

**West Cork Steering Committee**

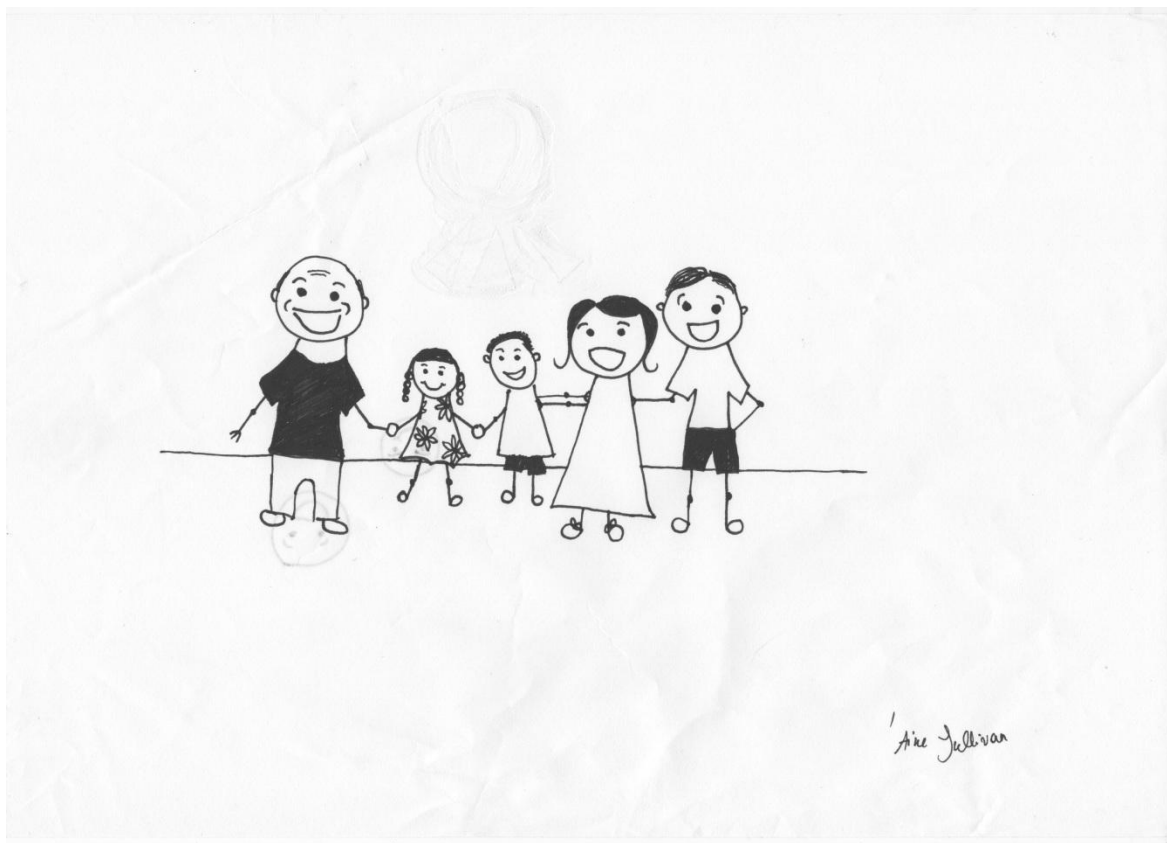
**Report**

**on**

**Strengthening Families Programme**

**Bantry**

**October 2011 – January 2012**





This document provides an overview of the planning and implementation of the  
Strengthening Families Programme Bantry.

*The West Cork Strengthening Families Programme Steering Committee would like to acknowledge and thank all those involved in the roll out of the Bantry Strengthening Families Programme and compliment everyone on the enthusiasm and energy it took to make this such a successful initiative.*

West Cork Strengthening Families Programme Steering Committee Members involved in the compilation of this report are;

- An Garda Síochana, Mr Damian White (Community Garda)
- Community Resource Centre & West Cork Development Partnership, Ms Anna Fitzgerald
- Health Service Executive, Health Promotion, Ms Sheelagh Broderick
- Health Service Executive, Social Work Dept, Mr Steven Peet
- Le Cheile Mentoring and Youth Justice Supports, Ms Fidelma Connolly
- Southern Regional Drugs Task Force, Mr Chris Black
- West Cork Development Partnership, Ms Lorraine O' Donovan
- Young Persons Probation, Ms Rosemary Fox & Ms Mary Walsh

## **Background to the Introduction of Strengthening Families Programme to Ireland**

### **Irish Context**

The Children Act 2001 is based on the philosophy that vulnerable children including those with high risk drug misuse, offending behaviour, child protection issues and those in conflict with the law should only be detained by the state as a last resort. One of the main principles of the Children Act 2001 is;

*It is desirable to preserve and strengthen the relationship between children and their parents/family members."*

The Act acknowledges that there is no single way of successfully dealing with the problems associated with drug misuse, neglect, child protection issues and youth offending etc. The Act also articulates the many community based measures which must be explored to enhance the skills and capacity of families.

