

Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund

Final Learning Report: Support for Disadvantaged Families Initiatives

Reference:	SDF2\100029
Organisation name:	Mediation Now

Section 1. Project delivery

Approach to learning

Tell us about your approaches to gathering learning and any challenges or successes you encountered in the process.

Outputs were monitored using the ResolveIT case management system. This records client information (name, gender, ethnic origin, disability or illness, occupation and outcome of safeguarding checks, children) together with all case activity and results.

Outcomes were measured via:

- Parenting Alliance Measure completed at the beginning and end of the parents' journey
- Written and verbal feedback, using standardised forms, from the parents and children at the end of each session attended and at the end of the programme
- Feedback from the court, CAFCASS or other referrer
- Mediator observation

Successes:

- Parents found the Parenting Alliance Measure simple and easy to complete.
- The standard evaluation forms we created worked well. Parents were usually happy to complete the short evaluation forms at the end of each session and the end of programme form. We felt that the forms gave us the information we hoped for.
- The children completed their end of session form using stickers and writing. The younger children loved the stickers and were fully engaged when completing the forms.
- CAFCASS and the District Judges at Portsmouth County Court thought the project was effective, were very engaged with the project and happy to give feedback.

Challenges:

It was originally intended that there would be a follow up evaluation one month after the end of the programme to find out whether parents and children were still benefitting from the programme.

Follow up evaluation - children:

After discussion with Ecorys and the Anna Freud Centre, we agreed that follow up evaluations with children would not be appropriate. This was because:

1. We could not find a method of evaluation (online, post, telephone call) with which children could engage without parental support/input. This could place children under pressure and leave them unable to answer honestly.

2. As we only saw the children once, a return visit to the office for face to face evaluation felt disproportionate.

Follow up evaluation - parents

It was much harder to obtain follow up evaluation from parents than anticipated. Parents were originally sent follow up evaluations by email. Not one of these was returned.

We also tried to complete some evaluations via telephone calls. This was not successful. The parents rarely answered a call from a withheld number (our phone system does this automatically) and parents did not call back when we left a message (possibly because completing the evaluation was of no benefit to them). Many of our parents also change their mobile numbers frequently, so telephone contact details are often out of date. We obtained one evaluation this way.

Again, after discussion with Ecorys, 80 parents were sent evaluations by post with a SAE. 5 were returned ie using an SAE gave a 6% return rate.

Project development

Describe the set-up process and governance for your project. What was the lead-in time? Did you experience any particular challenges or successes?

Please provide details of any project groups that met regularly to support delivery of the project.

Please refer back to your Theory of Change, and flag where any differences occur (and if possible, identify why).

Background:

The project was delivered by Claire Webb, Rebecca Hawkins, Helen Savage, Jo Findon and Lynn Jackson. They are all family mediators and specialist child consultants.

Mediation Now is managed by Claire (CEO) and Rebecca (director).

The project was designed by Helen.

Rebecca was in charge of marketing and publicity.

Project governance:

Day to day operations are governed by the Office Manual. This also covers health and safety, business continuity and disaster recovery and complaints.

Claire had primary responsibility for management of the project. Claire is a Professional Practice Consultant and provides formal supervision to all the mediators.

Helen monitored feedback and the evaluation process.

There were monthly meetings to:

- ascertain whether project targets and outcomes were being met
- consider available evaluation in order to monitor the quality of the participants' experience
- decide whether anything needed to be adapted in light of the parents' feedback, for example changing materials if low literacy levels were not being supported

Set up process (lead time 4 weeks):

During the first 4 weeks of the grant the following activities took place:

- Meetings to create and agree session plans, agree marketing material.
- Creation of course handouts
- Publicity material printed and sent out to stakeholders
- Training given to all mediators expected to be involved with delivery
- Visits made to promote course to expected primary referrers: Portsmouth County County, CAFcass, local solicitors' firms.

