

Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of
Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Porteous, David (2010) An evaluation of the NCY Trust teenage parenting project. Project Report. Middlesex University, Middlesex University.

First submitted uncorrected version (with author's formatting)

This version is available at: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/7580/>

Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

eprints@mdx.ac.uk

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/policies.html#copy>

An Evaluation of the NCY Trust Teenage
Parenting Project
Final Report

David Porteous
Middlesex University
January 2010

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the Newham Children and Young People's (NCY) Trust Teenage Parenting project. Research has demonstrated that teenage parents and their children are disproportionately likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) but also that their prospects improve when provided with appropriate support.

In this context, the project's aim was to engage young pregnant women and new parents in a training programme focused on parenting, caring and healthy living skills which would both equip them as parents and facilitate their ongoing participation in education, employment and/or training.

To achieve this aim the project attempted to overcome known barriers to participation such as a lack of appropriate childcare. In particular, it provided transport to and from the project, a crèche and a lunchtime meal.

The educational content of the course was based on units developed by the National Open College Network (NOCN). Two units covered the physical, mental and emotional development of babies during pregnancy and in early childhood, three units focused on parental and caring skills, two units focused on practical domestic skills and healthy living (diet, exercise etc.) and one unit on developing personal confidence and self awareness. In addition to this core curriculum, participants also had the opportunity to obtain a food hygiene certificate and a 'youth achievement award',

The project recruited two volunteers to support the teaching programme and involved input from other local young people's services in recruiting participants, delivering specialist teaching units and providing advice and information relevant to the young people's needs.

By the end of the project, eight of the young people had obtained qualifications. Reflecting their differential ability, some participants achieved more than others. Altogether:

- three young people completed four of the eight NOCN Progression award units;
- one young person completed five units plus the Food Hygiene certificate;
- two young people completed seven units plus the Food Hygiene certificate plus the Youth Achievement Award;
- one young person completed eight units plus the Youth Achievement Award; and
- one young person completed eight units plus the Food Hygiene Certificate plus the Youth Achievement Award.

All seven of the young people interviewed said that they intended to return to education and training in the future.

Interviews suggested that for participants the main outcomes were:

- A better knowledge and understanding of parenting and other life skills
- More confidence in themselves as parents and as adults in their own right

- Friendships with other young parents with whom they feel comfortable in talking about shared problems and concerns
- Knowledge of and access to a range of services for (young) parents
- A greater sense of direction in terms of what they will do next in their lives

The project can be said to have achieved its main objectives. The key success factors appear to have been:

- the enthusiasm, skill and “sheer hard work” of the project staff and volunteers and of the other tutors from other contributing organisations;
- the non-judgemental, open and empathetic approach adopted towards participants;
- the careful planning and delivery of learning materials including their flexibility such that young people of differential ability could learn at their own pace;
- the provision of facilities designed to overcome well recognised barriers to learning – in particular, the on-site crèche, transport, meals and the costs associated with these;
- the input of several different agencies to the project, combining skills and knowledge, and providing participants with access to an appropriate network of support services over the longer term

For NCY Trust and its staff, the project has been an extremely useful learning experience and as such one that stands the organisation in good stead in terms of its longer term goal of providing a one stop shop for teenage parents in Newham. The key learning points may be summarised as:

- a better knowledge and understanding of the characteristics and needs of the client group;
- a better knowledge and understanding of the qualification framework and of how to work with young people of differential ability in a workshop environment; and
- improved knowledge of and relationships with other relevant service providers

There appears to be a need for better teaching equipment and for a more logical timetable of delivery so that the units follow more closely the stages of parenthood from conception onwards. Consideration needs to be given as to how to engage young men more fully in the project and/or whether, in fact, the service is best targeted at young pregnant women and mothers alone.

Introduction

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the Newham Children and Young People's (NCY) Trust Teenage Parenting project. The aims and objectives of the project, as outlined in the 'Project Plan/Specification' (pp2-3) were to:

- “engage 10-15 pregnant women and new parents aged 16-19 yrs into a two and a half day a week course, for 12 hours per week for 10 weeks, running from October – December 2009.”
- enable participants to learn, develop and seek accreditation for a range of skills related to parenting, caring and healthy living
- provide a space and environment in which participants could reflect on and foster their own and their child's needs and well-being, building self-confidence and self-esteem
- “provide an opportunity for young parents to meet with their peers and decrease isolation levels”
- encourage and facilitate the young people's medium and longer term participation in education, employment and training

In addition to these client-focused goals, the project was intended to be a step towards NCY Trust's longer term aim to:

- “expand their work with teenage parents ... to establish a more sustainable project that will provide a one stop shop” for young parents.”

This report seeks to identify the extent to which these aims and objectives have been realised as well as how and why. The evaluation is based on an analysis of government policy for supporting vulnerable teenage parents; analysis of project records and monitoring data; observation of project workshops; and interviews with young people who participated in the project, one of the participants' parents, project staff and professionals from other organisations involved in the project.