### **Parenting Programmes**

Parenting at any time in history has always been a challenging experience, however Ireland has changed dramatically since the late 1980's with regards to our working life, family structure, gender balances, educational attainment and technological advances. Research has proven that parenting styles and perceptions have a "direct correlation with how children grow up, how they live and whether they will abide by the rules in society" (Thinking n.d in Sarac 2001).

Different parenting styles are practised in families today and were outlined in Baumrind in (Sarac 2001) as authoritarian, permissive, authoritative and uninvolved. It is also worth remembering that opposite parenting styles can be practised within the same household or family.

Parenting teenagers can be a difficult task as society can be judgemental of parents or unresponsive to their need for support. Parents tend to be removed from their immediate family and do not have a support base where they can turn to when it is needed. The confidence to parent is highly eroded in today's society where teenagers are highly connected with technology, mobile phones, internet, Facebook, Twitter etc but parents are isolated from their

child. The presence of technology in our lives has changed communication and presents new challenges for parenting.

Different parenting programmes have become very popular in recent years as a realisation has grown that parents need help to rear their children. Different agencies and organisations have identified that many parents are not equipped with the skills to deal with issues that arise in the home. There are a number of parenting programmes run in Ireland which are similar to Strengthening Families Programme and are skills based and by their nature are not a therapy for families but therapeutic as they assist families to become safer and happier places to rear their children. These programmes are equally of major benefit and enhance parent skills and confidence. The Strengthening Families Programme strives to do this and more by 1) considering the wider family contacts and including significant adults in the family's life along with parents in the programme. The My World Survey, a national study of youth mental health *"strongly confirms that the presence of "One Good Adult" is important to the mental health of young people. It has a positive impact on their self- belief, confidence, coping skills and optimism about the future. This "One Good Adult" can be a parent, grandparent, teacher, sports coach or someone who is available to them in times of need"* (2012: 98). These findings strengthen the approach of the Strengthening Families Programme which seeks to enhance and strengthen the relationship between parent, significant adults in the family's life and the teenager. 2) The inclusion of teenagers and the whole family in the weekly programme and 3) promoting the family meal and the strengths of a family coming together, eating together and communicating together within the weekly group work programme which empowers the families to work together to improve and enhance their skills in communication and parenting.

Strengthening Families Programme is a family skills based approach which involves all members of the family and focuses on particular topics over an extended period of time. Strengthening Families Programme is a good fit within the Children Act 2001 as it encourages and supports families to make changes to their communication skills and behaviour together. It seeks to strengthen the relationship between the family members and set in place protective strategies to help families deal with future issues which may arise.

The Strengthening Families Programme was first presented here in Ireland at Trinity College Ireland Addiction Research Centres annual conference in September 2005 by Dr. Karol Kumpfer (University of Utah & founder of SFP).

Following this, Drug and Alcohol Services H.S.E. South and Cork Local Drugs Task Force and Southern Regional Drugs Task Force arranged interagency training and from this the delivery of the Strengthening Families Programme has spread throughout County Cork.

The lead agencies and organisations involved in Strengthening Families Programme in Bantry are the

- An Garda Siochana
- HSE Drug & Alcohol Services
- HSE Health Promotion
- HSE Social Work
- Le Cheile Mentoring & Youth Justice Support Services
- Southern Regional Drugs Task Force
- West Cork Development Partnership
- Young Person's Probation Services

All of these agencies and organisations are involved in the Strengthening Families Steering Committee Bantry and the planning of the programme.

## Steering Committee

A steering committee was formed in June 2011 with representatives from;

- An Garda Siochana
- HSE Health Promotion Dept
- HSE Social Work Dept
- Le Cheile Mentoring & Youth Justice Support Services
- Southern Regional Drugs Task Force
- West Cork Development Partnership
- Young Person's Probation Services

The committee worked to secure funding for the programme roll out and the logistical details involved in delivering the programme in such a rural area such as venue, catering, identifying referral agents, information provision, development of a referral form etc. The steering committee met on the following dates;

Dates of Steering Committee Meetings
4th June 2011
15th July 2011
25th August 2011
22nd September 2011
12th October 2011
18th November 2011
20th December 2011
1st February 2012

## **Funding**

Funding for Strengthening Families Programme Bantry was sourced from;

- Bantry Lions Club
- HSE Drug & Alcohol Services
- Le Cheile Mentoring & Youth Justice Support Services
- Southern Regional Drugs Task Force
- West Cork Development Partnership

It is important to recognise that funding comes in many guises and that there was huge interagency cooperation throughout the Strengthening Families Programme to provide support to the programme.

