A 7 year Follow-Up Study (2008-2014) with Graduates of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (SFP 12-16 years)

Sandra Roe
Research

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Executive Summary

The aim of this research study was to undertake a 7 year follow-up study with graduates of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 years) to determine the impact of the Programme on family and community life. The key research methods used were a questionnaire, interviews with families who had graduated from the programme, a focus group with facilitators from the programme, focus groups with young people who graduated from the programme and case studies.

Overall, 53 different families were consulted through various methods in the study which accounts for 45.6% of all families who have graduated from the programme. In total, 58 programme graduates answered the questionnaire which was available online and in hardcopy format. Key findings from the questionnaire included: 96% of respondents felt the programme made a difference in their lives; improved communication was the most common impact of the programme on families followed by improved relationships; 97% of parents thought their parenting skills had improved as a result of taking part in the programme and 100% of teenagers thought their parent's parenting skills had improved; parents were most likely to still use communication skills and teenagers were most likely to use listening skills; 98.1% agreed or strongly agreed the programme had helped improve relationships in families; 94.3% agreed or strongly agreed the programme helped their family communicate better; 88.6% agreed or strongly agreed SFP had helped reduce conflict in their family; the programme was more likely to change behaviours and attitudes towards drugs than alcohol; and 100% of respondents thought SFP had a positive impact on the community.

Key findings from the focus group with facilitators included the effectiveness of the programme in terms of interagency involvement; challenges such as getting fathers involved and keeping facilitators involved; impacts of SFP on families included improved relationships, improved parenting skills, improved communication skills, increased confidence and positive impacts on education and criminal behaviour; impacts of SFP on agencies such as improved relationships between agencies and families, SFP complimenting agency's work and interagency benefits such as interagency communication and improved relationships; and impacts of SFP on the community including better communication and respect between young people and neighbours and members of the community and parents, increased engagement with education, training and other community projects.

According to the young people consulted in focus groups, the main impact of the programme on them and their families was improved communication skills, the ability to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger better, more positive relationships with parents and guardians, doing better in school, learning more about alcohol and drug misuse, dealing with peer pressure better, increased self-confidence, getting involved in groups in the community and parents improving their parenting skills. In terms of impacts on the community, some young people thought the programme had created a friendlier atmosphere in Ballymun.

The main impacts of the Ballymun SFP on families were improved communication, relationships and parenting skills, being able to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger better, the positive impact of SFP on teenagers in terms of education, dreams and goals, alcohol and drug use and peer pressure. The programme also made families more inclined to use services in the community because of the relationships they built up with facilitators from different agencies in Ballymun. The main impact of SFP on the community was deemed to be the positive knock-on effect of individual behavioural changes within families, particularly in relation to teenager's alcohol and drug use, peer pressure and crime.

Overall, families viewed the programme in a very positive light and still used the skills taught on the programme. The passage of time did not appear to have any significant effect on recall of the programme or the use of skills and the living situation for the majority was still with the family member with whom they completed SFP which also helped. The study found that Ballymun SFP has met the main aims and objectives of the SFP model but has also had other additional and unintended impacts and benefits such as the social aspect of the programme for parents and teenagers, the social normalisation of engaging with other families with similar issues, increased confidence for some participants, educational benefits, an intergenerational impact and improved relationships in the community. Finally, the interagency aspect of Ballymun SFP has played a very significant role in the success of the programme.

CHAPTER 01

Research Context

The aim of this research was to undertake a 7 year follow-up study with the graduates of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 years) to determine the impact of the Programme on family and community life.

Research aim

The aim of this research was to undertake a 7 year follow-up study with the graduates of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 years) to determine the impact of the Programme on family and community life.

Research objectives

a. To determine the extent families perceive Strengthening Families Programme as making a difference in their lives, if so in what way and to what extent.

b. To ascertain and demonstrate the benefits for families as a result of their participation and graduation from the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme.

c. To examine Strengthening Families Programme related outcomes of graduating children/teens and families and to explore how outcomes relate to child/teen and family characteristics, social and community issues and follow- up period.

d. To highlight factors that may or may not have complemented the role of Strengthening Families Programme both within and outside the family environment such as other social supports, housing, drug and alcohol issues.

Overview of the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP)

The Strengthening Families Programme was developed in the USA by Dr. Karol Kumpfer and associates at the University of Utah, in 1982. The programme has been adapted to many age ranges including 3-5 years; 6-11 years; 10-14 years; 12-16 years; and is available in web format for 10-16 years and DVD for 8-16 years. The shorter version such as the 7 week 10-14 years programme is suitable for universal families and the longer versions such as the 14 week 6-11 and 12-16 programme are targeted at high risk families. SFP has been culturally adapted to suit many populations and has also been translated into different languages. The Strengthening Families Programme is now operating across 35 countries. Further information can be found on www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org.

SFP is designed to reduce multiple risk factors for later alcohol and drug use, mental health problems and criminal behaviour by increasing family strengths, teens/children's social competencies and improving positive parenting skills. It focuses on building family protective factors such as parent-child relationships, communication, cohesion, social and life skills, resisting peer influences, family organization and attachment; and reducing risk factors such as conflict, family drug and alcohol abuse. The Strengthening Families Programme is disseminated worldwide by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as an effective evidence based family intervention. Randomized control trials have consistently found positive results with large to moderate effect sizes for diverse families, and up to 5 and 10 -year follow-up measures. Long term outcomes are in relation to reductions in behaviours related to risk factors, improvements in behaviours related to protective factors and decreases in parental and youth substance use (licit and illicit).

Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme

Ballymun SFP is a 15 week family skills programme and aims to improve parenting and family functioning and prevent substance use. However, an effective family prevention programme will impact on many types of outcomes apart from reducing the risk for drug and alcohol use such as improved family functioning, increased mental health and well-being. The goal of family focused prevention programmes are not only to reduce risk factors, but also to increase and further enhance existing family protective mechanisms.

Ballymun SFP was first implemented in 2008 with funding from the Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force and the support of the Ballymun Network for Assisting Children and Young People. At the time of writing, Ballymun has successfully rolled out 16 Strengthening Families Programmes (12-16 yrs) and 3 SFP (6-11 yrs). The inter-agency element of SFP has been fundamental to its implementation, as replicated across the island of Ireland. SFP is delivered by agency representatives and volunteers from a range of community, statutory and voluntary local services in Ballymun and continues to be managed and funded by Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

Research rationale

Ballymun SFP recognises the importance of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of each programme but also in assessing the extent to which the Programme has impacted on the lives of families following graduation. The rationale for this study was to demonstrate and ensure that the longer term outcomes of the Programme are measured, collated and analysed.

CHAPTER 02

Research Methodology

A mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted to undertake the study.

2.1 Overview

A mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted to undertake the study. Key elements included a questionnaire, focus groups with young people, a focus group with key stakeholders from agencies involved in SFP and interviews with families who have graduated from the programme. Case studies of sample families were also written up.

Table 1: Overview of Data Collection Methods & Participation

- 53 families engaged in research through various methods totalling 91 graduating parents/ teenagers 2008-2014 (49 parents and 42 teenagers)
- Some parents/teenagers engaged in more than 1 data collection method.
- 11 local agencies were consulted (10 via a focus group and one via email)

Method	Method by Number	Parents	Teenagers	Agencies
Questionnaire	58	47	11 (over 18 years)	-
Young Person Focus Groups	5	-	25 (under 18 years)	-
Family Interviews	14	14	16	-
Case Studies	5	5	6	-
Local Agency Focus Group	1	-	-	11

2.2 Data Collection Methods:

- **Questionnaire**
  A questionnaire was developed which was aimed at parents who participated in SFP as well as teenagers who had participated in the programme but were 18 years of age or older at the time of completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was available online using the online survey tool Survey Monkey and in hardcopy format from local agencies. A number of respondents with literacy issues were assisted in filling out the questionnaire by agency staff. A small number of teenagers under 18 years of age completed the survey but their responses were deleted and not included in the survey data. In total, there were 58 responses to the survey, of which 20 respondents completed the survey online and 38 completed it in hardcopy format.

- **Focus groups with young people**
  Five focus groups were conducted with young people under 18 years of age who had graduated from the programme. Two focus groups took place in Trinity Comprehensive Secondary School in Ballymun, two in Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR) and one was conducted with young people at a booster session of the programme. In total, 25 young people took part in the five focus groups, of which 15 were male and 10 were female.

- **Focus group with Key Stakeholders**
  A focus group was conducted in Geraldstown House with ten key stakeholders. One stakeholder was consulted via an email questionnaire. Stakeholders were from agencies in Ballymun including Ballymun Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force, Ballymun Job Centre, Youthreach, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR), an Garda Síochána, Trinity Comprehensive and Tusla Child and Family Agency (Geraldstown House Family Resource Centre) and one parent graduate who has trained up as a Facilitator.

- **Family interviews**
  In total, 14 families were randomly selected to take part in the family interviews. Interviews were arranged with families over the phone and took place at a convenient time in the family home. Parents or guardians and teenagers (or those who had completed the programme as teenagers) were interviewed together. Eleven out of the fourteen parents/guardians were mothers, two were grandparents and one was a sibling. Overall, 16 respondents who graduated from the programme as teenagers were interviewed, of which ten were male and six were female.

  Sampling for Family Interview

  The basic principle of sampling is that it is possible to produce accurate findings without the need to collect data from each and every member of a survey 'population' (Denscombe, 2010:23). The entire 'population' for this research, i.e. all families who have graduated from the Strengthening Families Programme to date, were sampled in terms of the questionnaire.

  A representative sample of families was selected from the population to take part in the qualitative interviews. A representative sample is a cross-section of the population and involves a selection procedure that includes all relevant factors/variables/events and matches the proportions in the overall population (Denscombe, 2010:24). For example, the sampling process reflected graduate family demographics such as teen age grouping (12-13 years and 14-16 years), repeat family graduates, family type, programme and year of graduation. Information gathered from a representative sample allows the researcher to draw valid conclusions about how things are in the overall research population.

  There are two approaches to the selection of samples, probability and non-probability sampling. This study employed a probability sampling approach. Probability sampling relies on the use of random selection and it is considered to be the best way to get a representative sample as the researcher has absolutely no influence on the selection of people to be included in the sample (Denscombe, 2010:24).

  A sampling frame, i.e. a list of names of all graduates of the programme was compiled. Good research practice states that a good sampling frame should be relevant, complete, precise and up-to-date (Denscombe, 2010:24). This was achieved through the programme co-ordinators drawing up a comprehensive list of families and working with the Research Advisory Committee and past facilitators who have existing contact with families to update any contact details and personal information. While all families were invited to partake in the online/hardcopy survey, a number of families were excluded from the family interview list due to personal reasons or changes in their circumstances. A small number of families were excluded when contact was made by the researcher when families were unable to participate due to personal reasons or a change in family circumstances. Updated contact information was also obtained through the study questionnaire. A random sampling technique of probability sampling was then used in this study, i.e. random number generator software. This meant that each family had an equal chance of being selected.

- **Case studies**
  Five case studies were carried out as part of this study. Case studies "focus on one (or just a few) instances of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance" (Denscombe, 2010:52). With regard to the selection of the case, a case study should be chosen "on the basis of specific attributes to be found in the case - attributes that are particularly significant in terms of the practical problems or theoretical issue that the researcher wants to investigate" (Denscombe, 2010:57).

2.3 Methodological considerations & issues

Access and recruitment

The SFP Programme Manager organised the focus group with SFP facilitators and helped organise the focus groups with young people in a local school and youth centre along with the relevant agencies. Families were contacted by the researcher to inform them of the study, recruit them as respondents and organise interviews in their family home. In some cases, the programme co-ordinators or members of the Research Advisory Committee made initial contact with families, for example through services or the SFP Facebook page, to obtain up-to-date contact details and inform them they had been selected to take part in the study. This initial contact from a familiar service provider worked well in terms of a high response rate.

Only three families who were contacted by the researcher were not interested in taking part in the family interviews. In one case, although the mother was interested in taking part, the teen was not; and another two families were contacted, given information about the study and asked to get back in touch if interested but never did. They did not respond to further telephone contact. However, the high response rate could also be reflective of the positive regard the programme is held in by participants as the majority of respondents were contacted directly by the researcher. The response rate, or proportion of eligible participants who agree to take part in a study, has an influence on the validity of the inference that the sample represents the population of interest (Woods et al, 2000; Hulley et al, 2001). In addition, incentives were offered to families who took part in interviews and young people who participated in focus groups. Families received €40 'One for All' vouchers and young people received €10 mobile phone credit as incentives.

Follow Up Studies

Some methodological issues relating to follow-up studies include respondent recall and maturation of respondents. In terms of respondent recall, people can reconstruct past events in the light of subsequent events and people can misremember and think events happened more recently or longer ago than they actually did (de Vaus, 2011:140). Providing respondents with "anchor points", i.e. before and after they participated in SFP, is useful in reducing this problem. Study respondents were also provided with memory prompts to recall various aspects of the programme in interviews and focus groups.

With regard to maturation, changes in respondent's behaviour can sometimes be due to people simply growing older, i.e. developmental effects (de Vaus, 2011: 132). In the case of this study, respondents who had completed the programme as teenagers were up to seven years older at the time of being interviewed. However, respondents from a large number of families (45.6%) who completed the programme were involved in the study which gave a wide representation of different outcomes and clear questions on the direct impact of the programme on specific issues relating to teenagers helped address this issue. For example, respondents were asked if they thought changes in behaviours and attitudes were as a direct result of what was learned on the programme or related to other factors.

Ethical considerations

Consideration was given to ethical issues arising at every stage of the process. However, the main ethical issues to be addressed in this project were:

- child protection and well-being;
- informed consent;
- confidentiality and anonymity; and
- record keeping including data protection and security.

Child protection and well-being: To ensure research procedure is in keeping with current best practice standards of child protection, researchers must carry out their work in accordance with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA, 2011). Factors that should be implemented to ensure the child is protected include:

- developing a risk assessment before starting the research;
- ensuring that Garda-vetting and employment checks are carried out on study personnel;
- ensuring that all researchers have adequate skills, training and access to relevant expertise in relation to child protection issues;
- having a trusted adult, or third party, present, recording interviews on video or conducting interviews in an environment where there is passive surveillance by a third party (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012).

Informed consent: The issue of informed consent is of utmost importance in any research, but particularly with children who are vulnerable (Mastroianni and Kahn, 2002). For consent to be valid, it has to be informed and all the necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the person whose consent is being sought has been given the requisite information and has been supported in developing an adequate understanding of the purpose and use of the data being collected. All legal requirements under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 were met.

Confidentiality: implies that research data that includes identifiable information on participants will not be disclosed to others without the explicit consent of the participants. Limited personal data was collected and this data will not be used for any purpose other than that specified at the time of the collection.

Anonymisation: At the earliest possible stage, data was anonymised and all research outputs were checked carefully to ensure no individual is identifiable.

Record keeping including data protection and security: All appropriate steps were taken to ensure data is held in a secure way including, for example, the removal of direct identifiers, the use of pseudonyms where appropriate, and, the use of technical means to break the link between data and identifiable individuals

2.4 Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis was undertaken on the quantitative data and information and data was summarised and displayed in table or graph format depending on the nature of the data. Focus groups and interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and a thematic analysis was undertaken in relation to the qualitative data in which key themes arising were identified.

2.5 Study sample

In total, respondents from 53 different families who graduated from SFP were consulted through various methods for the study. Overall, 132 families have graduated from SFP (12-16 years) between 2008 and 2014, of which 116 were unique families due to some families repeating the programme more than once. Therefore, the study consulted with 45.6% of families who graduated from the programme. A total of 14 families were interviewed, comprising 16 young people, 11 mothers, two grandparents and one sibling guardian. Eight families were two parent families, which included two parents, a parent and step-parent or two grandparents and six were single parent families. Altogether, 25 young people were consulted through focus groups and 58 graduates of SFP responded to the questionnaire. Eleven key stakeholders from the community were also consulted in a focus group.

CHAPTER 03

Literature Review of Family Based Prevention & SFP

SFP and similar family skills programs are an excellent way to improve resilience and the behavioural health outcomes for parents, children and adolescents.

3.1 Family Based Prevention

Devaney et al. (2013:25) describes family support as "a clearly defined orientation with an accompanying set of practice principles applicable across the four levels of service provision and with a developmental, compensatory or protective focus, as required." Table 2 below outlines various categories of family support (protective, compensatory and developmental) across the four levels of need (Devaney et al., 2013:25). SFP can target families from Level 1 through Level 3.

Table 2: OCategories of Family Support across levels of need

Categories of Support	Levels of Needs
Protective	Supports and rehabilitation for children and families with established difficulties and serious risk Level 4
Compensatory	Services for children and families targeting early difficulties and significant risk Level 3
Developmental	Support for children and families in need Level 2
	Universally available service Level 1

Family based prevention programmes are based on a large body of research which shows that parent and family factors play a significant role in influencing child and adolescent development (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Laursen & Collins, 2009). According to Ashery et al. (1998), family-based prevention programmes should enhance family bonding and relationships and include parenting skills; practice in developing, discussing, and enforcing family policies on substance abuse; and training in drug education and information. Research has found that brief, family-focused interventions for the general population can positively change specific parenting behaviour that can reduce later risks such as drug abuse (Spoth et al., 2002). Effective parenting is judged to be the most powerful way to reduce adolescent problem behaviours (Kumpfer and Alvarado, 2003).