The first referrals were received within 4 weeks of the start of the grant.

Steering Group:

Three monthly meetings. Members were Claire, Rebecca, Helen, DJ Wilson (Head of Family at Portsmouth County Court), DJ Ball (Portsmouth County Court), Claire Radford (CAFCASS), Samantha Lee (Swain & Co – local solicitors’ firm).

Successes:

Governance and management worked well. The set up process was efficient. The Steering Group was well attended and supportive. Members were fully engaged in making others aware of the course, monitoring feedback and providing advice and challenge where appropriate.

Challenges:

Nothing particular to report.

Theory of Change:

No differences.

Learning points:

- Existing relationships with the court and CAFCASS were highly influential in determining the success of the project. Including the District Judges and CAFCASS in the Steering Group gave the project standing which we believe led to an increased numbers of referrals.
- If we are able to go forward, we will invite The Roberts Centre to join the Steering Group. (This is our local contact centre in Portsmouth.) We expect this would increase referrals. Jigsaw Contact Centre on the Isle of Wight was a good source of referrals, but they were too far away to attend the Steering Group.
- We would also invite a couple of Social Workers onto the Steering Group in order to broaden the group’s base.

Changes and adaptations

Please highlight any key changes to your initiative, including staff changes and reallocation of funds over the course of the Challenge Fund. Please refer back to your Theory of Change and flag where any differences, such as changes to timelines occur (and if possible, identify why).

If you were to undertake another iteration of your project, would you put any changes in place?

Key changes:

The only change to the initiative was that follow up evaluation was not attempted with the children (as detailed in answer to “Approach to Learning”).

Staff:

There was one staff change. Jo left the firm, and another of our mediators (Lynn) began delivering the project in Jo’s place.

Funds:

There was no reallocation of funds.

Theory of Change:

No differences.

Future iteration of project:

There would be 2 key changes to the project.

1. The process would last for longer than 4 sessions to provide families with greater support
2. Children would attend at least 2 child consultations during the process.

These proposed changes are discussed in more detail in the answer to “Outcomes and Impact”.

Working with practitioners

Please tell us about the extent to which external practitioners and stakeholder partners have engaged with your project. How did you engage practitioners and what were the challenges and successes in securing their buy-in?

What was practitioners’ existing understanding of RPC?

To what extent did they differentiate between RPC and Domestic Abuse and what was their understanding of the difference between them?

Stakeholder partners:

Portsmouth County Court and CAFCASS were fully engaged with the project from the start. This was facilitated by Mediation Now’s existing, trusted relationship with both. Mediation Now has previously worked with the Court and CAFCASS, particularly around setting up and running the court’s Mediation Scheme. The court and CAFCASS have referred parents into Mediation Now for some years.

We believe it would have taken a couple of years to get a significant number of referrals into the project from both if we were beginning from a “cold start”.

External practitioners:

Local solicitors’ firms were slightly slower to engage with the project than expected. However, this improved as time went on. Once the court started referring parents to us, solicitors began to tell their clients they might as well try the project before a court application because they would be sent on it anyway.

Social workers were engaged with the project, especially once they realised there was no charge for it. However, unfortunately these referrals were often unsuitable because their parents were heavily entrenched and there was ongoing domestic abuse between parents.

How were partners and practitioners engaged?

Personal visits were made to the court, CAFCASS and large family law legal aid solicitors’ firms. Letters publicising the course were sent to Social Workers, solicitor firms and local schools.

What was the practitioners’ existing understanding of RPC?

The court, CAFCASS, local family law firms and social workers all want to encourage more cooperative parenting. All practitioners work hard to minimise parental conflict. The court, CAFCASS and solicitors however tend not work with parents for long enough to play a significant role in reducing parental conflict in the long term.

Differentiation between RPC and Domestic Abuse:

We had many referrals which were not suitable because of domestic abuse. Our experience was that almost all practitioners did not differentiate between RPC and domestic abuse.