The Policy Context

The welfare of young pregnant women and young mothers has been a longstanding concern for the current government with 'teenage pregnancy' being the focus of one of the first reports produced by the Social Exclusion Unit in 1999. That report “recognised that teenage pregnancy was both a result and a cause of poverty, low achievement and low aspirations and (w)as often associated with poor long term outcomes for young parents and their children.” (TPIAG 2008, p3) The policy that flowed from the report had two strands:

- To halve the number of under 18 conceptions by 2010 and establish a downward trend in the rate of under 16 conceptions
- To increase the participation of young mothers aged 16-19 in education, employment and training

In its annual report for 2007/8 the Teenage Pregnancy Advisory Group claims that considerable progress has been made in terms of reducing conceptions with “the teenage pregnancy rate (being)

at its lowest for over 20 years and ... falling in 89% of local authorities.” (ibid. p3) As regards the educational and economic activity of young parents, however, concern remains. The report records that 40% of teenage mothers have no qualifications and that 70% are not in education, employment or training or ‘NEET’. It is also noted that teenage pregnancy is concentrated in the country’s most deprived areas and that young mothers are twice as likely to be living in poverty.

These issues are further taken up in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance for local authorities and primary care trusts on teenage parenting. This estimates that there are around 50,000 mothers aged under-20 living in England, of whom over 80% are aged 18 or 19 and over 60% are lone parents. Set against the five ‘Every Child Matters’ outcomes for children and young people – ‘Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution & Achieve Economic Well-being’ – teenage parents, the guidance suggests, are particularly vulnerable. The report records for example that the children of teenage parents are have higher rates of infant mortality, are more likely to be born prematurely and have higher rates of admissions to A&E. It observes that already vulnerable young people, such as those in care or custody are disproportionately likely to be young parents and that teenage mothers experience higher rates of poor emotional health and well-being which have a negative impact in turn on their children. In tandem with the TPIAG annual report, the guidance notes that relative to 16-19-year-olds in general, young parents are both less likely to have had positive experiences of education, have obtained fewer qualifications and are three times more likely to be ‘NEET’ before, during and after the birth of their child. Moreover, this non-participation threatens over time to result in their disadvantage being “transmitted” to the next generation. “Children born to teenage mothers have a 63% higher risk of living in poverty, compared to babies born to mothers in their twenties” (2008, p15).

Again echoing the TPIAG report, the DCSF guidance concedes that while good progress has been made on reducing unplanned and unwanted teenage pregnancies, there is “less evidence that we are making similar progress on improving outcomes for teenage mothers and their children” (2008, p6). It calls for a ‘refreshed’, ‘broader’ focus on “all the issues that influence teenage mothers’ ability to build successful futures for themselves and their children”, in particular:

- the provision of tailored midwifery and health-visiting services;
- reaching out to the most vulnerable teenage mothers, and providing them with easy access to a broad range of support in one place;
- services geared towards “helping parents to cope with the challenges of early parenthood, by providing co-ordinated support from a lead professional who can act as an advocate for the young mother and father and put them in touch with any specialist support they may need”;
- support for young mothers who cannot live with their parents;
- more ‘attractive’ services for young fathers; and a
- “strengthening (of) the focus on helping teenage mothers to re-engage in EET.” (DCSF, 2008, pp6-7)

The need to target teenage parents alongside other disadvantaged and vulnerable young people is also highlighted in the DCSF and Learning Skills Council '16-19 Statement of Priorities and Investment 2010/11'. This re-emphasises the government's commitment to education and training for 16-19 year-olds in general, arguing that "it is vital for the wellbeing of individuals, society and the economy that young people participate in learning and achieve qualifications that will enable them to pursue full and productive careers and give them the best life chances" and pledging "nearly £8.5 billion in 2010-11 to fund learning for over 1.6 million young people – the highest level ever." In the context of a planned increase in academic achievement in general, the statement of priorities speaks of the need to "reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training by 2 percentage points by 2010 (from 9.7 per cent in 2004)" and to "narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from lower income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers." It further observes that "young people who are NEET will be likely to be those who face multiple barriers to their participation and need a different type of offer of post -16 provision to engage them in learning and keep them engaged. Such young people includes teenage parents, the document states and "flexible and responsive provision is essential if (they are) to be enabled to participate in learning." (DCSF & LSC, 2010, pp1-20)

What such 'flexible and responsive provision' consists of is also outlined in these and related governmental reports. Research commissioned by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit in 2005 into 'The Education of Pregnant Young Women and Young Mothers in England', for example, found that "specialist provision for pregnant young women and young mothers was most likely to lead to such young women continuing with their education post 16" and that the key features of such provision included "onsite childcare facilities; (the) academic, practical and emotional support offered; and the capacity to deal with post-birth issues". This report also noted the importance of non-judgemental, supportive, encouraging responses to young women and of providing participants some choice in how the educational process is handled. Being "respected and treated like adults" was significant as was the opportunity to be educated at the same time as knowing that the needs of their children were provided for (DfES 2005, pp1-5).