Effectiveness of family-based prevention programmes & SFP

Studies show that family-based prevention approaches can be effective in terms of in-home family support, behavioural parent training, family skills training, family education and family therapy and are more effective than solely child focused approaches (Kumpfer and Alvarado, 2003). Effective family-based drug and alcohol prevention approaches can teach parents how to set clear expectations and rules against the use of drugs and alcohol, reinforce positive behaviour, engage in effective family management practices, and nurture a close and caring relationship with their children (Winters, 2007). The model of SFP is based on decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors which have been identified in the literature

to reduce drug and alcohol use or initiation into it. One of these marked protective factors is the family. SFP and similar family skills programs are an excellent way to improve resilience and the behavioural health outcomes for parents, children and adolescents (Kumpfer, Xie, & Hu, 2011). In their systematic review, Foxcroft et al. (2003) found that SFP was the only programme to demonstrate continued benefits in the longer-term, i.e. more than 3 years. An independent study of SFP 6-11 in Utah with 800 families and 5 and 10 year follow-ups found long lasting positive improvements in high-risk families (Harrison, Boyle, & Farley, 1999).

Independent evaluations of the Strengthening Families Programme in different countries (United States, Canada, Australia, U.K., Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Thailand, Sweden, Norway and France) have shown it to be an effective programme in reducing multiple risk factors for later alcohol and drug abuse, mental health problems, and delinquency by increasing family strengths, children's social competencies, and improving parent's parenting skills (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002; Kumpfer, 2007; Bool, 2005; Orte, et al., 2007). SFP has also been found to be the most effective substance abuse prevention programme, preventing 18% of youth completing from using alcohol, 15% from using marijuana, 11% from using other drugs and 7% from using tobacco (CSAP, Miller & Hendrie, 2008).

3.2 SFP: A strengths based approach to family support

A strength based approach to family support practice is widely valued. For example, The Commission on the Family (1998:16) recommended an approach which is "empowering of individuals and builds on family strengths." According to Smith and Davis (2010), strengths based Family Support perspective advocates choice, participation, anti-discrimination and timeliness and employs approaches that put people's own solutions at the centre of service provision. Similarly, Buckley (2002:9) states that ''an important feature of Family Support is its facility to focus on strengths rather than problems." Strengths based approaches can be very effective in helping individuals, groups and communities to meet challenges (Saleeby, 1997). SFP recognises that families come with all different experiences and understandings, and rather than judging, enables families to tease out, with options, what skills might be helpful for their family. SFP tries to build on the skills that have already been developed.

Effective outcomes of programmes for young people

The Centre for Effective Services (CES, 2013) identified "7 potent mechanisms" or effective outcomes of programmes for young people, i.e. attributes that should help young people to be more employable, less likely to engage in problematic drug-taking or alcohol misuse, and less likely to drop out of school and/or engage in anti-social behaviour. These mechanisms are communication skills; confidence and agency; planning and problem-solving; relationships; creativity and imagination; resilience and determination and emotional intelligence. Many of these mechanisms are consistent with outcomes for young people from randomized control trials of SFP. For example, SFP has been shown to improve educational outcomes, social competencies (e.g. communication, problem-solving, peer resistance and anger and behavioural control), reduce alcohol and drug use or the likelihood of initiation of alcohol or drug use by parents and older children, improve protective factors and reduce risk factors predictive of later problem behaviours (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010:20).

3.3 Strengthening Families Programme in Ireland & Ballymun

Ireland has implemented SFP as an interagency coalition model in local and regional communities focusing primarily on the SFP (12-16 years) and more recently SFP (6-12 years).

A study by Kumpfer et al. (2012) of the effectiveness of a culturally adapted Strengthening Families Programme 12-16 years for high risk Irish families involving over 200 families, showed statistically significant positive results for all measured outcomes. Results of the study identified significant improvements in all of the outcomes measured including 100% or five of five family outcomes, 100% or five of five parenting outcomes, and 100% or eight of eight youth outcomes. Larger effect sizes were found for the Irish families than for the USA families. The study found the Strengthening Families Programme (12–16) to be effective in reducing behavioural health problems in Irish teenagers, improving family relationships and reducing substance abuse.

The study highlighted significant positive changes in parents, the family environment, and family resilience; and in the children's outcomes such as concentration and covert aggression. There were also statistically significant improvements in the areas measured for overt aggression (fighting, bullying, etc.), covert aggression (lying, stealing, etc.), depression, social skills, hyperactivity, concentration and criminal behaviour. These risk factors were identified in the study as the most important in reducing later substance use and abuse.

In 2014, a teen gender analysis was conducted of 327 teens who completed SFP from Ireland between 2008 and 2014 (Kumpfer et al., 2014). The study found statistically significant changes for both boys and girls in all variables for parent, teen and family outcomes with medium to large effect sizes. However, it was also found that adolescent boys benefitted more in parental supervision and overt aggression, and conflict reduced more in families with boys.

Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme

Since 2008, Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme have collated and reported on both qualitative and quantitative information on SFP process and outcomes in Ballymun. In particular, the Lutragroup parent outcome evaluations (pilot in 2008 and onwards) relate to outcome domains at a parent, teen and family level. These reports received from Lutragroup to date on SFP (12-16 yrs) have consistently shown statistically significant changes with the majority of effect sizes being medium to large. Reported positive outcomes include; increase parenting efficacy/involvement/supervision, family cohesion/communication /organization as well as teen concentration/social behaviour. On average, approximately two in every three graduating families engage in the evaluation process upon completion of the Programme. Booster session information reported by parents/teens at a six month period following graduation of families has also highlighted the positive effect of the skills learnt on the Programme but also the factors involved in application and use of SFP skills following programme cessation. Programme facilitators, referral agents and other agencies working with the families have similarly highlighted that longer term changes or impact of the Programme such as reduced drug and alcohol use at a parent or teen level are reported to occur at a later stage following graduation.

A report by Kumpfer et al. (2014) evaluated the overall outcome findings from 2008 to 2013 of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme 12-16 years. The aim of the evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the programme and measure outcomes against the established norms for the programme. The evaluation report identified significant improvements in 100% or all five parenting outcomes (parental supervision, parenting efficacy, positive parenting, parenting skills, and parental involvement), 100% or five of five family

outcomes (decreased family conflict, increased family communication, parent/child relationships, family strength and resilience and family organisation) and 100% or five of the five youth outcomes (decreased overt aggression, covert aggression, depression, and increased concentration and social skills).

The results suggested large improvements in the parents and in the family environment and family resilience. In addition, teenager's behaviours showed statistically significant improvements in overt aggression, covert aggression, depression, social skills and concentration. Overall, the evaluation results for families who participated in Ballymun SFP 12-16 years were better than the Irish SFP 12-16 norms. The report (Kumpfer et al., 2014:24) also found that Ballymun SFP is *"being implemented with quality and sensitivity to the needs of the families, which is creating significant positive changes in parents, children and the families."*

CHAPTER 04

Parent/Adult Perspective: SFP Questionnaire

SFP gave me so many tools and skills, I practice them all the time…
I couldn't say enough about this programme.
It changed our lives. It educated and made me so aware.

4.1 Key Points:

- Questionnaire was aimed at parent/teen graduates 18 years or older
- 58 respondents completed the questionnaire
- 96% of respondents felt the programme made a difference in their lives
- Improved communication and relationships were the most common impacts of SFP on families
- 98.1% agreed or strongly agreed the programme helped improve relationships in their families
- 94.3% agreed or strongly agreed SFP helped their family communicate better
- 88.6% agreed or strongly agreed SFP had helped reduce conflict in their family
- 97% of parents thought their parenting skills had improved as a result of the programme
- 100% of teenagers thought their parents parenting skills had improved
- Parents were most likely to still use communication skills
- Teenagers were most likely to still use listening skills
- Questionnaire respondents highlighted changed behaviours and attitudes towards drugs rather than alcohol
- 100% of respondents thought SFP had a positive impact on the community in Ballymun

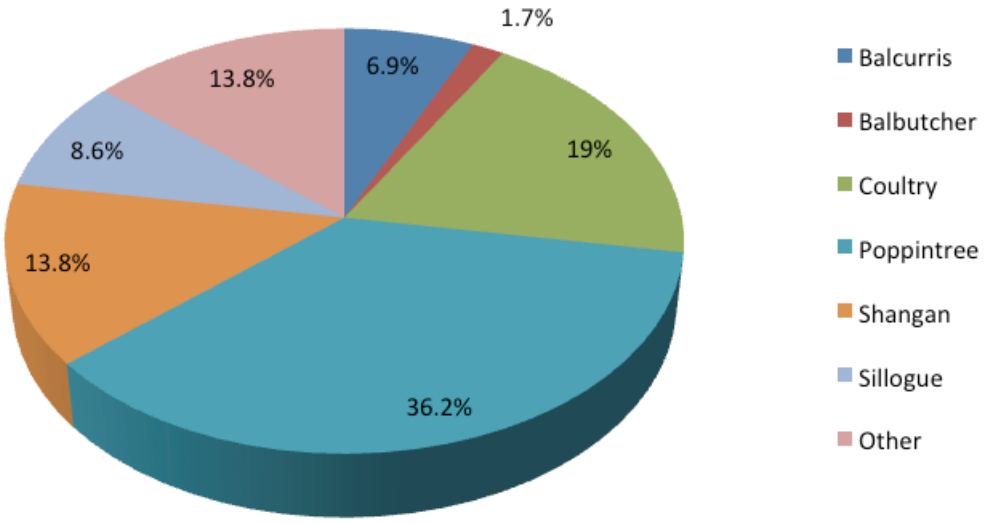
4.2 Overview

A questionnaire was developed as part of the follow-up study of graduates of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) (12-16 years). The questionnaire was available online and also available in hardcopy format. The questionnaire was aimed at parents and guardians and teenagers who were 18 years or older at the time of completing the survey. A small number of teenagers under 18 years of age completed the survey but their responses were deleted and not included in the data. In total, there were 58 responses to the questionnaire, of which 20 respondents completed it online and 38 completed it in hardcopy format.

4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

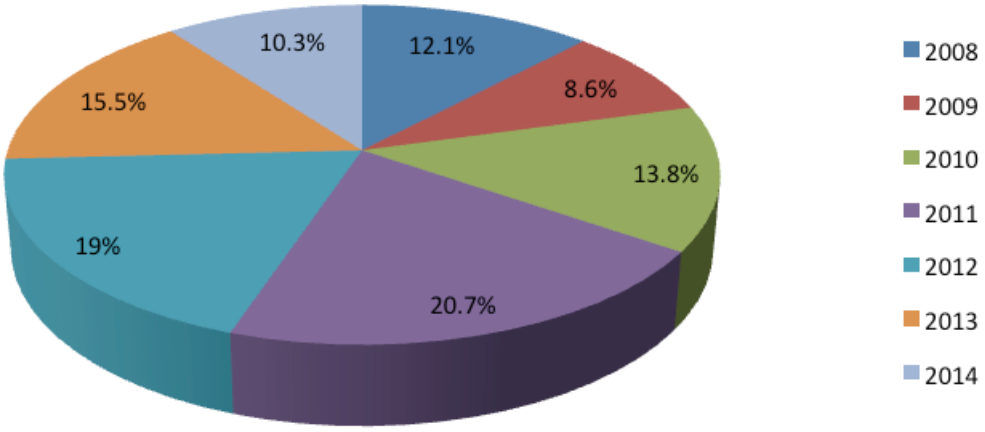
Of the 58 respondents who completed the survey, 47 (81%) were parents or guardians and 11 (19%) were teenagers who completed the Strengthening Families Programme but were 18 years of age or older at the time of responding to the survey. Respondents were asked where they were living at the time of completing the survey. As can be seen from figure 1 below, 36.2% of respondents were from Poppintree, 19% were from Coultry, 13.8% were from Shangan, 13.8% were from other places such as Santry, 8.6% were from Sillogue, 6.9% were from Balcurris and 1.7% were from Balbutcher. All bar one respondent (57 out of 58 respondents), were living with the family member who took part in the Strengthening Families Programme at the time of the survey.

Figure 1: Where respondents are living



There were responses to the survey from families who completed the Strengthening Families Programme for all years the programme has been running (2008-2014). As figure 2 below outlines, 10.3% of responses were from those who completed the programme most recently in 2014, 15.5% were from 2013, 19% from 2012, 20.7% from 2011, 13.8% from 2010, 8.6% from 2009 and 12.1% from 2008.

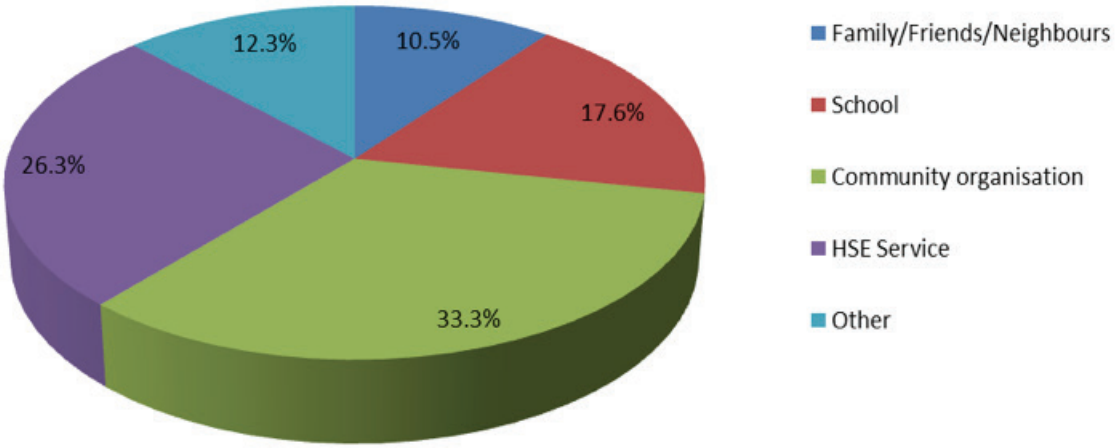
Figure 2: Year participants completed SFP



How did respondents hear about SFP?

Respondents were asked how they heard about the Strengthening Families Programme. As can be seen in figure 3 below, one third (33.3%) of respondents heard about SFP through a community organisation, 26.3% through HSE Services, 17.6% through schools, 12.3% through other sources such as a Juvenile Liaison Officers and Youthreach and 10.5% through family, friends or neighbours.

Figure 3: How respondents heard about SFP



Parent & Adult Teen Feedback

4.4 Parent's Skills

Parents/guardians were asked if they thought their parenting skills had improved as a result of taking part in the Strengthening Families Programme. All but one parent/guardian (97%) felt their parenting skills had improved as a consequence of taking part in the programme. Parents were asked how often they use the skills they learned on the Strengthening Families Programme. As table 3 below outlines, the most common skill parents always use was communication about drugs and alcohol (80.4%), followed by giving clear directions to their teen (78.3%) and setting clear boundaries for their teen (73.9%).

Comparative analysis on parent's skills and the year of graduation showed **no distinct patterns such as delineation of skills with year graduated, e.g. those who graduated more recently being most likely to "always" use skills**. In fact, parents who graduated in 2011 were most likely to "always" use SFP skills, followed by those who graduated in 2012, 2008, 2014, 2013, 2010 and 2009. This highlights the long term effectiveness of the programme and how the use of parenting skills does not necessary lessen over time.

Table 3: How often parents use SFP skills

SFP Parent Skills	Always	Sometimes	Never
I communicate about drugs and alcohol	80.4%	17.4%	2.2%
I give clear directions to my teen	78.3%	21.7%	-
I set clear boundaries for my teen	73.9%	23.9%	2.2%
I reward & notice good behaviour	67.4%	32.6%	-
I communicate about relationships and sexuality	65.2%	30.5%	4.3%
I use good speaking and listening skills	58.7%	41.3%	-
I set clear goals and objectives	50%	47.8%	2.2%
I use my skills to handle stress better	50%	47.8%	2.2%
I follow through on consequences (e.g. punishment, removing privileges)	47.8%	43.5%	8.7%
I spend quality time with my teen	43.5%	50%	6.5%
I use problem solving skills	36.9%	60.9%	2.2%
I ignore bad behaviour (where safe to do so)	31.8%	52.3%	15.9%
I use behaviour change contracts	19.1%	47.6%	33.3%

Other skills

Parents were also asked if there were any other skills they use with their teenager. Other parenting skills or methods mentioned by parents included **reward charts, pocket money, the opportunity to earn privileges back, not to overreact, knowing when to intervene or take a step back, letting teens take responsibility for actions, family meetings, empathy, family values, one-to-one time with teens, greater awareness of teens feelings and behaviour, tolerance and being more open to change.**

Teenager's views on parenting skills

Respondents who completed the programme as teenagers were asked if they thought their parent/guardian's parenting skills had improved as a result of taking part in the programme. All (100%) respondents felt their parent/guardian's parenting skills had improved as a result of taking part in the Strengthening Families programme.