Working with RPC programme

To what extent have you engaged with the wider RPC programme?

Please provide feedback on your experience of the Practice Network events and the value of these as well as any support received from the RILs.

Engagement with the wider RPC programme:

- Attendance at all the Practice Network Events.
- Liaising with other projects to learn from their experience, for example the Anna Freud Centre to discuss obtaining evaluation from children.
- Learning from the reports and research published by the RPC programme.
- Support from Ecorys

Key learning from above

Practice Network Events:

These were hugely helpful. Talks on the RPC Programme Organisation gave an excellent overview and an understanding of the context in which we were working.

	<p>It was interesting to learn about the other projects and network with practitioners working in the same area. This meant we got to know members of other projects well enough to contact them and ask for information which would help us in our project.</p> <p>We found the workshops the most useful, especially around the Theory of Change, Measuring RPC Outcomes and the Digital Workshop. During the Digital Workshop, at the RPC Network Event, research was explained that we should assume a reading age of 9 years. After this we simplified some of our handouts.</p> <p>Our Regional Integration Lead (Chris Tuke) was extremely helpful. She gave us leads into Winchester and the Isle of Wight. We met with both, and they gave us work and offered us training.</p>
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Sustainability

<p>Please tell us about any plans in place for sustaining the delivery of your intervention.</p> <p>If you have future plans in this space, please provide details of these.</p> <p>Please provide your thoughts on the sustainability for the outcomes of your intervention: how will the positive effects on the participants in your interventions be sustained?</p> <p>Where your project has delivered practitioner training, what do you think will be the impact of this?</p> <p>Can you identify any conditions that would support sustainability? For example, we are interested to hear about needs, enablers and gaps around further testing, trialling or scaling up.</p>	<p>Sustaining delivery:</p> <p>The intervention has had a significant impact in reducing court time. The programme is estimated to have saved the equivalent of three weeks of a District Judge’s time over a 12 month period (see answer to the “Outcomes and Impact” question below for more details). Therefore, the court is extremely keen for this intervention to continue, as are we.</p> <p>The Ministry of Justice has confirmed that we can run this course under a Legal Aid certificate provided that the sessions also contain an element of mediation. However, this will only work if both parties are receiving Legal Aid. In many cases, only one parent is financially eligible for Legal Aid. The non-eligible, privately paying parent is very unlikely to be able to afford to pay for their half of the costs.</p> <p>It is hard to find solutions to overcome this barrier. The best solution would be further funding.</p> <p>Sustaining outcomes:</p> <p>We will continue to deliver the programme where both parents have a Legal Aid Certificate. .</p> <p>We are of the view that to increase and sustain impact, we need to work for longer with parents and involve the children in a series of child consultations (rather than just one). This would not be covered by a Legal Aid Certificate. We are planning to work in partnership with a local charity to apply for funding from the National Lottery in order to deliver a new form of the intervention over 12 months. This will then be evaluated to see the impact of the different format.</p> <p>Conditions that would support sustainability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Legal Aid funding to cover the cost of the programme for both parents (or funding from another Government body) to cover the intervention. • The project could be easily scaled up nationally – specialist child consultation mediators already hold most of the skills required to deliver the project. They just need to be trained to deliver.
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Section 2. Parents / participants

Engagement

<p>Describe the target group for your intervention and the extent to which this varied from your initial plans, including how your target</p>	<p>Target Group:</p> <p>The target group did <u>not</u> differ from the original target group.</p>
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group differed from the original target group. Where changes occurred, please indicate the reasons for this.

How did you engage with your target cohort? We would like to hear about your approach to securing referrals and any learning points you can identify from this.

