



HeadStart Newham Being a Parent 9 -16 Peer Led Parenting

A mixed-methods study

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Thank you!

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HeadStart

This report focuses on the 'Being a Parent' courses run by HeadStart Newham. HeadStart is a National Lottery funded programme developed by The National Lottery Community Fund. It aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

The programme supports a broad range of initiatives for building resilience and emotional wellbeing in 10 to 16 year olds in order to:

- improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people
- reduce the onset of mental health conditions
- improve young people's engagement in school and their employability
- reduce the risk of young people taking part in criminal or risky behaviour.

The programme is being delivered in six local authority areas between 2016 and 2021: Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton. HeadStart Newham is delivered in partnership with the London Borough of Newham.

The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Every year it distributes over half a billion pounds for good causes, all thanks to the players of The National Lottery.



Summary

Study background

Aims

This mixed methods study aimed to explore (a) the recruitment, retention, and course experience of parents taking part in HeadStart Newham Being a Parent (BaP) courses between January – December 2019, (b) outcomes for those parents, including goal attainment, parenting styles, wellbeing and concerns about children, and (c) outcomes for children and the wider family, including perceived parenting differences and wellbeing.

Method

Sixty-six parents completed a pre and post-course survey. Registration and attendance data was available for 169 parents. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential comparison of means.

Nine parents, 3 facilitators and 4 children were interviewed about BaP. There was no quantitative outcome data available for children, however, perceived benefits to children and families were addressed during the interviews and thematically analysed.

Findings

Recruitment and retention

Successful recruitment strategies included face to face engagement with parents and school involvement in advertisement. Fathers were

underrepresented in BaP. Of parents who registered, 61% completed five or more sessions. Drop outs were often due to logistical challenges or inaccessibility due to language barriers.

Course experience

Parents had positive experiences of the peer-led model and the course in general. Expectations of topics to be covered during BaP differed between parents, and affected course experience, in cases where some topics were not addressed by facilitators.

Parent outcomes

Parents had improved positive wellbeing and parenting style scores at the end of the course. This was corroborated by the qualitative findings whereby themes around improved communication styles, parent wellbeing and their causal mechanisms arose.

There was no change to parent goal attainment scores, which may relate to difficulties parents had setting specific and realistic goals at the start of the course.

Child and family outcomes

There was no change to level of concern about child at the end of the course. Parents found strategies learned on the course had helped improve child behaviour, independence and resilience. Findings from child interviews were limited, however, reduction in parent reactivity and more instances of praising child behaviour were reported.

The report provides a number of recommendations to improve service delivery.

Study background and aims

The Being a Parent course

The HeadStart Newham Being a Parent (BAP) course is a manualised intervention developed by the Centre for Children and Families and South London and Maudsley Foundation NHS Trust, Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme (Day et al., 2012). It is a community-based intervention, training local parents to run parenting courses. The model assumes that parents find it less stigmatising and more supportive to attend parenting courses run by other local parents, in similar circumstances to themselves. The programme has received a national Sure Start award for innovation and user involvement. Figure 1 shows the BaP logic model, including the course inputs and intended short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes.

BAP courses are aimed at parents with children aged between 9-16 years old. They are free to attend, run for eight weeks in two-hour weekly sessions, and are delivered in community venues by parent facilitators. The ten week facilitator training course (Working with Parents for Professionals and Volunteers) is accredited at Level 3, Open College Network. It teaches knowledge and skills for effective parenting and for facilitating groups of adult learners. Parents successfully completing this course

become eligible to co-facilitate BAP courses, with ongoing support and professional supervision from the HeadStart Newham team.

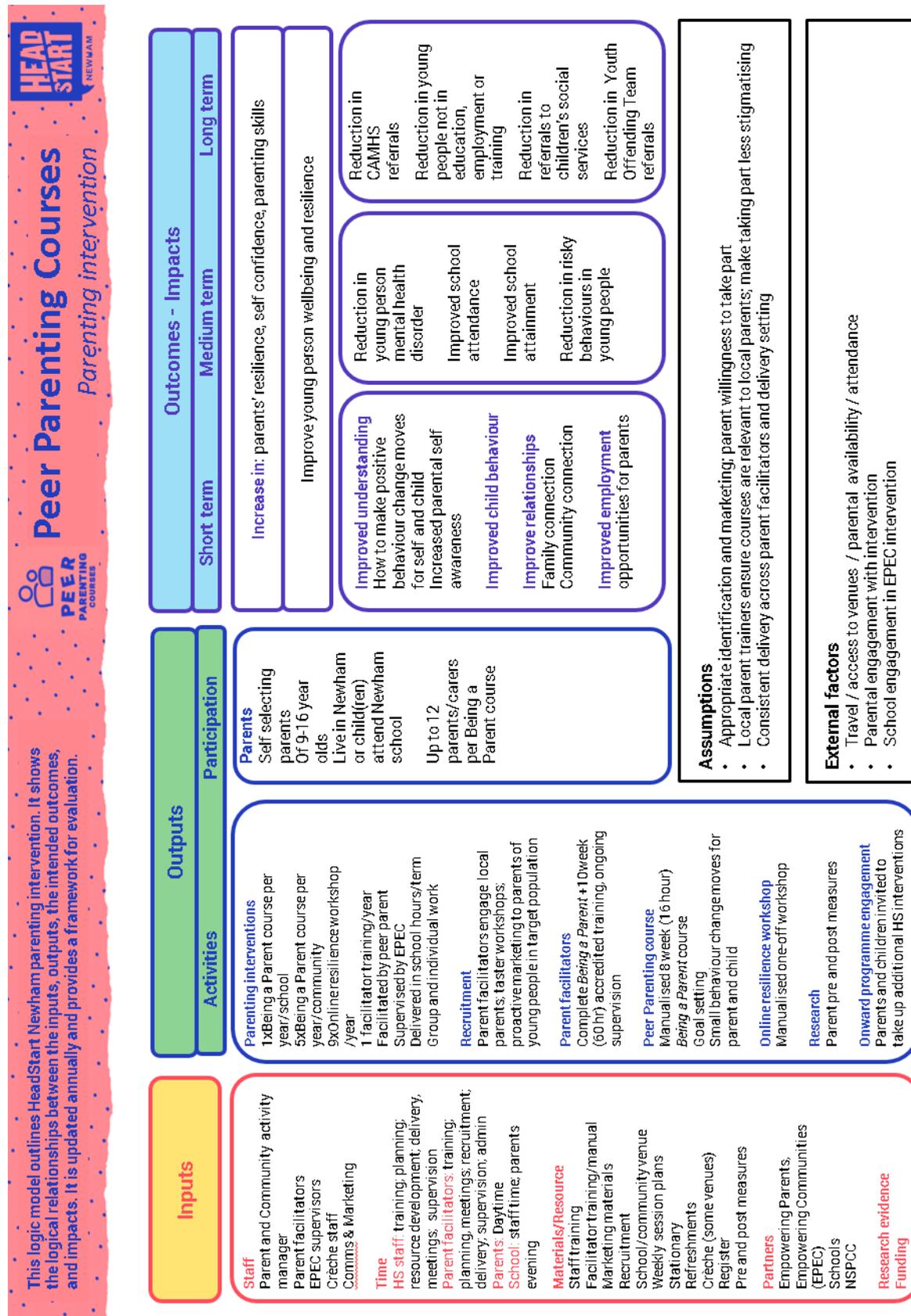
The study aims

This mixed-methods study explored the views, experiences, and outcomes for parents, children, and course facilitators involved in the BaP course from January to December 2019. The quantitative strand explored outcomes for parents participating in BaP via a survey, whilst the qualitative strand investigated the views and experiences of parents, their children, and course facilitators via depth-interviews. This study did not constitute a formal impact assessment as no comparative control group was included in the design.

In light of the course's aims to increase parents' resilience, self-confidence, and parenting skills, and indirectly improve child wellbeing, there were three research questions:

1. What is the recruitment and retention of parents and what is their experience of the BaP course?
2. What are the outcomes for parents who take part in BaP, specifically in regards to parenting goal attainment, parenting styles, parental wellbeing, child concerns, and family relationships?
3. Do children notice changes in parenting style, and does this affect their wellbeing?

Figure 1. Logic model for HeadStart Newham’s Being a Parent course.



