



London Borough Barking and Dagenham

Start for Life – Strengthening Families

Strengthening Communities Programme Impact

report

August 2024

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Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Programme Impact report

Introduction

Race Equality Foundation was commissioned in early 2023 to provide its group based Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities parenting programme (SFSC) to parents and carers in London Borough of Barking and Dagenham under the Start for Life programme. SFSC is a group-based parenting programme delivered over 13 weeks through a weekly 3 hour session with activities to implement at home during the week.

The service has been commissioned for a two year period from 2023 to 2025 and this report covers Year One; from April 2023 to March 2024.

The data in this report comes from the six SFSC programmes that were delivered during this period. Programmes were delivered in different locations throughout the borough, all during the daytime on week days and to a range of different communities. This included one delivery in Bangla and five deliveries in English. All programmes had both childcare provided on site and lunch and refreshments available.

The programmes were offered to any parent or carer living or working in the borough who had at least one child under five (or were expecting a baby). This included, foster carers, grandparents, stepparent and any adult who was playing a significant caring role in the life of a young child.

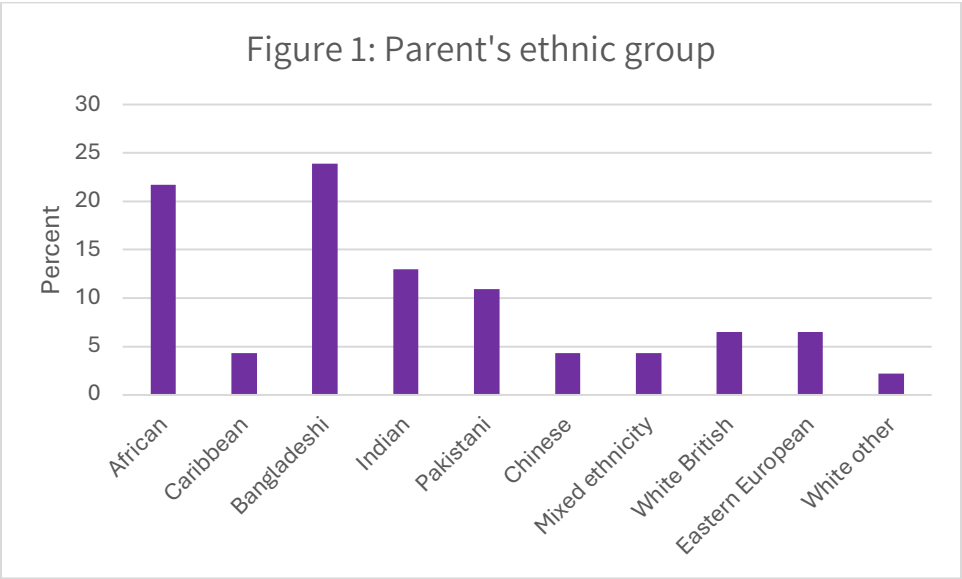
Recruitment to the programmes took place in a range of ways. Participants could be referred through workers and agencies (both statutory and voluntary) and could also refer themselves. In addition, community outreach was an important part of the recruitment process with the lead worker and her team of facilitators actively attending community settings and events to talk to parents about the programme and offering to register them.

All participants were asked to provide demographic information and to complete a questionnaire and the start and end of the programme (although not every parent completed all) to help us measure any change that had occurred during the 13 weeks of delivery. Questionnaires covered changes in parenting approaches and attitudes, parent-child interactions, parents' perceptions of their own parenting abilities and relationships, parents' perceptions of their child's abilities and questions on community engagement.

Demographic information

Ethnicity

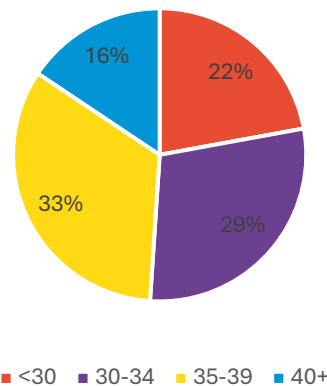
As shown in figure 1, 24% of the 47 participants attending the Barking and Dagenham course had a Bangladeshi and a further 22% had an African ethnic background. The ethnic backgrounds of the other participants were: Indian (13%), Pakistani (11%), Eastern European (7%), white British (7%), Caribbean (4%), Chinese (4%), ‘mixed’ (4%) or ‘white other’ (2%). Just under half of participants (44%) said their first language was English.



