



BELIEVE IN CHILDREN

Stories...

from P A C E

Parent And Community Education



Barnardo's

CANDL Project

Church and
Neighbourhood
Development in London



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This is the story of a parenting programme.

Barnardo's CANDL Project began piloting the '*Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities*' parenting Programme in May 2004. From August 2005 a successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund meant we could develop the Programme, and set up the Parent And Community Education (PACE) initiative, aiming not only to deliver the Programme, but also to enable parents to become facilitators. For a little more about the content of the SFSC Programme go to the Appendix at the back of this booklet.

These are the stories of ordinary people whose lives have been changed, who have rediscovered their families, or who have simply realised that yes, they do matter, and yes, they can achieve.

Some of the stories are dramatic, others less so, but all are true - names, photos and places have been changed, but the facts have not. Families and communities have been strengthened; we hope you enjoy reading how.

Sarah's story...

Sarah attended one of the SFSC Programmes, after hearing about it from her neighbour. Her neighbour had told her how much she had gained from attending a previous Programme, and Sarah decided that there couldn't be any harm in it. Besides, she felt quite lonely a lot of the time, with her husband out working very long hours, two children at school, and only a two-year old at home. There was also the promise of a free lunch!

Sarah was very quiet at first, not wanting to say anything that might make her appear to be a 'bad' parent. Her oldest son was receiving special help at school for behavioural difficulties, and she thought that was probably her fault; she didn't have any extended family to support her, as she had lost contact with her own parents some twelve years before.

Sarah really enjoyed the Programme. Eventually she enjoyed talking with the other parents, and discovering that she was not unique in her worries about her children and her parenting skills; she admitted that she smacked her children, but she also pointed out that no-one had ever given her any alternatives to smacking. When it was her turn to do the shopping for the weekly lunch she took great pride in visiting more than one shop to get the best value for money.

Halfway through the programme, it was decided by his school that Sarah's son's behaviour had improved so much that it no longer needed the 'special attention' being provided. Sarah had put into practice some of the strategies she had learned, and no longer automatically shouted, or resorted to smacking at the first provocation.

There was another result that was very significant. Following a session in which the parents discussed the importance of their children understanding their culture and their roots, Sarah decided to get in touch with her family once again. "He has the right to know where he has come from", she said, "and they have the right to see him." So she took her son to see his grandparents for the first time, and has kept up the contact ever since.

Sarah also began to realise the importance of the community. "I have been thinking a lot about our place in the community, how important it is to bring up my son as a good member of that community, and how I want him to have a good effect in community life in general. I have also been thinking about the ways I can get involved in the community."

Lily's story...

Lily was a qualified hairdresser, who now occasionally worked from home. A single mother with a two year-old son, she came



along with her friends, “because Julie (the Family Centre Coordinator) suggested it”. She was articulate and outspoken, not one to accept something she disagreed with lightly and, coming originally from a European country not known for its ‘shrinking violets’, often made her point very vocally! She was the first to admit, however, that she was not a particularly confident parent (are any of us?) and she could identify with the challenges that many of the other parents faced.

During the Programme, Lily became more and more involved with the children, especially during the lunch that always ended the morning. She would play with them, talk to them, and she discovered she really enjoyed being with them. When a second Programme was arranged at the same venue, she offered to help in the crèche as a volunteer, alongside the two qualified crèche workers. This meant registering as a volunteer at the centre, and undergoing a Criminal Records Bureau check.

Lily turned out to be a ‘natural’. The children loved her, and it was not unusual to see her marching down the corridor followed by a line of singing, dancing children. At the end of the Programme she had decided that she wanted to train as a crèche worker; she helped as a volunteer for a third Programme, and then was successful in gaining a place at the local college to undertake an NVQ level 3 in Early Years Childcare and Education, which she has now successfully completed.

Lily’s background was not an easy one, and her self-esteem had suffered; although she was outspoken, she was also defensive. But her experience in the group changed all that. Above all, she realised just how valuable a person she was in her own right, and what a valuable contribution she could make to her community.



George's story...

Our parenting groups are a mixture of 'voluntary' and referred parents - a mixture which works well. Parents who would not normally have very much to do with each other discover how much they have in common and, for young parents in particular, role models emerge whom they would probably never meet in any other situations. Those role models are often themselves surprised that anyone would think of them as such – a win-win situation! Our referred parents come via Social Services, Community Safety Officers, the police and solicitors. For some it is a 'last chance', for others it is a new start – a chance, hopefully, to change things for the better.