The DCSF guidance for local authorities and primary care trusts referred to above argues that at a general level there is "some clear evidence that: early identification, dedicated support from a lead professional; and an appropriately skilled workforce with access to specialist support where necessary, form the basis for an effective support package for teenage mothers" (2008, p24). Again the provision of childcare is crucial. The report cites evidence from an evaluation of the 'Care to Learn' programme (which provides financial support with childcare to assist young parents to engage in education or training) which found that "almost 90% of the 1,000 young mothers interviewed said that they would not have gone into learning" without it and concludes that "the biggest barrier to engaging in learning for young mothers is the cost of childcare" (ibid. p48). Further barriers identified include appropriate and affordable transport and the "lack of availability of foundation level courses and the difficulty of finding courses that are flexible enough to accommodate their needs as new mothers." Given such issues, the report urges responsible bodies to "develop a range of courses for young parents, including provision for those with low attainment" and to "ensure that pastoral support arrangements for teenage parents reflect the pressure of combining learning with the responsibility of looking after a young child" (ibid. p54).

The NCY Trust Teenage Parenting Programme

The elements of effective provision identified in the last section were echoed in the plan/specification for the NCY Trust project:

“ Connexions staff were involved with the previously funded ‘Parents with Prospects’ teen parent course (Oct-Dec 2008) and there it was evidenced that there is a market for young parents who are willing to engage in such a project, but do not feel ready to leave their children with an off-site childcare provider – therefore providing an on-site crèche addresses this barrier. The Parents with Prospects students clearly benefited from extra staff support with encouraging their attendance, assisting with coursework and receiving a non-judgemental, empathetic approach from staff used to dealing with this client group and the other issues that are common with this client group. This was essential in maintaining their participation and achievement on the course. Providing assistance with travel also addresses another common barrier – by providing taxis it assisted with attendance of those young parents who were still getting used to getting their children ready in the morning and being somewhere on time on a regular basis.” (2009, p2).

Accordingly, ‘free’ transport to and from the project, an on-site crèche (funded via Care to Learn) and a supportive, non judgemental ethos were key elements of the programme being evaluated. In terms of the educational content of the course, this was based on units developed by the National Open College Network (NOCN) for which NCY Trust has been an accredited provider for a number of years. In identifying appropriate units, the project sought advice and support from a project in a neighbouring borough with experience of delivering similar programmes for young parents – the Redbridge Young People’s Project. The latter were also involved in the delivery of certain elements of the programme as was the local branch of the National Health Service’s contraceptive and sexual health service for young people aged 24 and under – Newham Shine. The local Connexions service, which commissioned NCY Trust to deliver the project drawing on funds from the Learning Skills Council, was also a key partner particularly in identifying and referring young people to the project.

Within NCY Trust the project was coordinated and led by two members of staff. Both had other ongoing roles including work within the residential establishment ran by NCY Trust for vulnerable young people and whilst both therefore had extensive experience of working with young people this was the first time in which they had delivered this kind of project. Two volunteers were recruited to provide additional support to the young people during workshops as well as to take the lead on the delivery of some units.

Appendix A shows the timetable for the 12 week project. In essence each week involved two full days (10am – 4pm) of educational workshops with a free lunch provided and one half day in which there were visits to both local service providers and recreational outings to places such as the Museum of Childhood, the Sea-Life Centre, a pantomime and restaurants. Appendix B summarises the content of the eight units delivered during the course. In brief, two units covered focused on the

physical, mental and emotional development of babies during pregnancy and in early childhood, three units focused on parental and caring skills, two units focused on practical domestic skills and healthy living (diet, exercise etc.) and one unit on developing personal confidence and self awareness. In addition to this core curriculum, participants also had the opportunity to obtain a food hygiene certificate and a 'youth achievement award', the latter being "designed to help develop more effective participative practice by encouraging (them) to progressively take more responsibility in selecting, planning and leading activities that are based on their interests" (UKYouth 2010). The key feature of these kinds of qualification is that they are designed to "allow the learner to achieve at their own pace and build towards full qualifications overtime" (NOCN 2010) and so offer the flexibility identified above as a key criterion of educational provision for groups such as teenage parents.

Participants

Young people were referred to the project through the local Connexions service. Initially information was mailed out to all (200+) young people in the borough identified as eligible, i.e. aged 16-19, either pregnant or with a young baby and not in education, employment or training. Connexions Personal Advisers and in a few cases the project staff followed up these letters with phone-calls to young people encouraging them to consider the opportunity and inviting them to attend an initial session in order to find out more. Nine young people attended the induction session on 6/10/09 and over the next few weeks a further eight attended the project on at least one occasion. There was a shared feeling amongst project staff and other professionals interviewed for the evaluation that the recruitment process could have gone more smoothly so that, for example, all the young people had commenced at the same time. The main problem was that there was little time between the funding being agreed and the project starting and so as a result it was difficult to coordinate the referral process with some Personal Advisers involved to a greater extent than others. At the time of writing, a second 'run' of the project is due to begin shortly and it was reported that 22 young people were expected to attend the induction event, indicating that lessons from the initial 'referral experience' had been learnt and translated into a more efficient process second time round.

Of the 17 young people who were referred and attended on at least occasion, 13 were female and four male and most were aged 17 or 18 at the outset of the project. They included parents who had had their babies, two young women whose babies were born part way through the project and others whose babies were due after the cessation of the project. The group was also diverse in terms of their educational achievements with some having obtained several GCSEs from school, others having left with no qualifications. Most of the young people did not know each other when they joined the project with the exception of couples who attended jointly although only one of these pairs appears to have sustained their participation in the course (see below for further discussion of attendance).