Age

The youngest person attending the course was 24 years old, and the oldest was 48. Just over one in five (22%) of attendees were aged under 30, 29% were aged between 30 and 34, 33% were aged between 35 and 39 and 15.6% were aged 40 and over (figure 2). All the parents attending the course were women.

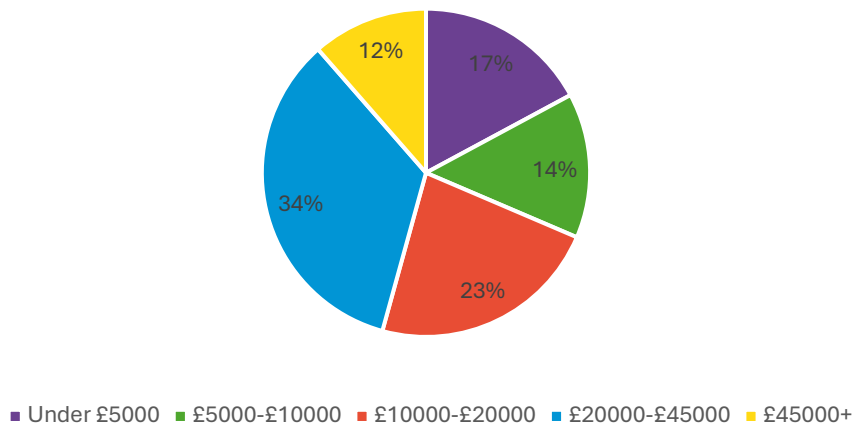
Figure 2: Parent's age (%)



Household Income

Just under one in five (17%) of the families attending SFSC programmes in Barking and Dagenham had an annual household income of under £5000 (figure 3), with a further 14% with annual household incomes of between £5000 and £10000. Just over a fifth (23%) of families on the programme had an annual household income between £10000 and £20000. A third (34%) of participants had an annual household income between £20000 and £45000, with a further 11% with annual household incomes over £45000.

Figure 3: Annual Household Income



Almost all the parents (89%) lived with at least one child aged between 0 and 2 years, and 53% lived with at least one child aged between 8 and 13 years of age. Over three-quarters (78%) were part of a two-parent family, and the rest were single parents. No grandparents,

stepparents, foster parents or people with other relationships to the children attended the course.

Over two-thirds of parents (69%) had never taken parenting class before. Parents in Barking and Dagenham most frequently mentioned joining the programme after receiving information from flyers or other announcements (38%). Almost a third of parents (30%) also heard about the programme from friends or relatives. Agencies were an important source of information about the courses for 16% of parents. No-one described hearing about the classes via newspapers or the radio.

Almost all (93%) of parents said, at the beginning of the course, that they were taking the class to become a 'better parent', with 13% saying that they were attending to try and resolve specific problems they were having with their children.

Impact of the programme: Changes in parenting approaches and attitudes

This section of the report aims to evaluate the impact of the programme by exploring how parents' social participation and engagement, and their perceptions of their own skills and parenting approaches – as well as their attitudes towards their children's abilities and family life – changed during that time, by focusing only on those parents who completed both the pre- and post-course questionnaires.

Establishing the impact of the programme in this way is complex. There is evidence, for example, that parents are frequently overconfident about their parenting skills and abilities at the time of enrolment in parenting courses, assessments which may become more realistic with increased engagement with the course. When parents have overestimated their abilities at the outset in this way, these analyses may show little change, or even a decline, in parental abilities and confidence over the period even in courses which have, in reality, been successful in improving parenting skills. Determining the extent to which this trend may impact on the findings presented here poses some limitations.