4.5 Adult Teenager's Skills

Those who answered the survey and completed the SFP as teenagers were asked how often they use the skills they learned on the programme. Using good listening and speaking skills were the most commonly cited skills, with over two thirds (76.9%) stating they always use these skills and 23.1% stating the sometimes use them (see table 4 below). The next most common skills always used by teenagers who graduated from the programme was saying no to staying out of trouble and asking for help when they need it (69.2%). In terms of communicating well with their parents or guardian, 61.5% said they always use this skill and 38.5% said they sometimes do.

Table 4: How often adult teenagers use SFP skills

SFP Parent Skills	Always	Sometimes	Never
I use good listening skills (e.g. interested, eye contact, ask questions)	76.9%	23.1%	-
I use good speaking skills (e.g. praise and interrupting skills)	76.9%	23.1%	-
I say "no" to stay out of trouble	69.2%	30.8%	-
I ask for help when I need it	69.2%	30.8%	-
I communicate well with my parent or guardian	61.5%	38.5%	-
I use "I" statements (e.g. "I feel…" "I think...")	53.8%	38.5%	7.7%
I talk to my parent or guardian about relationships and sexuality	53.8%	30.8%	15.4%
I talk to my parent or guardian about drugs and alcohol	46.2%	46.2%	7.7%
I manage emotions and feelings	46.15%	46.15%	7.7%
I use problem solving skills	46.1%	53.9%	-
I control and express my anger	38.5%	46.1%	15.4%
I help with family meetings and organisation	38.5%	53.8%	7.7%
I give and receive criticism	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%
I spend quality time with my parent or guardian	30.8%	69.2%	-

Adult Teens who are Now Parents

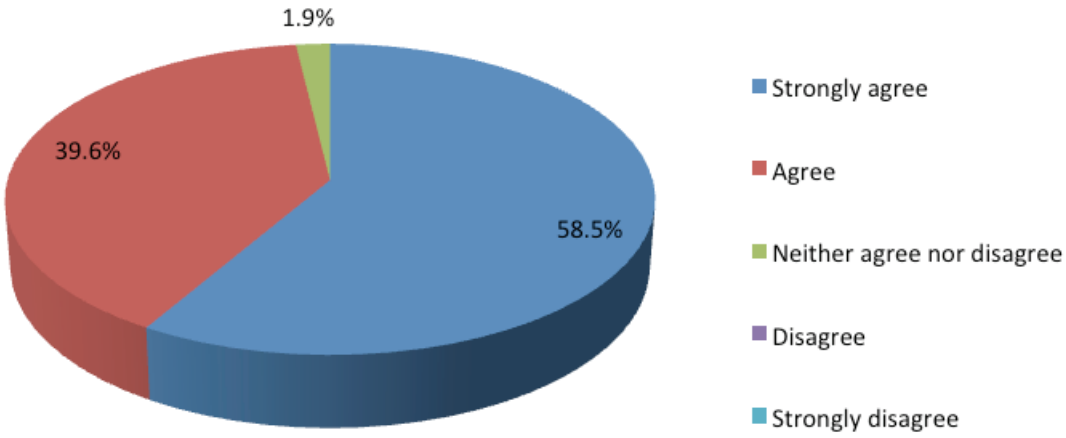
Out of the eleven respondents who completed the programme as teenagers and filled out the survey, three are now parents themselves. All three felt the skills they learned from the Strengthening Families programme helped them as a parent. One respondent believed he would also use the skills he learned in the future when his child is a teenager:

"I can speak to my child when he is older about been peer-pressured into drugs and to take the right path and listen to his parents."

4.6 Changes in Family Skills & Life

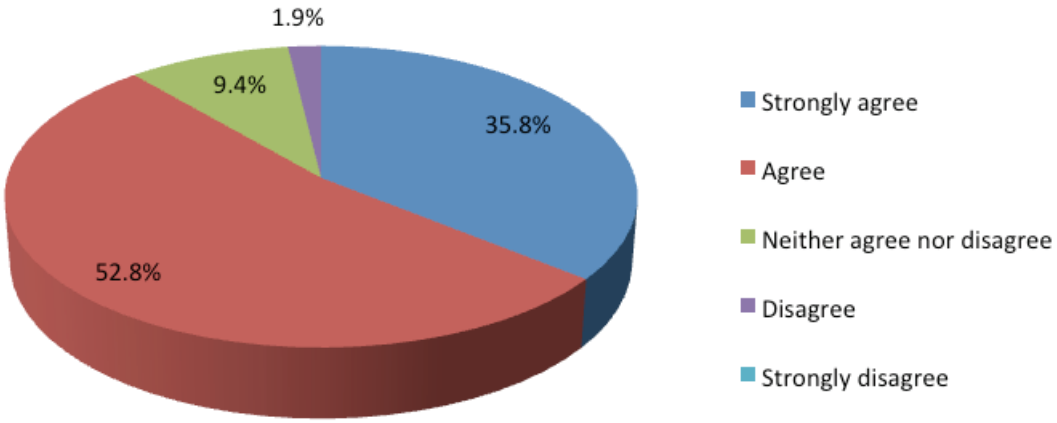
Respondents who completed the programme as parents/guardians and teenagers were asked to state the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements relating to the impact of the Strengthening Families Programme. Respondents were asked if the programme improved their relationship with their family. As can be seen from figure 4 below, 58.5% strongly agreed that the programme improved their relationship with their family, 39.6% agreed and 1.9% neither agreed nor disagreed. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed on this statement.

Figure 4: SFP helped improve my relationship with my family



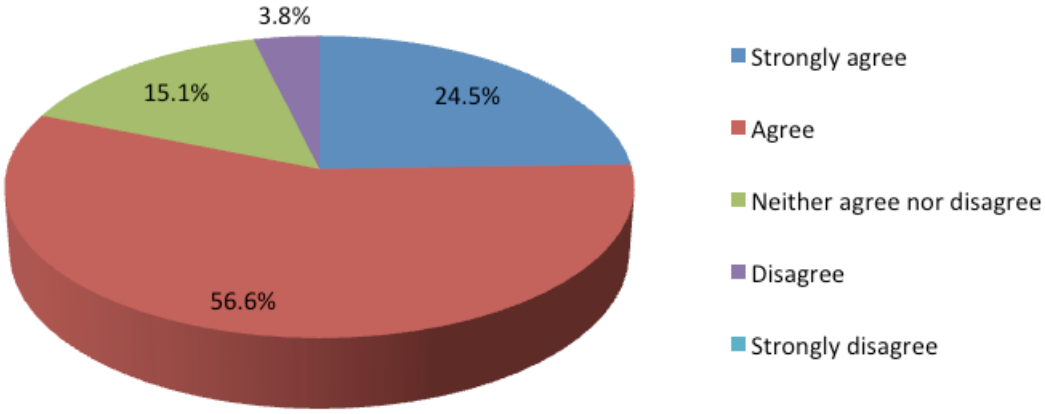
As figure 5 below shows, 35.8% strongly agreed that the programme helped reduce conflict in their family, 52.8% agreed, 9.4% neither agreed nor disagreed and just one respondent (1.9%) disagreed with this statement. No respondents strongly disagreed.

Figure 5: SFP helped reduce conflict in my family



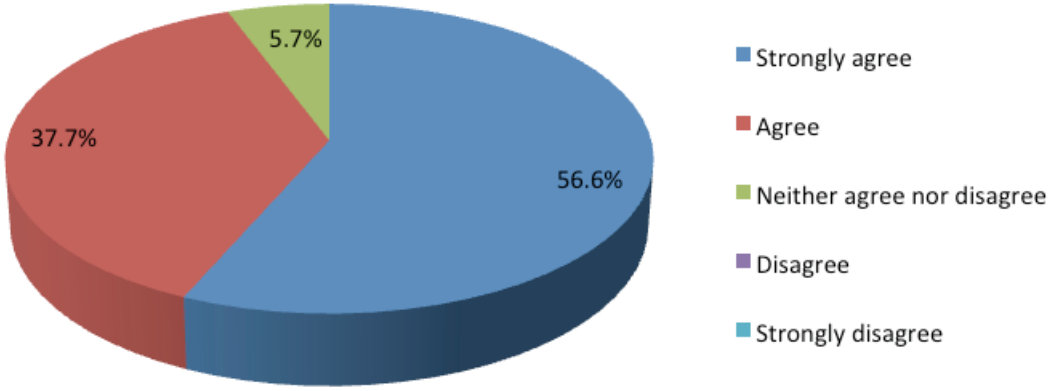
Almost one quarter (24.5%) of respondents strongly agreed that the Strengthening Families Programme helped their family to be more organised, 56.6% agreed, 15.1% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3.8% disagreed and no one strongly disagreed (see figure 6 below).

Figure 6: SFP helped my family to be more organised



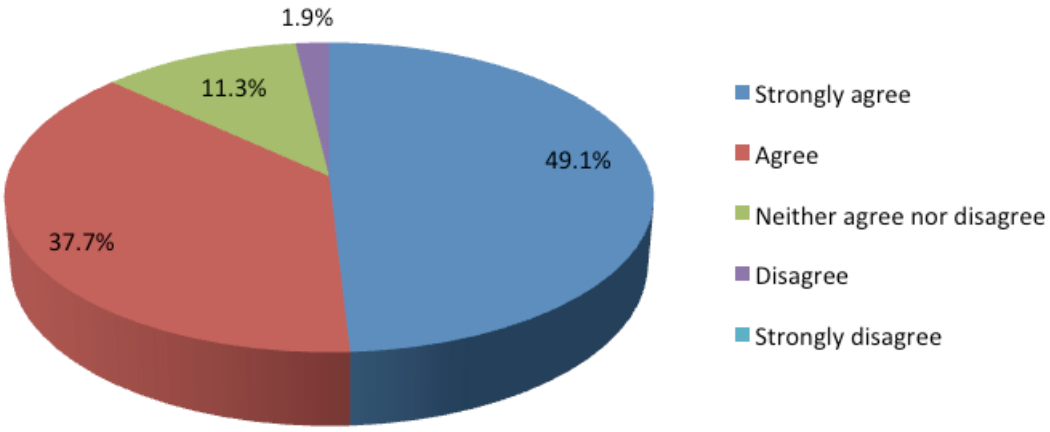
Respondents were asked if they thought the programme helped their family communicate better. Overall, 56.6% strongly agreed that the programme helped their family communicate better, 37.7% agreed and 5.7% neither agreed nor disagreed. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (see figure 7 below).

Figure 7: SFP helped my family to communicate better



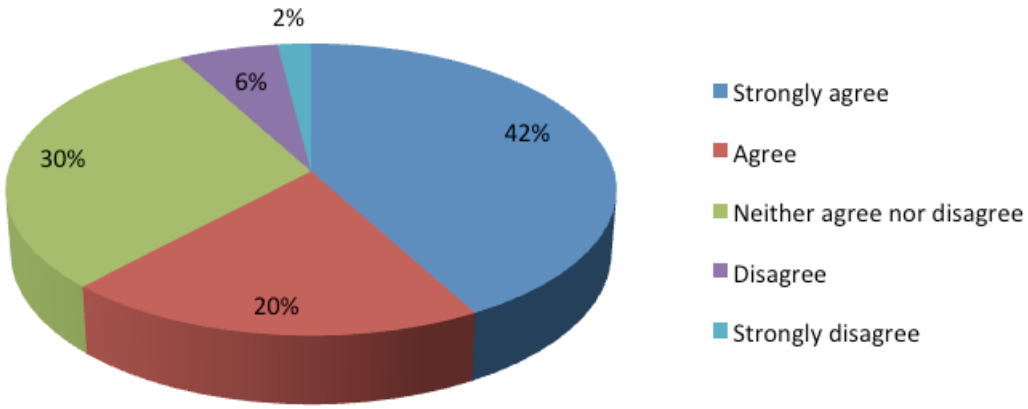
Almost half (49.1%) of all respondents strongly agreed that the Strengthening Families Programme made their family stronger and better able to deal with problems, 37.7% agreed, 11.3% neither agreed nor disagreed and one (1.9%) respondent disagreed. Nobody strongly disagreed with the statement (see figure 8 below).

Figure 8: SFP made my family stronger and better able to deal with problems



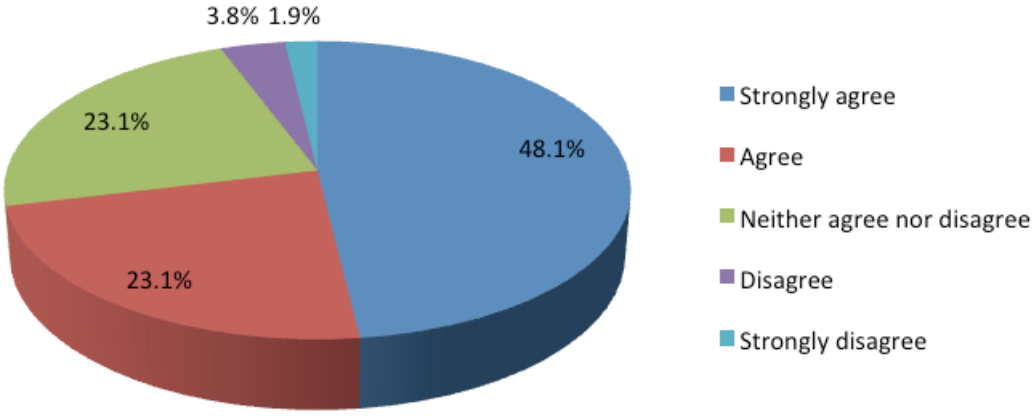
As can be seen from figure 9 below, 42% strongly agreed that the Strengthening Families programme changed their attitude and behaviour towards alcohol, 20% agreed, 30% neither agreed nor disagreed, 6% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed on this issue.

Figure 9: SFP has changed my attitude and behaviour towards alcohol



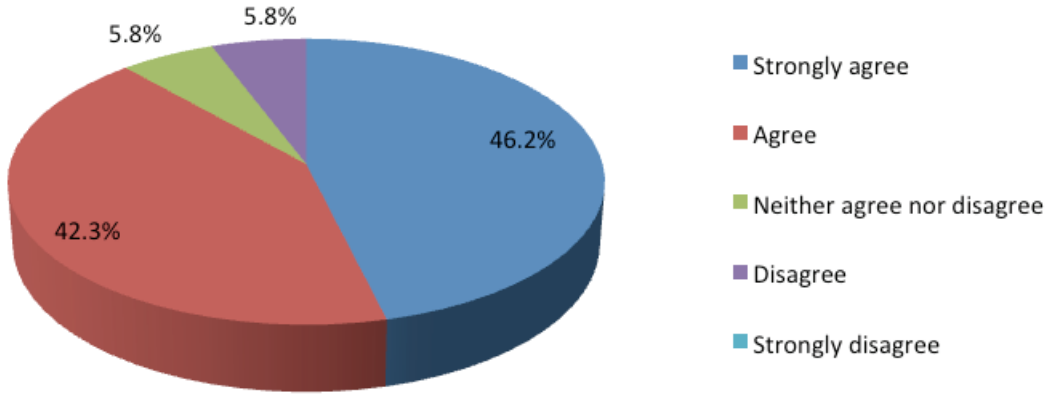
Similarly, respondents were asked if the SFP had changed their attitude and behaviour towards drugs. Almost half of respondents (48.1%) strongly agreed that the programme had changed their attitude and behaviour towards drugs, 23.1% agreed, the same number (23.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 3.8% disagreed and 1.9% strongly disagreed (see figure 10 below).

Figure 10: SFP has changed my attitude and behaviour towards drugs



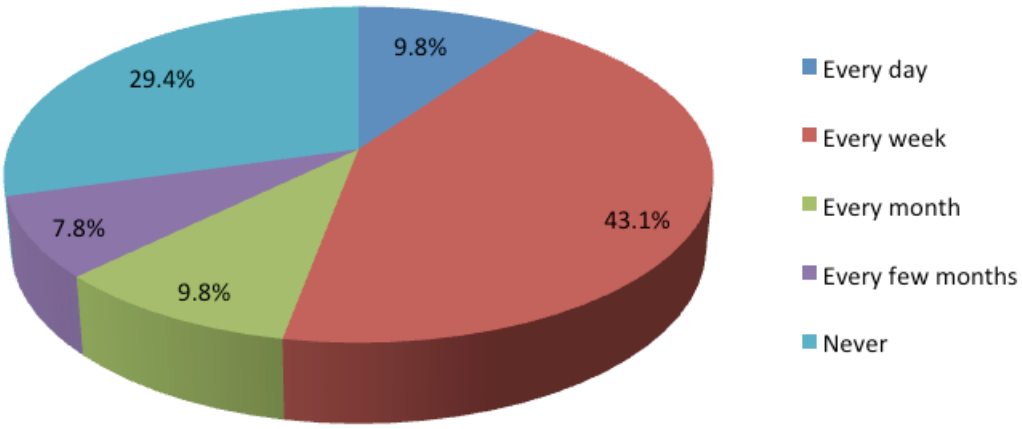
As figure 11 below highlights, 46.2% strongly agreed that the SFP increased the time respondents spend or do things together as a family, 42.3% agreed, 5.8% neither agreed nor disagreed and 5.8% disagreed. No respondents strongly agreed.

Figure 11: SFP has increased the time we spend or do things together as a family



Respondents were asked how often they have 'family meetings' or 'family talks'. Almost one in ten (9.8%) of respondents reported having family meetings or talks every day, 43.1% have them every week, 9.8% have them every month, 7.8% every few months and 29.4% said they never have family meetings or talks (see figure 12 below).

