

# Evaluation of Family Play Inclusion Support Service February 2013



*Supporting families' inclusion through play*

## Evaluation of Family Play Inclusion Support Work 2010 - 2012

### Background

The Family Play Inclusion Support service is a professional family support service which BAPP have developed using the model of family partnership and play as an engagement tool. It is an effective process which supports and strengthens family relationships. Children are referred for many reasons including recognition that they are socially isolated, play deprived, have poor attachment, are disabled and lack access to playing with peers or there are concerns about the child's development which play can support.

BAPP are a small, well established voluntary organisation who have developed from the ground up, building a strong reputation with local commissioners but keeping the play needs of children and young people at our heart. Increasingly over the last 8 years, there have been significant changes in family functioning and the B&NES Strategic Needs Assessment identifies these issues, particularly in areas of social inequality, which are increasingly problematic for children's development. Parents who themselves have had a far from positive childhood, often with poor educational experience, are struggling to function. They will not necessarily have had play experiences and opportunities to develop confidence in their ability to parent, make connections with their children and struggle to put boundaries in place.

We have supported over 90 families over the last two years having concerns about play deprivation and poor social skills. In every case, the parents have been socially isolated. This has been due to impacting factors such

as substance misuse, learning difficulties, poor communication skills and difficulties in managing their children's behaviour. These factors have resulted in lack of peer contact, poor community relationships and low self esteem.

### Referrals

The service is open through a referral process and referrals come from schools; Headteachers, Parent Support Advisors and SENCos, Health professionals including GPs, Health Visitors and School Nurses, Social Care including post assessment, Child Protection reviews and Integrated Assessment Panels looking at CAFs. Uniquely, we also accept self-referrals from parents themselves which is empowering as their self recognition that their child and them would benefit from support, is a powerful starting point.

#### Case Study

Father of 3 children, living in a hostel due to his substance misuse, with no access to children, very low self esteem referred by another VS agency. He was then allowed weekly access at the group. Children were on a CP plan. We supported housing applications and he was awarded custody and now lives in a house. They are attending the Playful Families group. He said at CP conference that the work saved his life.

## Characteristics of the families supported

Of the 90 referrals received for children aged 5 – 15 years in 2 years; 47% with disabled children or children with an additional needs. Of these families 25 have poor attachment or attachment disorders.

30 parents not working

11 parents with substance misuse problem

12 parents with a Mental Health problem

9 children receiving CAMHS support

14 parents with a Learning Disability

Once the referral is received, which includes the opinion of both the child and parent, we try to build up a picture of what life is really like for the family. This is done through a combination of Home Visits, discussion with the referrer plus other agencies working with the child.

We start with the play needs of the child and discuss openly what gets in the way and identify barriers with the family. Whilst the focus for the work is the child, barriers and issues have to be considered and looked at as otherwise progress can not begin. Using the family partnership model, we help the family identify strengths and use these as a starting point for a Play Action Plan. This usually consists of a few simple steps for positive change that the parent and child agree on. They initially are achievable and support is put in place as a catalyst for results.

We use the Family Outcome Star as a baseline tool to measure and assess where families place themselves after a few weeks, once the relationship is established and more challenging steps are agreed. This helps the parent understand and agree where they are and helps them to identify what needs to

change or be done differently, so change can happen.

### Case Study

Boy attached to Grandma who died. Poor relationship with Mum, breaking down, no real attachment. Housing issues sorted. Lots of discussion and talk whilst playing outside to understand how he was feeling but also to identify next steps. A project involving Mum and son in designing an area of the garden for remembering Grandma. Built a rockery and planted some of her favourite plants. Mum and son made a strong connection resulting in an improved relationship, increased self-esteem and playing out with peers.

All the way through this process, play is used; initially as a non-threatening neutral engagement tool but then as an intrinsic part of the improving attachment process and subsequent improved understanding of their child. Play is an area where stages of child development can be seen clearly and by observing their child's play with staff, they begin to better understand their child and how the relationship needs to change.



Play is also a great leveller and by enabling parents to value their child's play through appropriate participation and facilitation, we

can build strong trusting relationships. Then the more difficult challenges can be tackled.

The level of support is different for every referral; referrals are assessed after the initial Home visits to build up a clearer picture. Some families require intensive support over the first few weeks followed by regular weekly visits. For some, this is longer term and so flexibility is key. Others are invited to attend one of our Playful Families groups. In certain cases, we act as an advocate for families in meetings with school or accompany parents to meetings or liaise with GPs following appointments. We support with assessments, whether attending TAC or TAF meetings, completing paperwork for Social Care or Housing agencies. Without this support, many families would not engage with these services.

