

# MARGATE EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY INNOVATION PROJECTS 2020-22

## IMPACT AND LEARNING SUMMARY

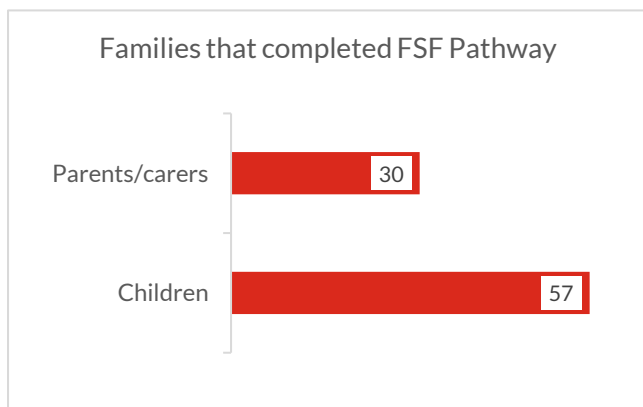
### Overview of Families Supporting Families Pathway Innovation Project

Families Supporting Families Pathway (FSF) was delivered by The Education People with funding from Save the Children UK. Families are provided a pathway of innovative virtual family workshops with the added dimension of participating families actively supporting other families with their children's learning.

The pathway has continued to be developed with parental and local agencies/organisations to promote the offer to vulnerable families within the community of Margate.

Participating families are encouraged throughout to share their learning with family and friends who have children to foster cross-fertilisation of learning and promotion of family harmony.

### Families Reached by Families Supporting Families Pathway



Five cohorts of families were reached between Dec 2020 and July 2022, giving a total of 87 parents/carers and their children reached. A breakdown of the families reached is as follows.

- 41 parents/carers enrolled.
- 30 parents/carers completed the pathway.
- 57 children involved: 32 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) aged children; 25 school-aged children.
- 16 children had a diagnosis of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) or were awaiting assessment.
- 6 families had English as an additional language.

### Impact on Families based on the last two cohorts

The impact presented is based on feedback and insights drawn from cohorts 4 and 5 which consisted of parents/carers with children within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Families Supporting Families Pathway had varied level impact on families as shown by feedback provided by the families who were part of the cohort. Overall the pathway had positive effects on families who recognised the need for activities to support their children's learning and were increasing their own knowledge and understanding of the importance of play as well as their role in supporting children's learning and development.

Greater recognition by families of the importance of increasing knowledge and understanding of engaging in activities with their children.

**100% of families agreed to the statement that:**

*I feel I recognise the importance of learning through play, and I am more interested in supporting my child's play.*

### FSF PATHWAY SESSIONS

FSF sessions facilitated by highly qualified early years advisers, cover aspects of child development and dispositions to learning in easily accessible and relatable approaches. Sessions cover:

- attachment and bonding
- communication and language development including singing and reading.
- wellbeing and involvement levels
- repetitive schematic behaviours
- the importance of the outdoor environment
- identifying learning opportunities everywhere, including household tasks.

Families had this to say about the range of activities they now do more with their young children:

- **67%** reading and looking at books more together.
- **67%** singing songs and rhymes more together.
- **67%** creating more made-up stories.
- **83%** having more make-believe play.
- **83%** doing more cooking.
- **100%** doing more household chores.
- **67%** doing more messy play.
- **100%** having more play outdoors together.
- **100%** access community events and facilities e.g. the library, swimming pool, the park, local woods.

At six weeks follow up after completion of the eight weekly sessions, families revealed that: They still use what they learnt... *"I use more of what I have learnt, the girls are talking so much more. I am more patient with the girls, I understand they can't control their emotions at times."*

The pathway is helping them to engage with their children... *"Helping me to understand [daughter], I still practice all that I learned. I understand some of my daughter's tantrums. I let her learn the way she prefers (schemas), spend more time to read, make up stories and, songs."*

They feel they have greater knowledge, skills and understanding of their role as a parent/caregiver... *"I still feel positive, more patient, we understand each other better. I am calmer, they are happier. I am more patient; I know more and what to do."*

At least 50% of parents/carers felt they have stronger bonds and support links with other adult family members and friends.