Figure 12: Frequency of family meetings/family talks?



Respondents who said they never have family meetings or talks (29.4%) were asked to explain the main reasons why. Reasons for not having family meetings or talks included lack of time, family members not listening to each other, teenagers not liking the idea of family meetings or regarding them as not useful, teenager not living in the same house, judging them as irrelevant and a perception that their family are "not posh" enough to have family meetings. Some respondents pointed out that although they do not have official family meetings or talks, they do talk to family members on a regular basis or whenever there is a need to.

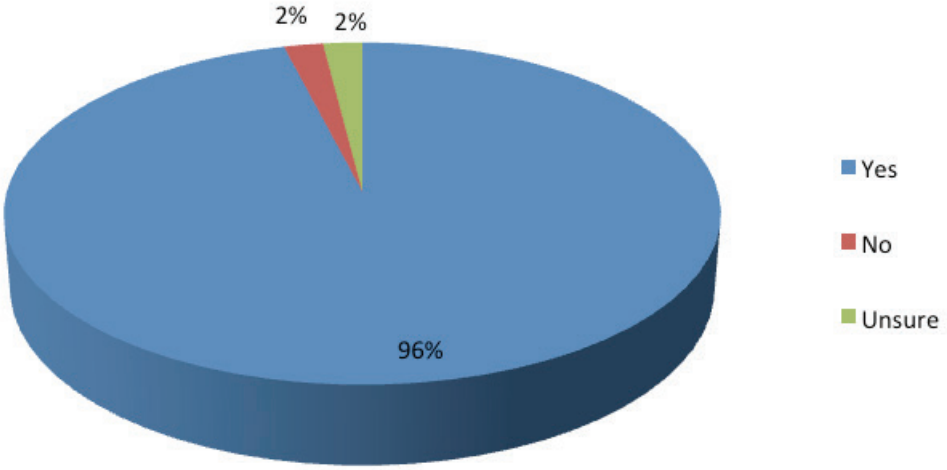
"Family meetings didn't work but we do talk when we need to."

"I try but my daughter doesn't like to."

"No time or not everyone at home but we do talk to each other."

The survey asked respondents if they thought the Strengthening Families Programme had made a difference in their life or that of their family. The vast majority of respondents (96%) felt the programme had made a difference in their life or their family's life, one respondent (2%) felt it hadn't made a difference and one respondent (2%) was unsure if it has made a difference (see figure 13 below).

Figure 13: Has SFP made a difference in your life or that of your family?



How has SFP made a difference in your life or your family's life?

Improved communication

Respondents were asked to explain how the SFP has made a difference or had an impact in their lives. The most commonly cited difference or impact the programme has made in respondents lives was improved communication. Parents/guardians and teenagers reported being able to listen and talk to each other better as a result of taking part in the programme. Several knock on effects of improved communication were highlighted, including the ability to express feelings and open up more, reduced conflict, awareness around expectations, better organisational skills, uncovering personal issues, increased trust, recognising and resolving problems.

> *"Better communication and express our feelings which we could never do. We are more open towards each other."*

> *"We discover a lot of our problems, were because we were not talking or he was been moody, or I was having bad day and didn't want to listen just yet. Instead of the blaming game, we talk a lot open now, and there's a lot more trust, I feel I can trust him, I didn't at times before."*

> *"We can speak to each other in a polite, civil manner instead of shouting."*

> *"I 'hear' my teen more. We communicate better. I try to empathise more with my teen."*

Improved relationships, stronger families

Respondents felt the SFP had improved relationships within families and made their families stronger, closer and happier. As a result, respondents believe their families are **more loving, caring, considerate and respectful of each other**. Participant families reported getting on better and having **'stronger bonds'**. Families also stated their homes were **more relaxed and calmer with less fighting and reduced conflict** than before they took part in the programme. They also felt better able to tackle problems and grow as a family. One respondent felt the biggest impact of the programme in their family was increased *"family values."*

> *"Yes it has brought us together and made us stronger as a family allowing us to tackle problems as a family."*

> *"Getting on much better and no more fighting."*

> *"Yes has made a big difference. It has brought my family closer and happier and more love, caring and respect."*

One consequence of improved relationships within families was respondents reporting they are spending **more time together as a family**. Respondents said they **understand each other better and enjoy each other's company** thanks to the SFP which has increased the amount of time they are spending with their families.

> *"We spend more time together as a family we sit and talk about everything."*

> *"We spend at least one night together as a family."*

Improved parenting skills

Another key difference or impact the programme has had in respondent's lives is improved parenting skills. Parents/guardians reported an **increase in their parenting skills**, for example, listening more, dealing with problems in a relaxed way, how to deal with difficult behaviour, manage problems, set boundaries, ignore bad behaviour and reward good behaviour. Some of the results of increased parenting skills included **increased confidence in parents and teenagers, better schools attendance, children learning from their parent's example and better awareness of teenager's needs.**

> *"My confidence improved as a parent."*

> *"I know it helped me as a mum because my kids never had boundaries whereas now they do and never miss school so I took a lot out of the programme."*

> *"I grew up without parents and no support, a lot of abuse of different kinds and hadn't got many parenting tools, until I did this programme I was going with my instincts…SFP gave me so many tools and skills, I practice them all the time…I couldn't say enough about this programme. It changed our lives. It educated and made me so aware."*

In addition, parents also felt less alone in terms of their own family's problems through hearing about other people's difficulties. This made parents feel less isolated and blame themselves less as they realised they are not the only families with problems.

> *"I think the main impact was learning that there is not something wrong with us as a family, that other families go through the same difficulties. That was a big impact as I used to beat myself up a lot thinking I was a bad parent."*

Better understanding, empathy and awareness

Many respondents said the programme helped parents and teenagers gain a better understanding of each other. This included being **more aware of each other's feelings and problems and learning how to deal with them**. Some parents felt they were able to **empathise more with their child and understand their behaviours better**. Parents also gained a greater understanding of what it is like to be an adolescent today and an awareness of the main issues affecting teenagers. The use of 'families role play empathy exercises' helped some respondents achieve a better understanding of their teenager.

> *"[I] loved the role reversals. To see how my son sees me through his eyes and how I react and how I think I react or behave."*

> *"Without a doubt it has made me open my eyes to my own family and what teens are going through in everyday life."*

> *"It has updated my family on the new things that are going on in the teen's lives these days as to the way it was when we were growing up."*

Improved behaviour in teenagers

Respondents identified another impact of SFP as improved behaviour in teenagers who have completed the programme. It was suggested that some teenagers who have taken part in the programme have become more independent, positive, happy and self-confident. Others have learned skills to get on better in education and employment as well as deal with peer pressure and alcohol misuse issues.

> *"I've stopped being the little brat that I was, always in trouble, and I turned my life around, got away from the people I use to hang always round with, gave the alcohol up and stuck to doing what was best for me. Now I've a full time job and couldn't be any happier with my life"*

> *"Knowing it's ok to say no. I've used my skills at home, college, sports team and the workplace."*

4.7 Changes in Community Life

Connecting with the Community

Other differences or impacts the programme has made in people's lives included getting involved in the community and making new friends. The survey asked all questionnaire respondents if they thought the SFP had made a difference in the Ballymun community. All (100%) respondents who answered this question thought the Strengthening Families Programme had made a difference in the Ballymun community namely through improving the lives of families who have taken part in the programme which in turn has improved life in the community. Families' lives have improved through better communication, improved parenting skills, learning how to deal with problems and parents understanding their children more. As a consequence of this, families are getting on better with each other, stronger, happier and more relaxed. As one respondent stated SFP is **"breaking the cycle"** in families. Families who took part in the programme also reported feeling less stigmatised as they realised they are not the only families with problems in the area.

> *"I really think SFP has made a huge difference in Ballymun with the education, tools and skills. We are building our teens up, and giving them the confidence they so crave. It's breaking the cycle and changing attitudes and stereotypes. We really needed this programme and will continue to do so. SFP is making a positive rippling effect on our communities and this starts in the home."*

> *"You see families that took part and see how they communicate with their children compared to when they started - it makes a huge difference."*

Respondents felt the SFP has improved the lives of teenagers, for example, through helping them deal with anger, peer pressure, increasing their self-confidence, helping them communicate better, educating them on drug misuse and providing support if they need it. This in turn has made a difference in the community as teenagers who took part in the programme have improved coping, problem solving and communication skills. It was also suggested that teenagers who have taken part in the programme are changing attitudes and stereotypes of teenagers in the area.

> *"Yes teens are more aware of the drugs around them and they can say no. They know there's a service they can ring if being bullied, also SFP has taught the teens don't be afraid to talk and their confidence grows every day."*

> *"It has made a big difference to me- people say it to me all the time, my anger, and the way I speak to people, I speak with lovely manners. If I see some body that needs help I be the first to help them."*

Other differences the programme has made in the Ballymun community identified in the survey include improved communication between people in the community, more open communication about issues, learning about other families, keeping positive, more supports for families who need it and the area is quieter. Respondents were also asked how the SFP affected their life in the community. Four out of five (80%) respondents said they know what services and supports are in the area as a result of taking part in the programme. Seven out of ten (70%) said they have better self-confidence, 46% reported making new friends and social connections from the programme and 40% have developed new relationships with agencies or support services in Ballymun. A small number (14%) of respondents who took part in SFP felt it didn't affect their life in the community. A further 6% said the SFP impacted on their life in the community in other ways, for example, creating awareness of community spirit and volunteering in community organisations.

Table 5: How SFP affected community life

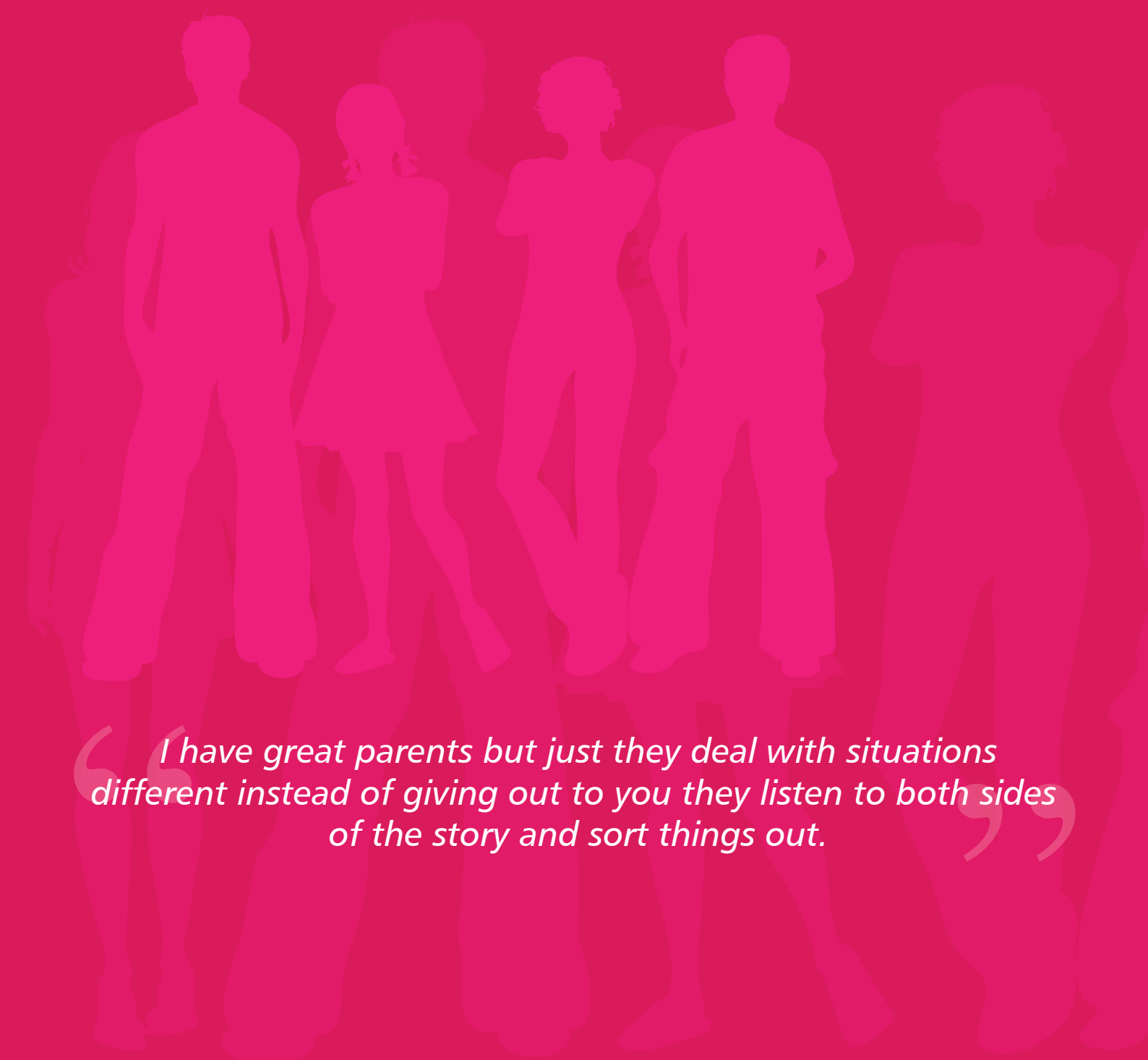
How did the Strengthening Families Programme affect your community life?	%
I know what services and supports are in the area	80%
I have better confidence in myself	70%
I have made new friends and social connections	46%
I have developed new relationships with agencies or support services in the area	40%
It didn't affect my life in the community	14%
Other	6%

Would you recommend the SFP?

Almost all respondents (96%) said they would recommended the Strengthening Families Programme on to other such as friends, family and neighbours.

CHAPTER 05

Young People's Perspective: Focus Groups



"I have great parents but just they deal with situations different instead of giving out to you they listen to both sides of the story and sort things out."

5.1 Key Points:

- 5 focus groups were conducted with 25 young people who graduated from SFP

- Young people identified the main impacts of the programme on themselves and their families as:
  - improved communication skills
  - better ability to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger
  - doing better in school
  - learning more about alcohol and drug misuse
  - dealing with peer pressure better
  - increased self-confidence
  - more positive relationships with parents and,
  - parents improving their parenting skills.

- Young people considered the main impacts on the community to be:
  - getting involved in groups in the community
  - a friendlier atmosphere in Ballymun
  - less drug misuse
  - better respect and communication between young people and neighbours and other adults in the community.

5.2 Overview

Five focus groups were conducted with a total of 25 young people under 18 years of age who had graduated from the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) (12-16 years). The ages of the teenagers who participated in the focus groups varied from 12 to 17 years. Two focus groups were held in the Reco (BRYR), and two focus groups were held in Trinity Comprehensive Secondary School in Ballymun. These focus groups were divided into younger and older teenager age groups. Older age groups spoke more openly about the impact of SFP on them and their families' lives. An additional focus group was held with teenagers who were participating in a SFP booster session in Geraldstown House. As regards gender, 15 (60%) of the young people were male and 10 (40%) were female (as can be seen in Table 6 below).

Table 6: Focus groups with teenagers by number and percentage

	Number of young people	Percentage
Male	15	60%
Female	10	40%
Total	25	100%

5.3 General Opinion of SFP

The majority of young people who took part in the focus groups thought the programme was very good and found it enjoyable, fun and interesting. Just one or two said it was "boring" and "long". Some young people were reluctant about doing the programme at the beginning but soon found it enjoyable and helpful. When asked what they liked the most about the programme, young people listed the meal at the beginning, interesting topics, meeting new people, "having a laugh", knowing people there, incentives such as free phone credit, the graduation, comfortable facilities and helpful facilitators. All but one young person said there was nothing they would change about the programme. One young person suggested the programme should be shorter in length.

> *"It (SFP) was great. I really enjoyed it.*

> *"At first I didn't want to do it (SFP). I was kind of being forced to do it but then as the couple weeks went by I started to like it. It was good. The leaders are easy to talk to. They keep it interesting. The topics they do every week as well are good, they are not boring topics."*

> *"You might not think it is going to help but it will. You might think you are wasting time but even the smallest things can set you off so it is better to get it off your chest than bottle it in."*

Young people identified improved communication, information on drugs and alcohol, how to deal with anger and conflict, skills such as how to make eye contact as some of the highlighted learnings for them.

> *"I learned to calm down and control my anger. Before with my brothers, I used to punch the head off each other but we don't now."*

> *"Drugs - don't take them."*

> *"Let people have their say and listen. There isn't as much shouting anymore."*

Almost all young people in the focus groups thought the impact of the programme had been long-term. However, one young person felt SFP only helped her family in the short-term, after which any positive changes reverted back to the way they were previous to the programme. The young person thought it might help if their family repeated the programme. A number of young people said they had forgotten some aspects of the programme and agreed that additional booster sessions for families after completing the programme would be beneficial.

> *"It did (make a difference) for a couple of weeks like it stopped a lot of fighting because it did techniques about how to stop fighting but you forget then after a while."*

> *"You forget things. I went two years ago but you would have to go the year after as well I think to remember it."*

Young people were asked if they thought the SFP made a difference in their own and their family's lives. The majority of young people thought **the programme had made a difference in their lives and described it as "helpful", "good" and said it had "helped with problems" and "made things easier"** in their lives. Some young people spoke about the programme making a subtle difference in their lives, sometimes without them being fully aware of it. As one young person said, the differences are in "small steps."