The Views of Project Staff, Volunteers and Professionals from other Organisations

We now turn to the findings generated by meetings and interviews with various stakeholders concerning the delivery and outcomes of the project, beginning with the views of project staff, volunteers and professionals from other organisations before moving on to discuss the views of the

young people who participated in the project. This section is organised along the lines of the (flexible) interview schedules employed.

The establishment and organisation of the project

As mentioned already, neither of the two lead staff within NCY Trust had had direct experience of organising and delivering a project of this kind previously and so they described themselves as having been on a steep learning curve. Whilst they are both experienced youth workers and have worked with young pregnant women and young parents in other contexts, the logistics of setting up the new programme – preparing the learning materials, liaising between the various agencies responsible for delivering particular units, organising the crèche, preparing lunch, responding to the diverse practical, emotional and educational needs of participants, organising visits to other agencies and recreational outings, recruiting volunteers etc. - had proved challenging if ultimately extremely rewarding. This was particularly the case because, as noted above, the time between obtaining funding for the project and the start date was very short. This meant for example that the course timetable had to cater for the fact that some of the people responsible for delivering units could only do so at particular times which in turn meant that the staff and volunteers at NCY had, in part at least, to ‘fit in’ those aspects of the programme for which they were responsible where there were gaps. In short, whilst certainly of the view that the project had been a success, project staff emphasised that they would do things differently given more time to prepare and based on the lessons learnt from the experience.

The volunteer interviewed for the evaluation, a former Primary School teacher, had been recruited to work specifically on this project. As with the Project staff, she emphasised that the project had been a great learning experience for all concerned and that one of the challenges had been the limited time in which to prepare. For example, asked what might be changed if the project were running again, she said:

“I think it was all put together in a bit of a hurry. I think that they’ll feel much more confident about delivering it all again and I think that they’d really like to do it, it has been a huge learning curve for them because they’ve never done anything like this and I take my hat off ‘cos its far more complicated than I thought, the logistics of encouraging them all to be there at that time, setting up a crèche and the lunch and the space, the materials to teach them and the presentation , its been a huge piece of work ... so I take my hat off to what they’ve done.... Next time if they had more time – to prepare, to engage with the young people, that would be better, but considering how they had to do it, they’ve done it brilliantly.”

It is important to stress that whilst these ‘teething’ problems were highlighted by those leading on and directly involved in the project, the difficulties that they described were not in fact mentioned by either the participants or by professionals from other agencies, excepting that the representative of the local Connexions service spoken to acknowledged that the process of referring young people to the project would have been improved by more advance publicity. On the contrary, the high levels of satisfaction and approval with the project expressed by participants and non NCY staff signifies that the considerable pressure and strain involved in establishing the project were managed and contained and did not in fact adversely affect the experience of participants.

Aims and Objectives

Unsurprisingly, when asked about the goals of the project, NCY staff and other professionals basically outlined those described in the project plan and summarised in the introduction to this report. In terms of emphasis, however, there was a tendency to highlight the provision of a learning environment in which the young people would feel relaxed, secure and supported and able to think and reflect upon their own needs as well as those of their children. Interviewees commented on the vulnerability and possible isolation of young parents and so of the importance of the project as a place where they could share experiences and problems with one another. Also stressed was the aim of providing support beyond the educational component –with health, housing and financial needs for example. In some ways, this emphasis on aims that go beyond the delivery of education and training reflected the longer term goal of establishing a ‘one stop shop’ for teenage parents that would reflect and meet their changing and diverse needs over time. Related to this and as already stated, interviewees saw the project as a learning experience from which lessons could be drawn and applied over the longer term.

Successful features of the Project

In many ways interviewees comments on what had worked well over the course of the project echoed what they saw as its goals as summarised in the previous section. Thus, for example, the very fact that in such a relatively short space of time the project and the various components of it as summarised so far had been established was viewed as a considerable achievement. Secondly, the fact that a core group of the participants had remained engaged with the project at a time when so much was going on in their lives was viewed as significant. This was exemplified in the case of two participants who had both given birth during the course of the project yet had returned to complete the programme. Thirdly, the support which the young people had offered each other was viewed as a positive outcome and as a reason for as well as a factor in its success. One small example of this occurred when a number of the participants had voluntarily gone along with one of the group to register her new baby. More general was the mutual support offered within and outside workshops with completing portfolios, with issues arising in the care of their children and in relationships with significant others. These observations are captured to an extent in the following comments:

“I think they could have been quite isolated and on their own and unless they knew where to go to meet up with young mums there tends to be a stigma still, when they get their hair done, when they go to the supermarket, everything, I think they get treated a little differently and I think they can share their experiences here and start to get on with life and start to look forward to the future.”

“Their camaraderie is great, the support that they have given each other as, fairly isolated young mothers. I think it has given great structure, opportunity to meet each other and not to be alone and some of them have come week in and week out and really tried hard, it’s given them a kind of learning opportunity, to learn things that are really useful to them and they’ve really put their hands to it and I don’t know the backgrounds but it seems that some of them have struggled with school, struggled with life in lots of different ways so it has given them a great shared focus and the camaraderie that they have been able to put together.”