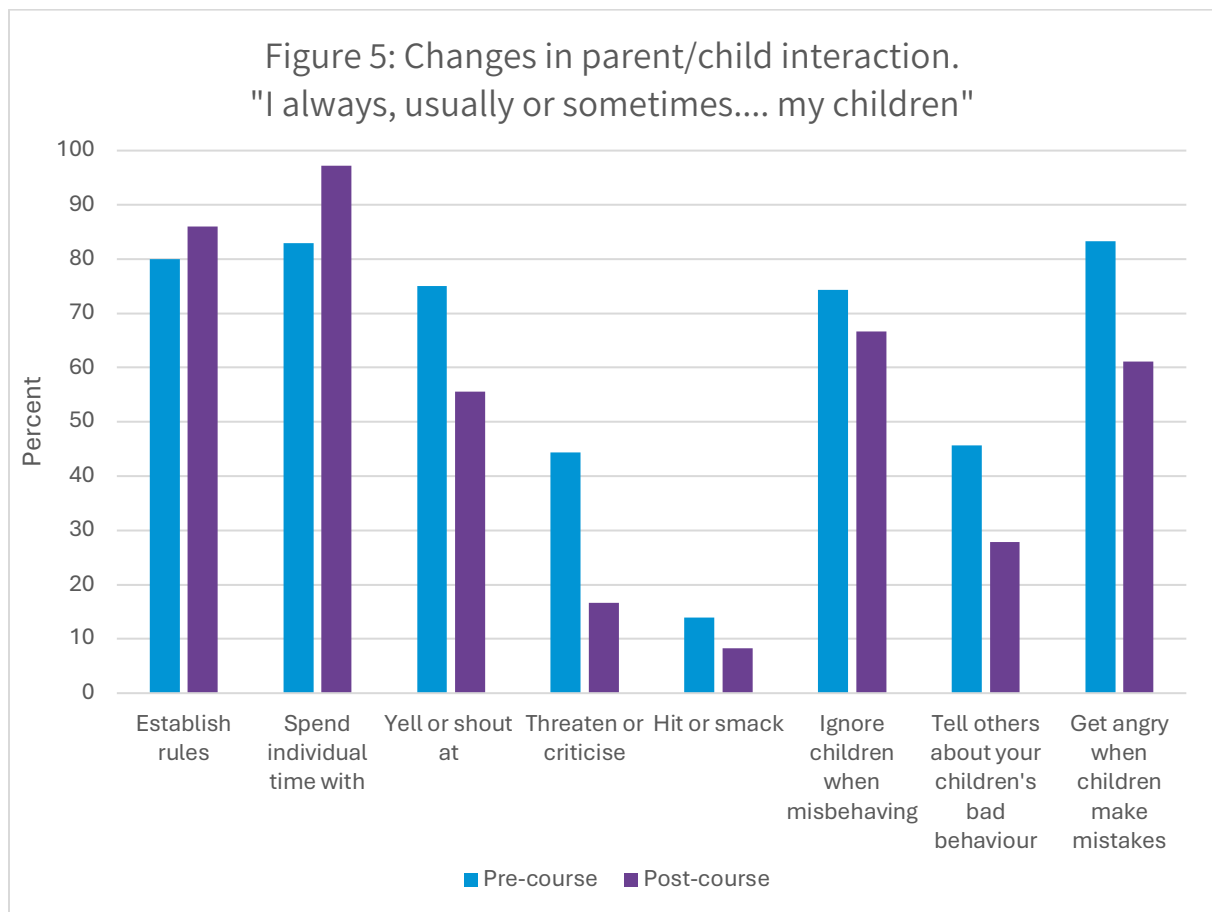
The following analysis refers to a number of questions that parents were asked about their parenting practices and their feelings about their own abilities and skills as parents, at both the beginning and end of the course.

Parent-child interactions

All the parents attending the Dagenham and Barking programme said that they 'always', 'usually' or 'sometimes', kissed and hugged and praised their children, at both the beginning and end of the programme. Over 90% of parents also said that they gave rewards to and had fun with their children at the beginning of the course, a figure which had risen to 100% by the end. The proportion of parents who said they always, usually or sometimes asked for their children's ideas and options and the proportion attending cultural events together remained

stable over the programme, the former rising from 84% to 97% and the latter remaining at 86%. As shown in figure 5, there was a small increase in the proportion of parents saying that they always, sometimes or usually worked with their children to establish rules rising from 80% to 86% over the programme. The proportion frequently spending time with individual children also rose from 83% to 97%. The proportion frequently spending time with individual children also rose from 83% to 97%.

There were more sizable changes in the proportions of parents reporting more negative forms of discipline over the course of the programme (figure 5). The proportion saying that they always, usually or sometimes yelled or shouted at their children fell from 75% at the beginning of the programme, to 56% at the end. The proportion who often got angry when their children made mistakes also fell, from 83% to 61%. While 14% of parents on the programme said that they frequently hit or smacked their children at the beginning of the course, this had fallen to 8% by the end. The proportion regularly threatening or criticising their children fell by almost two-thirds from 44% to 17%. The proportion of parents ignoring their children when they misbehaved at least 'sometimes' fell from 74% to 67%, while the proportion telling other people about their children's bad behaviour had fallen from 46% to 28% by the end of the programme.