Methods

Participants

The quantitative sample

Matched pre and post-course survey data was available for 66 parents who had taken part in BaP in 11 different Newham course locations between January and December 2019. Sample sizes varied by measure and are stated alongside findings. This sample was majority female (94%), with children of primary school age (58%) and at a school where HeadStart programmes are based (66%). Most parents were mother or father to their child (92.5%), whilst a minority were an aunt (3%) or foster carer (4.5%). A minority were lone parents (30%).

Most parents were aged 25-44 years (74%), followed by the 45-64 (34%) and 16-24 (4.5%) age groups. The greatest proportion of parents were of Asian ethnicity (48%), followed by White (23%), Black (16%) and Mixed (6%). Seventy-four percent of the sample spoke English as second language and 18 different first languages were spoken by parents, with the greatest proportion speaking Bengali (31%). See Appendix A for a full demographic breakdown.

Attendance and retention data was available for a larger sample of 169 parents who had attended at least one BaP session, across 18 different courses running between January and December 2019.

The qualitative sample

Interviews were conducted with 16 individuals:

- 9 parents who had completed BaP during spring/summer 2019,
- 4 children of these parents, and

- 3 course facilitators for spring/summer 2019.

These parents were recruited from 8 different BaP courses at different locations, to ensure a diversity of experience. All parents had attended at least 5 out of 8 course sessions. The majority of participants (14) were female; the 2 male participants included 1 parent and 1 child. Child ages ranged between 10 and 12.

Procedure

Quantitative procedure

Pre and post-course surveys were run by course facilitators and completed online by parents during the first and last sessions of each BaP course. The survey was hosted by snapsurveys.com. The questionnaires used to measure parental goal attainment, parenting style, parent wellbeing, and level of concern for child respectively are described below.

Parenting Goals (Scott et al. 2001) requires respondents to nominate at least two main goals to aim for during the parenting course and rate distance to reaching goal on a visual analogue scale. Scores range from 0-100).

The Parenting Scale (David, O'Leary & Wolff et al., 1993) is a 13 item self-rated scale consisting of statements describing styles of dealing with parenting problems. The respondents rate proximity in relation to two opposing styles using a 7 point scale.

The Short Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Stewart – Brown et al., 2008) contains seven positively worded statements about thoughts and feelings with five response categories. Scores range 7 to 35.

Concerns About My Child (Scott et al., 2001) requires respondents to nominate up to two child problems and rate the severity of each on a visual analogue scale (higher scores=greater severity).

Training Acceptability Rating Scale Davis, J. R., Rawana, E. P., & Copponi, D. R. (1989) assess parent satisfaction with course. Parents are asked 9 items about course experience and rate responses on a 4-point scale. The measure includes 3 open questions to assess course experience.

Qualitative procedure

Parents, children, and course facilitators were interviewed between August and November 2019. Facilitators and parents who had completed the course were invited to partake by phone/email by the research team. Child interviews were also sought during these exchanges.

At the start of each interview, the researcher explained the study and sought written and verbal consent to participation. For child interviews, consent was sought from both the child and their parent. Interviews lasted up to an hour, and were arranged at a time and location convenient to participants, including participants' homes, local community spaces, and HeadStart Newham office space. Each interview was audio recorded, with consent. Topic guides were developed by the HeadStart Research Team in collaboration with parent facilitators, and agreed with HeadStart Parent and Creative Activities Manager and Head of Service. Researchers used topic guides to ensure consistency of coverage across data collection activities. Parents and children each received a £10 Love to Shop voucher for their

participation, whilst facilitators were paid for their time.

Analysis

Quantitative analysis

The survey data was cleaned and analysed using Microsoft Excel and R Studio X64 Version 3.4.4. Recruitment and retention figures were analysed descriptively. Differences between mean pre and post-course survey scores were analysed using repeated measures t-tests, and effect sizes reported.

Norms data from the National EPEC database (N >1,000) is presented as a benchmark against Newham data, to investigate whether the data follows the same trajectory or not.

Qualitative analysis

Framework, a thematic approach to analysing qualitative data was used. Following familiarisation of the recordings, an analytical matrix framework was developed in Excel. Key themes were listed in column headings; each row represented a focus group/interview. Data from each focus group/interview was summarised in the appropriate column. This allowed for systematic and comprehensive analysis. Data was compared and contrasted between cases (looking at what different groups said on the same issue) and within cases (looking at how a group's opinions on one topic relate to their views on another). The analysis was documented and conclusions can be linked to the original data.

Recruitment and retention

This section describes attendance and retention statistics, followed by findings from qualitative interviews which explore the recruitment process and perceived reasons for variations in attendance and retention.

Key findings

Recruitment

- 59 % of those attending a taster session went on to attend the first full course session.
- Effective recruitment strategies included face-to-face engagement with parents and school involvement in course promotion.
- Suggested improvements to recruitment included more extensive advertising, and targeting promotion to fathers, who were under-represented on the course.

Retention

- 61 % of parents completed the course, attending 5 + sessions
- Parents' motivations to attend included:
 - a desire to improve parenting and safeguard child's future,
 - convenience (no cost, crèche, and timings), and
 - improving spoken English.
- Barriers to uptake and retention included:
 - stigma and misconceptions,
 - inconvenience (location, lack of crèche, and timings), and
 - language barriers.

Recruitment and retention

Statistics

Recruitment

Between January and October 2019, 131 parents attended 18 'Resilience Workshops', which involved a course taster session, and were run prior to the start of the full course as a method of recruiting parents. Of those who attended a workshop, 77 (59%) went on to attend the first session of the full course, indicating that this was a fairly effective recruitment strategy. However, 41 out of the 118 (35%) parents who attended the first course session had not been to a Resilience Workshop.

Attendance and completion rates

Including late-starters, a total of 169 individuals attended at least one course session, with an average of 9 parents per course group. Of these 169 parents, 103 (61%) 'completed' the course, by attending 5 or more of the 8 sessions. Recruitment strategies and possible reasons for drop-outs/non-completion were explored in the qualitative interviews, and are discussed below.

Recruitment strategies

All parents who participated in the interviews self-referred themselves to the Being a Parent course. Course facilitators noted that some parents on their courses were referred via a third party e.g. social services, but that the majority self-referred.

Parents were made aware of the course through posters, leaflets, digital marketing, email, and/or word of mouth via their child's school, youth centres, social

services, or HeadStart Newham activities/events with which their child was involved. Facilitators noted that the most effective recruitment strategies were those involving face-to-face engagement and taster sessions with parents, such as coffee mornings and parents' evenings.

Leafletting in the school playground was viewed as less effective, as parents were less engaged and often in a rush to drop off or pick up their child. However, school involvement in promoting the course was key, and recruitment suffered where this did not occur. Recruitment via schools also provided an opportunity for collaboration between course facilitators and school-based HeadStart Youth Practitioners, representing a holistic, child and family approach.

"The school involvement is I think very helpful, because when something's coming from the school, then parents think it is useful to them."
- Facilitator.

Facilitators and parents also suggested promoting the course more widely (e.g. at the East London Family Court, workplaces, faith spaces and the Newham magazine) and targeting advertising at men, who were under-represented on the course.

Course uptake and retention

Parents attended the course for a range of reasons. Firstly, they were looking to gain parenting advice and tips from peers and facilitators, either because they were struggling or because they simply aimed to improve. Parents who had previously participated in other parenting courses, specifically Triple P (Sanders, 2008) felt encouraged by their positive experiences and were looking to build on what they had learnt. Specifically, parents wanted help:

- increasing their child's independence,
- helping their child to listen and follow instructions more easily,
- supporting the transition to secondary school, or
- reducing the chance of child mental health difficulties.

Convenience and practicalities increased motivation to join and stay on the course; the course was free, whilst location, crèche provision, and timings often suited parents. However, parents noted that these aspects may not have suited their peers, particularly working parents. A need for more crèche options was highlighted by some, implying that provision varied across courses. Parents suggested running courses at Newham Council workplaces for convenience. Facilitators cited further practical reasons for drop-outs, including changes in parents' commitments such as starting a job, or difficulties in parents' personal lives.

Having English as a second language served as both a motivator and a barrier to course uptake and retention. Parents saw the course as an opportunity to practice their English speaking skills. Feeling supported by facilitators and peers with their English comprehension (sometimes via a translator) helped parents stay on the course. However, facilitators and parents also noted that drop-outs may have occurred due to a language barrier. Language support varied across courses.

Furthermore, facilitators and parents highlighted that stigma around courses being for 'bad' parents may have reduced uptake, as did preconceptions that the

peer-led model would lack expertise, the course would involve writing, or there would be clashing cultural differences between their own parenting approach and that of the course. Participants suggested more clarity and explanation during recruitment and promotion, to address these concerns.