“Bonding as a group and to keep coming back. Continuing coming, keeping turning up, not falling off, continuing to make contact even if they can’t come.”

A fourth successful feature concerned the organisation and delivery of the learning units. One professional from an organisation in a neighbouring borough with experience of this type of work had observed some of the sessions and commented to the effect that the course was structured around the needs of the young people and had engaged them by relating what was being taught to their individual needs and circumstances. Also noted was that the presence, normally, of at least two ‘tutors’ in the workshops had meant that the young people could be supported on a one to one basis and could progress at their own pace, very important given their differing levels of academic ability and confidence. Such comments chimed with the researcher’s own observation of one of the workshops. This revealed how comfortable the participants were in the learning environment; their engagement in the session – asking questions and joining in discussions; how they helped each other with exercises and tasks; and the usefulness of having an additional ‘tutor’ in the room to assist individuals with particular tasks. The advantage of the on-site crèche was also brought home by the fact that one parent temporarily left the classroom in order to go and feed her baby and then returned and resumed where she had left off. A final but important observation was the relaxed, friendly and happy atmosphere in which all this took place.

A fifth feature of the project commented on by those not directly involved related to the input of the two project coordinators. In part this concerned the sheer hard work involved but it also referred to their effort to include the young people in all aspects of the project. Thus one interviewee emphasised the “expertise” and “passion” which the two workers had invested and another commented as follows:

“I think the people who’ve planned it all have worked their socks off to make this whole project work, and each and every day that they do things with young people, making it a positive experience for them; they’ve very much included them in much of their planning, including what they want to eat for lunch, and they’re giving them opportunities to go out and do really nice things – Bethnal Green museum of childhood, the aquarium, going to a pantomime, out to meals – not expensive but lot of organisation for young Mums with buggies, bus fares and so on - and they’ve really tried hard to give them positive opportunities.”

Related to this was a sixth feature, namely the support offered to participants in areas of their lives that were not a direct concern of the project, including housing, benefits and health. In specific cases, the project coordinators had referred individuals onto relevant agencies or made appointments on their behalf. More generally, as the programme included inputs from and visits to other organisations such as Newham Shine, participants were gradually provided with information about a range of services which they could access if and as and when necessary.

A final feature to comment on concerns the efforts made by the project to help participants plan for their future. One of the project coordinators explained:

“At the moment I’m trying to set up their move-on path with the different things they want to do. One of them - gonna get her back started with her GCSEs, another one wants to start

doing accountancy so trying to get a pathway for them to follow from January. I'm liaising with X who is a Connexions PA and I've also got my own knowledge as well. I've got one of them who wants to go direct into employment. It's about not trying to put them all in one box but trying to get them in a line for what they have said they want to do."

So as other interviewees commented, the project was very much geared towards helping participants think about their plans for the future and facilitating as far as possible the transition into education, training and employment in the medium and longer term. As part of this, the project coordinators were organising a reunion amongst the young people at some time in the future. Insofar as possible, the intention was for the young people to continue to see NCY Trust as a place they could seek advice and support from beyond the lifetime of the project.

Problems and Challenges

As discussed already, the main difficulty faced by the project concerned the fact that there was relatively little prior experience within NCY Trust of delivering such an initiative, relatively little time available for preparation of the course and a number of different organisations, each with limited availability (at short notice), delivering elements of the course. Related to all this was the challenge of working with this particular client group. Thus one interviewee commented:

"What hasn't gone so well is, with hindsight and for me - and it's been, again, a great learning opportunity for me - is what a difficult group of young people to engage with because they ... the problems they have got in their life are just so enormous... There is one (young woman) in particular who is so confident and so able and yet was just so downhearted the other day - because she was having difficulty sorting out her housing, difficulties with relationships with her ex boyfriend, parents..., just the day to day managing with a small baby... and the nature of the group, of aiming at teenage parents ... means it's really difficult to engage with them week in week out - they've got housing problems to deal with, health visitors coming, hospital appointments, housing appointments, benefit appointments, just managing, so they don't manage to get there day in day out which is difficult because every day there may be a different cross section of the group."

So managing to keep participants on track with the course was problematic for the simple reason that even those who participated throughout the programme could miss odd days and sessions owing to the other demands on their time as young parents (and parents to be). At the same time, because the group included people with a wide range of abilities, this too presented a challenge to tutors who had to both deliver a more or less fixed curriculum and allow for individuals to progress at their pace.

One interviewee identified a need for better equipment, for "the right tools for the job." This included more tables and chairs, a new TV and DVD player and more flip-charts. A final and more specific problem had occurred in one of the visits to a local service provider. In short the reception offered to the project participants had been 'cool' and left them with a negative impression of a potentially very useful service.

The Views of Participants

Seven young people were interviewed by the researcher, six in two groups of three and one on their own. Once again, their comments are organised according to the structure of the interview schedule.

