

Insiders Guide: parent carer support course
Commissioned by Eleanor Smith School 2014

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<p>Background</p>	<p>Wide ranging research consistently shows that families of children with SEN are more likely than others to experience poverty, relationship breakdown, general health and mental health problems, unsuitable housing and problems associated with employment (PMSU 2005, Glenn 2007, Higgins et al 2005, Barlow et al 2006, Beresford 2008). And we know that 'spontaneous levels of parental involvement' work to promote school achievement (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). Eleanor Smith school were keen to explore new ways of supporting parents to build their resilience so that they were well placed to support their children. Resilience is the ability to withstand and recover from stressful life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful.</p>
<p>Aim</p>	<p>This project set out to enable parent carers to build their skills, resilience and confidence to support their children with special educational needs (SEN) attending Eleanor Smith school.</p>
<p>Input</p>	<p>Delivery of the fully evaluated manualised Insiders Guide parent support course – for more detail see http://www.boingboing.org.uk/index.php/training/insiders-guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course focuses on building resilience and what can help when life is tough. • 6 weekly sessions, each for 3 hours were delivered between February and April 2014 • Co-facilitated by a parent carer and practitioner together to model partnership working, draw on both sets of expertise and help reach parents who may be disengaged or anxious to attend. • Starts from the position that parents are key to improving child and family outcomes, travel a unique journey when their child has SEN and enter a world of disadvantage directly related to having a child with SEN. • Offers space for parents to reflect on their experience, meet up with others in similar situations to notice the skills acquired so far, gather information and learn new skills to manage the added demands of caring for children with SEN, map and assess their own needs and well being, practise strategies for building skills and strengthening resolve.
<p>Evaluation method</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 parents started the course, 11 completed it, 9 final evaluations were returned. This represents a completion rate of 91% which is much higher than the average drop off rate of parents whose children have no SEN and attend parenting courses (75%). Interestingly, most programmes experience high drop-out rates for parents of teens. • Parents completed an evaluation of the course experience in the final week and a pre and post evaluation tool (Family Activity Scale) was administered, as the school were eager to encourage parents to support their children in non-school based activities. • Demographic data was collected and indicates significant school success in attracting and engaging families living in particularly disadvantaged circumstances. The 11 attendees included: 8 mothers, 1 father, 1 aunty, 1 grandmother. 3 attendees required support with literacy and 3 were single parents. English was not the first language for 3 of the attendees and 2 were parenting more than one child with SEN. Attendees were parenting children aged from preschool to adolescence. • Observations made by the course facilitators were recorded, in addition to feedback provided by the Assistant Headteacher and Learning Mentor who it was agreed would not attend the course in order to offer parents an easy space within which to participate.