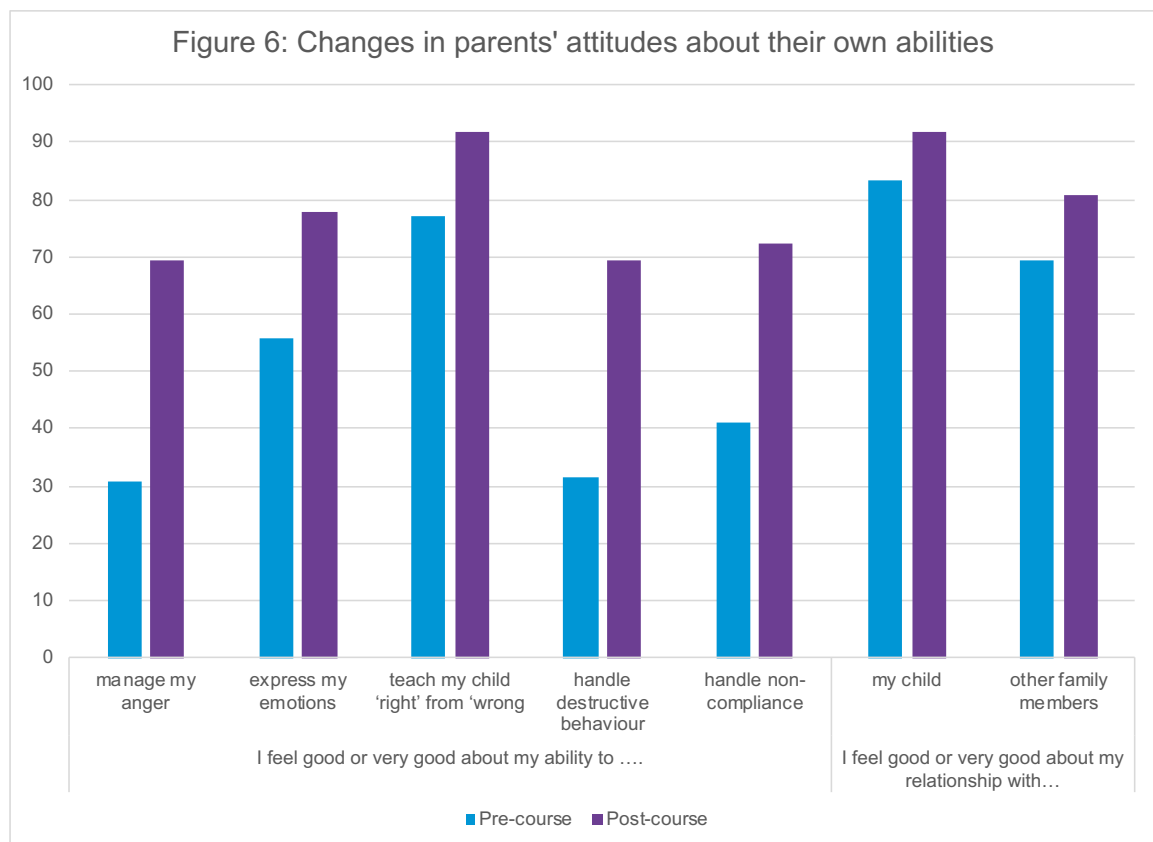


Parents' perceptions of their own parenting abilities and relationships

While over three-quarters of parents (77%) completing both the pre and post course questionnaires felt 'very good' or 'good' about their abilities to teach their child 'right from wrong' at the beginning of the course, this proportion had risen to 92% by the end (figure 6). At the beginning of the course, many parents described feeling much less confident in their abilities in other areas, with only 56% describing feeling confident in expressing their emotions, 41% feeling confident to handle their children non-compliance and fewer than a third feeling confident to manage their child's disruptive behaviour (31%) or their own anger (31%).

By the end of the course, the confidence expressed by these parents in these areas had grown considerably, with 78% feeling confident in managing their emotions, 72% feeling able to manage their child's non-compliance, 69% feeling able to manage their child's disruptive behaviour and 69% feeling able to manage their own anger effectively.