As a result of the pathway, friendships have been developed. The cascading of new knowledge and learning to family members and friends is an excellent way to disseminate and fertilise beneficial knowledge into the broader community. Most parents/carers reported that their family and friends had benefited from the information they had shared and were extremely interested in it, particularly the schema information. One EAL parent/carer commented on how she shared information with her mum, and they had chuckled together as they tried to find equivalent words in their home language.

Parents and carers have reported their own wellbeing and confidence has risen with being able to understand their child/ren more deeply and being able to be more patient.

The 'me-time' nudges have supported the parents/carers to take time for themselves and appreciate their own importance which has also assisted in them enjoying their role as parents/carers more. This has impacted on the family harmony as a whole as they develop their unique 'toolkit' which includes the Schema Development Wheels. Schemas have proven to be a revelatory aspect of the Families Supporting Families Pathway as puzzling and even challenging behaviours' have been understood in the context of learning.

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED – FROM FAMILIES AND PARTNERS

Families shared that they got a lot of value from the pathway sessions. They wished sessions could continue to be offered and reach more families in Margate.

*"It's an excellent program! It definitely needs more publicity to reach more people!"*

*"Would like it to be longer, with more people, and opportunities for more chatting with other families."*

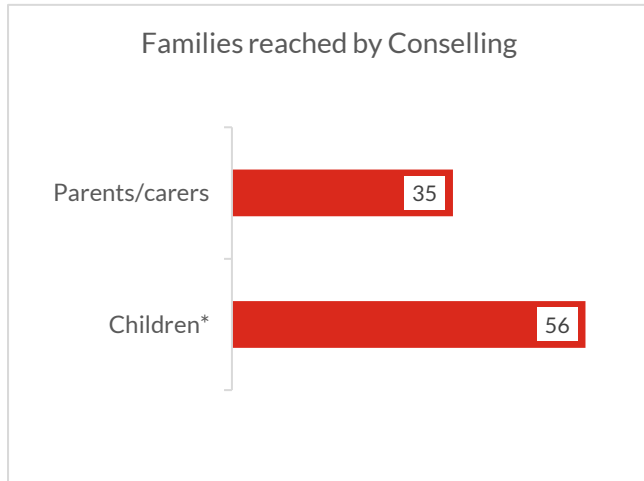
*"The programme is good with lots of information very useful information but would be better with more families."*

- A separate cohort for families with children under the age of two is not necessary, as the FSF Pathway is aimed at children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (0-5) and **can be easily differentiated to meet the needs of families within this age range.**
- When recruiting families, **more effective promotion of the FSF Pathway by the partner agencies is necessary to ensure a full cohort.**
- As the cohorts are only eight families to ensure all families can be present on screen at the same time it is of value to have the maximum number attend. **Less opportunity for richer diverse conversations and information sharing, new friendships, networking and support with lower attendance numbers.**
- Some families expressed **a wish to do the FSF Pathway face to face** now that the COVID restrictions had lifted
- Despite language differences, parents/carers who are speakers of English as an additional language (EAL) **feel the FSF Pathway would be transferable to the EAL community** and be of great benefit.

## Overview of Parent/Carer Counselling Innovation Project

With funding from Save the Children UK, Fegans delivered counselling (**Parent/carers Counselling project**) to a cohort of parents with children aged 0-5 in Margate. The counselling project was commissioned by the MELC, and counselling sessions were provided online as well as face to face. Parents were referred for counselling from third parties including their children's schools, Early Help, children's centres, and social workers. Counsellors worked with the parents, for the most part online, delivering counselling sessions around their issues, both personal and as a parent. The objective of the counselling project was to improve parents' mental health and confidence in their abilities as a parent. This meant that parents could have up to 10 counselling sessions each.