Joining the project

In most cases the participants had initially received a letter and information about the project. Some had followed this up themselves or else they had subsequently received a phone call (from a Connexions Personal Adviser or from one of the project coordinators) encouraging them to attend. In a number of cases, the young people were intending to work in the field of childcare in the future and so the course had the double attraction of being relevant to their needs as parents and useful in terms of longer term job prospects. For others, the opportunity to learn about childhood development and develop their skills as a parent had provided the main initial motivation.

Course content and activities

Asked what they had been doing over the course of the programme, the young people described the content of the various units in the first instance and then when prompted, the recreational outings they had been on. The following comments were typical:

“Lots of knowledge that we need to know. Medical things. Practical things, using a washing machine, shown how to iron. What to do in emergencies. How to turn power off. Clothes, how child will develop, cooking, cleaning, appropriate toys, what to dress child in. Chart all the weeks – different things they can do. What to buy for them – how much you can end up spending on stuff you don’t really need.”

“Learning how to care for your child at certain ages. Health and well-being. What to expect each month as your child develops like at three months, a child smiles and can move her head. We’ve learnt that every child is different. We’ve also done stuff on healthy living – diet exercise, safety, that sort of thing.... Going on trips – places to go that are free; good places to take a toddler. We’ve been to the aquarium, the museum of childhood, out for a meal and to the pictures.”

“I don’t know how to describe it., We’ve been learning like, about stages of pregnancy, your hormones. Been learning about, after pregnancy, what your child’s allowed and not allowed and just stuff like that... On Fridays, they’ve taken us out on trips and stuff. Baby museum. A pantomime, a couple of other places”

Satisfaction with and Enjoyment of the Project

Without exception the young people the researcher spoke to described the project in very warm terms. They saw the course content as useful and relevant but when asked what they had found most satisfying they highlighted the friendships they had gained with each other and the opportunity to share experiences and problems with people in a similar situation. Again, the following comments are representative:

I've learnt lots of stuff I didn't know. I thought I knew everything already but I didn't - useful things that you can put into practice. Even things like if something happens and you don't know what to do, it's good to know other people who you could talk to, other people in a parenting situation – we can give each other advice.

“If I wasn't doing this, I'd be sat at home, miserable, whereas here I'm meeting other people.”

“It's brilliant to know that there's other people you can talk to without being judged.”

“Every morning I wake up and think oh yeah, let's go. There's lots of writing but it's enjoyable because you can talk, work in groups. I like it small (i.e. the group)... and whatever we say its confidential, we don't expect to hear it from anyone else!”

“Learning about stuff that I didn't know and meeting new friends”

Some of the young people contrasted the learning experience at the project with that they had received or expected to receive in a more formal environment. This appeared to reflect the skills-based nature of the qualification as well as the supportive nature of the teaching. For example:

“The work is fun, not boring. It's not like college or uni. (Why not?) Because, when we work, they don't make us feel like we're wrong. This one, whatever you say is right. There's no right or wrong.”

“It's different (to school), easier to study, it's not so noisy. It's easy to get on with everyone 'cos you know everyone here.”

Benefits over the longer term

Asked how they thought the project might benefit them over the longer term, the young people again highlighted the value of the learning, both in terms of themselves as parents and because of the qualifications they would obtain. In addition, some participants pointed to positive changes in their self esteem and confidence:

“They've told me about services and also put websites up so we can go on them if we want to. And numbers they've given us that we had to write down on sheets, things that we need to do when we've had the baby – it's nice to know what we'll have to do once the baby comes... I understand more about pregnancy and what I'm going to be going through, 'cos you can get all sorts of stories, some good some bad, but doing the course makes it much easier cos you know what you're going to be going through – there's a lot of useful stuff”

“I'm more confident as a parent and in myself. I would say I was more confident and that I should trust in myself – believe in self, just know that you are doing the best thing for your child.”

“Getting it (i.e a qualification) is important, something to fall back on. You can go back to the college and show that you have already got to a certain level. It will help in getting a job in childcare – it's going to help me next year when I do childcare at college.”

Successful Features of the Project

As well as describing aspects of the project which they had enjoyed and benefited from, the interviewees also spoke of things which appeared to have underpinned its success. In particular, the willingness of project staff and volunteers to respond to problems and needs was recognised

“It’s good that they get us a cab here and home and provide lunch. Not taking our money – that makes it easier!”

“I think that everything we need has been provided. Even if you’re having a problem with something they’ll help to sort it out. Like there was a couple who had no housing and they sorted it out with a Connexions worker so that they can go and have a meeting and stuff, and sort it out.”

“X is really nice – always running around for us, treats you on the same level.”

“Y has been brilliant, well they all have.”

As these comments hint at, the young people also referred to the provision of transport, of an on-site crèche, of a (free) lunch all of which was important in enabling them to attend and which they recognised was over and above that which would be available to them in mainstream education and training.

“It’s good to be able to have the children here. When you go to college, you’re going to have to find a nursery which may not be on the same site and may not take babies until they’re 8 months old.”

Problems and Challenges

Asked if there had been any problems or if they would change anything, the participants were more or less stumped and when prompted, the only downside they identified was the relatively short length of the project. As one of them said, “I would make it longer, actually, yeah, ‘cos it feels like its gone so quick.” Or as another commented:

“Can we have it again next year? Not same thing though – at a higher level ... ‘cos next year they’ll (i.e. the children) be like, one....”