- Agencies and organisations released their staff to facilitate on the programme.
- The provision of a free bus from West Cork Rural Transport to collect participants from the town centre, drop them at the venue and drop them back to their pick up point after the programme.
- A volunteer bus driver who gave her time to collect participants and return them to Bantry town after the programme each week.
- The provision of a suitable building at a reasonable rate.

These are all expensive resources but due to the good interagency relationships that exist in the area it allowed the programme to be delivered on a modest budget.



## **Overview of the Strengthening Families Programme**

The Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) is an internationally recognised parenting and family skills initiative for high-risk families. It was developed by Dr. Karol Kumpfer, a Professor of Health Promotion and Education in the University of Utah. Initially, it was designed as a prevention strategy for 6 – 12 year old high risk children of substance abusing parents.

It has now developed as an evidence-based family skills training programme which has been found through research to significantly reduce problem behaviours, delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse in children. It has also been shown to improve the families' social competencies and child's school performance. It reduces the risk of child neglect as parents strengthen the bonds they have with their children and learn more effective parenting skills. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) along with fifteen other independent studies have found positive results in the following key areas:

- Improved parenting knowledge and skills,
- Improved family relationships,
- Improved children's social skills and behaviour

## **Programme Content**

The programme comprises of 14 individual sessions which are held on a weekly basis. The sessions focus on developing both the children's and parent's life skills and learning to put the skills into practice within a safe and supportive environment.

SFP sessions include the critical core components of effective evidence-based parenting programs. There is an emphasis on the parent and child incorporating a practice time in the family sessions to strengthen the learning of positive interactions, communication, and effective and appropriate methods of discipline.

## **Objectives of the Strengthening Families Programme**

The major objectives for the Strengthening Families Programme for the family, the parents, and the teens are:

### *To Improve Family Relations*

- Improve Family Communications
- Improve Family Bonding and Cohesion
- Increase Family Organization and Planning
- Decrease Family Conflict
- Increase Parent/Teen Time Together
- Increase Parent's Empathy toward Teen

### *To Increase Parenting Skills*

- Increase Parent Knowledge of Parenting
- Increase Parenting Self-Esteem or Efficacy
- Increase Positive Attention and Praise
- Reduce Physical Punishment
- Increase Effective Discipline
- Decrease Parenting Stress
- Decrease Parent Depression

### *To Improve Child's Behaviour*

- Increase Child Compliance
- Increase Child's School Bonding and Attachment
- Increase Child's School Grades and Performance
- Decrease Children's Overt Aggression
- Decrease Child's Covert Aggression
- Decrease Child's Hyperactivity Decrease Child's Shyness
- Decrease Child's Depression

### *To Increase Children's Social Competencies*

- Increase Communication Skills
- Increase Peer Refusal Skills
- Increase Recognition of Feelings
- Increase Knowledge of Alcohol and Drugs
- Increase Coping Skills for Anger and Criticism
- Reduce Future Intentions and Use of Alcohol and Drugs

### *To Reduce or Prevent Alcohol and Drug Abuse*

- Decrease Parent's Alcohol and Drug Use
- Prevent Child's Alcohol and Drug Use

The objectives have also been designed to address teen pregnancy, poor life adjustment, decrease children's intermediate risk factors (i.e. behavioural, social, emotional, and school problems) and improve protective factors (i.e. coping, communication, social, and academic skills) by improving family relations and parenting and supervision skills and significantly improving relationship skills.

### **Format of Weekly Sessions**

There are three separate sessions which take place on a weekly basis.

- 1) The Family Meal
- 2) Parents Skill Session & Teenagers Skill Sessions (These sessions run parallel to each other)
- 3) The Family Skills Session.

The focus of the programme is to build upon the existing strengths within the family. This differs from other approaches which focus on what is missing or poorly developed within high risk family groups.

## **Outline of Parent Skills Training Sessions**

1. Introductions and Group Building
2. What Teens Are Like & How to Manage Stress
3. Encouraging Good Behaviour
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Communication for Better Relationships
6. Communication and Family Meetings
7. Helping Your Teen Handle Peer Pressure
8. Alcohol, Drugs and Families
9. Solving Problems and Giving Directions
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality
11. Setting Limits I
12. Setting Limits II
13. Contracts for Changing Behaviour
14. Remembering All You Have Learned 6

## **Outline of Teens Skills Training Sessions**

1. Getting Started and Dreams
2. Speaking and Listening
3. Staying Cool in Conflicts
4. Being Who You Want to Be
5. Speaking for Yourself
6. Speaking Up in Your Family
7. Handling Peer Pressure and Temptation