### Parent/Carer Counselling Project Reach



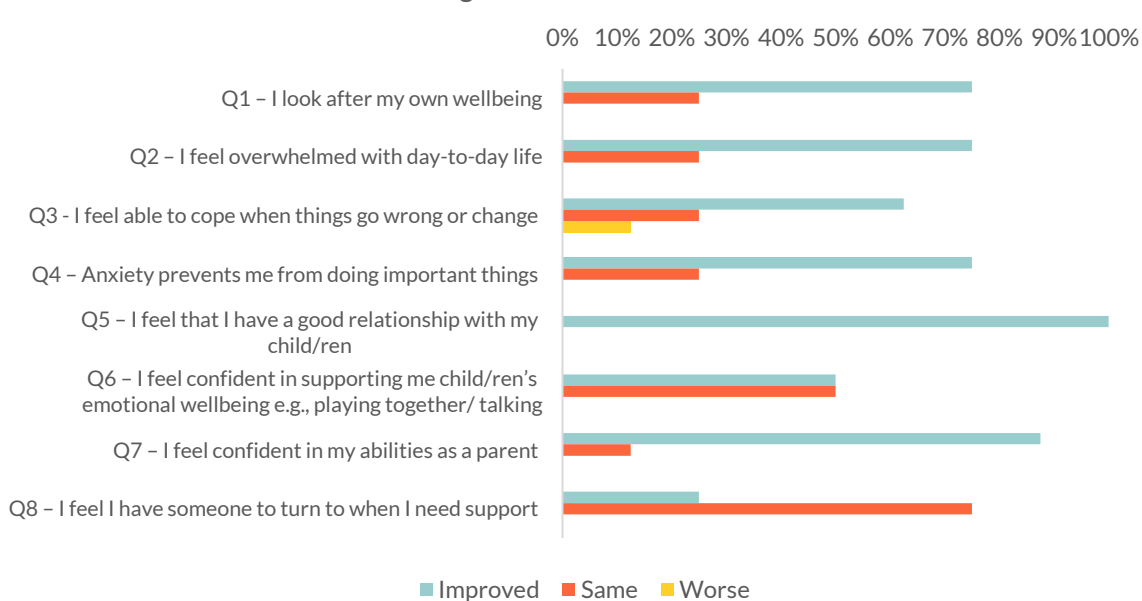
Whilst a significant number of parents were referred for counselling, only 35 actually started and completed the counselling. This was due to a variety of reasons which include: Parents not engaging in the first instance to start counselling; parents starting counselling but then not showing up for future sessions; parents not realising what they had been referred for and then deciding it was not for them (for instance, some families thought the counselling would be related to their experiences as a parent and , whereas some referrers thought the counselling was for the children) and parents not being available during working hours, for which is when the counselling sessions were made available. (\*The number of children represents indirect reach, given as an estimate based on the 1.6 birth rate)

### Impact on Families

Feedback is based on the last cohort of parents that have completed counselling. These parents showed improvements in most areas of counselling. Areas that did not show improvement have stayed the same, and none have gone backwards. It is worth noting that in counselling 'staying the same' is often an achievement as without the counselling they (parents) might have 'gone backwards.'

Overall, the counselling project saw parents progress in areas of their mental health such as anxiety, but it also saw improvements in their confidence in parenting and their ability to support their children's emotional wellbeing and having a good relationship with their child/ren.

### Counselling Outcomes: Parents feedback



- More than half showed improvement in 6 out of 8 areas, with one area being a level split between 'staying the same' and 'improved' and the final one mainly 'staying the same'.
- Q5 highlights progress for all parents (families) on having a good relationship with their children. This is a significant outcome, as this was an area that the project was aimed at, as this in turn can improve outcomes for children themselves.

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED – FROM FAMILIES AND PARTNERS

Delivering the majority of the counselling online has been a great modality for this project as it made the counselling accessible to most families because they could access it in lunchbreaks, so they didn't have to take time off work, or without having to find childcare for those with children not in school/nursery.

- This year's cohort were harder to engage than the previous year, 2021. Discussions with the Working Group highlighted **there was potentially less need for this type of support post-lockdown, leading to lower engagement from referrers and families alike** (The first cohort ran during lockdown when families had less access to other agencies and family/ friend networks).
- **The project ran very late as it took time to engage parents**, if indeed they did engage, so time was lost before moving on to the next referral
- Referrals were slow to come through. Referrers did articulate that **it can be hard to identify parents that might benefit from counselling all at once over a short time frame**
- Referrals coming from agencies other than schools e.g. Early Help, were perhaps working, **with more vulnerable families** who could be harder to consistent