It was a family solicitor who first contacted us about George - a teenage dad, with a young son, who had been granted very limited supervised access at a contact centre. The court had ruled that, before George was granted any more access, he had to participate in a Parenting Programme, and so along he came.

As he arrived he asked, "You aren't going to make me put nappies on dolls are you?" Having been reassured on that point, he joined the others. It was a small group which included another father, and George quickly became part of the group. He was quiet and nervous that first week, but gradually began to join in. He arrived early each week, and helped to clear up at the end of the evening. One week he didn't come, and we discovered the following week that he had been mugged the week before and his jaw had been broken. "I tried to come" he said. "I got on the bus, but I had to get off again as I was in so much pain."

At the end of the Programme George said "This has made me realise that my family comes first now I'm a Dad – coming here has got me out of trouble, and stopped me fighting." Shortly after this he went before the Family Court and his access to his son was increased; the workers at the contact centre were amazed at the difference in him.

George then went on to take part in our six-week anger management programme, coming every week, and growing in confidence each time. He was supported by both groups in which he participated, and we felt that he was gaining a great deal simply by being part of a group that accepted him and respected his opinions.

We don't know what the future holds for George, but we do know that, at a crucial time, he was given support and encouragement; hopefully not only will he be a better parent in the future, but he will also be a more fulfilled member of his community.



Juliet's story...

Juliet was a single mum, who felt very isolated. She and her young son were very close - "there's only him and me, we only have each other" - and she



found it hard to 'let go'. Consequently she felt emotionally and physically tired most of the time. She was quiet during the first few sessions, and seemed to find the whole

idea of 'community' difficult.

One of the ways we try to help parents think about community is by looking at 'circles of support' – those people we turn to in times of crisis, or just for a bit of help every now and then. Several people spoke about their neighbours, family, and friends – one person cited her doctor as someone she could turn to – but Juliet said nothing. After several minutes she suddenly said "I don't have anyone. There is no-one I can go to." There was a short silence, and then one of the other parents said "Yes you do – you have all of us!"



Juliet didn't change miraculously overnight. She was still fairly quiet, and found it hard to mix, but she gradually came to realise that what that parent had said to her was true. When she went to visit her parents abroad in the summer, one of the group said she would keep an eye on her flat, and another rang her a couple of times to see how she was doing; gradually she was becoming part of her community. When the Programme ended, this was what she said:

"This has been so overwhelming; I feel like you're my other family. I really felt I could be myself here".

Yvette's story...

Yvette thought she was a failure. With 3 teenage daughters, she described her life as “one long battle”. She desperately needed some strategies to help her with her daughters, who were in her words, “rude, noisy, lazy and just think I’m stupid”.



Yvette needed, above all, to talk. She needed to talk about herself, her life and her children. The group that she was a part of was large, and it was impossible to let everyone talk for long periods; the facilitators needed to be very sensitive to the mood of the group, and not let one person dominate. At the debriefing held after the second session, when Yvette’s need had become more obvious, the facilitators decided that she needed more one-to-one time than they could give her in the group. They suggested to Yvette that she contact a local voluntary organisation who offered ‘listening’ sessions, and also chatted with her on a one-to-one basis after the ‘Strengthening’ sessions.

It took Yvette quite a long time to contact the listening service, but eventually she did, and she found it enormously helpful. She attended almost all the SFSC sessions, finding the strategies for teenagers helpful. But above all, she came to realise that she was not a failure; her daughters were just normal teenagers, doing and saying the things that all teenagers do, and reacting in a normal teenage way. As one of the facilitators put it: “Your daughters are just fulfilling the teenage job-description perfectly!”



Yvette will probably always need to talk – some people have that need throughout their lives. She now knows where she can find help and support; she also knows that there are many others going through the same challenges with their teenagers.

“Hearing the stories from other people made me realise that what we really need to say to each other is “You’re doing a good job!”

Cathy's story...

At the beginning of her Programme, Cathy described her daughter as 'just horrible'. She never really explained what she meant, but it became evident that they had a very difficult relationship.



Her daughter was the eldest of 4, with 3 brothers, the younger two being toddlers only 11 months apart - and she found it hard. Her oldest son coped by keeping to himself. Cathy's partner had had a drink problem, and she'd finally asked him to leave the family home. She appeared confident and outgoing, but the facilitators suspected that this was a front, put on for the benefit of the other parents, and that deep down she was very insecure in her relationship with her children.