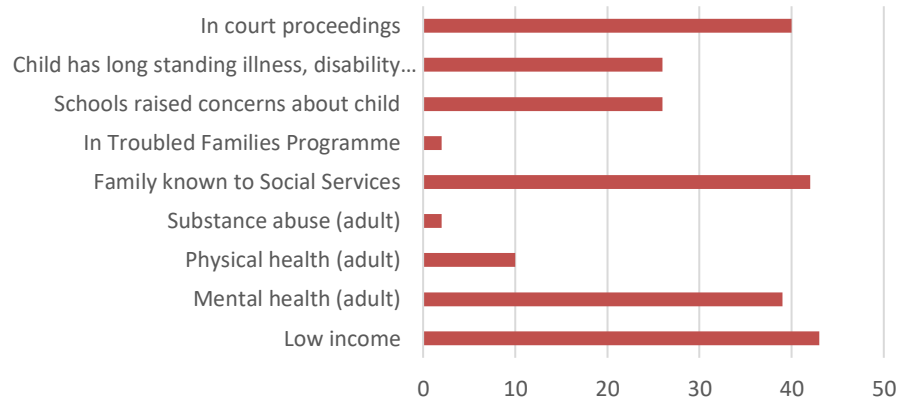
Were attendance rates as expected and what proportion of participants completed the intervention? What factors impacted on this (either positively or negatively)?

The project targeted separated parents who have existing disadvantages.

To qualify for the project the parents had to be separated and fit one or more of the following criteria:

- At least one parent out of work or has a low income. Evidence of this included being in receipt of Universal Credit, other passporting benefit or Tax Credits.
- At least one parent or child has a long-standing limiting illness or disability, or mental health issue (including previous substance abuse)
- The family is known to Children Services (this includes a child having an early help/assessment plan, CIN, CP or child is a looked after child) or be involved in the Troubled Families Programme
- There are family court proceedings
- At least one of the children is at risk of being excluded or the school has expressed concerns that the child/children's behaviour is impacting their learning.

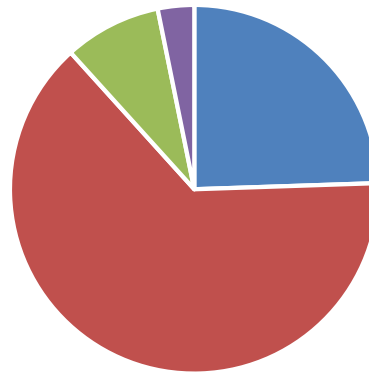
Categorisation of disadvantage of families who completed the programme



Statistics about parents who completed the programme:

- **Age:** The youngest parent was 21. The oldest parent was 54. (Apart from one grandfather, with residence of the child, who was 70.) The average age was 40 years.
- **Ethnic origin:** 92% were from a white ethnic background (91% English, Welsh, Scottish, NI and 1% European). 4% were from an African ethnic background. 4% preferred not to say. This distribution broadly reflects the local demographic.
- **Employment status:** Many of the parents were not working, or working part time, and in receipt of benefits.

Employment status



■ not working ■ employed full or part time ■ self employed ■ prefer not to say

- **Legal representation:** 24% of parents had received legal representation.
- **Domestic abuse:** 35% of families had at least one parent who said there was domestic abuse in their relationship when they were together.
- **Sexual orientation:** There were no same sex couples.
- **Length of separation:** The longest time couples had been apart was 9 years. The shortest time was 6 months. The average time was 2 years.
- **Number of children:** The highest number of children from the couple relationship was 4. The lowest was 1. The average was 1.8 children.
- **Residence:** At the beginning of the programme, 77% of parents felt residence was agreed. 21% felt it was not agreed. 2% were not sure.
- **Contact:** The most prevalent issue was that of contact. At the beginning of the programme, 88% felt contact was not agreed. 9% felt it was agreed. 3% were unsure.
- **New relationship:** 44% of parents were in a new relationship (of which 30% had children from the new relationship). 47% remained single. 9% preferred not to say.

How did you engage with cohort?

Through referrals. Parents referred from court, CAFCASS, social services, local family solicitors and through Mediation Now (existing mediation clients).

