we will be eternally grateful for the help – thank you!”

A family constructing a family shield, detailing their strengths and unique attributes
Overview of Year 1 of the Realising Ambition project

The first year of the Realising Ambition programme has surpassed expectations, with the Oxford Brookes University-led consortium reaching 99 young people in the UK and projected to reach 514 by the end of the three years. The diverse UK-wide populations we have worked with have provided many learning and development opportunities that are being used to help refine the SFP10-14 (UK) and increase the reach and quality of our work. We have conducted level 1 SFP10-14 (UK) training with delivery partners and we have run workshops on recruitment and retention. We have gained a more detailed understanding of the needs of the diverse families we have worked with, which is helping to inform future practice for OBU, Dorset Youth Association and Lifeline Project. The Realising Ambition support network has also given us access to commissioning and networking opportunities and is also helping us build a truly sustainable My Strong Family Centre.

What we are doing next year

We will continue to develop MSFC during 2013/2014 by:

1. Implementing the findings of the My Strong Family Centre Stakeholder Analysis Market Research Report June 2013 conducted by IPC.

2. We will work in partnership with the Young Foundation to develop a sustainability plan for MSFC.

3. We will aim to conduct 20 SFP10-14 (UK) level 1 trainings and consultancy over the year.

4. We will aim to conduct 5 level 2 SFP10-14 (UK) trainings and 5 level 3 SFP10-14 (UK) trainings over the year.

5. We will aim to successfully complete Realising Ambition Project Year 2 and achieve gold status under the grading of evidence based programmes.

6. We will work with UNODC in Brazil to successfully implement the SFP10-14 throughout the country.

7. We will aim to organise an international conference in Oxford in 2014.

8. We will seek funding to develop the Strengthening Families curriculum for 6-10 year olds and pilot the programme in four different geographical areas.

9. We will seek funding to conduct an evaluation of the SFP10-14 (UK) and emotional health and wellbeing training for Muslim families in partnership with Changing Lives.

10. We will embark on a programme of rebranding of SFP10-14 (UK) materials and website.
Reaching out to support families and communities

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