

Background to setting up the project. Partners and trainers.

Child-to-parent abuse (CPA) can be defined as *any act of a child that is intended to cause physical, psychological or financial damage to gain power and control over a parent/carer.* (Cottrell, 2001)

CPA is a significant and widespread problem (*How widespread:* Quantitative surveys conclude that 7-18% two parent families and 29% of one parent families are affected, Qualitative surveys conclude that 4% of all families seriously affected) requiring urgent attention. However, publication on the subject and how to best intervene is still very limited and conflicting. Parents' experiences are often misunderstood and minimised, and the shroud of shame and silence around these families contributes to their isolation and feelings of self-blame (Gelles 1981).

In Brighton and Hove, workers were encountering families struggling with abusive young people for whom there was no specific intervention. Interested professionals across several agencies (Rise – a Women's Aid Organisation, Family Intervention Project, Youth Offending Team, Targeted Youth Support Services, Children and Young People's Trust (CYPT)) decided to get together to address this issue. The resulting programme, **Break4Change**, born out of their effective cooperation and resources generously contributed, is designed for parents whose adolescent sons or daughters act in violent and abusive ways, and for the children themselves. Eddie Gallagher, an Australian social worker with twenty years of experience in working with CPA, contributed generously with the material he designed for working with abused parents.

The first programme was piloted from February to April 2009. It consisted of two 8-week programmes running concurrently: one for parents, one for young people aged between 13 and 16.

The second programme started on the 30th September 2009 and is in progress and was for parents and one for young people aged between 11 and 16.

Programme summary including aims and objectives

Following analysis of the pilot, the new Break4Change programme consists of 2 parallel groups, one for parents, the other for young people, running for 12 weeks (increased from 8 following revision due to the pilot's conclusions) with a strong creative element brought in by Audioactive (a young persons music organisation), to be expanded to 2 sessions of the parents group as well.

The programme follows a Brief Solution Focused approach, with pre/post assessments and interviews to assess suitability and progress. We insist on referrers' continued support throughout and following the intervention. Participants should be at least at pre- / contemplation stage on the cycle of change (Di Clemente)

Aims of Break4Change for Parents and Young People:

- Reduce parent's feelings of isolation, and young people's feelings of entitlement
- Challenge parent's feelings of guilt and deterministic thinking about causes (e.g. "I/he/she can't help it because of A.D.H.D". or "father was violent")
- Create belief in possibility of change.
- Clarify boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and balance entitlement with responsibilities.
- Examine strategies for creating meaningful and practical consequences for unacceptable behaviour/ for alternative to abuse
- Reinforce progress and provide emotional support while they attempt to become more assertive parents / non abusive young persons.

- Explore anger, both children's and parents'
- Encourage assertiveness and self care
- It is expected that parents will feel less depressed and powerless by the end of the course and that the amount of violence and abusive behaviour will decrease in a majority of the families.

Details of sessions for the young people's programme:

Session 1 – working agreement, strength and resilience

Session 2 –Abuse & anger. Definitions, triggers etc.

Session 3 – Recognising behaviour, Excuses, Cost/benefits of behaviour.

Sessions 4&5 – Behaviours, evaluating values and beliefs

Session 6 – Review, motivation for change

Session 7 – Relationships

Session 8 – Influences: media, peers and family

Sessions 9 , 10 and 11 – Strategies to reduce abuse

Session 12 – Feedback and ending

Creative sessions with Audioactive follow most programme sessions. Work includes lyric writing on CPA issues and film work to develop young people's interview skills, crafting questions to bring out views and feeling about CPA, aiming to have some young people interview some of the parents, to help them see a different perspective and develop empathy.