A Parent’s View

The researcher also spoke to one of the young people’s parents. Whilst their view cannot be assumed to be representative of all the participant’s families, it did correspond with the overwhelmingly positive comments of young people and of professionals not directly involved in the project. The mother explained that her daughter had been bullied at school over a period of five years, had no confidence and had suffered, as a direct result she said, from anorexia. For her daughter, the project had been “fantastic!” She said that both the other young people on the project and the ‘teachers’ had been “lovely” and that in the space of a very short time her daughter had gone from being very isolated to being much more confident and happy. As with the young people interviewed, she expressed regret that the project had been “too short” but overall, “I have not got

a bad word to say about it – everyone has been very supportive” and the transformation in her daughter had been almost miraculous.

Conclusion

At the end of the project, eight of the young people obtained qualifications. Reflecting their differential ability, some participants achieved more than others. Altogether:

- three young people completed four of the eight NOCN Progression award units;
- one young person completed five units plus the Food Hygiene certificate;
- two young people completed seven units plus the Food Hygiene certificate plus the Youth Achievement Award;
- one young person completed eight units plus the Youth Achievement Award; and
- one young person completed eight units plus the Food Hygiene Certificate plus the Youth Achievement Award.

All seven of the young people interviewed said that they intended to return to education and training in the future. Most planned to obtain a qualification in childcare and one pursue a long held ambition to become an accountant. Whether or not these aspirations are met cannot of course be known at this stage but by obtaining the qualifications they have the participants have clearly moved a step further forward. Given the extensive evidence documented earlier concerning the disadvantages facing teenage parents in respect of entering employment, education and training, this is potentially very significant.

As the interviews have evidenced, the young people have gained much besides the qualifications from their participation in the project. These outcomes include:

- A better knowledge and understanding of parenting and other life skills
- More confidence in themselves as parents and as adults in their own right
- Friendships with other young parents with whom they feel comfortable in talking about shared problems and concerns
- Knowledge of and access to a range of services for (young) parents
- A greater sense of direction in terms of what they will do next in their lives

This ‘good news’ needs to be qualified. The evaluation has clear limitations. Little can be said about the reasons why a significant number of young people who were referred to and attended the project did not sustain their participation and it is worth observing that of the four young fathers who came along, only one stayed the course. It is also likely that just as some of the young people obtained more qualifications than others, so some will have gained more in other ways – the positive outcomes listed above are therefore a generalisation. Likewise how long the benefits will last is unknown and there is a concern that without the considerable extra support provided by this

project, these young people will find it much more difficult to engage in education, training and employment over the medium and longer term.

Yet given the evidence documented, it would be perverse not to conclude that the project has successfully achieved each of the aims set out at the beginning of this report. It is also possible to identify the key elements of this success, namely:

- the enthusiasm, skill and “sheer hard work” of the project staff and volunteers and of the other tutors from other contributing organisations;
- the non-judgemental, open and empathetic approach adopted towards participants;
- the careful planning and delivery of learning materials including their flexibility such that young people of differential ability could learn at their own pace;
- the provision of facilities designed to overcome well recognised barriers to learning – in particular, the on-site crèche, transport, meals and the costs associated with these;
- the input of several different agencies to the project, combining skills and knowledge, and providing participants with access to an appropriate network of support services over the longer term

It is of course precisely these factors which national and local evidence has suggested should be incorporated in the design and delivery of education and training services for young people. For NCY Trust and its staff, the project has been an extremely useful learning experience and as such one that stands the organisation in good stead in terms of its longer term goal of providing a one stop shop for teenage parents in Newham. The key learning points may be summarised as:

- a better knowledge and understanding of the characteristics and needs of the client group;
- a better knowledge and understanding of the qualification framework and of how to work with young people of differential ability in a workshop environment; and
- improved knowledge of and relationships with other relevant service providers

Accordingly, it follows that the organisation has in the course of the project accumulated a range of skills, knowledge, learning materials, information and contacts which will inform future activity with young parents. There are things which could have gone better and it is to be hoped that a higher proportion of young people referred to the project in future will sustain their engagement and obtain qualifications. There appears to be a need for better teaching equipment and for a more logical timetable of delivery so that the units follow more closely the stages of parenthood from conception onwards. Consideration needs to be given as to how to engage young men more fully in the project and/or whether, in fact, the service is best targeted at young pregnant women and mothers alone. Finally, it is worth observing that the considerable demands that the project made on staff and in particular the two project coordinators. It is principally through their commitment and perseverance that the project achieved what it did and they appear to have gone, as it were, beyond the ‘call of duty’. It is probably unrealistic to expect that such dedication could be sustained

over the longer term. Hopefully, with so much learnt and now in place, a more 'normal service' can be resumed.