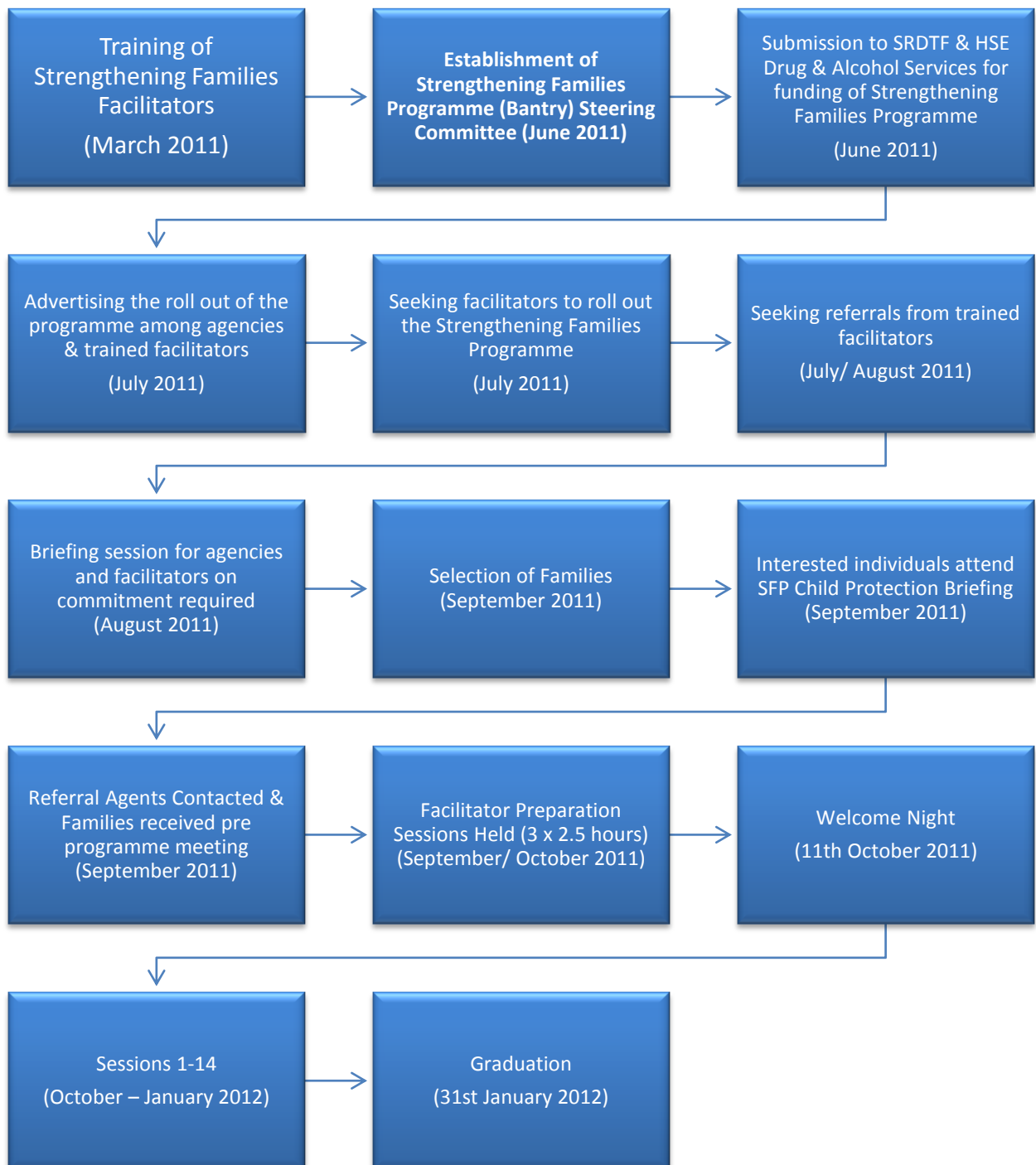
8. Alcohol and Drugs
9. Problem Solving
10. Friends, Dating and Sexuality
11. Managing Emotions
12. Handling Criticism
13. Coping with Anger
14. Resources, Review and Graduation

### **Outline of Family Skills Session**

1. Introduction and Group Building:
2. Appreciating Family Members
3. Our Time and Rewards
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Communication for Better Relationships
6. Communication and Family Meetings
7. Supporting Teenagers' Resistance
8. Learning From Parents
9. Problem Solving, Giving Directions
10. Relationships, Love and Sexuality
11. Empathy – The other person's shoes
12. Family Values
13. Managing Anger
14. Graduation & Celebration

## Time Line of Strengthening Families Programme (Bantry)

The following diagram illustrates the timeline for the delivery of Strengthening Families Programme (Bantry).