"It's stigmatized. People think that if you're going for a parenting class, then as a parent you have a problem, which is not the case."
- Parent

Finally, course experience was perceived to have impacted retention. Parents may have left due to a mismatch between unrealistic expectations and outcomes, such as improving child academic performance. Attending with friends or neighbours, positive group dynamics, feeling that they were learning, and staggered presentation of course content (i.e. not being provided with a complete handbook at the start) helped individuals to remain on the course. Course experience is discussed in more depth in the following section.

Course experience

This section describes parents' experience of BaP, with respect to course content, group dynamics, and group diversity, as described in qualitative interviews. This is followed by a summary of parents' responses to the Training Acceptability Response Questionnaire (TARS).

Key findings

- Parents valued the peer-led model, and the focus on real life experiences of parenting.
- Parents expected BaP to cover managing transitions to secondary school in detail and professional guidance about child resilience/ mental health which it did not cover.
- The group members promoted a supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere which enabled parents to feel comfortable sharing experiences and to participate fully in the sessions.
- Course experience varied for parents with English as a second language. Where adaptations were made and support provided, these parents felt they could participate.
- Course content felt to be most relevant and meaningful to parents of children aged between 9-16 years. Some content was not deemed appropriate by foster carers.
- The majority of parents responded positively to the TARS questionnaire, indicating positive course experience.

Course Experience

In the qualitative interviews, parents discussed their expectations and experience of BaP, with respect to course content, group dynamics, and group diversity. These findings are explored below, and are followed by a summary of parents' responses to the Training Acceptability Response Questionnaire (TARS).

Course content

Those who had previously taken part in Triple P (Sanders, 2008) expected BaP to be similar, but found BaP's peer-led model more focused on real-life experiences. Parents thought BaP offered more opportunities for role-play and to explore responses to hypothetical scenarios with their children. Parents preferred this to advice-led courses. Whilst this was valued by parents, there were other parents who expected the course to provide professional guidance from an expert, such as a psychiatrist or psychologist, and were disappointed to find that this was not the case. Furthermore, there were parents who had been told the course would focus on transitions to secondary school and provide advice on child resilience, but felt this was not covered in enough detail.

Parents of very young children did not benefit from course content as much as those with children within the target age group (9-16 year olds), as the discussions were either not relevant or experiences as relatable. There were times when parents felt that the course did not always allow space to 'dig deeper' into more specialised subjects such as mental health, instead facilitators were reported to respond in a scripted way, as these were off-topic.

Facilitators who delivered BaP for foster carers, found that some of the course content conflicted with the perceived responsibilities of foster carers. For example, it was not felt appropriate to use "I statements" with foster children. Facilitators needed to be responsive to this and review with group what strategies were appropriate to address in sessions.

Parents valued the way the course ended, with focus on celebration and recognising each other's strengths. Some parents felt sad that the course ended as they had developed relationships with their peers, enjoyed the structure of weekly sessions and space to talk with others in the group.

Group dynamics

Parents had overall positive experiences of the group. At the start, parents experienced initial trepidation around potential judgement from other parents about their parenting, but found that the course promoted a supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere. Facilitators and other parents were friendly and open, which enabled good levels of participation throughout the sessions. Parents reported that the strength of the course was this peer-support element, and commended facilitators for their willingness to share personal experiences. However, if group attendance was sporadic e.g. late arrivals, early exits or missed sessions this negatively affected group rapport and the extent to which parents felt comfortable sharing experiences/ideas with each other.

Facilitators described two types of parents. The 'quiet parents' who preferred to listen rather than offer personal experiences to the group, and 'loud parents' who offer lots of personal insight and are comfortable talking in the group

setting. Facilitators acknowledged it could be hard to find a balance to ensure all had equal opportunities to share their experiences, but felt where this was achieved the course worked well for parents.

Group diversity

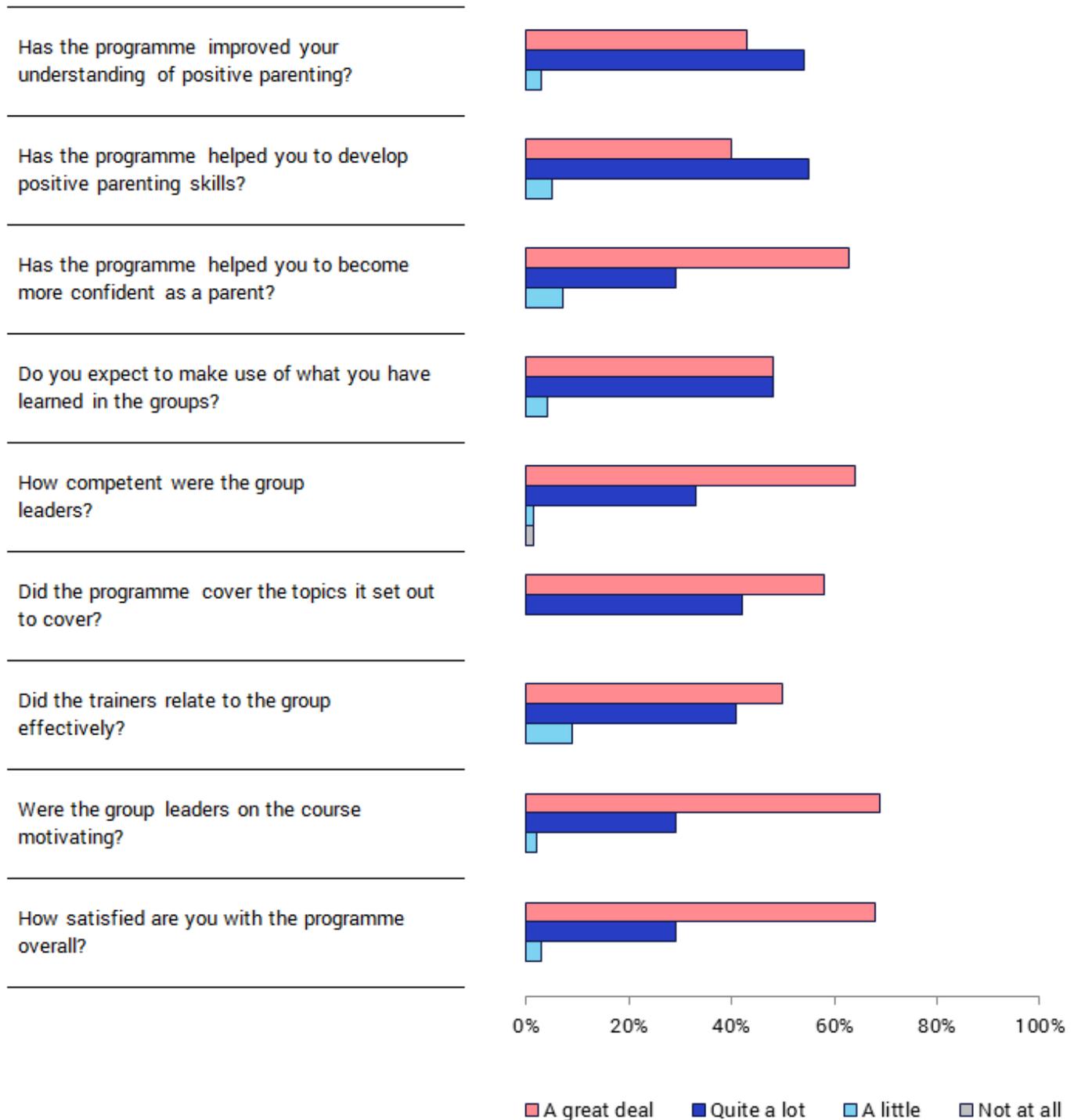
The ethnic and cultural diversity of groups offered parents a range of different perspectives, discussions and a chance to learn from others. Parents with English as a second language noted feeling nervous about their ability to participate in course activities. Course experience for these parents fell into two categories: those who struggled to follow the content and did not enjoy the course, and those for whom the language barrier was not a significant issue, due to the presence of additional support or a parent/facilitator who could translate. Parents in the latter group described how other group members were encouraging and provided space for them to speak in sessions, which put them at ease. Facilitators and parents recognised that supporting with language difficulties was a challenge which required more time in session and patience from the group (for translating, checking understanding,

and assisting with the online survey). Whilst this affected time management and occasionally the quality of delivery, it was felt to be important by parents and facilitators.