> *"You can see a difference but in small steps. Like I used to always go to kill my sister for small little things and now I feel like it but I don't do it."*

> *"Before it was just hostile and one thing would set everyone off and everyone was just going mad with each other and now it's much better and everyone isn't on edge all the time. Before we would all get involved even if it wasn't anything to do with you and screaming at each other for the craic… It has made everything easier so you can just actually relax in your house and watch TV without everything starting off and have time to do whatever you want."*

5.4 Changes in Family Life

Family Bonding, communication & relationships

The main impact of the programme on young people and their families was they are able to talk to and listen to each other better. The impact of this improved communication in families was young people feel their families are closer, they find it easier to talk about personal issues or problems, it's easier to solve problems, there are less arguments and fighting between teenagers and their parents and between teenagers and their siblings, there is more trust between parents and teenagers and young people's families are calmer and quieter overall.

> *"I didn't think it was going to help because everyone was always arguing before and now we talk to each other. We don't argue anymore. It is a lot quieter house now."*

> *"It (SFP) got our family closer together than it actually was. Like we would always be fighting and we wouldn't go out and ever since we are communicating better and going out together."*

Other impacts of the SFP included young people spending more time with their parents or guardians, young people and parents maturing, parents giving out to their teenagers less, young people having more rules, young people and parents learning to "forgive and forget" and young people and families solving problems together, e.g. in school.

"Yeah me nanny is moaning at my brothers more than me now. She is correcting them more than she is correcting me. She used to moan at me more before."

"It (SFP) has been a great help. Both sides have matured and you can go past the stupid stuff."

"Don't live in the past and talk about arguments that happened ages ago. It's gone just forget about it. Forget and forgive."

All of the young people felt the relationship between them and their parents or guardians had improved as a result of talking part in the SFP. Just one young person reported a short-term improvement in relations with their parent. Better communication, for example listening and talking to each in a respectful and calm way, has had a very positive impact on the relationship between teenagers and their parents or guardians. Young people stated they were now able to talk to their parents or guardians more openly about personal issues such as relationships, they confide in their parents more, they argue and fight less, spend more quality time together, trust each other more, deal with problems quicker and forgive each other easier.

"I could come and tell her anything whereas before I usen't to tell her anything."

"When I used to be talking to me ma I used to be really cheeky and have an angry tone the whole time but not now."

"You can talk now to each other in an adult way kind of and not scream up and down the stairs."

Parenting skills

Young people were asked if they felt their parents or guardians parenting skills had improved since taking part in the SFP. All bar one young person agreed that their parent or guardian's parenting skills had improved as result of taking part in the programme. The main ways young people thought their parents or guardians parenting skills had improved was **they are listening more, are more understanding, connect with them more, give out less, shout and argue less, resolve conflict better, are more open, are more trustworthy, are less strict, allow more freedom, are more reasonable, are less judgemental and are clearer about rules and boundaries**.

"Me ma deals with things better than before."

"I have great parents but just they deal with situations different instead of giving out to you they listen to both sides of the story and sort things out."

"She (grandmother) gives me a little bit more freedom and I don't have to hear her whining at me all the time…it's great."

"If she (mother) is explaining stuff she will make it more clear. If I forgot to do something she won't shout at me and she understands and listens to me more."

Family meetings

Some young people still have families meeting on a regular basis, whereas others don't and a small number never had these types of meetings in their family. Although some young people reported not having family meetings, a number of them felt they were able to talk to their parents or guardians more, especially if they had a problem. One young person who had just completed the programme with her family was having her first family meeting the night of the focus group:

> *"I'm having one tonight for the first time. Before we would all keep fighting and fighting and that is what me ma is going to talk to us about."*

> *"Family meetings- we have them once a month."*

> *"We just sit around and talk."*

5.5 Changes in Young People's Lives

Dealing with stress, conflict, criticism and anger

Overall, young people consulted in the focus groups felt they are better able to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger since they have graduated from the SFP. Ways young people deal with stress and anger included writing things down, going to their room, going for a walk and listening to music.

> *"Write things on a piece of paper."*

> *"I go for a walk and listen to music."*

> *"I listen to music on the way to school and I am happier then."*

In terms of dealing with conflict and criticism, the majority of young people reported using techniques they learned from the programme when they were having an argument or in a conflict situation such as counting to ten, "biting their tongue", not reacting, thinking before speaking, walking away from the argument, talking to someone and "giving a warning."

> *"Yeah - just walk away and go for a walk or something."*

> *"Just go up to your room. Before I would have kept on arguing."*

> *"I still argue with my brothers and sisters but it is better now. Say if my little brother annoys me now I just walk away or tell someone."*

> *"I bite my tongue anytime I am in an argument with me ma. Before I would have snapped back at me ma…now I say 'ma can I talk to you please? I don't want to be fighting with you.' She doesn't be fighting with me then and asks, 'what's wrong with you?"*

The impact of dealing with stress, conflict, criticism and anger better is young people described communicating better with their parents and siblings, arguing and fighting less with their parents and siblings, they are more solution focused and are quicker to apologise.

> *"We just sit down together and talk more instead of screaming and it works better."*
>
> *"I just think to myself I am never going to win this argument."*
>
> *"When they (parents) give out before we would throw things at each other but now we listen to each other, get our points across, try and resolve it and just walk away."*
>
> *"Look for a solution. There is no point in arguing if you don't know both sides and where everything is coming from so you have to find out where it's coming from."*
>
> *"After a while now I go in and say sorry but I wouldn't have done that before."*

Though the majority of young people consulted in the focus groups felt they were better able to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger, a small number of young people still showed signs of not being able to deal well with these issues:

> *"I still can't control my anger…."*

Impact on Education

Young people were asked if they thought what they learned in the programme had helped them in school in any way. While a number of young people thought the programme had no effect on their school lives, **many young people thought the skills they learned in SFP had an impact on how well they were getting on in school**. The main impacts of the programme on young people in terms of school were **changes in behaviour and attitudes towards teachers, learning and school in general**. Young people talked about getting into trouble less in school and arguing less with teachers and friends. Some young people have used techniques they learned in SFP in school situations, such as counting to ten to deal with conflict. A number of young people felt the programme helped them "cop on" more when it comes to getting on well in school.

> *"Sometimes you get frustrated and really angry and want to burst them but now I take it easy and count to ten and it does work."*
>
> *"I don't get in trouble as much. In first year I got in trouble a lot. I got suspended around 20 times in first year but this year only ten times."*
>
> *"It helps you cop on more. If someone is messing with you, just step away and don't get in trouble because someone is acting the eejit."*

Some young people said they **have learned to talk to their teachers in a more respectful manner through the communication skills they developed from the programme**. As a result there is less conflict between these students and their teachers. Some young people said the programme has helped them mature and see things from their teacher's perspective in terms of wanting the best for their students.

"You kind of mature and realise that they (teachers) only want the best out of you and you start respecting them more…They are not there to get you in trouble. They are trying to get you on the right path."

"In some ways its better, sometimes I talk to my teachers and I am cheeky but it has made me less cheeky and I think about what I have done."

Young people reported also **getting in trouble less with their parents or guardians because of their improved behaviour and attitude in school**.

"Yeah my nanny is not barking down my throat and moaning at every little thing because I'm getting into less shit at school."

Drugs and Alcohol

Young people were asked if they thought the SFP had changed their behaviours and attitudes towards smoking, drinking and drugs. The majority of young people in the focus groups felt the programme hadn't changed their behaviours and attitudes towards drinking but it had changed them with regard to drugs and smoking.

"Smoking yeah, drinking not as much."

"I seen people my age smoking and taking drugs and it is horrible."

"I don't remember the night about drinking but I do remember it about smoking and drugs."

According to young people, the programme helped them learn more about drugs and the negative effects they can have. **A number of young people said the programme "turned them off drugs" and gave them skills on how to deal with peer pressure around drugs**.

"It (SFP) helps- you know what can happen if you do those drugs."

"Drugs - it turned me off them."

"People just do it (take drugs) to be cool with their friends and it is just stupid. At the time I was young and I didn't really know much about drugs but now I wouldn't touch them."

"Don't be stupid. Don't be a sheep with drugs, following the crowd, crowd of sheep, muppets."

Peer pressure

The majority of young people agreed the programme helped them deal with peer pressure and staying out of trouble. However, some young people felt they were able to deal with peer pressure before taking part in SFP. As was mentioned above, young people learned skills about how to deal with peer pressure around issues such as drugs as part of the programme.

> *"You know to stay away from it and if your friends are doing something just don't do it. You know not to be doing it after it (SFP)."*

> *"Most my friends do smoke and all and they ask you but you just say no. Most of the girls and boys in my group smoke and its horrible…they are all junkies. I just don't talk to them."*

Dreams and goals

While some young people were unsure if the SFP helped them in the area of dreams and goals, others felt the programme **helped them focus more on what their dreams and goals are and how they can achieve them**. A number of the young people said the programme **improved their self-confidence and gave them the self-belief to follow their dreams and goals with regard to their education and what they would like to work at when they are older**. For some young people, the programme gave them the opportunity to see what they are good at and what career area might suit those talents. It also made some young people realise the importance of education, e.g. staying in school and going to college, in achieving their dreams and goals. Furthermore, young people became more aware of how imperative "staying on the right track", for example not getting a criminal record, and "moving on in life" is in achieving your dreams and goals.

> *"They (facilitators) make you believe in yourself that you can achieve it and give you more confidence so you can go out and do it."*

> *"It makes you think of your dreams and goals more and instead of picking something you can't do, you pick something more realistic you can do."*

> *"I never kind of thought of what I wanted to do, just do my work. You see your stronger points and you chose what you are best at."*

The following quotes are some examples of the dreams and goals of young people who participated in the focus groups:

> *"I would like to have a good life and get on a good track and get a good job and finish college."*

> *"When I was small I was thinking about being a vet and I didn't for a while but now I do and I want to get an education. I learned about moving on in life."*

> *"I went from one thing to another, from a chef to a barrister. You have to do ten years in law school."*

> *"I want to be a dance teacher."*

> *"I want to go on and do a college course next year, outdoor adventure."*

> *"I want to join the army after I leave school."*

5.6 Young People's Engagement in the Community

Young people who took part in the focus groups were asked if the SFP helped them get involved in any clubs, groups, activities or services in the Ballymun community. Several young people said they got **involved in activities and services in the community as a direct result of hearing about them in the SFP**. For example, young people joined youth groups in the Reco, one young person got involved in Comhairle na nÓg (local youth council) and another began attending the Aisling Project, an after-school initiative to prevent early school leaving. Some young people also talked about the programme giving them the self-confidence and drive to join new groups, make new friends and get involved in new activities in the community.

> *"The Reco - in a youth group. I wouldn't have joined the group if I hadn't have heard about it on the programme."*

> *"I joined Comhairle na nÓg. The programme made me realise I have to make something of my life. I have only been to one meeting. It's about young people's voices being heard."*

> *"You are not shy about it and you don't shy away from it. You have confidence going in. If there is something you would like to do you just do it and go in and meet new friends. I went to a few clubs like football, boxing, hurling. I am still in the boxing now. They told you what activities were around and they said if you want to try some and I said definitely and went off and joined it."*

The important role of programme facilitators was stressed by young people in relation to this area. For example, young people found it easier to join new groups or services if a facilitator from the programme was already involved with that group or service. This also seemed to enhance the relationship between young people and facilitators as they found it easier to talk to and trust facilitators after building up a relationship with them on the programme. They also felt respected and listened to by facilitators.

> *"They (facilitators) are basically like one of your mates. They make you feel heard and wanted and stuff."*

> *"Yes - you can just talk to them (facilitators) more now."*

> *"It makes it easier and nicer. They (facilitators) are easier to talk to. Cathy (facilitator and outreach worker in The Reco) is the business."*

Impact of SFP on the community in Ballymun

According to young people, the main impacts of the SFP on the community in Ballymun are it is friendlier, there is a nicer atmosphere, young people who participated in the programme are less likely to take drugs and have more respect for neighbours and other people in their community and people who took part in the programme are able to communicate and get on better with others in the community.

> *"It's (Ballymun) friendlier and there would be less people going around on the streets taking drugs on the streets."*

"It (SFP) has helped a lot of people and a lot of people are going to use those skills then towards each other and everyone else so that is going to help…there is just a nicer atmosphere in Ballymun, nicer people… I would say there has been a few people that have went to that (SFP) and it changed their mind a lot and changed their point of view and probably has stopped them (taking drugs).

"It teaches you how to respect them (neighbours) and not just your parents."

"Being able to talk to them (neighbours) better and everyone can talk to each other easier and get on better."

CHAPTER 06

Family Interview Findings

We learned to communicate and talk to each other more. We learned to communicate and how to talk to other families and people not just your own family.

6.1 Key Points:

- 14 family interviews were conducted
- Probability sampling was used to ensure a representative sample of families, i.e. graduation year, teen ages, family type
- 14 parents and guardians were interviewed including 11 mothers, 2 grandparents and 1 sibling
- 16 young people were interviewed- 10 male and 6 female; 10 under 18 years and 6 over 18 years
- Main impacts of the Ballymun SFP on families included:
  - improved communication
  - improved relationships
  - improved parenting skills and
  - being able to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger better.
- The programme had a positive impact on teenagers in terms of:
  - education
  - dreams and goals
  - alcohol and drug use and
  - peer pressure.
- SFP had a positive impact on families in terms of service use in the community, i.e. as a source of information and establishing relationships with facilitators.
- Key issues affecting the community identified in the study included drugs, alcohol, teenage pregnancy, early school leaving, unemployment, poverty, anti-social behaviour, violence, intimidation and fear of reporting crime.
- Main impact of SFP on the community was the positive knock-on effect of individual behavioural changes within families, i.e. teenager's alcohol and drug use, peer pressure, early school leaving and crime.

6.2 Overview

In total, 14 families were interviewed as part of this study. Interviews were conducted jointly with parents or guardians and their child/ward. In relation to parents or guardians, 11 were mothers, two were grandparents and one was a sibling. A total of 16 'teenage' respondents were interviewed, of which ten were male and six were female (see table 7 below). The majority of interviews involved a parent or guardian and one teenager who completed the programme; however two family interviews were with two teenage siblings who had completed the programme. All but one (13 out of 14) parent/guardian completed the study questionnaire. Five teenagers (from four different families) consulted in focus groups were also selected randomly to be interviewed alongside their parents/guardians for the family interviews.

Table 7: Number of parents and teenagers consulted in family interviews by gender

	Parents/Guardians	Teenagers
Male	1	10
Female	13	6
Total	14	16

6.3 Key Issues for Families

Families interviewed for the study had varying levels of needs. The family support model (see table 1 in the literature review) outlines four different levels of need across three categories of support (protective, compensatory and developmental support). SFP is usually aimed at families with levels 1-3 of need (Level 1= Universally available services; Level 2 = Support for children and families in need; Level 3 = Services for children and families targeting early difficulties and significant risk; Level 4 = Supports and rehabilitation for children and families with established difficulties and serious risk).

Teen Issues

School related issues were very common among teenagers before participating in SFP. This included getting in trouble in school, being suspended, not attending school and early school leaving. Many teenagers displayed behavioural or anger issues in their home or school and a number of teenagers were attending Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), a specialist service for children and adolescents with serious emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties. Some young people had engaged in violent behaviour in the home. A small number of teenagers had been in short-term foster care due to family circumstances.

Some teenagers had engaged in alcohol misuse and one teenager had serious alcohol misuse issues. A very small number of young people had engaged in drug misuse. Some young people had been in trouble with the Gardaí and one or two had engaged with Garda Youth Diversion Projects. One young person had been involved with a gang selling drugs. A number of teenagers and their families had experienced violence and intimidation. This included violent assaults causing harm to teenagers and family homes being attacked in the case of a small number of families. Other families experienced less direct fear and intimidation. Since taking part in the programme, issues affecting teenagers included unemployment and unplanned pregnancies.

Parent Issues

Key issues affecting parents included unemployment and poverty. A small number of parents talked about having alcohol and drug addictions in the past. In some cases, other family members such as fathers, siblings and uncles had alcohol and drug addictions and a small number of these had also died as a result of addiction issues.

6.4 Changes in Family Life

The main impacts of the Ballymun SFP on families were improved communication, relationships and parenting skills, support from other parents, being able to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger better, the positive impact of SFP on education, the impact of SFP on dreams and goals, the impact on alcohol and drug use and peer pressure, the impact of SFP on service use and the impact on SFP on the community.

Improved communication skills

According to families, the most significant impact of the programme has been improved communication skills, i.e. talking and listening to each other. All families felt the programme gave them the skills to communicate better both within and outside their families. This included improved communication within families between parents and their teenagers, between teenagers and their siblings and outside families between teenagers and their friends, between teenagers and their teachers and between both parents and teenagers and other people in the community.

> *"It did give us good skills to communicate better."*
>
> *"That was the best thing that came out of it (SFP) for me as his mother, that I can communicate with him now."*
>
> *"We learned to communicate and talk to each other more. We learned to communicate and how to talk to other families and people not just your own family."*
>
> *"I'd say that communication has improved within the community."*

Different families had different levels of communication skills before participating in the programme. Some parents and teenagers were barely speaking to each other, some communicated through screaming and shouting and some already communicated positively. However, all families believed their communication skills improved as a result of SFP.