Parents' attitudes about their relationships also improved over the duration of the programme, with those feeling positive about their relationship with their child rising from 83% to 91% and those feeling positive about their relationships with other family members rising from 69% to 81%.

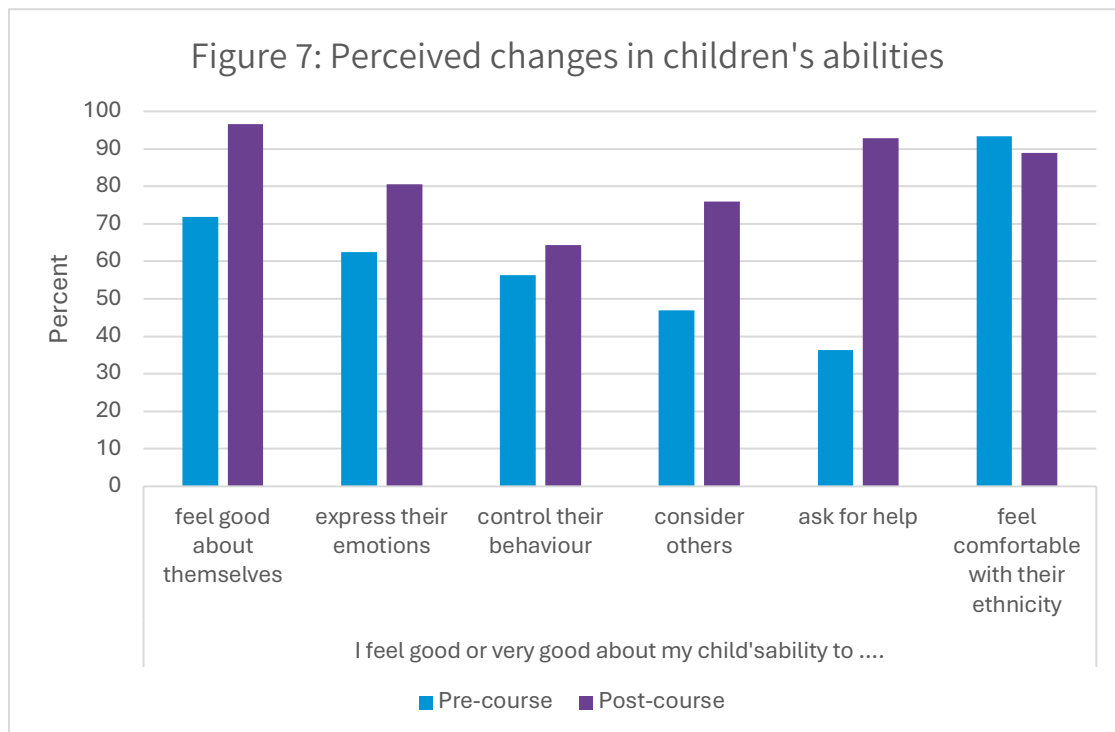


Parents' perceptions of their child's abilities

Parents were also asked about their perceptions of their child's strengths and weaknesses.

While the proportion of parents feeling 'very good' or 'good' about their child's ability to feel comfortable with their ethnicity remained consistent over the course of the programme, there were sizable increases in the proportions feeling positive about other aspects of their child's abilities (figure 7). The proportion feeling that their child could feel good about themselves rose from 72% at the beginning of the programme, to 97% at the end. The proportion feeling that their child would be able to express their emotions effectively rose from 63% to 81%, while the proportion of parents feeling that their child would be able to control their behaviour rose from 56% to 64%. Over three-quarters (76%) of the parents completing both the pre and post course questionnaires felt positive about their child considering others, while fewer than half (46%) felt similarly at the beginning. Almost all the parents completing both the pre and post course questionnaires felt that their child would be able to ask for help if they needed it by the end of the course (93%), compared with just over a third (36%) at the beginning. Finally, the proportion of parents feeling that their child would be able to ask for help if they needed it by the end of the course (93%), compared with just over a third (36%) at the beginning.