Survey feedback

These positive experiences of the course were reflected in The Training Acceptability Response Questionnaire (Davis, Rawana, & Copponi, 1989) responses. The questions asked about participant satisfaction and the extent to which the programme was useful. The majority of parents responded 'quite a lot' and 'a great deal' to these questions, suggesting a positive experience of BaP. Parental responses are summarised below in Figure 2. See Appendix B for full summary of TARS responses and frequencies.

Figure 2. Training Acceptability Response questionnaire responses (N=66)



Parent outcomes

This section describes course outcomes for parents, combining findings from the parent survey with parent and facilitator interviews. Differences in goal attainment, parenting communication styles, and wellbeing are summarised.

Key findings

Goals

- No significant changes were seen in goal attainment between the start and the end of the course.
- Parents found it difficult to set SMART goals at the beginning of the course and often set broad goals which were unachievable.
- Facilitators felt that it would be valuable to support parents more with goal setting in session.

Communication styles

- Parenting style scores significantly improved between the start and the end of the course.
- Parents described improvements to communication styles, including reduced reactivity/anger, increased clarity, improved listening skills, and more open dialogue around feelings.
- Improvements to communication occurred via peer support, increased self-awareness, learning parenting strategies, and better parent-child understanding.

Parent wellbeing

- Parent wellbeing scores significantly improved between the start and the end of the course.
- Parents described improvements to managing anger, feeling calmer and well-supported, looking after their own needs, increased confidence and reduced guilt.
- Improvements to wellbeing occurred through more constructive communication with children, peer support, and increased self-acceptance.

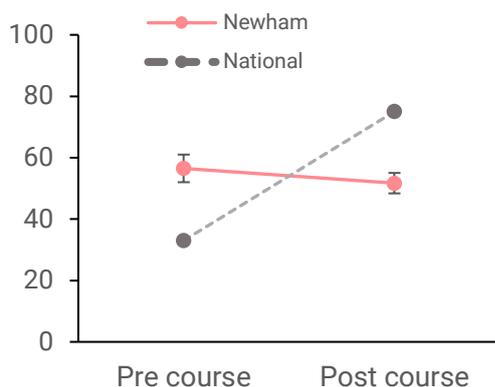
Goals

Goal setting is a core aspect of the BaP programme. At the start of the course, parents are required to set two SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) goals related to parenting and are encouraged to work on these for the duration of the course.

Using the Parenting Goals measure (Scott et al., 2001), parents rated distance to reaching goal on a visual analogue scale at the start and the end of the course. No significant differences were found between average scores at the start (mean = 54.6) and end (mean = 50.3) of the course¹. Figure 3 shows the average pre and post-course goal ratings (0 = goal not at all reached, 100 = goal completely reached). National EPEC norms data figures are shown as a benchmark (Harwood, Kendall, Nichol & Day, 2020).

Figure 3. Average pre and post-course parenting goal scores.

Scores are shown for Newham (N = 30) and nationally (N > 1000). Error bars display ± 1 standard error.



Caution should be exercised when interpreting these findings. The Newham data, showing no significant change, sits

¹ A repeated measures t-test indicated no significant change in goal attainment from pre ($M = 54.6, SD = 24$), to post-course ($M = 50.3, SD = 24$): $t(df = 29) = 0.65, p = 0.52$ (ns), cohen's $d = 0.19$.

in contrast to the EPEC national data and a number of other studies showing significant increases in goal attainment between the start and end of the course (Harwood, Kendall, Nichol & Day, 2020; Day et al., 2012). Parents in Newham set very similar goals to parents from the national EPEC dataset, however there were differences in how these were rated. This stark difference in findings may be linked to data collection issues in Newham. For instance, the online digital survey measure used a slider scale that some parents found difficult to use. Further, during the post-survey, parents were given a verbal reminder of the goal they set at the start of the course, but did not have to enter this into the digital survey. Thus, parents were not necessarily rating the same goal in both the pre and post-surveys. Finally, the majority of parents on Newham courses speak English as an additional language and it is possible that there were some language barriers when completing the survey measures.

The qualitative strand explored parent and facilitator experiences of goal setting and whether or not goals set were perceived to be reached at the end of the course.

Goal setting

Parents recalled having set goals which were general or broad in nature. For example, *being a better parent; being less selfish; learning about everything out there; putting children first and focusing on the future; being more flexible with the rules; being calmer, being less overprotective*. Facilitators concurred that parents did not always set SMART goals at the beginning of the course. There were attempts by facilitators to refine parent goals into something more realistic and achievable. However, parents could struggle to

identify even small changes to work towards.

Parents set more achievable goals for their child during the course e.g. protected time for studying or reducing time on PC/phone in evenings. Though, there were instances where goals remained vague. For example, wanting child to embrace their cultural identity, to be more resilient, to be more self-sufficient and self-aware.

Facilitators reflected that parents often identify more realistic goals during the middle of course and felt this was because parents had learned about different strategies and engaged in peer-discussions about parenting. This had helped parents think about areas to address, either with themselves or at home. In some instances, facilitators felt it was only at the end of the course, when the group acknowledged achievements that a parent realised they had been working on an achievable goal and will reframe the outcome at this point. For this reason, facilitators reported that parent goals stated in survey could differ to what they set or agree in session.

There were ways facilitators felt the goal setting process could be improved. They suggested devoting more time in sessions to support goal identification. For example, unpicking with parents what behaviour change to expect and how to define this. Although, facilitators questioned the feasibility of this as there is very little time spare after delivering the content of each session. Furthermore, weekly reviews with parents to check progress, relevance of goals and relationship with children could help ensure that goals evolve and retain meaning throughout the course.

Goal attainment

There was a mixed picture in regards to whether parents felt they had met goals after the course. There were parents who

stated goals were on-going and had only been partially met, this was especially true with goals related to altering a parenting style e.g. "being less overprotective". These parents stated that they wouldn't expect goals to be reached in such a short space of time (8 weeks). Conversely, there were parents who felt short-term change was possible; these parents' goals related to response style e.g. "be more patient", "less shouting", "communicating better" and felt they had been achieved at the end of the course. A mechanism for achieving these goals was through applying strategies learned on the course (negotiation, compromising, listening to child and identifying the need behind behaviours).

Child goals that were specific and achievable were met. Parents described taking action to enable child to reach goals. For example, establishing routines and structure embedded protected time for studying, social media, and opportunities to assist with cooking at home. Parents felt open communication with child about feelings had helped increase resilience in preparation for secondary school. Those who reported child-goal attainment suggested the peer support offered by BaP had increased confidence to implement these changes at home.

Communication styles

At the start and the end of the course, parents were asked to complete The Parenting Scale (David, O’Leary & Wolff et al., 1993), which reflects communication styles when dealing with common parenting problems. A medium-sized, statistically significant reduction in average scores was found between the start (mean = 2.3) and the end of the course (mean = 1.8), indicating more effective parenting at the end of the course.² Figure 4 shows the average pre and post-course parenting style scores. National EPEC norms data figures are shown as a benchmark.

Figure 4. Average pre and post-course parenting style scores.

Scores are shown for Newham (N = 56) and nationally (N > 1000). Possible score range = 0-7. Error bars display ± 1 standard error.



This improvement in communication style was reflected in the qualitative interviews, which reflected small changes in communication with their children at

home. These improvements and the mechanisms behind them are explored below and illustrated in Figure 5.

Trusting relationships

Parents and facilitators both felt that in order for parent-child communication to benefit from course strategies, a trusting and open relationship between parent and child needed to pre-exist. Without this foundation from which to build, any benefits or changes to communication were not as meaningful. Parents interviewed all felt that they had good relationships with their children, although reported varied difficulties with parenting and motivations for attending.

Increased self-awareness

Many of the strategies taught on the course were used by parents prior to course participation, such as negotiating, praising, listening, acknowledging the child’s feelings and spending time together. However, the course supported reflection on when to use strategies and how to increase consistency in approaches to communication and behaviour at home. Further, the course developed already-existing parent skills e.g. listening and praising skills became more reflective and descriptive. For these parents, tweaking the use of strategies led to small improvements in parent-child communication.

“I always praised my girls when they did something but descriptive praise taught me ‘why are you saying well done’... I didn’t do it before...when I did descriptive praise there was a bigger smile on their face”.
- Parent

² A repeated measures t-test indicated significant improvement in parenting styles from pre ($M = 2.3, SD = 0.6$), to post-course ($M = 1.8, SD = 0.6$): $t(df = 55) = 5.19, p < .001$, cohen’s $d = 0.65$.