> *"I never talked to my ma before (the programme)."*
>
> *"Communication was the thing that we just hadn't got…we didn't talk, we roared and shouted."*
>
> *"We always got on grand together before the programme."*
>
> *"You can talk to them (children) better and communicate better whereas I used to scream and not listen. I used to just blame him and not listen to him whereas I should have listened to him."*

With regard to long-term impacts, the majority of families said they still use communication skills learned on the programme on an on-going basis. A small number of families talked about refreshing their communication skills from time to time. Only one mother stated that her and her son who participated in the programme are not on speaking terms. Some families still have family meetings whereas other don't. However, families who don't have family meetings anymore felt communication had improved significantly in their family which meant there was lesser need for a more structured type of communication system. Also, families with younger teenagers were more likely to still have family meetings rather than those whose teenagers were now older or even adults.

"And when the communication's going a bit dodgy, we'll sit down and we will talk, don't we?"

"We talk and have meetings and discuss what is going on if they have a grievance."

"Family meetings, we don't do that because communication levels are much better."

The result of improved communication is quieter, calmer and more relaxed family homes. Almost all parents and teenagers agreed there was a much better atmosphere in their homes than previous to taking part in the programme.

"We don't want that roaring and balling in the house. It's calmer now."

"There's not as much tension in the place anymore."

"It works real well compared to before. Before we would stand around shouting at each other and now we sit down and get things off our chest and it is working a lot better."

Improved relationships

All of the families agreed the relationships between parents or guardians and teenagers had improved as a result of taking part in the programme together. Parents and teenagers talked about having stronger, closer and more open relationships.

"He's (son) real open and we've a great relationship as well now, the pair of us."

Many parents gained a better understanding of their teenagers and had more empathy for them due to aspects of the programme such as role reversal exercises. Similarly, many teenagers said they understood their parents or guardians better after hearing them discuss issues such as parenting difficulties or their dreams and goals at the programme.

"Because of the programme we had to know each other better and got to bond more."

"We just understand each other better now."

For many families, the programme not only improved relationships between the parents and teenagers who had participated in the programme but also improved overall family relations. Families talked about being closer and stronger.

"We are more of a unit now."

"We (family) are actually getting on better because we're sticking together now."

Many families talked about the relationships between teenagers who completed the programme and other siblings improving after taking part. A number of parents noticed their teenager had improved relationships with friends also.

> *"I'm getting on a lot better with my brothers now since the programme."*

> *"Well his relationship with his sister at the time would have been...not bad, but always kind of, you know, fighting with one another. Now they seem to get on a lot better."*

> *"I kind of connect more with him (brother), just talk more to him. Just small things, not like big things. Small steps and we're good."*

> *"I think it (SFP) improved the relationships with some of her friends as well."*

Improved parenting skills

All parents or guardians agreed that participation in the programme had improved their parenting skills. Likewise, teenagers agreed all their parents or guardians had improved their parenting skills in some way. Parents talked about the programme helping to bring out their parenting skills and draw on skills they might not have known they had.

> *"Like there were skills there I didn't even know were there but it (SFP) brings it out in you."*

Overall, parents reported the following changes in their parenting: being **less strict, stressed and controlling and more relaxed, patient, flexible, respectful and affectionate** with their children. They also reported listening and **praising good behaviour** more and shouting and arguing less. Putting rules and boundaries in place allowed both parents and teenagers to relax more and know where they stood. While families often felt they had more rules than before they took part in the programme there was a perception that their parents were less strict after the programme.

> *"I was a very stressed parent. So yeah, they can see the change in that."*

> *"I praise them (children) more. I let them know I appreciate them more."*

> *"Yeah, I am a very strict parent, but I think what I have realised around that is…it was more a controlling thing rather than just strict."*

A number of parents spoke about learning new parenting skills that their parents had never used in their families, such as showing more affection. One grandparent who took part in the programme with their grandchild felt they learned many new parenting skills which they didn't have the first time around such as how to listen, communicate and parent in a more relaxed way.

> *"Not treating them as kids, treating them as adults and telling them how much you love them and giving them a hug. Things my ma never did with us."*

> *"The way I raised my children, I would be very strict. I found I can listen more now. I was more heavy handed with them and screaming and shouting. I find after being in strengthening families I have more patience and I listen now which I didn't do as much. Stop, think and listen. It has taught me quite a lot."*

Teenagers felt their parent or guardian's parenting skills had improved because they were more relaxed, less stressed, listened more, argued less, spent more time with them and understood them better. They made the following comments in relation to their parent or guardian's improved parenting skills:

> *"It did improve her parenting skills. She doesn't roar and shout anymore."*

> *"She was always a good parent but she has changed the way she talks to me and she helps me now with my homework."*

> *"Well she always was a good parent like, but we've stopped arguing with each other."*

Lastly, three respondents who took part in the programme as teenagers are now parents themselves. All three believed they would use the skills they learned on the programme in the future with their own children. Some were using some of the skills they learned already. A number of other teenagers reported using "parenting skills" from the programme with younger siblings.

Dealing with stress, conflict, criticism and anger

Overall, the programme helped both parents and teenagers deal with stress better. Families acknowledged they feel less stressed and calmer since they participated in the programme.

> *"I (mother) would say I would be 95% less stressed."*

> *"I (teenager) have calmed down. Can't remember the last time I let rip."*

> *"I'm (teenager) not stressed like...you don't be coming home from school saying 'Oh I have to listen to her (mother) now.' [Laughs] You can just come home and chill out."*

The programme helped all the teenagers interviewed deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger better. Teenagers gave examples of skills and techniques they use to deal with stress and anger, including not reacting at the time, going to their room, going for a walk, jogging, playing sport and talking to someone. Some teenagers are also able to deal with criticism from parents and teachers in a more controlled way which has resulted in getting into less trouble in school. Families are better able to deal with conflict through improved communication and some spoke about being able "to let go" of arguments easier than they were in the past. Some families talked about teenagers being less aggressive and violent since taking part in the programme.

> *"He (son) was much calmer after the programme. It helped him with his anger and stress. It makes a difference. The frame of the door would be knocked and he would shout 'get out of my room.'"*

> *"I (teenager) just go to my room if I am feeling stressed. I use to go mad. I used to shout at her (mother) and I don't now."*

> *"In school someone broke my earphones, I wanted to shout at them but I just turned away and did my work."*

> *"If we fight now I (teenager) just let things go now."*

A number of teenagers also spoke about taking responsibility for their behaviour since taking part in the programme.

> *"I (teenager) don't feel like the world is against me now, and I was all innocent, but since the programme I realise it is my own choices, I've been doing it and I am also in the wrong."*

6.5 Changes in Young People

Impact on education

All of the teenagers who graduated from SFP felt skills they learned there **helped them do better in school**. While some teenagers had no difficulties in school previous to taking part in the programme, those who did benefited greatly in terms of improving their school life. The main benefits were **dealing better with criticism from teachers, dealing with anger or conflict with other students, listening and communicating better with teachers and friends, increased self-confidence**, i.e. speaking up or reading in class, concentrating more in class and being **more focused on doing well in school**. Some teenagers even said their teachers noticed a difference in their behaviour.

> *"I'm listening a lot more and controlling my anger. I don't fly off the handle as easy as before. Just ignore them, let it go in one ear and out the other. Before I would be in trouble every day and now it's every two weeks."*

> *"In school I wouldn't like to talk in front of people or talk from the book now I would do it. Like the programme you are in your groups talking to people so you get more confident and less shy."*

> *"Yeah even my teacher said they saw a difference in me. I used to be slacking and not working."*

Many teenagers talked about getting in trouble much less after taking part in the programme. A number of them spoke about a change in their attitude towards school and learning. They used phrases such as "copping on" and "putting the head down" in relation to school and some spoke about changing their minds about leaving school.

> *"I did have problems in school. I wasn't even allowed out at lunch, I used to have to sit inside in the room because I used to be fighting a load of people. I was just always annoyed but now I'm alright. The teachers all love me down there, they do."*

> *"It helped a lot in school like I used to get suspended but not as much anymore. I used to be cheeky and say things that weren't very nice but not now."*

> *"I started to get a bit more cop on. Just wanted to get school finished and over with. Try and go to college."*

> *"I wanted to leave school, now I want to go on and do a college course."*

Impact on dreams and goals

Families discussed the impact of SFP on teenager's dreams and goals which is focused on as part of the programme. While a small number of teenagers said their dreams and goals hadn't changed since the participating in the programme, the majority said they had. For many young people their goal was to finish school and go on to college. As a result, many young people stated they became more focused on doing well in school and staying out of trouble. Teenagers talked about having more self-confidence and self-belief that they could achieve goals such as staying in school, going to college and getting a job. Some also said the programme helped them think more realistically and practically about what their dreams and goals are and how they can achieve them.

> *"I know one of the goals was to finish school."*

> *"My dreams and goals have changed. The first day I wanted to be a chef but now I want to be a barrister…It (SFP) thought me about real life like you can't just keep dreaming on of things that are not going to happen. You have to think realistically. I want to do something I am interested in and not be bored at it."*

> *"I was so focussed after (SFP)…I said right I'll just get school done and finished with."*

> *"I just used to say to myself that I'd never get a job and all. And now I say to myself, yeah you will."*

> *"It (SFP) made you want to have something to look forward to."*

Impact on alcohol/ drug use and peer pressure

All young people who graduated from the programme felt they had learned more about the effects of alcohol and drug use from it. In terms of peer pressure, almost all young people felt the programme increased their skills and self-confidence to deal with peer pressure related to alcohol and drugs. While the majority of older teenagers and young adults said they still drink, none of them said they take drugs.

> *"Like, not to do stupid things, really, and not to let people pressure you into do things and knowing where the boundary is. And just to say no instead of saying yeah to something stupid and then probably end up dying."*

> *"Yeah, don't go down that path like. If you're with a group that try talk you into it just keep saying no, I don't want to do it. I don't feel peer pressure. I don't take drugs or drink really. I used to do things to fit in and show off but I realised it's not fun anymore."*

The programme had the most **profound effect on a small number of young people who had issues with alcohol misuse**. One teenager who became involved with a gang selling drugs in the area and was being "paid" with bottles of vodka felt the programme helped him gain confidence to stand up to peer pressure, get away from the gang and stop drinking to excess. The following quotes from the teenager and his mother highlight how SFP helped him:

> *"I stopped drinking bottles of vodka every night when I was doing the programme. I stopped hanging around in the flats with the drugs and all."*

"It (SFP) did get him (son) off the block. He was minding the drugs and he would mind the drugs when they went off and they used to give him bottles of drink. He was 14 then until 16. They nearly killed him. Strengthening Families made a difference. It gave him the confidence to say no to them."

A number of teenagers spoke about not drinking or taking drugs because of the impact of family members or friends being alcoholics or drug addicts. Some had close family members such as parents and uncles who had died as a result of their addictions.

"I would know what alcohol does to people so I wouldn't go near it."

"I guess knowing someone else that had done it (drugs) and the effects and the things that could happen in the family and that could happen to a young person itself is not really nice. So you obviously know then if you don't want to end up like that person, then say no. Don't say yeah."

"I don't drink myself because I saw what it done to kids, like I know kids that did heroin at 12."

According to some young people, the programme helped them deal with peer pressure they were experiencing from friends and in many cases move away from groups of friends who were getting in trouble.

"The people I was hanging around with were always in trouble. When I was younger I used to get stopped by the police but now I do my own thing. You have to take two steps back to take a step forward. It came from the programme around peer pressure and decisions. I decided to step away from them. I don't do drugs and sit around parks and get in trouble."

"It (SFP) made me more wary of where I was going, who was around me, what company I was in and be careful about having a drink."

Building up a relationship with Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers who have acted as Referral Agent or Facilitator on the programme also helped some young people stay out of trouble.

"I actually remember talking about that (getting into trouble) with the Guard…like I'd have seen people, the way they've been and I was just like that's not for me."

"He'd (Guard) say to us 'if you're finding you're going out drinking on the streets and all you come to me,' and he said the same to his own daughter… He talked to us as well. He had an effect on me as well like 'cause that's a copper saying that to you, about his own daughter."

6.6 Changes within the Ballymun Community

Key Issues Identified in the Ballymun Community

According to families, the main issues affecting the community in Ballymun are drugs, alcohol, teenage pregnancies, early school leaving, unemployment, poverty, anti-social behaviour, violence and intimidation and fear of reporting crime. Some teenagers thought there was not enough facilities and services for them in the area.

> *"Seeing kids at the age of twelve smoking and drinking maybe taking drugs is not a nice thing to see."*

> *"We live beside the playground and there are sessions every night and its horrible living beside it and its worse in the summer and they don't stop until six in the morning."*

> *"The main issue would be the drugs, because they're constantly trying to push them on to kids… You can't go anywhere, you can't do anything. They're constantly watching whose coming and going. You're constantly living in fear of...are you going to come back and is the house going to be in one piece."*

> *"The drug scene and the lack of things to do. There is a gap from age 15 to 21 and there is nothing for them to do other than stay on street corners because there is nothing in place. A lot of people are unemployed or on a very low wage."*

Awareness & engagement of/with Services

Both parents and teenagers cited being **more aware of services and more inclined to use them since participating in the programme**. This was primarily because many facilitators on the programme were from different services in Ballymun. Families built up relationships with facilitators which has made it easier to approach their services if needed. Many parents and teenagers talked about facilitators being "friendly" or "familiar faces" in services.

> *"I (parent) wouldn't hesitate to get involved in services now."*

> *"It's nice to see people in services you know from strengthening families. It makes it easier. Like I (teenager) went to the job centre and it was nice to see someone I knew."*

> *"It would be a familiar face if you (parent) did want to go to another service."*

Environmental & Social Impact on the Community

In terms of the impact of SFP on the community, families felt the main impact was the change in individual behaviour of parents and teenagers who participated in the programme which in turn has a positive impact on the community. For example, the programme has helped teenagers overcome or become more aware of issues around alcohol and drug misuse. It has also helped teenagers deal better with peer pressure in relation to alcohol and drug misuse and getting involved in crime. Finally, skills learned on the programme such as improved communication have had an impact on how some people interact with other members of the community.

"I'd say there are some people who were going to go down the wrong road and then they went to that (SFP) and they both learned how to communicate with their ma or their da or whoever and I'd say they could have just copped on a bit."

"It (SFP) is good for the community because we kind of don't want to keep seeing the younger generation and people that like with different problems. Strengthening Families is a positive ending for them and they're all on the right track of life and they all seem to be doing well… if I hadn't have gone to Strengthening Families, God knows what way our family would have been. So I think on that end of it Strengthening Families has done a lot for families and that's all positive."

Support from other parents

A number of parents felt the **support of other parents in the programme was very important**. Not only did parents learn parenting skills from other parents, they also turned to them for support and advice and felt less isolated in terms of parenting problems from listening to others. Some parents no longer felt they were the only families with difficulties which they found reassuring.

"It was good to have that kind of support, to be able to talk, kind of parent-to-parent."

"One (parent) would say to me 'How's your son?' and I'd say, 'he's doing great, he's after being grand,' and she'd say to me, 'my young fella went mad the weekend, and I'd tell her to calm down…I'd be giving her advice and she'd be giving me advice, you know what I mean."

CHAPTER 07

Case Studies of Families

…SFP clearly facilitated relationship building in families… this highlights the effectiveness of SFP as a model of intervention for families across the various levels of family support needs.

Family 1

Carol* and her son Brian* graduated from one of the first Strengthening Families Programmes. Brian took part in the programme when he was 14 years of age and is now 20. Carol's husband did not take part in the programme. Brian still lives at home with his parents and is the youngest of a family of five. The family have lived in Ballymun all their lives and moved from the flats into a house over ten years ago. Brian was referred to the programme from his school. Overall, Brian and his mother found the programme very enjoyable and helpful. The main impacts of the programme were an improvement in their relationship, better communication and understanding each other more. Both Carol and Brian agreed that the programme helped improve Carol's parenting skills. They also stopped shouting at each other as much which resulted in a calmer atmosphere in their house. The family don't have family meetings but talk to each other on a regular basis. According to Brian and his mother, the programme helped him get on better in school where he was getting into trouble regularly. Brian began attending Youthreach as a direct result of a referral from a facilitator from the programme. Knowing a facilitator from Youthreach made it easier for him to attend this service. He attended Youthreach for a while and is currently attending another similar educational programme. The programme helped Brian deal better with peer pressure through increasing his self-confidence. As a result of the programme, Brian took a step back from friends he was hanging around with that were getting into trouble with the Guards and felt more able to say no to peer pressure. Brian drinks socially but doesn't take drugs. His mother smokes but doesn't drink. Carol feels the programme made her son "a good young fella" and she "trusts him 100%."