## **Role of the site coordinator**

The role of the site coordinator is to ensure that the Strengthening Families Programme is delivered and implemented to the standards set down by the SFP creators. The responsibilities of the SFP Site Coordinator include the following:

- Ensuring that all group leaders are available and prepared for the session
- Ensuring that all families are supported to attend the programme
- Ensuring adequate childcare arrangements are set up/ in place
- Ensuring that the family meal is prepared on time and is of good quality
- Managing difficult situations which may arise as part of the sessions
- Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection in accordance with Children First Guidance
- Facilitating the de-briefing sessions
- Reporting to Steering Committee on progress of Strengthening Families Programme

The site coordinator was present at the Welcome Night and the 14 sessions of SFP. Le Cheile Mentoring & Youth Justice Support Services supported the site coordinator with any queries/ issues which arose from time to time.

## **Referral Agents**

The role of the referral agent was to support the family that they have referred to the programme for the duration of the programme. The referral agent should help and encourage the family over the weeks they are attending the Strengthening Families Programme. As the referral agent has undertaken Strengthening Families Programme Training they are empowered to use the manuals on a one to one basis with the families and work on specific topics in the future.

All of the referring agents were provided with information leaflets in relation to the programme and their role for the duration of the programme.

The referral agents were invited to a meeting with the site coordinator to discuss the role of the referral agent thoroughly.

## **Referrals**

During June & July 2010 flyers and information documents were designed to promote the programme roll out in Bantry. These were distributed to the agencies who engaged in the training event which was held in West Cork in March 2011.

The referrals to the programme came primarily from HSE Dept. Social Work and Young People's Probation. The number of referral agencies involved in this programme was quite low which reflects the limited services and organisations operating in the Bantry area and the newness of the programme to the area.

## **Selection of Families**

A selection panel of four steering committee members was established to consider the referrals to the programme. The selection committee reviewed the referral forms that were completed by the referral agents and families. 13 families were offered a place on the programme and 12 of these families took up this offer.



The following table presents a breakdown of the families that attended Strengthening Families Programme.

<b>Family No</b>	<b>Parents Attending</b>	<b>Young People Attending</b>
<b>1</b>	1	1 x 13 year old
<b>2</b>	1	1 x 17 year old
<b>3</b>	1	1 x 17 year old
<b>4</b>	1	1x 16 year old
<b>5</b>	2	1 x 13 year old 1 x 14 year old
<b>6</b>	1	1 x 15 year old
<b>7</b>	1	1 x 16 year old 1 x 14 year old
<b>8</b>	1	1 x 18 year old
<b>9</b>	1	1 x 15 year old
<b>10</b>	1	1 x 13 year old
<b>11</b>	1	1 x 16 year old
<b>12</b>	2	1 x 15 year old 1 x 16 year old
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>

## **Feedback from Referral Agents**

*One of my referred clients benefited greatly and has since gone on to make a lot of positive and meaningful changes in their life i.e avoiding issues with Gardai, reducing their drinking and other risk taking behaviours. I feel that the crucial difference for this family was the chance to look at how they communicated and to make the required changes so that the young person felt listened to and understood."*

One of the referral agents informed the site coordinator that their agency was "able to close the open case for one client due to the fact that the entire family reported significant improvements in their relationships and the ways they communicated. I believe that communicating as a family group helped the family immensely".

## **Facilitators**

The individuals and agencies involved in the Strengthening Families Programme training in March 2011 were contacted and informed that the programme was commencing in October 2011 and that facilitators were being sought for the programme. 9 individuals identified themselves as interested in facilitating the programme. Facilitators were provided with the following role description.

### **Role description: Group Facilitators**

*Group Facilitators should:*

- Be experienced in the facilitation of parent/teen and/or group work programmes.
- Be able to attend all 14 weeks of the programme.
- Engage well with the families attending the programme.
- Be able to work well alongside your co-facilitator(s).
- Be able to attend the Group Leader orientation session(s) prior to commencement of the SFP.
- Have a good understanding of ice-breakers and energisers used in group work programmes with both Teens and Adults.
- Be trained in and/or have an excellent understanding of Children's First
- Be able to identify your own support needs as regards the facilitation of the programme and make these aware to the Site Co-ordinator and or your own line manager for assistance.
- Have the ability to adjust the weekly session to the needs of the participants
- Understand that the programme cannot be adapted without the permission of the programme creator.
- Have a basic understanding of the principles of evaluating programmes and be able to take instruction from the Site Co-ordinator on how to administrate a questionnaire. Take part in any post programme evaluation exercises.
- Attend briefing and preparation sessions prior to each session with the other facilitators.
- Attend de-brief sessions each evening following the session with the other facilitators.
- Be able to attend the Family Meet and Greet Night prior to the commencement of the programme (if applicable).