Referrals were secured through meeting with stakeholders and other professionals to explain the course and intended outcomes. Mediation Now also assessed all parents in the target group who had been referred for mediation to assess whether the family would benefit from the course.

Main learning points:

1. An existing trusted relationship with stakeholders and other professionals is essential to obtain referrals and reduce lead time.
2. Many professionals do not differentiate between parental conflict and domestic abuse. This led to a number of inappropriate referrals.

3. Many conflicted separated parents present with a strong perception of post separation emotional abuse which was not characteristic of their relationship prior to separation.

Rates:

95% completed the course (“completion” defined as attending 3 or more sessions). There are 5 families who started but did not complete the course due to lock down. These families are not included in the figures and we not claimed for.

Factors perceived as influencing good engagement rate:

- Involving the child/children in the process provided significant motivation for attending the course. Parents often thought the children would confirm their view of the conflict or hoped that the child consultation would provide evidence of parental alienation.

Some non-resident parents in the programme felt parental alienation was relevant to their situation, especially where the child had refused all contact with them. The resident parent, without exception, said they had tried to encourage the child’s relationship with the other parent.

In practice parental alienation is extremely difficult to prove, with most professionals, including ourselves, working from the basis of “we are where are” and focussing on how to move forward and improve the parent/child relationship. This could feel understandably disappointing and frustrating for the parent who felt he/she had been alienated. We therefore spent a lot of time working with both parents to try to improve the child’s relationship with the “alienated” parent.

- The child consultation was in session 2. Parents wanted to know what their child had said and returned for session 3.
- Where there were family proceedings, the court ordered parents onto the programme and we reported to the court whether or not the parents attended (although not the nature of their discussions which were confidential).
- Some parents felt that attending the course provided proof of their commitment to their children, which would help their “case”.

Attitudes to parental conflict

We are interested to understand participant attitudes to RPC. Please describe the attitudes you have experienced in your intervention; to what extent do attitudes differ across different groups?

How have you addressed attitudes to RPC through your intervention? We would like to hear about the terminology you have used to discuss RPC and any changes you had to

Experience of participant attitudes to RPC:

- Almost all parents wanted to reduce parental conflict. They were exhausted with arguing and just wanted it to stop. This attitude was shared consistently across the cohort.
- Many parents did not want to actively “co-parent”. They just wanted contact to take place peacefully and for everyone to move on. They wanted to minimise contact with the other parent, rather than reengage in a co-parenting relationship. Mediator perception was that this was more often, but not exclusively, the case with the dads than the mums.

implement to your approach, particularly in terms of delineating between conflict and abuse. Please describe the impact any changes had.

- Most parents had some understanding that parental conflict was “bad” for their children. Very few understood the potential outcomes for their children of ongoing conflict.
- Parents rarely saw themselves as behaving inappropriately. They felt the issues were solely with their partner. Parents consistently found it very hard to accept they might have been at fault too.
- The unhappiness of their child about their conflict sometimes surprised them. This could be a motivating factor for change.

How have you addressed attitudes to RPC through your intervention?

This is a selection of examples of how we tried to address parents’ attitudes to RPC:

- Providing parents with a summary of research about outcomes for children of ongoing conflict. Emphasising that these outcomes are not set in stone. Explaining that continuing good relations and co-operation between parents is one of the main mitigating factors.
- Children’s perceptions and feelings around their parents’ conflict were fed back to parents after child consultation. This helped parents understand how upset their children were by their parents’ behaviour.
- Helping parents focus on their mutual love for their children. Simple exercises such as “give me three words each to describe each child”. Emphasising that they see their children in the same way. Reminding them of the damage that ongoing conflict will have on the children they both love.
- Asking each parent to show the mediator a photo of the children on their phone and, with permission, showing the other parent. This often helped a parent see that the children were smiling and having a good time with the other parent (often the children told parents that they were miserable with the other parent).
- Helping parents “normalise” their frustrations by helping them understand that post separation conflict was often to be expected, but that they could move forward and deal with the situation positively.
- Asking each parent to imagine their children were in charge of the way their separated parents related to each other, and to explain how this might look e.g. be kind, be friendly, attend school plays together, don’t criticise the other parent.