**“The support has brought us closer together, we now feel like a family again. Playing together has really helped our relationship and I now understand why they behave like that and we have fun together.” Parent of 3 children**

### **Groupwork**

With funding from an anonymous donor, we were able to pilot a Playful Families group. This was an idea following the identification of a lack of services to move families to after intensive individual support work. Many families struggled with relationships with others and by continuing our agency involvement, we have been able to extend the professional relationship and families feel able to seek advice in times of crisis as it arises, on the telephone or arranging to meet.

Playful Families are a safe space where the whole family can come together and enjoy time together with support from staff, providing positive role models and enabling strengths to be built on whilst strengthening attachment with their children.

This has worked very well and has enabled us to extend our caseload as families move into less intense support, freeing up capacity to take on more families. The support is longer term and staff are available on the telephone as needed but without the need for individual support in the home as they become more confident. There is very limited capacity for individual caseloads.

We would like to further empower parents to take more of a lead in the group with the longer term intention of them becoming parent run. However this will take time. With further funding not only can we provide more groups but can employ additional Family Play Support Workers to meet the growing waiting list for the service.

### **What works well about Family Play Support**

Of 32 service users asked to rate the service 1 (worst) – 5 (best), 30 rated it 4 or above.

The relationship is central to them and the attitude, level of support and qualities of the Family Play Support Worker are key. Service users including children and young people spoke about the importance that the worker

- Is reliable, non-judgemental and believes in them
- Provides advice and motivates change

- Provides a listening ear or someone at the end of a phone reassuring that I'm doing OK
- Can provide practical ideas for improving relationships with their children
- Can challenge and question

Of 20 referrers asked to rate the service 1 (worst) – 5 (best), all rated the service 4 or above. They spoke of the importance of

- Tailored, holistic support for the whole family, which is child-centred and trusted
- Flexible and available, able to respond to the level of support needed
- Able to deliver focussed and effective support, in the home as well as groups

#### Case Study

Two elective mute sisters living in chaotic home with parents who wouldn't engage with school, referred by Head. Four weeks intensive support followed by placement in a local holiday playscheme with excellent staff over the summer holidays. In September, the Head, who had been on the verge of stating the children, was staggered at the transformation; they were engaging and contributing in class, much more confident and would not be stated. The family were invited to be part of a new group, Playful Families, and they have been attending regularly. Parents have made connections with other parents, have improved some behaviours around their children but this is still ongoing work.

- Staff are good at communicating and signposting on where needed

#### **In all cases we have made a positive impact.**

▶ 3 parents have gained part time work; they feel better about themselves and with encouragement have successfully found work.

▶ 47 children have developed better resilience, understood how to keep themselves safer and have better social interaction with their peers

▶ 3 parents have found voluntary work; this has given them a useful purpose and role which in turn has helped their mental health and improved the health of the family.

▶ 2 parents have undertaken training courses in order that they can move into voluntary or paid work.

▶ In all cases, the parent:child relationship has improved dramatically as well as the attachment

▶ 23 parents regularly attend two Playful Families groups weekly; this has provided regular networking opportunities for social interaction between isolated adults. It has provided positive adult role models with staff supporting their implementation of agreed strategies to improve behaviour and the quality of the attachment between parent and child at the same time as providing a safe place for children to play supported by their parents.

▶ 8 parents have started a Stepping Into Play course aimed at improving their understanding of children's play and development

**“It has made a huge difference as we don’t feel on our own anymore. It has made a very good impact on us; my eldest is less angry and helped us have a positive look on life.” Parent**

## **Conclusions**

**Diversity of need:** Different families need different interventions. Different children respond to different approaches. Everything needs to be tailored and there is no one package of family play support that fits all.

**Play is a key component:** Families positively welcome the service. Using play helps parents understand their role and their childrens’ behaviour. Children feel valued and included.

**Intensity and length of involvement:** Of the 90 families, 5 have had support for 2 years. Initially intense and regular through the week. Now attending weekly group with support provided as needed. 38 have had support for less than a year and have now exited the service.

**Measuring Impact:** Using the Family Outcome Star, our support has enabled 6 parents to move from “stuck” to “trying” and “finding what works”

Despite grading themselves higher than we anticipated, with realistic and open discussions with Support workers, parents better understand where they are on the star at the start of the process. 3 parents have become more “effective parents” and others are moving in the right direction. We will further develop this work area as we understand the importance of using tools to measure and demonstrate outcomes.



**“Once referrals were made they were able to set up support quickly through joint visiting. The support worker has been able to offer ongoing individual play support to the children whilst linking families to groups helping to strengthen children and families positions within their communities. The support has enabled them to make positive and safe links within their communities, increasing overall social opportunities and interactions with other children their age and has boosted their confidence and self esteem through play. Such support has also acted to lessen these children’s feelings of isolation and exclusion.**

**This support is an invaluable service and needs to continue and expand. “**

**B&NES Social Worker**

**The BAPP Family Play Support service works effectively using play as a powerful process at engaging children and their parents to work together to achieve positive change and has had a hugely positive effect on some complicated family lives and enabled families to better connected through play.**