<p>Evaluation summary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 9 parent evaluations report that the course had helped them with information a lot. • All 9 parent evaluations report that the course had helped them with new skills and new ways of looking at things. (7 said a lot, 1 said a little, and 1 provided no comment). • All 9 parent evaluations reported that the course had increased their knowledge of services and support networks. (6 said a lot, 2 said a little, 1 provided no comment). • 8 of the 9 parents reported that their confidence as parents had increased. (7 said a lot, 1 said a little, 1 provided no comment). • 8 of the 9 parents would recommend the course to other parents. 1 did not comment. • Parents were asked to describe how the course had helped: some said they had learnt new skills and tips from other parents; some said it made them realise they were not alone, others were struggling too and it was good to meet new parents; others said it helped them to put things in place to look after themselves; some mentioned the value of getting more information; others commented on improving their skills and ability to spot triggers and one parent said it affirmed what she was already doing. • Examples of how parents reported doing things differently: <i>'I try to understand the feelings of what might cause certain behaviours'.</i> <i>'Wish we had more of these courses. I tried to relax more and bought CD's for ME – I spent money on me!'</i> <i>'I am looking after myself more and building my resilience'.</i> <i>'I have more understanding of other kids and their parents'.</i> <i>'I think about myself as well as my child and how they are linked together'.</i> <i>'I've tried to not get so stressed'.</i> • When asked how parents might improve the course, 4 said it could be longer, 2 said it didn't need any changing, 1 said more parents should be involved and 2 did not comment. 1 parent would have liked more challenge with completing tasks. • The course facilitators, with help from the school's Learning Mentor, designed a specialist module about the importance of leisure activity and introduced a standardized scale to prompt exploration of both joint and independent family activities. While no significant change in level of activity was recorded, the group shared many stories about the difficulties encountered when going out with their children including managing their behaviours and their differences and dealing with negative public reactions. The school incentivized engagement by offering attendees financial support to attend non-school based leisure activities. The group took part in ongoing discussion about both the range of opportunities on offer and the perceived barriers and solutions to inclusion.
<p>Outcomes for parent carers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced a resilience enhancing mechanism that enables parents to positively reframe the challenge of being parent carers • Reduced isolation and increased connection between parent carers • Introduced and/or practised a range of tips, ideas and strategies • Built confidence, a wider perspective and more positive outlook • Provided information about a wider range of community based leisure opportunities for children, young people and parent carers • Increased liaison between parents and between school and parents
<p>Outcomes for Eleanor Smith School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assistant Headteacher and the Learning Mentor took full part in discussions and reflections about their experiences and observation regarding the impact on parents. • Supported commitment to empowering and equipping parent carers • Raised levels of partnership working between parents and school staff • Affirmed value of school based Learning Mentor • More in-depth understanding about the parent carer experience and increased job satisfaction
<p>Lessons learned</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating Learning Mentor time to promote and organize the course as well as arranging the pre-taster information session held in December 2013, successfully enthused parents to join in.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical details such as cheerful first impressions, familiar venue and personnel, appropriate refreshments and comfortable chairs arranged informally all helped to attract and keep parents attending. Proactive effort to secure initial attendance and contact during the course supported continuous attendance. Rewarding and incentivizing attendance also appeared to help. Providing a completion certificate was welcomed. • Timings were difficult for some parents to manage as the course overlapped with a language course they were also attending. Delivering the course on school premises was slightly complicated as some parents were concerned about being seen by their children. • While two of the six course modules were designed specifically to suit parent need, the group struggled to agree preferred topics and re-negotiated original choices. • We know from research on parent programmes, that early interventions are most effective and last longer, but later interventions are better than none (Moran et al 2004). While the school frequently provides parent support activities, course facilitators observed less robust knowledge retention amongst some parents. Setting small goals may be more realistic as parental need for material, practical, informational and relational support was observed to be high. A follow through component may help to sustain gains. • Whole group learning appeared to enable the sharing of tips and opportunities for ongoing mutual support. • Offering the course to future cohorts of parents could be achieved by training staff and parent duos to co-deliver the course. Screening both to ensure readiness to reflect and learn and deliver the course would be imperative.
<p>References</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barlow, J.H., Cullen-Powell, L.A. and Cheshire, A. (2006) 'Psychological well-being among mothers of children with cerebral palsy' in <i>Early Child Development and Care</i> 176 (3-4), May 421-428. • Beresford, B. and Rhodes, D. (2008) <i>Housing and disabled children</i>. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. • Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. (2003) <i>The impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement: A Literature Review</i>. DfES Research Report 433. London: DfES. • Glenn (2007) <i>Growing Together, or Drifting Apart? Children with disabilities and their parents' relationship</i>. London: One Plus One. • Higgins, D.J., Bailey, S.R. and Pearce, J.C. (2005) 'Factors associated with functioning style and coping strategies of families with a child with an autism spectrum disorder' in <i>Autism</i>, 9(2), 125-137. • Moran, P.; Ghatge D.; Can der Merwe, A. (2004) <i>What works in Parenting Support? A Review of the International Evidence</i>, DfES Policy Research Bureau, London. • Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU) (2005) <i>Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People</i>. London: Cabinet Office.