Terminology:

This was kept as simple as possible. After the Digital Workshop at the RPC Network Event, where research was explained that we should assume a reading age of 9 years, terminology in documents was simplified further. We did not notice any impact from this change, but the mediators felt comfortable having taken this research into account.

The mediator NEVER criticised either parent, focussing on what they already did well, how it was clear they both loved their children dearly and how hard they were obviously trying.

Delineating between conflict and abuse:

This was an extremely important delineation for the mediators and the participants. We absolutely did not want to encourage better communication/co-parenting where it was not safe to do so. This was dealt with at the individual safeguarding appointment before the course started. Mediators discussed with the parent whether there had been abuse in their relationship, and whether it was appropriate/safe to attend the course.

Parents were able to continue with the programme if they felt completely comfortable to do so, the history of domestic abuse was not extreme, and domestic abuse did not characterise their separated relationship.

Outcomes and impact

Tell us about the outcomes and impact achieved by your intervention. To what extent did you achieve the outcomes set out in your grant agreement and Theory of Change?

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

We are interested to understand what worked well and why. Please focus on any barriers and enablers to the achievement of outcomes in your response.

Outcomes taken from Theory of Change

- **Parents more aware of the negative impact of parental conflict on their children**

At the end of the programme, 90% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that they understood more about the impact of parental conflict on children. 10% of parents answered “neutral” to this.

From the feedback, it appears the most useful ways to help parents understand the negative impact of conflict on their children were:

- Running through the latest research on the ways in which parental conflict impacts their children eg behavioural problems, mental health issues etc.
- Hearing how upset the children are about their conflict

- **Parents more aware of the support and free resources available**

Parents were given details of free national and local resources available to separated parents and for their children.

68% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that these were useful. 28% felt “neutral” about these. 7% did not find them useful.

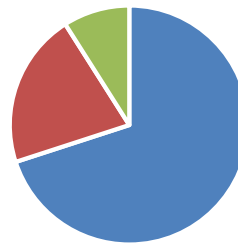
Learning points:

- The mediators ran through these briefly, but generally parents preferred to take the details away with them to read at home.
- We do not know whether many parents went on to use the resources in the future, but the majority felt it was useful to know where to go if they needed extra support

- **Whole family communication is improved**

In the end of course evaluation 70% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they had some new ideas about how to communicate. 21% answered “neutral” and 9% strongly disagreed or disagreed.

I have some new ideas about how to communicate



■ Strongly agreed or agreed ■ Neutral ■ Strongly disagreed or disagreed

51% of parents completed two Parenting Alliance Measures, one at the beginning and one at the end of the programme. The Parenting Alliance Measures shows level of cooperation between parents. 90% recorded an improved Parenting Alliance Measure in their second form.

Feedback after the third session (when the children's views were reported back to the parents) showed that the vast majority of parents found hearing their children's wishes and feelings helpful. Many parents intended to listen to their children more and take their feelings into account when making decisions.

"To listen to what children have said"

"Exploring my daughter's feelings and discussing options to move forward"

"Seeing my son's point of view"

"Hearing what our daughter has to say and would like"

"Knowing how the children felt"

"Having mine and the children's concerns listened to in a safe environment"

"Finding the children's views and opinions"

"Being able to see what my children have expressed to me and their mother"

About 50% of parents said they wanted to attend a fourth session. They could choose whether this was with the children or by themselves. The majority chose to attend by themselves as there were still issues which needed resolving.