The facilitators who worked on the Strengthening Families Programme (Bantry) came from a variety of agencies and backgrounds and represented; An Garda Siochana, Dunmanway Family Resource Centre, HSE Social Work Dept, Le Cheile Mentoring & Youth Justice Supports, Matt Talbot Services, School Completion Programme, The Caha Centre and West Cork Development Partnership. Through facilitating on the programme, the facilitators have increased their knowledge of the work of the different agencies and now enjoy a better relationship with the agencies and their representatives.

### **Facilitator's Initial Expectations**

Prior to the commencement of the course the group leaders grappled with the skills based approach rather than the traditional therapeutic approach that they were familiar with.

The group leaders had concerns about the time in which they had to deliver the sessions and ensure that the skills had been adequately passed on to the participants.

### **Facilitator Preparation**

The facilitators met as a group to prepare for the programme for three 2.5 hour sessions prior to the commencement of the programme to ensure that leaders were comfortable with the content and the approach. The preparation sessions allowed facilitators to get to know one another, develop as a team and work alongside their co facilitator for some weeks prior to the programme commencing.

In addition to the formal preparation sessions, the facilitators met each week prior to the programme starting to plan the following weeks session and tweak the facilitation plan for the session that evening. These sessions were used to adjust the programme to the needs of the individual groups which proved challenging on some occasions with the needs of families being diverse however there was a great pool of knowledge and confidence within the interagency group of facilitators to ensure the sessions ran energetically and smoothly.

### **Effectiveness of Facilitators**

A strong bond developed among group leaders. The preparation sessions allowed each team member to become familiar with the other strengths of the other facilitators. The group leaders

became comfortable with one another very quickly and maintained a professional approach to the preparation and planning of the sessions throughout the programme. Members of the team felt supported by one another and agreed that they felt everyone in the team was listened to and respected.

The team brought a great diversity of skills and knowledge to the table from their different experiences of working with young people, families and in the community. From the first preparation session, through each session, through to the end of the programme there was great commitment, enthusiasm and laughter among the leaders.

### **Feedback from Facilitators**

Facilitators were asked to give some information on their experiences of Strengthening Families Programme Bantry and the benefits of facilitating the programme. Facilitators were asked why they became involved in the programme what were the benefits to being involved in the programme.

*"I became involved to support the roll out of the programme in West Cork and to support young people and their families who experience difficulties in their lives".*

*"I feel that one of the most important factors in improving young people's lives is in supporting their parents and families also. I thought SFP was a great way to work with teens and parents together to produce results which would benefit other family members and the greater community also".*

*"It gave me confidence and brought together a wide selection of people with different backgrounds with a common goal to make the project work for the benefit of all involved".*

*"I was interested in the programme and wanted to see how effective this type of intervention could be and how this could be achieved within the community".*

*"I found it hugely enlightening to see them (families) in a different context and it made me much more positive in my dealings with them".*

*"I became involved with SFP Bantry as I wanted to gain more experience in group work and in work with vulnerable teenagers and adults. I believe that the ethos of SFP is the way forward as you work holistically with a family to achieve a positive change in a young person's life."*

*“It was excellent to link in with the individual representatives from the various organisations, on a personal level, these contacts will allow for better cooperation, and hopefully enhanced services as a result”.*

*“The benefits for me personally included networking, establishing new professional relationships with different agencies involved in the programme”.*

## Interagency Benefits

The different agencies involved felt that the project was successful as an interagency initiative. The benefits experienced by organisations are briefly stated below.

*“Strengthening Families Programme gave an opportunity to be involved in a very positive initiative that held great potential to benefit families in Bantry”.*

*“Families under stress were one of our target groups and the ethos of Strengthening Families Programme was very much in keeping with the ethos of our organisation”.*

*“The organisation has benefited from its involvement – much greater awareness of other agencies/ organisations that are working with young parents – better links and relationships have been formed with individuals who work in other agencies/ organisations”.*

*“The advantage is that now they (the teenagers) have youth workers who have a whole other tool kit at their disposal when dealing with issues that arise”.*

*“It was a great way for personnel from various agencies to work together in the delivery of the programme, since there are very few opportunities for organisations to pool skills and work effectively in the community as a team, rather than as individual organisations. Overall the programme alleviates some of the workload of organisations and dependant on the nature of work, it can complement work in progress, or alleviate some of the difficulties experienced by at risk parents and teens”.*

*“The benefits of being involved were the development of relationships and teamwork with other facilitators, the linkage between various organisations was excellent, and seeing the participants take benefit from, and engage with the SFP”.*

*“Interagency work is a key incentive as I have learned much from colleagues and also can see how my work fits within a broader institutional framework”.*

