

Will "You Make the Difference" Make a Difference? - Training SureStart Staff and Speech & Language Therapists in Sandwell to deliver 'You Make the Difference' Courses - a Parent: Child Interaction Programme devised by the Hanen Centre

What is 'You Make the Difference' (YMTD)?

YMTD is a parenting skills course. It aims to help parents to communicate and interact with their children effectively - something that should enhance the relationship between a parent and child and promote children's social, cognitive and language development.

The course consists of 9 sessions, held over 9 weeks. For part of each session the course leaders talk to parents about how they interact with their children and about additional strategies they could use to enhance this interaction. For the remaining part, parents play with their children to give them a chance to put the new strategies they have learnt into practice. Video footage is taken of the play sessions with the aim of 'catching parents being good' - capturing moments where parents are 'in tune' with their children and creating the best possible environment for their child to learn. These moments are played back at the following session to help build parents confidence in the new strategies and to give them a chance to see the difference their behaviour makes to their children.

The course is designed to prevent rather than treat language problems and is aimed at children who could be at risk of developing a language delay rather than those who have been diagnosed as having one. Factors that would put a child at risk of developing a language delay include things such as economic disadvantage and social isolation. As such, many children living within areas covered by SureStart local programmes are at risk of language delay.

The course was devised by the Hanen Centre, a Canadian based organisation that helps young children with or at risk from language delay to communicate to the best of their abilities. The Hanen Centre is very well respected in the Speech & Language community.

In addition to delivering YMTD courses directly, the Hanen Centre delivers 3-day YMTD Training Workshops designed to teach other professionals to lead YMTD courses for parents. Given that YMTD is designed to prevent rather than treat language problems it does not need to be delivered by speech & language therapists, but can be delivered by early years workers and other community professionals.

YMTD Training Workshops in Sandwell

The Sandwell Speech & Language Department and Sandwell SureStart Programmes have heard a lot about the Hanen Centre and their YMTD course. Noting that the course is based on literature in the field of child developmentⁱ and that it should have a direct bearing on the SureStart objectives of "improving children's ability to learn" and to "increase the percentage of children with normal speech & language development" they decided to invite the Hanen Centre to deliver a series of YMTD Training Workshops for local SureStart staff and Speech & Language Therapists.

Three sessions have been arranged, two in May 2004 and one in September 2004. Up to 24 SureStart staff/ Speech & Language Therapists can attend each session

The cost of the training is £17,700. In addition, costs were incurred to cover a venue and refreshments for the training, organising the sessions and naturally delegates time away from work. Excluding staff time, the total cost of putting on the course is estimated as being £20,100. If all 72 places are filled, this will equate to £280 per person.

Has investing in the course been worthwhile?

Given the time and money invested in the training and the wish of the SureStart Programmes and Speech & Language Department to assess whether or not their belief in the course is justified an evaluation project has been planned. This will involve the following activities:

- ❖ Asking everyone who takes the course in May to complete a feedback form at the end of the training
- ❖ Contacting some of the people who have taken the course, six months down the line, to find out how the training has influenced their practice
- ❖ Asking SureStart staff who deliver a YMTD course to parents in 2004 to evaluate it. To facilitate this, an evaluation toolkit has been prepared. This requires course leaders to assess the way parents interact with their children at

the start of and at the end of the course, to collect feedback from the parents who attend the course and for them to reflect on how the course went.

- ❖ Independently assessing video's taped during YMTD courses to see if the training leads to changes in the way parents interact with their children.

It is early days in relation to this plan, and this is an interim report, which focuses on participants reactions to the YMTD Training Workshop.

What did participants say about the YMTD Training Workshops

The YMTD Training Workshops held in May 2004 were attended by 23 and 21 people respectively. 30 were SureStart staff, 10 were Speech & Language Therapists and 4 were Primary School Teachers. The feedback detailed below is based on questionnaires completed by these people at the end of the training.

Generally, people responded very well to the course and feel it will benefit local families.

What plans do trainees have to use YMTD in their work over the next 6 months?

18/44 people expressed definite plans to run a YMTD course in the next 6 months and a further 6 said they hoped to be able to do so.

Others were either unable to say without speaking to others in their team or felt they would use the approach in their work, but not by running an actual course for parents. Speech & Language Therapists feel it is unlikely that they will be able to run courses as their focus is on intervention rather than prevention.

This hopefully means that all 8 SureStart programmes in the Borough will look to offer at least one course, either independently, or working in conjunction with one another.

How do they think parents will respond to the course?

45% think parents will be very interested in YMTD and 55% think they will be mildly interested.

Interestingly, people see generating and sustaining parents' interest in the training as one of the things that will be hardest about running a course.

This suggests it might be worthwhile for the different SureStart programmes in the borough to work together to share ideas on how to promote the courses, or to run joint courses.

How do they think parents and their children will benefit?

Apart from "a lot", people feel **parents** will benefit in the following ways:

- ▶ By developing a skill that enables them to provide additional support to assist their child's development (15 people)
- ▶ By increasing their confidence in playing with their child (13 people)
- ▶ By enhancing the way they interact with their children (9 people)
- ▶ By enriching the relationship they have with their children (6 people)

It will be interesting to cross reference this against the feedback from parents after courses are delivered.

They feel the course will benefit **children** by:

- ▶ Increasing the amount and quality of interaction with their parents, which should enhance their relationship (10 people)
- ▶ Improving language skills (8 people)
- ▶ Increasing their confidence & self esteem (8 people)
- ▶ Providing additional learning opportunities (7 people)
- ▶ Increasing their ability to communicate (5 people)
- ▶ Giving them a head start (4 people)

Again, it will be useful to cross reference this to feedback from parents after their training.

How do they feel the training has benefited them?