Parents shared common difficulties managing responses to children when feeling angry or upset. They reported that the course had helped them think of ways to be more constructive with communication, and less reactive. They were encouraged to think about how to “*find the right words at the right time*”. This improved their dialogue with children and had positive effects on how they and their children felt.

The mechanism of peer-support

Engaging with personal disclosures made by facilitators and group members helped increase parent awareness of communication strategies and styles. Hearing others’ experiences illuminated the benefits of a strategy, and encouraged personal reflection on how to implement a similar strategy at home. Open discussions created an atmosphere where parents felt safe to share experiences and generate solutions. Indeed, some parents found the peer-support element to be of more practical benefit than the manualised course content.

“Some of the tips wasn’t from the course as such but was from other mums. Just simple things like ...having competitions with the kids to basically get them to do what you want ...and I got that from another mum ”
- Parent

Learning strategies

A group of parents felt that the course introduced novel concepts and ideas never previously tried with their children, such as using “I statements” to explain parent feelings to children, or reducing negative or labelling language. Furthermore, facilitator-led role-plays demonstrated strategy-use and associated parent-child outcomes, which

gave parents the confidence to implement them at home. These parents learnt a new communication method and/or shifted their perspective regarding parent-child communication, which was received positively at home by children. However, there were others who either did not benefit from strategies or did not implement them.

Understanding each other better

Parents had increased understanding of their child’s perspective and point of view after the course, which benefitted the parent-child relationship. The course helped parents see where they could improve (e.g. admitting fault), where they had previously felt that changes should be made by the child. Examining their own childhood and relationship to parents during the course, contributed to understanding their child’s perspective. For some parents, parallels were identified with how they were parented and how they now parent. This was a powerful way of understanding how their actions affect their children and was a key take home for some parents. Via increased empathy, parents were better able to manage their own reactivity and anger toward their child. Parents often said that this was on-going, something they continue to work on.

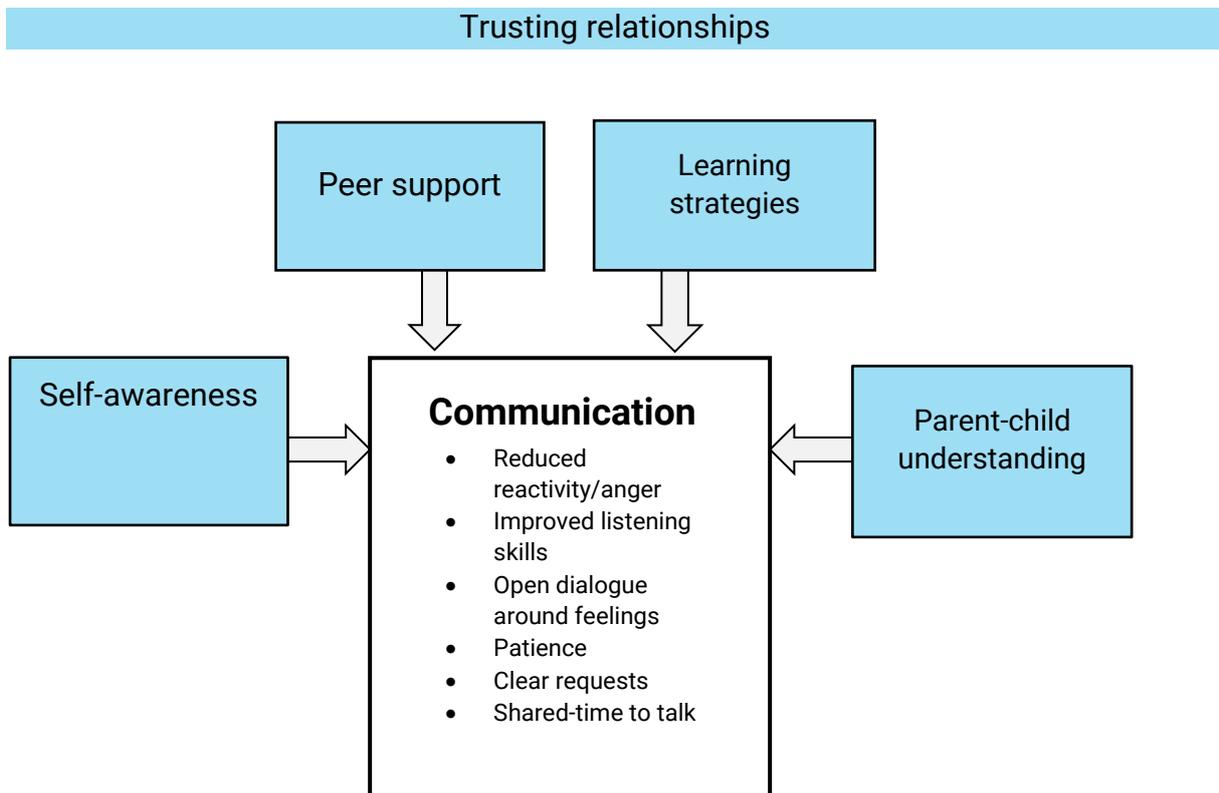
“After the course, I started to speak more to my children, I showed them my emotions and explained that I was tired and that was why I shouted at them. They could understand me more, and we have started to speak like this more”
- Parent

Parents who had implemented more family time at home e.g. family meetings for discussions or quality time activities felt there had been an increase in mutual understanding between parent and

children. Parents felt spending more time with their children meant they could understand what was important to their children and were better able to help and acknowledge their child's feelings. It also provided opportunity for the children's voice to be heard, and to explain parent motivations. There were barriers to consistently implementing family time, actually finding the time to meet around busy schedules e.g. work, homework, cooking household chores. Parents and facilitators hoped that by understanding each other better, children would feel more inclined to talk to parents about

serious issues affecting them in future e.g. mental health.

Figure 5. Course mechanisms leading to improved communication styles

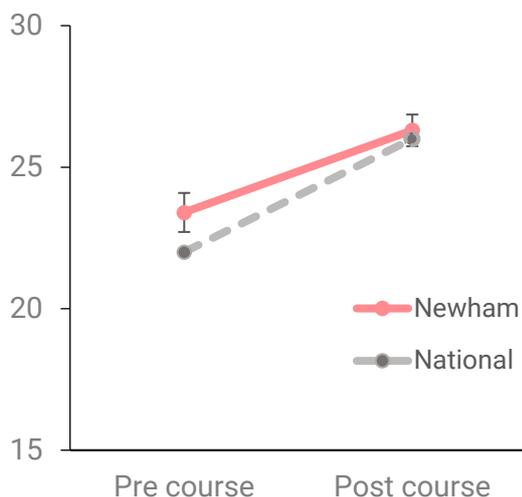


Parent wellbeing

At the start and the end of the course, parents were asked to complete The Short Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Stewart – Brown et al., 2008) to assess their wellbeing. A medium-sized, statistically significant improvement in wellbeing was found between the start (mean = 23.4) and the end of the course (mean = 26.3).³ Figure 6 shows the average pre and post-course wellbeing scores. National EPEC norms data figures are shown as a benchmark.

Figure 6. Average pre and post-course parent wellbeing scores.

Scores are shown for Newham (N = 57) and nationally (N > 1000). Possible score range = 7-35. Error bars display ± 1 standard error.



³ A repeated measures t-test indicated significant improvement in parenting styles from pre ($M = 23.4$, $SD = 5.4$), to post-course ($M = 26.3$, $SD = 4.4$): $t(df = 56) = 3.69$, $p < .001$, cohen's $d = 0.59$.

This improvement in wellbeing reflected descriptions by parents and facilitators in the interviews. However, there were also parents who did not describe improvements to their wellbeing. The reasons why and how parents both did and did not experience improvements to wellbeing are explored below and illustrated in Figure 7.

Communication

In the previous section, we saw that the course provided parents with the tools to implement the BaP parenting strategies and styles, which improved communication with their child(ren). This in turn improved parent wellbeing. For example, parents were better able to manage their emotions and language, particularly anger and reactivity.

"It [the course] helps you not to use negative words. You know you're angry, so you try to take the word anger away and keep it back. You use the positive... so it's like the positive words echo with the universe. I try to use the word 'happy', so that it will echo around you"
- Parent

Self-acceptance

Supportive, open discussion around what it means to be a "good enough parent" validated parental struggles and reduced the pressure to be the "perfect parent". This increased self-acceptance thus improved wellbeing.

"I feel that I'm doing a good job as a parent. Could be better, but we all could be better. Could be a lot worse... I'm ok."