It was the anger management sessions that 'lit light bulbs' for Cathy. She began using the strategies, and realised that she didn't have to shout at her daughter; if she didn't shout, then her daughter didn't feel the need to shout back, and they were actually able to communicate meaningfully with each other. Cathy was enabled to understand her daughter's behaviour better, control her own anger, and begin to build a better relationship with her daughter. This affected the whole family – there were fewer rows, her son began to talk to her more openly, and she was able to have a better relationship with the children's father.



We met the 'horrible' daughter at the Award Ceremony for the group. Had she changed? It was hard for us to tell, but mother and daughter sat together, chatted, and laughed, and when Cathy got up to receive her certificate, who do you think clapped loudest and longest?

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Mollie and Sheree's story...

One of the things that always strikes us as facilitators is the way that, once a group has gelled, a huge amount of trust is generated, and participants feel that they can disclose things that perhaps they have never told anyone before. That's what happened with Molly and Sheree. The group was sitting having lunch, and Sheree began to talk about 'Alan'. Alan, she told us, was the man who had been her real father, much more so than her birth father. Alan had died the year before, and the pain was still raw. Gradually over lunch, the story came out. Sheree's father had been a homosexual, and Alan had been his long-term partner. To Sheree, Alan had always been a father figure, more so than her birth father, and he had been a very important part of her life. It was obvious to us that she had not grieved for him properly – she had given birth to a baby a couple of months before, and had not allowed herself the time and space to do so - and when we began to talk about support networks, she realised how much she missed him.



Then, in one of the silences that so often happen when sensitive issues are being discussed, Molly spoke very quietly. "My mother was gay, too – we found out when we were teenagers." The group listened as she spoke about her experiences, and she finished by saying "do you know – I have never told anyone this before."

The group treated the information with sensitivity, even though for some of them it was a difficult topic, and we were able to give both women details of an organisation that gave advice and support to the children of homosexual parents. We also reminded everyone that the 'confidentiality clause' applied to things spoken about at lunch and coffee breaks as well as in the sessions themselves; trust can be broken far more quickly than it can be built up!

Ayesha's story...



As part of the 'Strengthening' Programme, we invite two speakers from the community to visit us; the facilitators choose the first speaker, and the group chooses the second. We have had speakers from the local police force and community safety team, school attendance officers, debt counsellors, magistrates, pastors and school governors. It was this last visitor who really inspired Ayesha. He talked about the work that Governors do, and about the valuable contribution that Parent Governors make. For most of the parents, what he told them was a revelation. They had no idea what Governors did, or that parents could be Governors; invitations to the annual Governors meetings or letters about parent governor elections had passed them by – indeed we discovered later that in one local school there had been no parent governors for over a year, as no-one had come forward.

After the session Ayesha collared the speaker for more information; her daughter was about to start in the Reception class at the local school, and Ayesha decided to look into 'this school governor thing.'

She did look into it, and 6 months later was elected as a Parent Governor; she became very involved with school affairs, and finally took the ultimate step

for her – she applied to university to do teacher training, and was accepted.



Hopefully she will go back into her community – maybe even the same school – to lead and support local families. She feels that the SFSC Programme gave her the confidence and knowledge to approach the school initially; little did she think that simply attending a 'parenting course' would change her whole life!

Robert, Connie, Pauline and Louisa's story...

Robert, Connie, Pauline and Louisa came to different Programmes as parents. They all had different motivations. Robert's wife had already participated in a previous Programme, and wanted him to experience it too. Connie had come from a country where discipline was tough and physical, and had realised that this just wasn't acceptable now she was living in England. Pauline came along to the very first Programme as a parent who used the Family Centre, and Louisa worked in the voluntary sector, had heard about the Programme and "wanted to see what all the fuss was about."

They each benefited in her or his own way. Robert and Connie both realised that there were ways to change behaviour other than using physical punishment, and Robert, who had children from a previous relationship with whom he had contact, as well as two from his present marriage, began to think about his role as a father, and about the need for all of his children to know and appreciate each other.

Pauline was extremely quiet during the first few sessions, but she gradually began to contribute, showing an ability to understand where others were coming from, and a gift for quiet support that often went unnoticed by the rest of the parents. Louisa became less and less the 'voluntary sector manager' and more and more the 'parent,' opening up, and as she admitted, for the first time letting her vulnerability show.