Details of sessions for the Parents programme:

Session 1 - Intro to programme, group rules, overview, differences expected after B4C

Session 2 - Communication, Anger, hurt, need, fear, Volcano, Drama triangle,

Session 3 - Goals. Influences, Causes of child behaviour

Session 4 - What is abuse, time out, self talk, thought switching, Realistic expectations

Session 5 - What you do for your child. Consequences

Session 6 - Parenting styles, Parenting behaviour

Session 7 - Drug, Alcohol, Sex , Handling difficult discussions

Session 8 - Anger and Anger management, parents and children's

Session 9 - Assertiveness

Session 10 - Needs. Showing love and care.

Session 11 - Self-care, Support, Future goals

Session 12 - What has changed . Ending. Certificate

Referrals:

From the thirteen original referrals, administered by FIP,

7 parents/carer and 5 young people started the pilot programme and stayed engaged.

Pilot participants gender breakdown:

6 parents 1 carer (5 women, 2 men)

5 young people (2 boys, 3 girls)

In the second group in September 09 group, administered by the TYS team.

13 parents and 8 young people were referred, by the following agencies: YOT, CAMHS, Parenting team, East Area Team, Linx-Falmer school, FIP, Connexion, TYS, Hove YMCA.

Evaluation. Outline process of evaluation and include outcomes

An independent worker evaluated the success of *Break4Change* according to the following criteria:

- The ability of parents to break the silence and isolation regarding CPV
- Parents' growing sense of empowerment regarding this issue
- Change in parenting behaviour and responses, parents becoming more assertive and more able to defuse and decrease escalation
- Parents increasing their awareness of the impact of their own behaviour on their son/ daughter
- Young people change in attitude regarding entitlement and responsibilities
- Young people able to use some strategies to stop their violent response

Questionnaires were filled pre- and post- intervention .

Facilitators met with all prospective participants and gave information about the programme, written information and consent forms, and helped the participants one-to-one to fill the entry research questionnaires. Baselines regarding levels of violence and quality of the relationship were provided by these intake questionnaires and the data we got from referrers regarding the participants. This data was then compared with post course questionnaires and semi-structured interviews data.

Analysis indicated that, immediately following the short intervention, most parents reported less violence and isolation, more assertiveness and a wider range of strategies to deal with their children's violent behaviour. Young people reported increased empathy, drastically reduced physical violence and increased satisfaction at home. Some had re-engaged with school.

The most important limitations of the pilot's evaluation were the small sample size, lack of a comparison group, and reliance on very short-term self reports, so initial conclusions are limited until we get further data at our 6 month evaluation.

Break4Change was effective in *initiating* change in parents and young people, as a considerable proportion of participants reported a reduction in violence. Follow up evaluations will aim to explore whether changes reported have been sustained over a period of nine months.

Our encouraging initial results show it is possible to reduce violence, when there is a focus on changing the values, beliefs and actions of participants by improving internal control, offering clear alternative strategies, increasing critical reasoning, and enhancing empathy.

Quotes from parents and young people

Parents reported on the relief to finally being able to access specifically designed support: "*We all had the same problem. We all thought we were alone. We are not. Its good to know...*" P1 "*I have been desperate for this course for years*" P7 , "*For 4 years I have been saying I need help, this is not working. The programme has been a life saver for me*" P3.

Friendships developed, facilitated by the depth of disclosures shared, the support offered, and the commonality of experience. "*You do build up a bond, we shared some really deep personal stuff, will be great to carry on as we built that bond, to carry on that support*" P3

Parents reported a changed perspective and a sense of empowerment regarding the abuse: "*I am a lot stronger in myself now, a lot more determined. Its been brilliant, my life has totally turned around by going on the course, its 100% better*" P2
"*i feel more in control of the situation*" P1

Self- Awareness improved: Parents accepted that their own behaviour might have contributed to the problem and needed to change:

" Trying to change things so you are not just responding or defaulting to old habits...trying to change the way I communicate...more detached, a bit more objective, trying not to get so caught up with things realising that its not all down with me, a lot of things she has to learn or work out for herself... Before I'd help her out or stop her from messing up her life or dropping out of college.... Now I've learnt to hand over some of the responsibilities, pointing out choices and responsibilities to her and getting a lot less involved" P3

"I am standing up and here is the boundary and carrying through the consequences" P3.