However, there were also parents who did not value this discussion, explaining that “good enough” was not a high enough standard for them. These parents did not report improved wellbeing overall.

Furthermore, non-judgemental discussion of parenting styles encouraged parents to be open, identify and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Parents could identify their own style (assertive, aggressive, demanding, controlling, passive, or over-protective) and learnt that it is ok to encompass all of the styles in different contexts. Sharing and hearing the experiences of others who were struggling allowed parents to feel more confident in their own parenting and accept what they can and cannot control. Parents could feel less alone with their fallibility.

Peer support

Whilst non-judgemental peer support facilitated parental self-acceptance (as described above), it also directly improved parent wellbeing. Key themes were friendship and companionship; parents explained that they enjoyed chatting and laughing with other parents, which reduced their stress. They could be honest and open in the course sessions; sharing and listening to experiences of the facilitators and other parents helped them to feel supported and not alone.

Facilitators added that this open dialogue helped parents to feel valued and noticed. Additionally, peer support was conducive to learning parenting strategies, which provided parents with confidence and excitement/hope for the future. Furthermore, peer support increased parents’ sense of calm and confidence in their abilities. Activity sessions in which parents were encouraged to write down positive comments about one another

boosted this self-confidence and provided hope for their and their child’s future.

“When people are saying nice things about you and calling you strong and telling you ‘don’t give up, carry on’, it’s really nice to hear those words.”

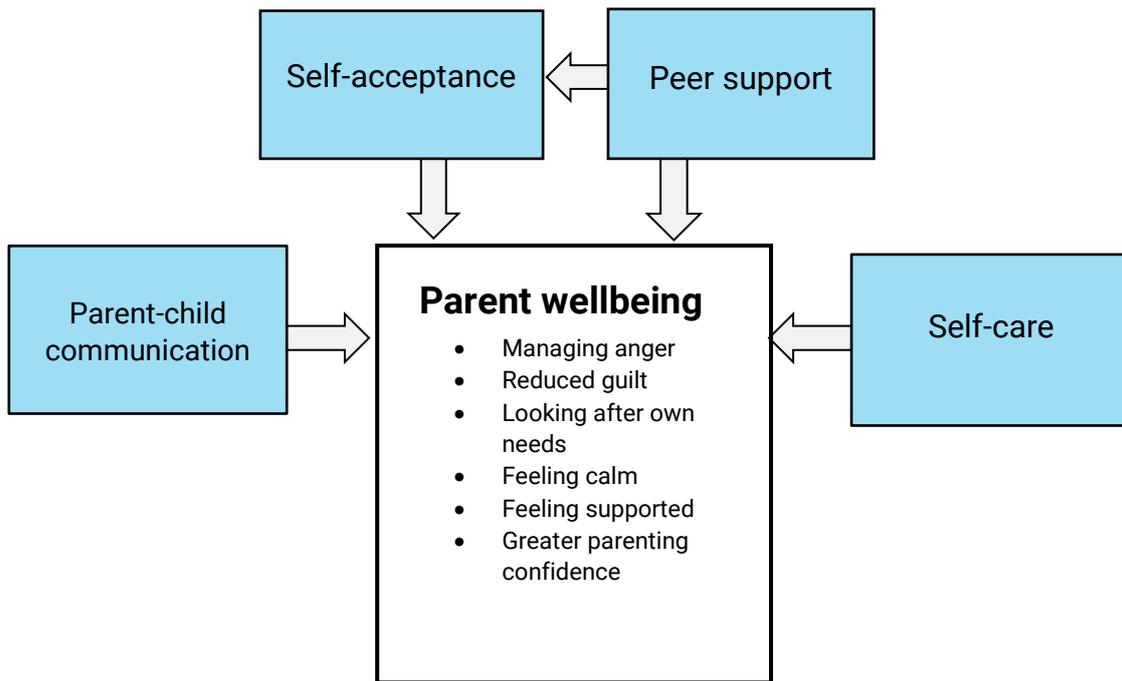
- Parent

However, there were parents whose wellbeing did not benefit from the peer support and peer-led model. These parents were hoping for expert instruction and advice on parenting and child mental health.

Self-care

BaP’s “taking time for myself” strategy encouraged parents to prioritise their needs, to improve their own wellbeing and capacity for parenting. Facilitators noted that some parents struggled to identify what they could do for themselves, but that the course provided an essential space to gain support with this. Through course discussions, parents realised the importance of “taking time for myself” to both their own and their child’s happiness, and this justified going to the gym, pursuing hobbies or seeing friends. Parents became aware of the distinction between quality family time and taking time for themselves, and made changes at home to increase the amount of each. However, there were also parents who were not comfortable with “taking time for myself”; these parents were keen to highlight that their children are always a priority over themselves, and did not want to make any changes to their routine. There were also parents who reported having realised the importance of rest and relaxation, but had not been able to do so, due to their busy lives.

Figure 7. Course mechanisms leading to improved parent wellbeing



Child and family outcomes

This section describes wider course benefits to the child and family from parent/facilitator perspective. In addition, findings from 3 child interviews explore whether children noticed parenting changes and if so, whether this impacted their wellbeing.

Key findings

Parent/facilitator perspective

- No significant improvements were seen in parents' concerns about their child, between surveys at the start and end of the course.
- However, parents and facilitators described improvements to wider family communication and increases in quality time.
- Parents and facilitators described how the strategies learnt during the course improved child behaviour, independence, and resilience.

Child perspective

- Findings from child interviews were limited due to small sample size and data quality issues.
- However, interviews highlighted that children noticed a reduction in parents' reactivity and an increase in praising, which may have improved their wellbeing.
- Children also reflected increased parental trust in HeadStart and improvements to parents' spoken English.

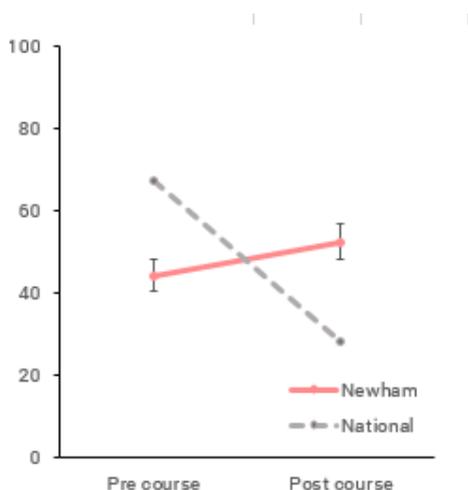
Child and family

Parent and facilitator perspective

At the start and the end of the course, parents were asked to complete the Concerns About My Child questionnaire (Scott et al., 2001), in which they nominated up to two child problems and rated the severity of each on a visual analogue scale (0 = not at all concerned, 100 = extremely concerned). Scores were not significantly different between the start (mean = 44.2) and end of the course (mean = 52.3)⁴, indicating no change in parents' perception of child difficulties. Figure 8 shows the average pre and post-course levels of concern. National EPEC norms data figures are shown as a benchmark.

Figure 8. Average pre and post-course levels of concern.

Scores are shown for Newham (N = 37) and nationally (N > 1000). Possible score range = 0-100. Error bars display ± 1 standard error.



⁴ A repeated measures t-test indicated significant improvement in parenting styles from pre ($M = 44.2$, $SD = 24.4$), to post-course ($M = 52.3$, $SD = 26.6$): $t(df = 36) = 1.41$, $p = .168$ (ns), cohen's $d = 0.30$.

This Newham data, showing no significant change, is not in line with EPEC national data and a number of other studies showing significant reduction in levels of concern between the start and end of the course (Harwood, Kendall, Nichol & Day, 2020; Day et al., 2012).

As highlighted above in 'Goals', this unexpected difference in findings may be attributable to Newham data collection issues. These include a) technical difficulties using the slider scale to rate concerns in the online survey, b) no requirement to re-enter initial goals in the post-survey (so parents may not be rating the same goal at both timepoints), and c) language barriers to completing the survey, related to the high number of parents with English as an additional language in Newham.

In contrast to the survey, the qualitative interviews did not focus on improvements to specific child concerns, but explored wider benefits to the child and family. Parents and facilitators felt that the course brought significant benefits to the child and family, which are explored below. Increases in quality family time and openness between parents and children, as highlighted in the 'Communication' section of 'Parent Outcomes', led to improvements in wider family relationships and in child behaviour, resilience, and independence.

Family relationships and quality time

Facilitators and parents both highlighted the course's role in improving wider family relationships. BaP taught transferrable skills in active listening and acknowledgement of feelings, which could increase empathy and understanding. In particular, parents described better

communication in both parent-child and spousal relationships, reporting that their partners had noticed them listening more.