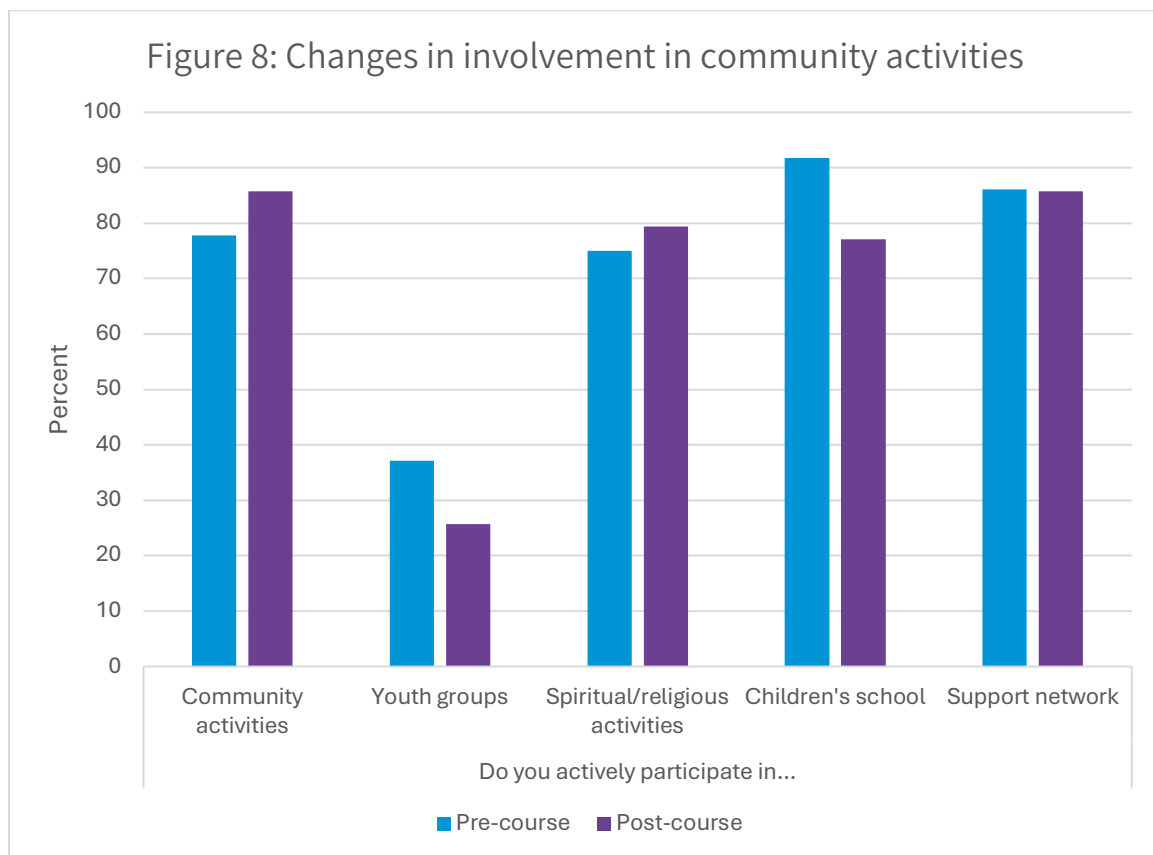
Again, it is difficult to disentangle the complex relationships underlying any apparent changes in these indicators, which might be related to changes both in the children's actual behaviour and in the parent's perception of that behaviour, both of which might have been influenced by attendance on the SFSC courses.



Community engagement

The change in the proportion of parents indicating that they participated in community activities between the beginning and end of the course was only marginal, rising from 78% to 86% (figure 8). There were also very small changes in the proportions indicating that they participated in spiritual or religious activities (rising from 75% to 79%). There was no change in the proportion of parents indicating that they had a support network of family and friends. The proportion of parents indicating that they were involved in youth groups declined from 37% to 25%, and the proportion saying they were actively involved in their child's school declined from 92% to 77% between the beginning and end of the course.

As has been highlighted already, with pre and post-test measures we know that it is possible for parents to overestimate on some of the questions they are asked, particularly for areas where they may lack an understanding or information. For the questions relating to community, this is an area that requires a longer period before we tend to see change, it is also a subject that parents sometimes struggle to provide an honest reflection of when we first engage with them and are much more accurate and honest in the post questions. This may in part explain why we do not see such positive change. This directly contradicts what facilitators see first-hand with parents who tend to become more active within community settings.