It was obvious to the facilitators of all four Programmes that Connie, Robert, Pauline and Louisa attended that, with training, they would make very good facilitators. The Race Equality Foundation subsidises two free places per training course for parents who have completed SFSC Programmes, and who are recommended by a sponsoring agency. Three of them managed to get places under this scheme, and a fourth





was paid for from CANDL's grant from the Big Lottery.

They undertook a week's training - not easy when you have to organise childcare for 5 days from 8am to 5pm, and then do your 'homework' each evening! Each of them then co-facilitated a Programme on a voluntary basis with one of PACE's experienced facilitators, and gained accreditation with the REF. It is worth remembering that for three of them at least, this was the first time they had undertaken any kind of training and teaching for a very long time, if ever. We could almost see them grow physically as their self-esteem rose, as they realised that they really could do this.

Offering them on-going support and training was an important part of this 'package' for CANDL, and it still is. Regular workshops are held, looking at facilitation skills, and group work, and good practice in areas such as child protection, health and safety, and equal opportunities.

All four have blossomed, and their lives have been changed. Connie now works for the REF as an ambassador for the SFSC Programme, Robert and Pauline are sessional workers for a local voluntary youth project delivering the SFSC programme, and Louisa has become one of CANDL's valued 'As and When' workers, delivering the SFSC Programme in both her own Centre, and in others.

This is community development at its best - the local community producing its own workers and role models, giving the community what it believes it needs. We hope that even more parents will train as facilitators in the coming months.



Stickers' story..!

“If you arrive on time, you will get a sticker!”

No, this is not a promise made to a group of small children, but one made to each new group of ‘Strengthening’ participants. We have a variety of stickers - smiley faces, animals, birds, teddies, letters of the alphabet - and we are strict in their use. Now you may not believe that any group of sane adults will rush around because they have been promised a sticker but, believe me, they will!



Countless times, as the hands of the clock crept towards 10.15am (our strict deadline) we heard the outside door being flung open, feet flying down the corridor, and “I’m here – am I in time for a sticker?” shouted through the door as they went past towards the crèche.



“I haven’t had a sticker as a reward since I was a child” – said a grandfather who was always very choosy as to which one he would take.

“I want one that Dean [her small son] will like” – declared a mum who really didn’t like putting her son in the crèche.



“I want to spell the letters of my name” - exclaimed a mum with a large family, who had difficulty keeping anything for herself.

In one Programme we even had a Sticker Monitor! It was a small group, which had gelled well, and Derisia decided that this was to be her role within the group; the others accepted it all very graciously!

We now give a sheet of stickers to each parent along with their certificate – a reminder, perhaps to be on time for those important appointments!



(stickers copyright of The Sticker Factory, CaVE Technology Ltd)

Appendix

CANDL, PACE and *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities*

Barnardo's CANDL Project has been based on the borders of Hackney and Tower Hamlets since 1988. The Project primarily works alongside local churches to develop community initiatives which benefit children, young people and families.

The *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* programmes form part of CANDL's Parent and Community Education (PACE) initiative, launched in 2005 with funding from the Big Lottery Fund.

Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities is a well-established parenting programme adapted by the Race Equality Foundation from an American violence-prevention model. It involves a 13-week parenting programme which aims to help individuals, families and communities. Based on the belief that parent education needs to be integrated with an awareness of community resources and responsibility in order to be effective, the Programme presents information within a cultural framework to address the needs of a variety of different ethnic and cultural groups. In the past three years, parents and carers from 46 different cultural backgrounds have completed the Programmes run by CANDL's PACE initiative.

The information presented is divided into 5 'curriculum areas':

- Cultural and spiritual
- Enhancing relationships and violence prevention
- Positive discipline
- Rites of Passage
- Community involvement

All these areas, used throughout the Programme, help parents and children to develop strong ethnic and cultural roots, a sense of who they are, and 'where they have come from', more positive relationships with those around them in family and community, and the life skills necessary for functioning adequately in today's society. There is an emphasis on anger management and solution-building, encouraging parents and children to think of ways of solving their problems and achieving their goals without resorting to the use of violence, verbal or physical.

The group dynamic is important. This is not a 'this is what you should do to make your children behave' Programme, but a chance for all the participants, including the 2 facilitators, to look at the challenges facing families today and talk together about solutions, which are often different for different families.

SFSC is not simply a 'Parenting Course'. It looks at the lives that participants currently lead, and offers a holistic approach to achieving the life that they would like for their family and their community; most importantly, it helps families to realise that **they** can make a difference in their homes and community by their actions.

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