"My husband noticed a difference, because he said that earlier I wasn't listening at home, not to him, not the kids, and now I listen, I hear, and I'm more supportive."
- Parent

Furthermore, as a result of course discussions, parents took time for themselves (see 'Parent Wellbeing'), which increased/improved family time, as parents felt less tired. Building in quality family time or meetings provided opportunities for all family members to share, listen, and pay attention to each others' perspectives and feelings. Parents reported less shouting and more listening within the family, as a consequence. However, there were also parents who did not report any changes to wider family relationships as a result of the course; these parents described a close family unit that had not changed.

Child behaviour and resilience

Parents explained that child behaviour had improved after their participation in the course, as a result of better parent-child communication. When parents acknowledged the child's feelings, used 'I statements', and fully explained any requests, young children engaged in fewer tantrums whilst older children increased their calmness and responsiveness to requests.

Parents explained that the course's crèche provided an opportunity for them to be separated from young children, fostering child independence, whilst providing space and capacity to improve parent responses to child behaviour. Furthermore, facilitators described parents' use of course strategies, such as descriptive praise and acknowledging

feelings, as mechanisms through which children became more independent and resilient. For example, where children's fear of undertaking solo activities was acknowledged and accompanied by praise and encouragement, they felt more confident and able to be independent. Parents reported increases in child confidence and resilience when they provided an open forum for children to discuss their feelings, be heard, and explore solutions to problems.

In addition, parents noted that as a result of the course, they had provided children with more routine, boundaries, and structure, modelling a responsible approach to living. They had also encouraged children to take more responsibility for their own lives, e.g. by creating a study schedule.

"One of the things I started is getting [child] into a routine of creating her own schedules - planning her days, planning her weeks, so that when it comes to GCSE time, she can plan her own study sessions."
- Parent

Child perspective

Three interviews were conducted with 4 children of parents who had also participated in this study. There were:

- two 1:1 individual interviews, and
- one interview of 2 siblings together.

The interviews explored perceived parenting changes and subsequent impact on child wellbeing. However, the findings are limited for several reasons. First, for some interviews the child's parent was present in the room, increasing child reluctance to explore parenting styles fully and/or make negative

assertions. Second, only three interviews were conducted, representing a limited range experiences which were often contradictory. Finally, some interviews were conducted in a loud and distracting context, affecting interviewee focus and data quality. Below, we explore only those findings which were consistent across interviews and/or discussed in the absence of a parent.

Noticing parent changes and child wellbeing

In the interviews, children drew a timeline of the months during which their parent participated in BaP, and were asked whether they had noticed changes in their parent's parenting style during this period. Children primarily reported experiencing fewer angry responses to their behaviour from their parent since the course e.g. less shouting. They also highlighted more praising from parents, which made them feel happy and proud. This reflects parent perspectives on improved communication and emotion management, discussed in the 'Communication' and parent 'Parent Wellbeing' sections.

Furthermore, children reported that after the course, parents were more enthusiastic about them engaging in other HeadStart activities at their school, reflecting increased trust and understanding of the organisation as a result of participation in BaP. In addition, some children reported improvements in their parent's spoken English, as a result of the course.

*"I feel very proud of myself because my mum said very good to me and she's proud too."
- Child*

In the interviews, young people described feeling that their parents understood, shared, and could offer support with their general concerns. These concerns included worries about getting into trouble (at school and generally) and about starting a new school year, where they thought the work would be more difficult than it had been previously. Children identified 'heart to hearts' and quality time with parents as of particular importance to them.

Conclusions and recommendations

This section concludes the report and provides recommendations for future service delivery. It also includes response and action statements from The HeadStart Newham Parenting and Creative Activities manager (HeadStart Newham response).

Recruitment, retention, and course experience

Taster/introductory sessions were an effective recruitment strategy, with the majority (59%) of attendees also attending the first full course session. Interviews revealed that effective recruitment strategies included face-to-face engagement with parents, whilst school involvement in promotion increased parents' trust in the course. Some facilitators and parents noted that course promotion ought to be more extensive, and should work to recruit fathers in particular.

It is therefore suggested that HeadStart Newham:

- continues to utilise taster sessions and other face-to-face engagement recruitment strategies and explores ways to further engage Newham schools in BaP course promotion,

- widens course promotion – e.g. at the East London Family Court, Newham workplaces, faith spaces or the Newham magazine, and

- works to recruit fathers in particular.

HeadStart Newham response:

The Parent Facilitator Team engage in active outreach through schools, parents evenings, coffee mornings, transition events to share how Being a Parent works. We will continue to maximise these opportunities.

We use our website, electronic and hard copy flyers to support promotion with services and stakeholders. The flyer aids parent facilitators to engage in conversations with parents.

We encourage and support facilitators to undertake word of mouth community based recruitment. Greater numbers of parents are coming to groups after finding out about us through the courts; we will continue to support this as a place to recruit.

We are always exploring ways to engage fathers in the course's traditionally parenting programmes have higher engagement from women

The majority (61%) of parents completed the course, attending 5+ sessions. Barriers to attendance included stigma and misconceptions (around course being for 'bad' parents), practicalities (location, crèche, and timings) and language barriers. However, the same practicalities and support with language difficulties also represented reasons parents continued to attend the course – suggesting varied timings, crèche and language provision across courses.

The service could:

- explore the practicalities of running lunchtime courses at Newham workplaces,
- ensure consistent provision across courses in terms of crèche and additional language support,
- address stigma and misconceptions (course content/target age group) during course promotion, and
- consider additional facilitator training in child mental health/resilience.

HeadStart Newham response:

The HeadStart Being a Parent Programme is a manualised programme with each session lasting 2 hours. We could deliver a group at lunch time at Dockside for staff.

Crèche provision is subject to budget and space being available at the course location. Where possible we provide a crèche for children under the age of 4.

We can use our social media platforms to support challenging the stigma and using the quotes from parents who have taken part. Our Facilitators are our best advocates and working with them to lead outreach is what works best.

Delivering in different languages would require enough facilitators and a supervisor to adapt and deliver a group. The Centre for Parent and Child Support have done this for some community languages. This is something we can consider as part of our sustainability planning.

Overall, parents reported positive course experiences, both in interviews and survey feedback. They valued the peer-led model and supportive group dynamics, which enabled open reflection and sharing of real life experiences. Course content felt most meaningful to parents with children aged 9-16 years, and could sometimes be inappropriate for foster parents. Some parents expected the course to cover secondary school transition, and child mental health, and were disappointed that it did not.

It is suggested that:

- Facilitator training and delivery continues to promote personalised, reflective and open discussion
- third parties i.e. schools promote course accurately **or** consider additional facilitator training in child mental health/resilience
- There is consistent cross-course guidance for facilitators with respect to supporting parents with English as a second language.
- There is clarity over target child age group during outreach.
- Course is adapted for foster carer groups.

HeadStart Newham response:

The peer-led model is core to the ethos of the group and we would preserve this.

The groups are promoted by schools and partner organisations. We share the tips, tools and content aims for the group to ensure clear and consistent messaging.

The course content touches on themes that will equip parents to better able to support their children through all sorts of life events.

The HeadStart Team will support the facilitators with some clear and consistent guidance on supporting parents with additional language needs.

The target child-age for course is written on course flyers, website and will be highlighted across all promotions.

We will work with the facilitator team to adapt the course content/session plans to meet the needs of Foster carers.

Parent outcomes

Goals

There were no changes to parenting goal scores at the end of the course, indicating parents did not perceive any progress towards or away from goals set. However, this finding was not in line with EPEC national data and should be interpreted with caution due to data collection issues. Furthermore, the qualitative interviews highlighted the difficulties parents had setting realistic and achievable goals for

themselves during the course. Goals set were often broad, and sometimes not identified till the middle or end of the course. Parents perceived goals as on-going, or unmet at the end of the course, indicating that parents and facilitators needed more time to define meaningful goals.

It is recommended to:

- adjust data collection procedures in the digital survey,
- review timings for when goals are set during the course,
- review course information on SMART goals, ensure facilitators are well-trained in supporting
- monitor progress and break down goals.

HeadStart Newham response:

We plan to:

Edit the slider scale on digital survey measure for goal/concern measures.

Include a free text box in the digital post-survey for parents to write in goal from pre-survey.

Extend the session time to allow time to complete the survey in the session.

Undertake regular training with the facilitator team on goals.