"She comes and sit down calmly because I'm listening more, she had to learn she wont get my attention by screaming, now I refuse to engage if she does." P2

"We do talk more now instead of ignoring each other or argue and shout. She is calmer, if I do ask her to do something, I'd don't get screaming any more. She knows I love her now, as before she used to think I loved her brother more. Now I tell her I love her and I praise her much more now, before there was so much tension, I was always telling her off". P2

Empathy developed: "Understanding why he behave like he does, talking about the root cause rather than the manifestation of his feelings, now I look deeper at what is happening...Knowing that has made me stronger, I get my point across better by understanding. I have a name for it, so I don't get frustrated that he is ignoring me... Before I would ...have met his violence with force." P1

Parents reported an increased sense of assertiveness:

" I felt able to explain that I have a right to say no, and felt more confident doing it, that I've got rights as well. Now I am not feeling guilty for saying no. I used to cave in for a quiet life. P1"

"Its a shift of power. ..Now I stand my ground rules... I am now giving clear, definite messages" P1

"Putting my foot down and saying enough, i am not willing to put up with this any more, has been a bit of a waking call for her.., and she has been keeping in touch and wanting a relationship with me" P3

" He's seen that I am now in charge. One of our words is the final word" P1

Children were noticing the difference:

"..am happier with the way my dad is now. He is calmer, he acts more maturely...He's definitely more strict but he's a lot better, he takes more interest when I'm a bit down, he's like more involved, like ringing up and checking that am in, and things like that, its good" YP1

" Now we get on better we do more stuff together" YP4

Most parents were now setting clear consequences:

"Now its my house, she has to listen to my rules. Now every time she smokes in her room she knows I'll punish her so she tends not to do it any more. Now I stick to my rules, its not chaos any more" P3

Young people were making progress: Increasing empathy:

"now its made me see clearer, like.. the upset that it causes." YP2 and finding some strategies to reduce escalation: "I changed. I hardly argue back now. I walk away from arguments and go in my room.." YP4
"we used to have lots but the last fight now was ages ago. I'm more like clear with my mum that I need space. YP2

Most were developing a sense of agency:

" I am more in control of my temper. Its kind of made me look at what happens. I now see it as a pattern, that I have some kind of choice in what happens...so it may not happen as much I suppose...made me see it more as unacceptable" YP2

Attitudes were changing:

"Its made me think that I want to have a good relationship with my mum, I do love her really, I want to stay in good terms with her, until I leave home, that its not all her fault (mental health issues) as well."

" am definitively changed... its working. Now me and my mum are close again. Now we talk much more, so we come to some agreement... We've calmed down and enjoying being together..now we listen to each other instead of walking out, we talk. I want to be there more for my mum" YP3

A positive impact on school work and work prospects was reported:

"I don't stay in bed all day any more, now am out of the door, looking for a job " YP3

" I am working harder at school and even doing my exams, now, am more mature " YP4

Collated and written by Agnes Munday (Rise).

Rise is the Brighton and Hove Women's Aid Organisation providing crisis, children and young people's support, community outreach and therapeutic support, training and education to survivors of domestic violence and supports Living Without Violence

For more information on any of the above, **references, or a copy of Agnes' dissertation** about CPA contact agnesmunday@gmail.com

For more information on Break4Change, please contact Dennis Byrne Targeted Youth Support Team Leader, B&H City Council. E-mail: Denis.Byrne@brighton-hove.gov.uk Tel: 01273 294783 or

For details of Brighton and Hove DV Work, please contact the DV Strategic Co-ordinator , Brighton and Hove. E-mail: michelle.pooley@brighton-hove.gov.uk Tel: 01273 290524

Partnership Working between