*“Strengthening Families Programme provides an opportunity to work with and support the families of young people referred to our agency by the Young Peoples Probation Service. It complements the work of both agencies though the provision of a strengths/skills based parenting programme delivered in partnership with other agencies whose additional expertise and professionalism enhances the provision of services to the families and children with whom we work”.*

## Format of Weekly Sessions

Each weekly session followed the same routine, as outlined by Best Practise;

Time	Action
4.30/5p.m	Facilitators arrive & prepare
6p.m	Families Arrive & Dinner (facilitators and families)
6.30p.m	Session 1 – Teen Session & Parent Session
7.20p.m	Break
7.30p.m	Session 2 –Family Session
8.20p.m	End of Session 2 – Families go home
8.25p.m	Facilitator Debrief
9p.m	Home time!



## **Families Attendance at Strengthening Families Programme Bantry**

The attendance of each family at Strengthening Families Programme is outlined below.

	<b>% Attendance (Sessions 1-14)</b>
1.	78.5%
2.	71.4%
3.	92.8%
4.	64%
5.	92.8%
6.	92.8%
7.	Did not finish SFP
8.	64%
9.	50%
10.	64%
11.	92.8%
12.	Did not finish SFP

10 of the 12 families who began the programme completed the programme which equates to 83.3% completion rate. Family number 7 did not return to the programme after session 2 while family number 12 did not participate in the programme following session 4.

Week 9 saw the fewest families attend the programme. The weather was particularly bad on this night and it was the week before Christmas which may have been the reason that families found it more difficult to attend.

## **Venue**

A number of venues were proposed for the programme however the only venue suitable for the Strengthening Families Programme was the National Learning Network which was located outside the town. The site coordinator and a member of the steering group performed a site visit to identify any potential risks that may be encountered as part of the programme.

## **Health & Safety**

The Strengthening Families Programme complied with Health & Safety Regulations.

## **First Aid**

One of the team members had completed First Aid Training and SafeTalk Suicide Alertness Training and ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training).

## **Confidentiality**

It was clarified with the families prior to the programme commencing that information that passed between referral agents and the site coordinator would be done with the knowledge of the family.

## **Child Protection**

The Strengthening Families Programme Bantry was run within the ethos and guidelines set out in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

The site coordinator for Strengthening Families Programme is the Designated Liaison Person Site Co-Ordinator.

- To ensure that the organisation's child protection policy is implemented
- To establish if reasonable grounds for concern exist
- To consult informally with the Duty Social Worker & make a formal referral
- To inform the person who brought the concern to the attention of the site coordinator
- To maintain confidential records

- To inform parents/ carers if a report is made

The site coordinator and a number of the facilitators attended a Children First briefing in October 2011 to ensure that we were familiar with the new guidelines.

As part of the weekly debrief, the site coordinator asked all the facilitators if there were any child protection/ welfare concerns.

## **Family Meals**

The family meal is an important part of the Strengthening Families Programme as it encourages families to sit together and engage with one another. The provision of dinner removes a barrier and provides an additional incentive for families to attend the programme.

Although the facilitators and families reported the family meal setting as strange initially, all families came to enjoy the meal by the end of the programme. At the beginning of the programme, the teenagers did not want to eat with their parents, or eat the food; however towards the end of the programme there was a change in their attitude. The site coordinator ensured that the dining area was welcoming and that additional efforts/decorations were available at thematic times of the year e.g. Halloween & Christmas to ensure that families felt valued.

All of the facilitators and families praised the standard of food provided. The facilitators identified the family meal as a useful tool as it allowed them to check in with families on their progress the previous week and gauge where difficulties may have arisen.

## **Childcare**

Assistance is provided to the families to ensure the equal participation of families in the programme and to remove this particular barrier which can prevent attendance or add to the stress of a family who are attending the programme.

Due to the distance travelled by the families and the age difference in the children requiring child care assistance, it was not feasible to provide childcare arrangements on site. Instead, families were written to by the steering committee and advised engage private baby sitters. They were provided with the "Guide to Choosing a Babysitter" by Cork County Childcare

Committee to assist them with this decision. The cost of the childcare was subsidised and this was received weekly by the families upon their attendance at the programme.

*The three families who received child care assistance during the programme pointed out that they wouldn't be able to attend the programme without it.*

## **Transport**

The Strengthening Families Programme provided transport assistance to families attending the programme to eliminate this obstacle which prevents attendance.

As West Cork is a large and unique geographical area, it would be impossible for families to use public transport or taxis to attend the programme. Many families undertook a 40 mile round trip to attend the programme with one family travelling a distance of 65 miles round trip each night, and another family driving almost 80 miles round trip to attend the programme each week. Families were provided with fuel vouchers (from a fuel station near the venue) weekly to assist with the cost of travelling to the programme which they received weekly when they attended the programme.