Family 2

Barbara* and Jamie*, 16, took part in the Strengthening Families Programme when Jamie was 12 years of age. The family were referred through Ballymun Job Centre through an older sibling. Jamie is the youngest of four children and lives at home with his mum and her partner who also took part in the programme. Both Barbara and her partner have worked on the programme as facilitators. Barbara feels taking part in the programme has opened up a lot of opportunities for her including further education, training and employment. The main reason for this is increased confidence and opportunities she gained from participating in the programme. They don't have family meetings anymore but communication between Jamie and his parents is very good and they talk regularly and are aware of what is going on in each other's lives. Both Jamie and his mother thought the programme was very good and enjoyed taking part in it. The main impact was improved communication and learning to compromise. As a result, they argue less and don't scream and shout at each other often. The programme helped make Barbara and Jamie's relationships stronger. While Jamie did not have any behavioural problems, the programme helped Barbara deal with behavioural difficulties another child of hers was having in a calm way and improve communication with the whole family. Jamie enjoyed meeting new people on the programme. The programme also helped Jamie improve his relationships with his siblings and understand any difficulties they were going through. Barbara found it useful to talk to and learn from other parents who were having similar parenting problems with their children. Barbara feels the programme has helped Jamie mature and "grow into his personality." He was doing well in school before participating in the programme and continues to do so. According to Jamie, the programme helped him want to "stick with school, do my best and go on to college." Jamie felt he was able to deal with peer pressure before taking part in the programme but his mother thinks SFP helped them establish clear boundaries around issues such as alcohol and drugs which she finds reassuring.

Family 3

Sarah* and Steve* took part in the Strengthening Families Programme when Steve was 12. He is now 18 years of age and is now a father of one himself. Steve still lives at home with Sarah, who is a single parent, and his two younger siblings. Sarah works full-time and Steve is attending a training college as well as working part-time. Sarah heard about the programme through a friend who had participated in it and rang up herself to sign up. She felt her family's problems were "mild in comparison to other families" attending the programme. The main thing Sarah learned from the programme was to communicate better with her son and show an interest in his day-to-day life. They both learned to communicate better and as a result their relationship improved. Sarah and Steve, who according to themselves are shy people, felt the programme helped increase their confidence levels and speaking in front of other people in their groups assisted in this. Sarah uses skills she learned on the programme still with her younger children. In Sarah's opinion, Steve is calmer since taking part in the programme and doesn't scream and shout as much. She also feels he respects her more, is more patient and is more inclined to help around the house and with his younger siblings. Steve thinks his mother listens to him more, is calmer and is more interested in him. Overall, Steve and Sarah believe she has improved her parenting skills as a result of talking part in the programme. The programme helped Steve to "cop on" in school and he intends to go to college in the future. Steve discussed how the programme educated him on drink and drugs and helped him deal with peer pressure. He drinks socially but doesn't go near drugs. According to his mum, SFP helped Steve "take the good path," while some friends he used to hang around with have "strayed a bit the wrong way" with regards to drugs. Sarah has noticed the positive impact of the programme of other teenagers who have taken part in it also. Finally, Steve thinks he will use the skills he learned on the programme with his child when they are older, for example, communication skills.

Family 4

Ann* and Ryan* completed the programme recently when Ryan was 14. Ann is Ryan's grandmother and he came to live with her, along with his siblings, when his mother passed away. They all live together with Ann and her husband. Ryan was referred to the programme from his school. Ann was initially reluctant to take part in the programme but after the first night enjoyed attending it. The programme was different from what they both expected and they thought it great and gained a lot from it. They found the atmosphere relaxing, the facilitators friendly and helpful and enjoyed aspects such as the games. Facilitators on the programme helped Ann with any literacy difficulties she had which she found very supportive. According to Ann, the programme has changed her parenting style from when her own children were growing up. She is now less strict, listens more, shouts less and communicates better. Ryan has noticed a big difference in his grandmother's parenting style and says she no longer "flares up" when they have an argument. Overall, they both felt they are getting on better than before the programme and their home is much calmer. He also feels he is getter on better with his siblings since the programme. Ann feels the family are "more of a unit" since taking part in SFP. Ann and Ryan spend more one-to-one time together as a result of the programme and Ann has more empathy for issues Ryan is facing as a teenager. They also still have family meetings to discuss any issue or problems in the family which works well. The programme has helped Ryan take responsibility for his behaviour and actions and he no longer feels "the world is against me." Ryan has learned to control is anger better which has meant he is getting in less trouble in school. He has also changed his goals and dreams. He believes the programme has made him more realistic about his future and he wants to finish school and go on to study law in college. Ann has noticed "a new maturity" in Ryan since taking part in the programme and thinks "the benefits are brilliant."

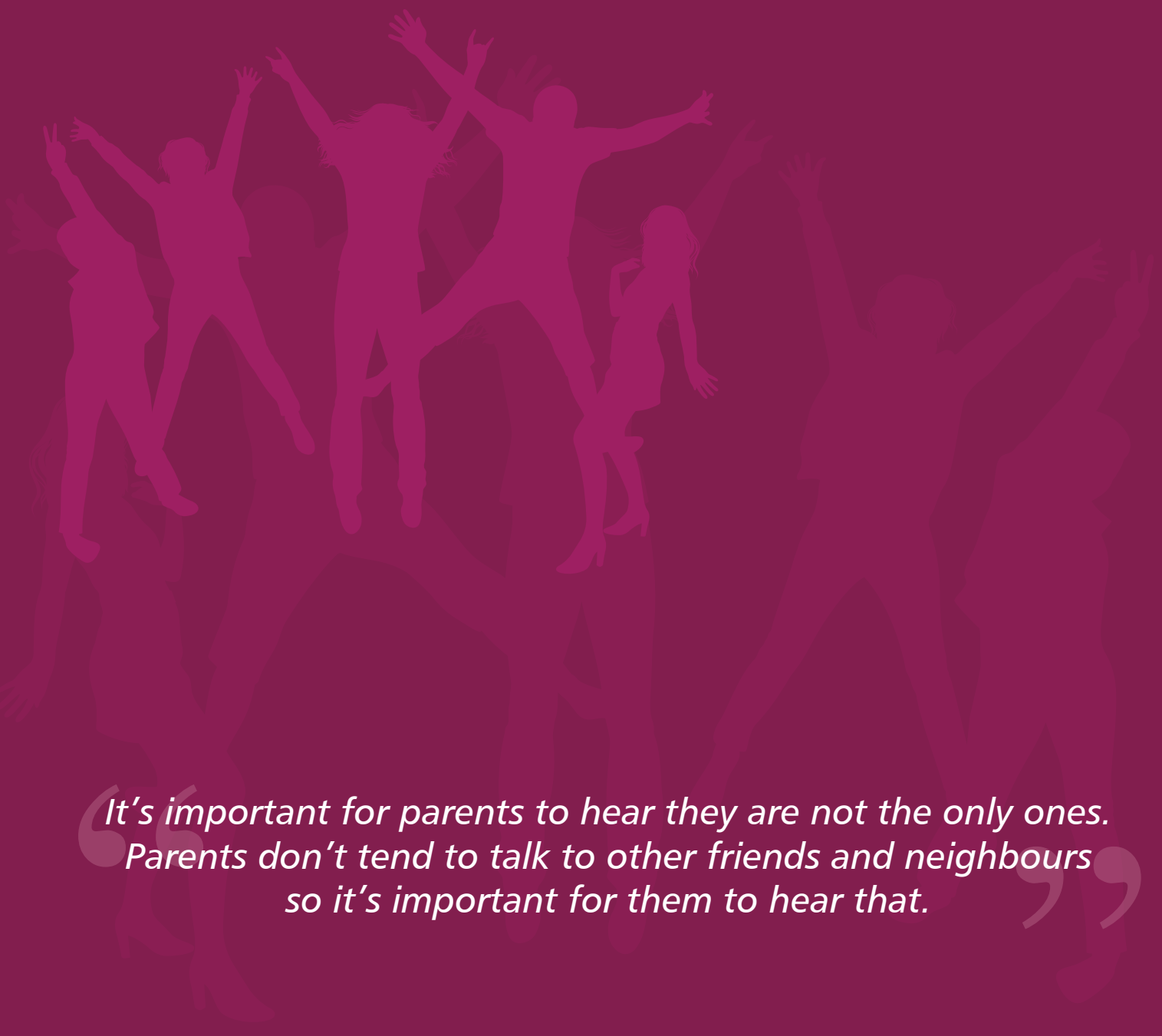
Family 5

Joan* completed the programme a few years ago with her two children Donna* and John.* Donna was 14 when she completed the programme and John was 15. Joan is a single mother and they all live together with another younger sibling. The family was referred through their school, primarily because of Donna's behavioural issues. All the family thought the programme was good and enjoyed it. However, they missed three weeks of the programme because Donna didn't want to go. She changed her mind as she thought it would be good for her family, gave it one more try and was glad she did. The teenagers thought the facilitators were open, easy to talk to, non-judgmental and trustworthy. Knowing some of the facilitators, for example through youth services in Ballymun, made it easier and more relaxed for them. Joan feels Donna has calmed down a lot since taking part in the programme. Donna admits she had a "bad attitude" before the programme and believes SFP has changed her. She is getting on better in school and has changed her behaviour towards teacher and other pupils. She now wants to stay in school. Donna and her mother's relationship improved a huge amount since participating in the programme. They are able to communicate much better now, whereas before the programme they barely spoke to each other. The two siblings are getting on much better also and are able to talk to each more and argue less. Donna believes she has more confidence since completing the programme. She is also able to deal with stress and conflict in a calmer way than previously. She has stopped binge drinking and getting into trouble since learning about how to deal with peer pressure on the programme. Building up a relationship with a Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer on the programme helped Donna change her behaviour and attitude.

*Please note names have been changed in the case studies

CHAPTER 08

Agencies & Services Perspectives of SFP



It's important for parents to hear they are not the only ones. Parents don't tend to talk to other friends and neighbours so it's important for them to hear that.

8.1 Key Points:

- 11 key stakeholders from Ballymun SFP were consulted.
- Main challenges identified included getting fathers involved in SFP and keeping facilitators involved.
- Key impacts of SFP on families:
  - improved relationships
  - improved parenting skills
  - improved communication skills
  - increased confidence
  - positive impacts on education
  - positive impacts on criminal behaviour.
- Key impacts of SFP on agencies:
  - improved relationships between agencies and families
  - SFP compliments agency's work
  - interagency benefits such as improved communication and relationships.
- Impacts of SFP on the community:
  - better communication and respect between young people and neighbours
  - better communication between parents and members of the community
  - increased engagement with education, training and other community projects.

8.2 Overview

A focus group was held in Geraldstown House with ten stakeholders from the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 years). One further stakeholder was consulted at a later date via an email questionnaire. The interagency element of Ballymun SFP, includes multiple roles for agencies and volunteers, including Referral Agent, Management Committee member, Site Coordinator, Programme Manager, & Facilitator. Although a number of representatives at this focus group crossed into multiple roles over the 7 year time frame, all have, at one point or another, been a facilitator on the programme. This involved delivering the programme every evening over 14/15 weeks with either parents or teens, and family sessions.

8.3 Key Benefits and Challenges of Ballymun SFP:

Benefits

Stakeholders were asked what they think works well in the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (SFP). The most important features of the programme were judged to be the interagency aspect, the way the programme is delivered, the programme's reputation in the community, targeting parents and teenagers simultaneously and working with similar families.

Interagency aspect of SFP:

The interagency aspect of the SFP was considered to be very effective as it provides programme participants with direct access to agencies through facilitators, gives them more information about agencies, "puts a face to services" and "breaks down barriers." Some participants also share their knowledge of agencies and services with other participants.

> *"The interagency contact-it breaks down the barrier. It's not as scary to go in somewhere when you know the face."*

> *"I do notice from a lot of teens that don't use the youth service before doing the programme that it makes it easier for young people to access services. The barrier is broke down, like say for Youthreach; they know the people working there to access the service."*

> *"A couple of the parents didn't realise they had an addiction issue. When they realised I work in addiction services they contacted me about their issues."*

Delivery of the programme:

The way the programme is delivered was judged to be very important. Stakeholders believe the programme works well because it is delivered in a way that is not intimidating, non-judgemental, interesting, involves a lot of group work and varies week to week. In addition, the fact that some of the facilitators are from Ballymun works well as it puts participants at ease.

> *"They see the facilitators are from Ballymun. They sit down with us and it puts them a bit more at ease and makes them more relaxed I think."*

The programme's reputation:

The programme also has a good reputation among people in the community in Ballymun. There is a sense of pride among those who have completed the programme and numerous parents have recommended the programme to other families. There is a very low drop-out rate from the programme and the reason for dropping out is usually because of families experiencing a crisis at the time of the programme.

> *"You meet teens that are in the programme but they would be like 'hiya I know her from SFP' so it has a good reputation in the community and there's no stigma."*

> *"There are parents from SFP 1 and 2 saying they still recommend to parents with younger teens now."*

Targeting parents and young people simultaneously:

The fact that the programme works with parents and teenagers simultaneously, which differs to more traditional parenting programmes, was deemed to an important factor in the success of the programme. Parents and their teenagers "go on a journey together" throughout the programme and stakeholders felt that participants generally are happy they have completed the programme together. According to stakeholders, other aspects of the programme that work well include the meal for families at the beginning of each session, the facilities in Geraldstown House and participating with other families with similar issues.

> *"Getting dressed up for the family photograph in week 14 is brilliant. They get a certificate and it is the only thing you get a cert for the whole family and there is a pride."*

> *"The facilities that are here are great. Even from a facilitator's point of view, it is very relaxing. There is lot of space to do things."*

Working with similar families:

Parents find it reassuring to meet other parents who are experiencing the same parenting issues as them as it makes them feel less isolated. Parents and teenagers often bond or form friendships with other people from their groups and stay in touch after programmes have finished.

> *"A lot of parents come along and think it's only my teen that has this problem but as the weeks progress and they listen to other parents they say my teen is normal as such."*

> *"It's important for parents to hear they are not the only ones. Parents don't tend to talk to other friends and neighbours so it's important for them to hear that."*

> *"The parents have the thing of not being the only parent that has the only child with difficulties so they don't feel the failure they might have felt."*

Challenges

Getting fathers to participate in the programme was identified as a key challenge by stakeholders. The programme mainly works with teenagers and their mothers. Therefore, it is largely relying on mothers in terms of relationship building and developing skills with teenagers during and after the programme. As a result, there is not the same dynamic in families if both parents haven't taken part.

> *"When I was working on it is was mostly mothers. That's a problem, getting fathers involved. A lot of the stuff that is going on, a lot of the relationship building is relying on the support of single parents. When it goes back to the family it doesn't have the same dynamic if both parents haven't been involved."*

Keeping facilitators involved can be a challenge for the management of the SFP and impacts on the sustainability of the programme. While a large number of people have been trained as facilitators for the programme, they are generally drawn from the same small group of organisations each year. This is largely due to organisation's staffing and financial constraints. Having a cohesive approach and "buy in" from all organisations is essential for the success of the programme, according to agencies.

> *"You would have 200 odd people trained in Ballymun (SFP) but every term you are relying on the same organisations to come forward again and again…From a management point of view it is very difficult and you are relying on the same people so it is a difficulty and it does have impacts on the sustainability of the programme."*

Follow Up Sessions with Families

If participants miss sessions this can also be a challenge in terms of bringing them up to date, however there is now a dedicated person assigned to following-up on these issues. Another challenge is getting parents and teenagers to practice the skills learned on the programme at home. Finally, agencies recalled challenges the programme faced at the beginning of SFP when some of the families who were participating were very chaotic and had addiction issues. There were difficulties with these families in terms of attendance, time keeping and consistency. As a result, agencies are less likely to refer families in crisis to SFP. However, one stakeholder who still works with some of those chaotic families reported that SFP has "made a lot of positive changes in their lives."

8.4 Impacts and benefits of SFP on families

Impacts and benefits of SFP for families highlighted by stakeholders from agencies involved on the programme included **improved relationships between parents and teenagers, improved parenting skills, improved communication skills, increased confidence and the positive impact on education and criminal behaviour**.

Improved relationships between parents and teenagers:

All stakeholders agreed that SFP improves the relationships between parents or guardians and their teenagers who participated in the programme. Changes in relationships between parents and teenagers can occur on an incremental basis. Exercises such as role reversals for parents and teenagers and parents telling teenagers what their dreams and goals were at their age help them to understand each other better. The programme is an opportunity for parents and teenagers to draw a "line in the sand" of their relationship and start again. Furthermore, parent's interest and participation in the programme can often make teenagers realise they have their children's best interests at heart.

> *"It's a unique opportunity for parents and tend to draw a line in the sand and say we have an opportunity to try something new and look at things differently."*

> *"The progression in the 14 weeks of the relationships forming and bonding better between parents and teens and graduation, that niceness and closeness between parents and teens."*

> *"That is one session always impacted on me. That is when they see their parent as a person and individual not just a mum and dad."*

Improved parenting skills

While stakeholders stated that some parents come to the programme hoping to "fix their child", very often the programme helps parents understand their role in their teenagers' behaviour and they become more aware, reflect on their own behaviour and improve their parenting skills. Skills learned in the programme can help parents facing challenges into the future, according to stakeholders.