Reasons parents gave for not attending the fourth session were:

- Contact arrangements were resolved at the end of the third session and they wanted to see how thing went
- The sessions were very emotional, and parents could not face seeing each other again straight away
- They could not resolve issues and wanted to use the court system

50% of children wanted to attend the fourth session. Some of them were afraid of seeing their parents together.

Where children attended the fourth session, the mediators ran through the process of a problem solving family meeting so that families to support whole family communication.

Parents said that the best part of the fourth session was:

“Coming up with a family meeting to move forward”

“Understanding ways to resolve conflict”

“How to take into account all views [including children’s]”

“Discussing issues with the children”

“Family safe words for difficult conversations”

“Family codewords”

“Our [family’s] rules”

- **Parents have a new agreement on family arrangements (such as contact time with each parent, birthdays, Christmas or maintaining telephone contact with each parent).**

50% of parents felt they had reached some form of agreement by the end of the programme. 13% of parents had not reached an agreement. 37% were not sure or did not comment.

The sort of agreements reached included (as described by the parents): child contact, alternate Saturdays with some sleep overs and more time during school holidays, code words when conflict goes too far, holiday contact, preparation for consent order together much better than solicitors letters, new contact timetable, contact for school weeks, communication when the children are at home with me, speak to each other if not sure on new situation, Christmas, photos of child to other parent monthly, regular telephone calls, contact plan for 2019/2020, more flexibility, joint residency

- **Children feel listened to in the process**

Children universally appeared to enjoy the child consultations. We did not receive any negative feedback from the children or their parents (when asked at the next session whether the children had enjoyed it, they all said they had loved it).

Comments from children included

“I felt like it took a lot of worries away”

“It was good and I thought the mediators got the point through very well. I thought it was done incredibly well by the mediators.”

It was useful “because I have told someone”.

Best part was “When we finally had the courage to tell dad”.

Best part was “Talking about my worries”

Least good part was “Leaving”

“I think it is good because I’ve managed to tell them how I feel”

“I think it went well and I said everything I wanted to”

"I found it very helpful as I felt I could talk freely"

"I think you did excellent"

"Brilliant!"

"It was fun and it made me feel more relaxed about going to dads"

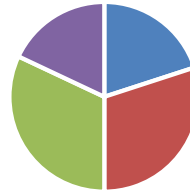
Learning points:

- The Bear Feelings Cards allowed children to express feelings which might have been harder to express using words alone. The cards look "babyish" but in fact they worked well for all ages, including late teens.
 - Parents find it easier to hear their children's views by looking at pictures on the cards than through verbal feedback. Parents cannot argue that mediators have misunderstood what their child said when they have a picture in front of them.
 - Parents were likely to be motivated to change behaviour by hearing their child's feelings.
 - Providing special drinks and food which the parents said the children particularly liked made the children feel comfortable.
 - Accusations of parental alienation were not eased by a child consultation. The "alienated" parent felt that the children were just saying what the other parent had told them to.
- **Parents avoid or exit the court system.** Estimated court time saved by the programme = 3 weeks of a District Judge's time in a 12 month period.

44% of families were in court proceedings. Of this number 60% reached an agreement which they used as the basis for a consent order at court. This is estimated to have saved 15 days of a judge's time ie 3 weeks of court time in a 12 month period.

Of the parents not in court proceedings, there were 16 families where at least one parent said that attending the programme meant that they no longer intended to issue court proceedings. However, of these 16 families, 5 parents contacted us within 3 months of the end of the programme to say that they were considering issuing court proceedings. We do not know whether they went ahead with this. A longer programme would be likely to provide better support in helping parents avoiding reverting to old patterns.

Families avoid or exit the court system



- Stayed in court proceedings
- Came out of court proceedings
- Decided not to issue court proceedings
- No intention to issue proceedings

If families did not exit the court system

Portsmouth County Court asked us to prepare a brief summary of the children's views from the child consultation. This was only done if parents could not reach agreement and the hearing went ahead. A total of 7 reports were made.