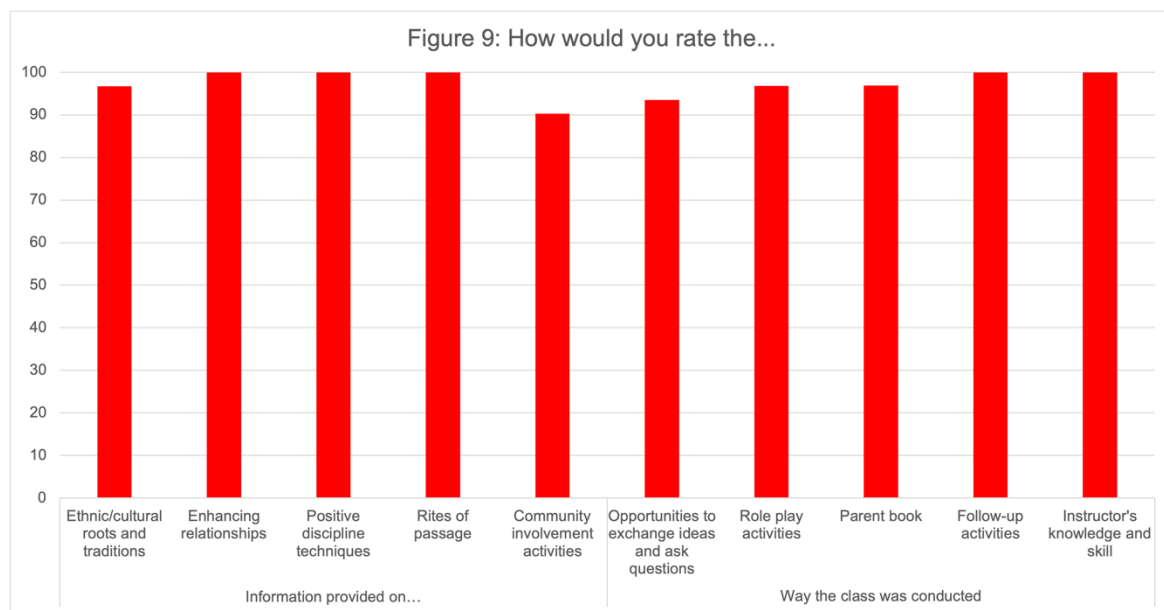


Course evaluation

Participants were asked to rate the course in a number of ways, exploring attitudes towards the information presented during the course and also the methods used to deliver it. All of the parents rated the information presented on enhancing relationships, positive discipline techniques, rites of passage, 97% of parents rated the information provided on ethnic or cultural roots and traditions and 90% rated the information on community involvement activities as 'very good' or 'good' (figure 9).

In terms of the methods employed on the programme, all of the parents felt the instructor's knowledge and skills and the follow-up activities were 'very good' or 'good'. Almost all the parents also described the parent manual (97%), role play activities (97%) and opportunity to exchange ideas and ask questions in the class (94%) as 'very good' or 'good'.

All the participants said that they would recommend the class to other parents, and 94% said they planned to continue implementation after graduation.



Conclusions

The Barking and Dagenham SFSC programme attracted parents with a diverse range of ethnicities, language backgrounds and ages but were less diverse in relation to gender, having only attracted women. There was considerable diversity in the average household incomes of the group, although almost a third of participants had annual household incomes of £10,000 or less. The programme also only attracted parents, although there was a mix of people in single or two-parent headed households. Almost all the parents attending the programme had a child aged between 0 and 2 years of age, with around half (also) having an older child, aged between 8 and 13. The majority of parents had never attended a parent education course before, and almost all said that they were attending to become 'better parents'. A few also said that they were attending to try and address a particular issue they were experiencing in their parenting.

Looking at the changes in the reports of parents completing questionnaires at both the beginning and the end of the programme, the Barking and Dagenham SFSC programme has had particular success in supporting participants to adopt more positive approaches to child discipline in their parenting and rely less on approaches involving verbal or physical violence or threats. There were also clear improvements in parents' confidence to manage disruptive behaviour and non-compliance from their children and manage their anger and express their emotions more effectively. Parents' also felt more positively about their child's ability to have a strong sense of self-esteem, express their emotions effectively, consider others in their behaviour and ask for help when they needed it. Specific aspects of the programme - related to both its content and approaches to its delivery - were rated very highly, with several elements described as 'very good' or 'good' by everyone. All the participants said that they would recommend the class to other parents, with almost all of them planning to continue to implement the learning from this course in the future.

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