Revisit how the goals are set with parents and support parents to capture a smart goal.

Parenting communication styles

Parents were found to have more effective parenting style scores at the end of the course. This is in line with feedback from parents and facilitators who reported improvements to parent-child communication. The improvements to communication and their causal mechanisms included:

- less reactivity /shouting, more effective listening via increased parental awareness of communication styles, effort to be more consistent and implementing new strategies learned through BaP
- increased discussion about challenges/successes to parent-child communication and generating shared solutions via peer-support.
- better understanding between parent and child via parental reflection on ways to improve parenting/reflection on their own childhood, and
- more open and meaningful dialogue with child via increased opportunities for quality time.

Parent Wellbeing

Overall, parent wellbeing scores significantly improved between the start and the end of the course. Interviews highlighted that parents fell into two groups: those who felt that their wellbeing had improved, and those who did not. Improvements to wellbeing and their causal mechanisms included:

- better emotional regulation/reduced anger via improved parent-child communication

- reduced parenting guilt/self-criticism via course discussion around self-acceptance as a “good enough” parent,
- parents prioritising their own needs via discussion on the importance of self-care for parenting, and
- feeling less alone via supportive encouragement from peers.

Where one or more of these components were missing, largely due to individual differences, parents did not report improved wellbeing.

Child outcomes

Whilst parents described improvements to child wellbeing in the qualitative interviews, no significant improvements in parents’ specific concerns about their child were found between the pre and post-course surveys. This could have been because specific concerns did not improve. However, this finding may also be attributable to data collection issues with the digital survey, including the lack of requirement for parents to re-enter their initial concern in the post-course survey. Furthermore, parents may have struggled to highlight and define specific concerns early in the course, in light of difficulties experienced in setting SMART goals. Parents explained that communication strategies they had learnt and implemented during the course helped children to openly discuss feelings and feel heard, thus improving child behaviour, independence, and resilience. Parents and facilitators also described improvements to wider family communication and increases in quality time, via course discussions around these topics.

Whilst this study also sought to explore the child perspective through 1:1 interviews, findings were very limited due to small sample size and data quality

issues. However, it was clear that children did notice a reduction in parents' angry responses and increases in praising, which they said made them feel happy. It is not clear whether there were wider benefits to child wellbeing from the available data. It is recommended that HeadStart Newham:

- explores the feasibility of future data collection for monitoring child outcomes for BaP, with due consideration of ethical and practical concerns.

Headstart Newham response:

We plan to:

Include a free text box in the digital post-survey for parents to write in concern from pre-survey.

Explore future data collection with children of parents as part of the wider LBN work on parenting support and the sustainability for the peer led parenting work.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Figure A.1. Percentage breakdown of parents in sample by course location (N=66)



Table A.1. Parent sample characteristics (N=66)

Gender		
Female	62	94
Male	4	6
Ethnicity		
Asian British/Asian Other	32	48
Black British/Other	11	16
Mixed British/ Mixed Other	4	6
White British/White Other	16	23
Other ethnicity	3	4.5
Age range		
16-24	3	4.5
25-44	49	74
45-64	23	34
Relationship to child		
Mother	58	88
Father	3	4.5
Aunt	2	3
Foster carer	3	4.5
Lone parent		
Yes	20	30
No	46	70
English as a second language		
Yes	49	74
No	17	26

Figure A.2. Percentage breakdown of first languages spoken by parents (N=45)

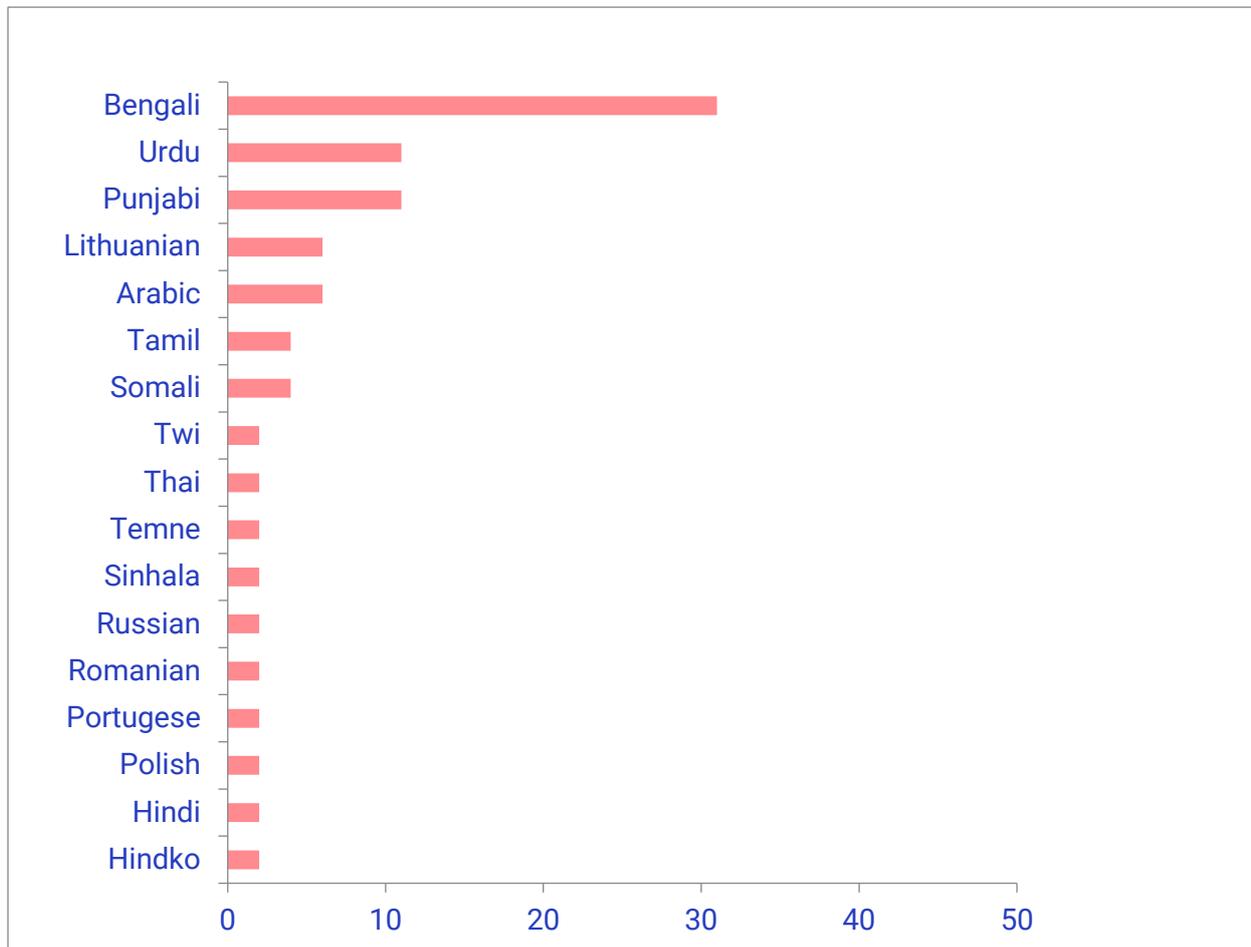


Table A.2. Focus child age and school information (N=66)

Table 4. Child information		
(N=66)	N	%
Age of children		
9 years (or under)	22	33
10 years	6	9
11 years	6	9
12 years	11	17
13 years	8	12
14 years	1	1.5
15 years	8	12
16 years	3	3
17 years (or above)	3	3
Type of school		
Primary	38	58
Secondary	25	38
Headstart school	25	66
Non-HeadStart School	13	34

Appendix B

Table B.1. Training Acceptability Response questionnaire (TARS) responses

	Not at all	A little	Quite a lot	A great deal
Has the programme improved your understanding of positive parenting? (N=65)	0%	3%	54%	43%
Has the programme helped you to develop positive parenting skills? (N=64)	0%	5%	55%	40%
Has the programme helped you to become more confident as a parent? (N=65)	0%	7%	29%	63%
Do you expect to make use of what you have learned in the groups? (N=65)	0%	4%	48%	48%
How competent were the group leaders? (N=64)	1.5%	1.5%	33%	64%
Did the programme cover the topics it set out to cover? (N=65)	0%	0%	42%	58%
Did the trainers relate to the group effectively? (N=64)	0%	9%	41%	50%
Were the group leaders motivating? (N=65)	0%	2%	29%	69%
How satisfied are you with the programme overall? (N=65)	0%	3%	29%	68%