> *"It can happen sometimes at the end. No one has been saying it to them but it is a dawning on them that is not all my teen or all me."*

> *"A lot of parents come to fix their child but it is about looking at yourself, in a very gentle way, not in an accusing way or judgemental way. Parents look at some of their skills or lack of skills."*

> *"The parents realise they play a role and it is not just about fixing Johnny or Mary. It is how I act or talk impacts my child and that is very powerful. You would often see that in the last third of the programme."*

According to stakeholders, the programme helps remind parents of skills them may already have. Stakeholders have also heard teenagers remark that they welcome having more structures or rules in their lives. Rules can also act as an "opt out" for teenagers in terms of peer pressure as they can blame their parents for not being allowed to do certain things.

"I have heard them (teenagers) say I'm not allowed do that anymore and it's a way of opting out of things they don't want to do and it's good for parents that teens are doing what they are told."

Improved communication skills

Improved communication was identified as the key skill parents and young people have gained from participation in the programme. An improvement in communication skills results in better problem solving skills for families in the opinion of stakeholders.

"Communication skills is the big one that comes across, they think more about how they communicate and use the skill."

"I met with one family that did the first SFP and the teen is in the twenties and the key thing she said is, 'we learned how to communicate' and that is amazing. One of the teens who is in her 20s now and she says she talks to her dad every single day and she connected it with family meetings and there is still a trend from SFP there after all these years."

Increased confidence

Participation in the programme has given some parents who took part in SFP the **confidence to link in with services and pursue further education and training**. Agencies working with young people in Ballymun have noticed they are **more confident and resilient** since participating in the programme.

"From the job centre, some of the parents would link in and do something because it has built their confidence up to do different things in their lives."

"Generally the young people are more confident and more resilient after the programme."

Impact on education

One stakeholder involved in a local school felt the programme had a positive impact on some young people in terms of their education but not on others. Some stakeholders felt there was a direct link between SFP and young people doing better in terms of their education. There were examples given of a number of young people who had gone back to school, education or training as a direct consequence of that they had learned or the supports they received from SFP.

"I think some young people have gone back to school and done better as a direct result from SFP. Some of these young people who would have ended up as my clients in the job centre have gone back to school and done their Leaving Cert and that is directly as a result of SFP."

"Half of teens would have stayed in education and half would have dropped out at some point. I think the programme helped them stay longer than they would have. It made them more reflective and think about their own future."

One stakeholder gave an example of a teenager who had used communication skills she learned on the programme to improve her relationship with a teacher she was in conflict with:

> *"One young person was having a difficulty with a teacher she felt she was being picked on and we did the skills and the 'I feel statements' and she came back after the programme and she said this teacher always picks on me and I told her I feel and used those statements and the teacher came back to her and said I didn't realise I made you feel that way and they had a discussion. Whereas before they would shout at each other it would become a screaming match and she would get suspended that actually stopped happening when she approached her about that."*

Impact on criminal behaviour

According to a Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) who was involved in SFP, there is a **marked improvement with respect to criminal behaviour** among young people who had taken part in the programme and had previously come to attention of the Gardaí. These teenagers build up a positive relationship with the Garda JLO and as a result do not want to "let them down" by getting into trouble.

> *"From a Garda and criminal activity point of view, after the programme very few kids have come to the Garda attention, maybe for minor offence like shop lifting. None have got in trouble again after that once they feel like they have let you down when they appear in front of you. You get a sense they have really learned from it. I don't think there have been any exceptions to that…They build up such a relationship with you that they wouldn't like to have to come to get a caution from you."*

8.5 Impacts and benefits of SFP on agencies

The key impacts and benefit of SFP for agencies were deemed to be improved relationships between agencies and parents and teenagers, SFP complimenting agency's work and interagency benefits.

Improved relationships between agencies and parents/teenagers

Agencies believe involvement in the programme has helped improve their relationships with parents and teenagers who have participated in the programme. Stakeholders have found young people are more respectful of them and they are also more respectful of young people as a result of building up a relationship on the programme. One stakeholder from an agency that works with young people stated that involvement in the programme as a facilitator promotes a greater understanding of young people, makes it easier to communicate with them and creates a link with parents who have also been involved in the programme. Facilitators on the programme provide support to parents on an on-going basis which is aided by the strong relationship and trust which are build up on the programme.

> *"My experience with young people who have been involved is they have been more respectful and I have been more respectful towards them too."*

> *"I work with young people primarily and SFP for me, from an agency point of view, gives you a link with the parents and a better sense of the young people and you are able to reach out and communicate with them. A lot of parents are more open to approaching you as a worker."*

"Through the 14 weeks the relationship that builds up with the facilitator, a strong relationship and the trust builds up so they feel very relaxed approaching you for something."

"I have got phone calls from parents over the years on a number of different issues about teenagers and if they hadn't have done the programme they wouldn't have had that support or link."

Complimentary Role of SFP in Agency's Work

Agencies felt strongly that the programme compliments the work they are doing. For example, agencies providing counselling services have found programme participants have found it easier to be self-reflective or "see themselves in a different light" due to aspects of the SFP. Agencies who typically work with young people, or adults alone, have found it useful and more effective to work with clients using a family based approach and SFP enables them to do that. Agencies also found that parents and teenagers draw on the skills they learned on the programme when they are tackling problems or issues within their services. For instance, agencies reported teenagers using problem solving skills learned in SFP and parents using family meetings. Agencies on occasion use skills from the programme in their own work.

"From an agency perspective it has actually complemented the work I do with parents and teens. Different instances that have happened because of working with them here (SFP) and in a counselling perspective they see themselves in a different light."

"One parent said it dawned on her to have a family meeting and she is a single parent and to stand up and do that was because she remembered to do it from here (SFP) and so did her children and it worked very well. It compliments what I do and makes it easier for people."

"The changes may not be very apparent to other people but on two different occasions teens used problem solving skills that they related back to SFP."

Interagency benefits

Agencies who participated in the focus group agreed that taking part in the SFP has many interagency benefits such as improved interagency communication, knowledge, understanding and relationships.

"You get to know the workings of other agencies. You have better networks of other colleagues around you. When you sit down to do interagency work you are more on the same page."

"It takes the mystery out of other agencies. Before I thought I had a fair idea of what other agencies do but I didn't really. It is easier now for agencies to walk through each other's doors. You know someone there and it makes people closer."

8.6 Impact of SFP on the community

Agencies were able to identify impacts of SFP on the community of Ballymun through their work and interactions with graduates of the programme. Some stakeholders who live in Ballymun have noticed a difference in young people who have taken part in the programme in relation to how they communicate with and treat their neighbours or other members of the community. Finally, parents who participated in the programme have got involved in back to education courses, training and other community projects because of what they learned, increased confidence or the support they received on SFP which in turn has had a positive impact on the community.

> *"The SFP has had an impact on the wider community and it is very quiet and very subtle."*

> *"What I have even noticed living in Ballymun is young people who have taken part in the programme over the years I can see a difference. Young people that live near me that might have been in trouble for fighting with neighbours and throwing balls at people's houses and shouting back at them. You can actually see a difference, it might be a subtle difference at the beginning but you can see a change in how they are responding has changed. I think that is very big because that has a knock on impact on the grumpy old man next door who is shouting at them."*

CHAPTER 09

Summary

Overall, the study found that Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) had a very positive impact on family and community life...

Introduction

Overall, the study found that Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) had a very positive impact on family and community life among those who graduated from the programme between 2008 and 2014.

Improved communication skills

Improved communication skills were the most significant reported impact of the programme on family life. Communication skills helped families improve their relationships within and outside their families in the wider community. The main outcome of improved communication skills was less arguments and calmer family life.

Improved relationships and stronger families

All graduates from the programme thought it had helped improve relationships in their families. Parents and teenagers understood each other better, felt closer and spent more time together since participating in SFP. In general, those who took part in the study felt the programme strengthened their families. The programme also helped the majority of young people improve their relationships with their siblings, and in some cases, their teachers and friends.

Improved parenting skills

SFP helped improve all parents and guardian's parenting skills in some way. Parents as well as teenagers noticed significant changes in parenting skills. Good communication was the basis to most improvements in parenting skills, with parents listening to their children more. Overall, parents felt less stressed after completing the programme and having more rules or boundaries helped both parents and teenagers feel more relaxed and secure.

Impact of SFP on dealing with stress, conflict, criticism and anger

Skills learned on the programme in relation to how to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger had a major impact on all other areas of family life. Both parents and teenagers developed skills and techniques to deal with stress which they found very useful. Teenagers, in particular, found being able to deal with conflict, criticism and anger better improved relationships with their parents, improved communication between them and parents, siblings, teachers and friends and resulted in them getting into less trouble in school. It also led to a calmer family life.

Impact of SFP on education

The programme had a positive impact on teenagers in terms of education. Newly learned communication skills helped teenagers communicate better with their teachers and peers, improved self-confidence enabled them to engage more in class and newly learned skills and techniques to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger helped them get in less trouble in school. Concentrating on dreams and goals through the programme helped young people focus on their education, stay in school, and in some cases, go on to third level education.

Impact of SFP on alcohol and drug use

In terms of alcohol and drugs, SFP helped inform young people about the dangers of misuse. It also gave young people confidence to deal with peer pressure related to drugs and alcohol. However, SFP appeared to have more of an impact on the attitudes and behaviours of respondents towards drugs rather than alcohol. Parents and young people felt very strongly about drug misuse while there seemed to be less of an attitudinal change towards alcohol use. This is perhaps due to the fact that respondents had a strong view on alcohol use before the programme or is linked to a general societal view that alcohol is less harmful than drugs. It might also highlight that young people are better able to resist peer pressure related to alcohol use even though their attitudes to it have not changed significantly. While the majority of older teenagers and young adults stated they drink socially, none of them reported drinking to excess. The programme also helped a small number of young people with alcohol addiction to change their behaviour.

Impact of SFP on the community

Finally, the majority of graduates of SFP thought the programme had a positive effect on the community in Ballymun. The interagency aspect of the programme had an impact in terms of community services becoming more accessible to families through building up relationships with facilitators from local agencies. Another key impact on the community is the positive effective of changes in individual family's behaviour as a result of taking part in the programme. Changes in teenager's behaviour in relation to alcohol, drugs, crime, improved educational outcomes, improved communication skills, being better able to deal with stress, conflict, criticism and anger as well as parent's improved parenting and communication skills have all had a positive impact on the community in Ballymun.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions and Recommendations

The family unit is an important model for intervention and SFP can strengthen this process.

Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme was viewed in a very positive light by both families who graduated from the programme and those involved in the running of the programme. Engagement in the three month programme is voluntary, therefore the high retention rate of families suggests they found it useful and enjoyable and showed commitment to complete it.

Despite the seven year timeline of the programme, it was still viewed very positively by all families regardless of how many years it was since their graduation. The majority of families were able to recall aspects of the programme and still used some skills learned on it regardless of their year of graduation. This suggests that SFP has 'stood the test of time' and the **level or strength of skills learned is not determined by the number of years since graduation from the programme**. In all but two families involved in the study, parents/guardians and teenagers who completed the programme were still living together which meant there was still opportunity for the continued practice of skills.

The study shows that **Ballymun SFP has met the main aims and objectives of the SFP model which is to decrease risk factors**, for example for alcohol and drug use and criminal behaviour **and build protective factors**, i.e. increasing family strengths, teenager's social skills and improving positive parenting skills.

All aspects of the study consistently found that the programme had **improved communication and relationships between parents and teenagers, improved parenting skills and teenagers' social skills resulting in stronger families with less conflict**. Each parent and teenager seemed to gain different levels of skills from the programme as needed and SFP clearly facilitated **relationship building in families** in a very effective way. This highlights the **effectiveness of SFP as a model of intervention for families across the various levels of family support needs**. It appears that SFP adequately targets the needs of families helping them make transitions from higher to lower family support needs. The case studies document the various levels of needs of families when they are first referred to the programme. While some families had higher levels of needs than others, overall **family's needs appeared to have lessened as a result of participating in SFP**. The referral of families with varying needs from different agencies also demonstrates that, although agencies may have certain responsibilities to work with individuals or families, the **family unit is an important model for intervention and SFP can strengthen this process**.

In addition, SFP has helped many different types of families to improve communication, relationships and cohesion, including two parent families, single parents, grandparents, siblings and foster parents. Clearly the programme is **adaptable to different family types** as well as different age ranges, with both younger and older teenagers benefitting from the programme. While early intervention serves a crucial purpose, it is also clear that the **programme is effective in helping teenagers make changes in their attitudes and behaviours**. The study found that SFP helped the majority of teenagers to deal better with peer pressure, and in some cases, addiction issues.

However, the impacts of the programme have been more extensive than just meeting the aims and objectives of the SFP model. There have also been **additional impacts and benefits such as the social aspect of the programme for parents and teenagers, the social normalisation of engaging with other families with similar issues, increased confidence for some participants, educational benefits, an intergenerational impact and improving relationships in the community**.

The **social benefits** of the programme were evident for both parents and teenagers. Social isolation emerged as an issue for parents in Ballymun due to factors such as unemployment, lack of amenities and fear and intimidation. Participation in the programme was judged to be a positive social outlet or space for parents and many benefitted from interacting with other families with similar issues which helped normalise their situation. Some parents engaged more with community services and organisations as result of the programme.

Young people also benefitted socially from the programme. Some young people made friends with other young people from the programme or joined youth groups as a direct result of the programme. However, the programme appears to have **created an understanding or bond between many young people who have completed the programme which has been noted by those working with young people in the area**. For example, young people who have participated in SFP, even though they might not be friends, often look out for one another in school or confide in each other in relation to problems.

Many parents felt the programme increased their self-confidence and social skills through speaking in front of others and interacting with other families. **All parents felt SFP increased their confidence as parents and in some cases the programme gave them confidence to pursue further education, training and employment**. Two parents who graduated from Ballymun SFP went on to become facilitators on the programme. Similarly, SFP helped teenagers increase their confidence and social skills which had a positive effect on other areas of their lives such as education and meeting new people. Agencies working with teenagers who participated in the programme in Ballymun have noticed they are more confident and resilient since participating in the programme.

The study shows that SFP has an intergenerational impact in terms of improving parenting skills. A number of parents acknowledged their own parents lack of parenting skills, and in some cases neglect, and felt SFP helped educate them and develop skills to improve their parenting style. It could be said that **SFP is "breaking the cycle" of negative parenting in the instances of some families and helping them make the transition to positive parenting**. In the case of a small number of grandparents raising their grandchildren who have participated in the programme, there has been a significant shift in parenting styles from the way they brought up their own children. They have moved from an authoritarian to a more authoritative parenting style in line with the SFP model.

Finally, the interagency aspect of Ballymun SFP has undoubtedly played a very significant role in the success of the programme. **Key stakeholders from many different agencies in Ballymun work together effectively to run a successful programme from the initial referral stage to facilitation and providing ongoing support to participants during and after the programme**. For instance, support is provided by the SFP Site Coordinator/Manager and Parent Advocate worker which ensures there is ongoing communication between the referral agent, family and SFP and that families are supported outside of the programme contact hours and after the programme if needed. As much work happens outside the programme, which has a positive effect in terms of issues such as retention, engagement and the development of relationships.

The benefits of an interagency approach are positive relationships and communication between agencies and enhanced awareness of services and engagement between agencies and programme participants. Central to this are the **positive relationships developed between agency facilitators and programme participants**. The non-judgemental approach of facilitators, who are often from the area, has made **agencies and services more approachable for both parents and young people in the community**. These positive relationships have had a particularly constructive impact on young people, for example, some young people have developed a relationship with the Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer which impacted positively on their criminal behaviour. Unlike other programmes which can operate in isolation, the interagency aspect of the Ballymun SFP is unique to Ireland and is clearly vital to its enduring success.

Recommendations:

- Ballymun SFP should continue to be supported to help families and the community in Ballymun.
- The interagency aspect of the programme should be supported and maintained.
- Agencies should provide ongoing support for employees who are facilitators on the programme.
- Ballymun SFP should examine methods of engaging more fathers in the programme.
- The programme should be well advertised to families in the area.
- SFP should continue to provide six month booster sessions and consider providing further refresher courses for families who need to update their skills.
- The programme could look again at developing a follow-up group for parents who are interested in meeting socially, i.e. a monthly drop-in group.

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Appendix I

Membership of the Ballymun SFP Research Advisory Group 2014/2015

Name	Organisation/Role
Clíodhna Mahony	Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
Marie Lawless	Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
Tom O'Donnell	Tusla, Child & Family Agency, Geraldstown House
Mary Fitzpatrick	Ballymun SFP Parent Advocate Worker (BLDATF)
Cathy Duncan	Ballymun Regional Youth Resource
Patricia Kavanagh	Ballymun Job Centre
Linda McDermott	SFP Parent Graduate & Facilitator

Membership of Ballymun SFP Management Committee 2015

Name	Organisation/Role
Clíodhna Mahony	Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
Marie Lawless	Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
Tom O'Donnell	Tusla, Child & Family Agency, Geraldstown House
Mary Fitzpatrick	Ballymun SFP Parent Advocate Worker (BLDATF)
Cathy Duncan	Ballymun Regional Youth Resource
Patricia Kavanagh	Ballymun Job Centre
Mick Creedon	Ballymun Job Centre
Mary McGagh	Young Persons Probation
Fiona Gallagher	Trinity Comprehensive Secondary School
Roisin Byrne	Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force
Hugh Greaves	Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force

Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force
Axis Centre, Main Street, Ballymun, Dublin 9

01 883 2142

www.ballymunlocaldrugstaskforce.ie