People feel the training has benefited them in the following ways:

- ▶ By enhancing their own knowledge and skill base (11 people)
- ▶ Giving them something that will help improve the way they interact with children (9 people)
- ▶ Providing them something else to offer the families they work with (7 people)
- ▶ Helping them develop a greater understanding of the importance of the parent: child relationship (4 people)

They feel they will take a lot from the course, in particular:

- ▶ The confidence to run a YMTD course (6 people)
- ▶ Tips on how to help enhance parent: child interaction (5 people)
- ▶ Enthusiasm for the course and a belief that parents can make a difference (5 people)
- ▶ Coaching skills & understanding of how to give non-threatening feedback (3 people)

How do trainees feel about the prospect of running a YMTD course?

Generally positive - **19% said they feel very confident, 65% feel fairly confident and 16% feel quite nervous.**

Those who feel nervous feel that way because it represents something new and many haven't trained or presented to a group before. Many said they would feel better once they got going and that the second course was sure to be easier.

Those who feel confident see the course as a simple, easy to understand approach, that they have been well trained in and provided with the tools they will need.

Anecdotal feedback suggests that a number of people attending the workshop knew very little about the content of the course and what they were being trained to do before attending. Given that training and group facilitation is not something that everyone is cut out for programmes should think carefully about who attends the course

in September to ensure the programmes will be in a position to obtain maximum benefit from the time and money they are investing in the training.

91% said they now have all or most of the skills needed to run a YMTD course for parents. Those who feel they only have some of the skills needed either had concerns about their confidence, knowledge of the leaders guide or how to use video. Generally, the skills that trainees feel they need to develop further are:

- ▶ Use of a video camera (17 people)
- ▶ Confidence/ presentation skills (8 people)
- ▶ Coaching skills (7 people)

The use of a video camera is obviously something that people can and should practice before starting a course. This, and their confidence/ presentation skills will hopefully develop over time, and most plan to run the course in pairs, which should help. We do not know how parents will react to the idea of being video'd but should be prepared to reassure and deal with any concerns parents have about this aspect of the training.

It is good to see that most people seem to feel confident about their coaching skills given that this is key to the impact the course makes on parents. It will be useful to follow this up during the six month review to see if people find coaching as simple as they hope it will be. It will also be useful for people co-facilitating sessions to give one another feedback about their coaching technique to enhance one another's skills.

People were asked **what they thought they would find difficult about running a course.** Responses differed between SureStart staff and Speech & Language Therapists.

The key concern for Speech & Language Therapists was that their focus is intervention rather than prevention meaning it will be difficult to secure funds, a venue and the childcare required to run a course. Some expressed an interest in working with SureStart to deliver courses.

The SureStart staff felt a variety of things would prove challenging:

- ▶ 12 think it will be difficult to get parents interested and to sustain their interest across the 9 weeks of the course
- ▶ 8 think it will be difficult to find the time and manpower required to run a course

- ▶ 4 think finding funding will be difficult
- ▶ 4 think time keeping on the course will be difficult

People would like the following additional support to run a YMTD course:

- ▶ practical support - including funding, venues and staff to provide childcare (14 people)
- ▶ to deliver training in pairs (7 people)
- ▶ Ability to network with others who have completed the training (4 people)
- ▶ back up from Speech and Language as required (3 people)

1 person indicated that they would like language assistance, but it is not clear if this refers to support from the Speech & Language Department, or help working with parents who do not speak English.

Another mentioned that he/she would like to see a co-ordinated boroughwide prevention strategy.

Conclusion

Initial reaction to the training has been very positive. However it is important to monitor if the training workshop leads to training for parents and the success of this training - hence the further evaluation planned.

As mentioned, anecdotal feedback suggests that a number of people knew very little about the content of the training or what they would be trained to do before attending the workshop. Now that programmes know more, they should think carefully about who attends the final workshop in September to ensure the people trained are those who will be/ feel able to make most use of the YMTD approach.

The training workshops were only possible due to the Borough's SureStart programmes and the Speech and Language Department working together. It seems it would be beneficial for them to continue to work together:

- ▶ to share physical resources such as video cameras
- ▶ to give peer support to those running training courses

- ▶ to share ideas and experiences about what makes a YMTD course work and how to get parents interested
- ▶ to run joint courses if appropriate, given the concern that getting enough parents interested will be a challenge

If such co-ordination is to happen though, someone will need to take responsibility for this...

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ⁱ At present, we are not aware of any evaluation evidence that shows the value of YMTD training per se. However, as mentioned, the programme is based upon literature in the field of child development. Two particularly interesting sources of information are detailed below:

1. A review of the book "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children" by Betty Hart and Todd Risley (1995, published by Paul Brookes) reviewed in WigWag - Winter 1998 - a publication of the Hanen Centre reports that economic advantage/ disadvantage is the key determinant of a child's vocabulary development. It is important because in homes with high socio economic status more talk is directed toward children, the talk tends to be richer (e.g. more different words, more past and future tenses) and parents maintain conversations for longer. The authors concluded that hours of exposure to language outside of the home would still not come close to compensating for the words not experienced at home and as such, parent intervention programmes, rather than professional intervention were required. A successful intervention is cited which contains a parent coaching element, designed to help the parent improve daily interaction in the home and helping children communicate by being their 'play partner' - factors prominent in the YMTD approach.
2. An article on "Using Home Videotapes to Strengthen the Parent-Child Relationship" by Professor Victor J Bernstein, Department of Psychiatry, University of Chicago, Newsletter of the Infant Mental

Health Promotion Project, IMPrint, Volume 20, Winter 1997-8. This describes a parenting programme that uses videotape to help parents understand how they and their child communicate - something which the authors feel has worked extremely well and they believe helps strengthen the Parent-Child relationship. Video taping and review is also an important element of the YMTD approach.