References

DCSF & LSC (2010) 16-19 Statement of Priorities and Investment 2010/11 London DCSF

DCSF (2008) Teenage Parents Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trust
London DCSF

DfES Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2005) The Education of Pregnant Young Women and Young Mothers
in England London, DfES

Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group (2008) Annual Report 2007/8 London, Department
for Children, Schools and Families

Appendix A: Project Timetable

Date	Week	Activity
28 th Sept		Enrolment
Tues 6 th Oct	1	Course starts - induction
Wed 7 th Oct		Intro and get to know you session
Fri 9 th Oct		Trip to Museum of Childhood
Tues 13 th Oct	2	Intro to Developing Skills for caring for your Child
Wed 14 th Oct		Portfolio work
Fri 15 th Oct		Picnic in the Park
Tues 20 th Oct	3	Alternatives – Pregnancy and Prep. For baby
Wed 21 st Oct		Portfolio work
Fri 23 rd Oct		Chinese buffet lunch
Tues 27 th Oct	4	Caring for you baby
Wed 28 th Oct		Caring for your baby
Fri 30 th Oct		Halloween Activities
Tues 3 rd Nov	5	Understanding child development
Wed 4 th Nov		Understanding child development
Fri 6 th Nov		Youth centre activities
Tues 10 th Nov	6	Domestic Skills Trip to Oliver Thomas Children’s Centre
Wed 11 th Nov		Domestic Skills
Fri 13 th Nov		East Ham college & Connexions Visit
Tues 17 th Nov	7	Portfolios / tutorials / food hygiene / YAA (Symone 10am)
Wed 18 th Nov		Portfolios and tutorials / food hygiene
Fri 20 th Nov		Sea Life Centre trip

Tues 24 th Nov	8	Developing parenting skills
Wed 25 th Nov		Developing parenting skills
Fri 27 th Nov		Photo Shoot
Tues 1 st Dec	9	Portfolio / tutorials / food hygiene
Wed 2 nd Dec		Developing Confidence and Self Esteem
Fri 4 th Dec		Aladdin Panto at Stratford
Tues 8 th Dec	10	Healthy Living (11am Shine workshop) (inc l. portfolio work)
Wed 9 th Dec		Healthy Living (incl. portfolio work)
Fri 11 th Dec		Winter Wonderland trip
Tues 15 th Dec	11	Portfolio / tutorials / food hygiene
Wed 16 th Dec		Portfolio / tutorials / food hygiene
Fri 18 th Dec		Xmas shopping Romford
Tues 21 st Dec	12	Portfolio / tutorials
Wed 23 rd Dec		Christmas Party.

Source: NCY Trust

Appendix B: Summary of Units

1) Introduction to developing skills for caring for your child

In this unit you will learn about how and why it is important to look after your child's hair, skin, teeth and feet, at different stages as they grow up. You will be looking at what clothes they should be wearing depending on what age they are and in what weather. You will also be looking at what is important in a child's daily routine and why these things are important (like bath time and dinner time).

2) Understanding your pregnancy and Preparation for your Baby

In this unit you will be looking at how the baby grows during your pregnancy. You will learn about what antenatal care is, why it is important and where to go for ante natal care and also how to look after your health when you are pregnant. You will also look at what happens to your body and your emotions when you are pregnant and after the baby is born, and how to cope with these changes. You will learn about all the equipment you will need as soon as your baby is born, where to buy it and how much it will cost.

3) Developing Domestic skills

In this unit you will be able to learn / show that you understand what laundry labels mean and how to separate the things you put into the machine into different loads. You will be able to learn / show that you can use an iron safely. You will look at the different cleaning products that are in the shops and what products should be used where in the home and considering chemicals that will be harmful to your or your child. You will also learn about the different emergencies that may happen in your home and what to do, for example, if there is a power cut, or a gas leak.

4) Understanding Child Development

You will look at the changes in your child as she / he grows up and what toys would be best for them at different ages. You will be able to learn about why different toys are useful for your child to learn how to walk, talk, learn about colours etc. You will look at what child care options there are, how much they cost and what you think will suit your needs as you may decide to go back to college or to work. You will also look at what safety products you may need to think about to make your home safe for your child.

5) Caring for your Baby

In this unit, you will learn about the needs of your baby, learn about making a routine for your baby thinking about meal times, bed times etc. You will also look at what food your baby will eat as she / he gets older. You will learn about what help is available for new parents in your area and think about the health checks your baby will need as she / he gets older.

6) Introduction to developing Parenting skills

In this unit, you will be able to learn about the different roles a parent may take within your family. You will look at the basic rights your child has within their family. Also, you will learn about how

important it is to listen to your children and when and how to give your child choices about things. You can learn how to cope with difficult behaviour from your children and be able to look at your needs as a parent. You will be able to learn about how children learn from their families about daily activities and jobs and how you can help your child learn about these and make it fun.

7) Healthy Living

In this unit you will look at why it is important to stay fit and healthy and how you can do this, including having a balanced diet, getting good exercise, personal hygiene, sexually transmitted diseases and general lifestyle.

8) Developing Personal Confidence and Self Awareness

This unit, which will give you an NOCN Level 1 certificate, will look at occasions when you have felt confident and help you recognise how and when these feelings came about and what made you feel confident. You will look at behaviour which has made you feel uncomfortable, why this made you feel uncomfortable and what could have been done to make sure this does not happen again. You will be able to understand what makes you feel stressed, how you behave when you are stressed and what you can do to help you relax and cope better with the stress. Finally, you will learn about how to set yourself goals and achieve the things you want from life!

Source: NCY Trust