We needed both parents' permission for this and none refused. This saved CAFCASS time because they did not have to prepare a Wishes and Feelings Report and meant the children were not seen twice.

Quote from District Judge Wilson – Head of Family, Portsmouth County Court

Commenting as a judge of some 20 years' experience I think I am in a position to make informed observations as to the merits of this initiative...

Involving the children in the process has been a game changer for many parents who, for the first time, stop to think about the consequences for their child/children. The non-directive way in which the views of the child are established cuts out any argument about the child's views being influenced by a parent. What has been particularly helpful is the fact that the child's wishes and feelings can be disclosed to the court on a non-privileged basis, and again this pre-empts a parent from misrepresenting the child's views in those case where agreement is not reached. The benefit of this is that any argument over the child's wishes and feelings is resolved as they have already been established by independent means.

I have also found that in some case even here agreement has not been reached within New Foundations, it does seem to cause some parties to reflect upon their position and change their behaviour towards each other which in turn leads to an agreed solution. I can think of one particularly difficult case where just this happened at a recent hearing when the past history suggested I would have to give directions to a contested hearing...

It would be a disaster if funding for this initiative were to be withdrawn subsequently and this would not sit very comfortably with the commitment by HMG to ADR.

Learning points:

- The programme saves court time.
- The programme saves parents the trauma of court hearings and avoids damaging their parenting relationship further.
- A short summary of the children's views saves CAFCASS time
- The court embraced the programme and were keen to refer parents in.
- Some parents need more than 4 sessions of support to help sustain the impact of the programme.
- A second child consultation would be likely to benefit the children., keep parents engaged and help parents consolidate new communication skills.

- **Contribution to the evidence base around reducing parental conflict**

See learning points above.

Unexpected Outcomes

- Dad's attended all sessions and were not difficult to engage. The prospect of hearing the children's views was attractive to dads (often, but not always, the parent hoping for more contact with the children).
- Number of referrals from social workers where parents would not engage. Approximately 50% of referrals from social workers were for parents who ignored all telephone calls and letters and did not attend even the individual first appointment.
- The majority of parents cited the "HALT" and STOP" communication tools as one of the useful aspects of the course.
- If the parents did not manage to move forward during the course, they usually blamed the other parent and did not see themselves as having a role to play in the conflict.
- This is mediator perception, but it seemed that the number of children living with dad was much higher than we have seen before. Also, more siblings were living apart ie one with mum and one with dad.
- Children seemed much more aware of their own rights, and often punishing other parent by refusing to see them at all because they had "caused" the separation.

<p>Please provide us with details of any views received from participants in your intervention or training.</p> <p>If you provide direct quotes, please advise if we have permission to include these in our published report (please maintain participant anonymity but include details of the capacity in which they participated in your project e.g. health professional, parent, child).</p>	<p>Views from participants detailed above.</p> <p>In addition:</p> <p><u>Would you recommend New Foundations to other separated parents? Why?</u></p> <p><i>“Yes a friendly and safe environment to talk openly”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, gets others perspectives in a safe place”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, aided dialogue”</i></p> <p><i>“Calm, relaxed environment to get your point across”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes. Helped me with communication”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, to get the children's views on the situation”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, more comfortable environment to discuss feeling and conflicts than going to court”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, Opportunity to discuss in a supportive atmosphere”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes to understand what conflict does to a child”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, it can help prompt conversation and working together. However both parents need to be open to it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, opens up channels of comms”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes a very good idea for children to help them in these situations”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes well structured and flexible”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes to allow each point of view to be heard”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, it’s a neutral environment for resolving conflict”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes it helps people understand each other”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because your child should be heard”</i></p> <p>All quotes provided in this report have been anonymised and can be used by the DWP.</p>
<p>Anything else?</p> <p>Please use this space to note anything else that you think is relevant, which has not already been covered in the rest of the report.</p>	<p>N/A</p>