*5 of the families reported that they couldn't have made the commitment to the programme without the fuel vouchers as it would be too expensive for them.*

## **Incentives**

Incentives were provided to the participants in Strengthening Families Programme Bantry as a mark of appreciation and thank you for the efforts the families had taken in attending the programme and working on particular topics and home practise assignments. The site coordinator and facilitators discussed appropriate sessions in which the incentives were distributed. The incentives were given at the end of the family session on week 2, week 6 and week 10.

## **Family Portrait**

The family portrait is a representation of the family's efforts at Strengthening Families Programme and also serves as a reminder of their achievements from the programme. As the Strengthening Families Programme Bantry took a Christmas break, it was decided to hold the family portrait session on week 11, the first session after Christmas. The portraits were taken as families arrived at the venue, prior to the family meal. A number of teens and parents were daunted by the idea of the family portrait initially however 8 of the 10 families who finished the programme posed for the portraits.

After receiving the family portraits, a number of parents commented on the nice symbolism and good quality of the portraits.

*"When we hung our photograph, I felt that my teen was at a turning point and his behaviour and attitude has improved greatly so I feel the photo will represent this time in our lives and we can look back and remember it a time of change for both of us."*

## Graduation

The Strengthening Families Programme Graduation Ceremony was held on 31st January 2012. The site coordinator addressed the families at the family session on week 8 to give them information about the graduation and ask for suggestions on the type of celebrations that were desired. On week 9 the families fed back to the site coordinator that they wished to have a karaoke night as part of their Graduation Ceremony and only wished to have their immediate family present at the event. The site coordinator sent invitations to each of the families on the programme inviting them to the Graduation Night.

The format of the Graduation Night was slightly different to the normal weekly session.

Time	Action
4.30/5p.m	Facilitators arrive & prepare
6.15p.m	Families Arrive
6.30p.m	Session – Teen Session & Parent Session
7.30p.m	Break
7.40p.m	Graduation, Buffet & Karaoke
9.15p.m	Home time

A member of the Steering Committee presented each family with a certificate of completion. Each family was also given a graduation present and their family portrait at the Graduation ceremony. Parents, teenagers and facilitators enjoyed the remainder of the evening by performing karaoke hits.

## **Graduation Packs**

Graduation packs were distributed to each family prior to the Graduation Ceremony. These contained information about a variety of issues; parenting, money management, contacts in the community, mental health, alcohol and drugs etc. The site coordinator contacted the referral agents with the list of publications within the pack in advance of the distribution of the packs to ensure that the information was appropriate to the families' situations.

The following is the list of publications that were distributed within the pack.

- Look After Yourself, Look After Your Mental Health
- Adult Personal Stories of Recovery Towards Mental Health
- Safetalk
- Deliberate Self Harm –Information for Young People
- Deliberate Self Harm – Information for Parents
- Legal or Illegal Highs Can Cause Serious Health Problems
- Know the Facts about Drugs
- Parents – Tips for Talking to Older Teenagers about Relationships & Sex
- Youth Health Service
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Positive Options
- Student Stress

These publications are available on [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

## **Future Skill Development**

The families were informed of one to one or group work skills based programmes which were available in the locality so that families could continue developing their parental skills. The site coordinator clarified with the referral agents that it was appropriate for this information to be provided to families.

## **Closure of Facilitation Team**

Upon the completion of the full programmer, all facilitators met in a debrief meeting to officially end the facilitation team. It was made clear to all of the facilitators that their role in working with the families had ended and the families would continue to be supported by the referral agents including using the Strengthening Families Programme manuals as a one to one resource with their clients in the future, if needed.



## Strengthening Families Programme (Bantry) Completion Rate

The following table highlights the makeup of the families who completed the Strengthening Families Programme (Bantry).

Family Number	Adult Male	Adult Female	Teenager Male	Teenager Female
1.		1		1
2.		1	1	
3.		1		1
4.	1	1		1
5.	1	1		2
6.		1		1
7.	Did not finish			
8.	1		1	
9.		1		1
10.		1		1
11.		1	1	
12.	Did not finish			
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>

Families 7 and 12 did not finish the programme, these families comprised of 1 female adult and two female teenagers & the second family comprised of 1 male adult, 1 female adult, 1 male teenager and 1 female teenager.

## What Was the Impact of the Strengthening Families Programme?

The steering committee decided to try and capture some of the qualitative experiences of the families who attended Strengthening Families Programme Bantry. The confidential questionnaire was distributed to the adults in each family at session 13 and collected on week 14. Of the 10 families who finished the programme 7 families chose to complete the evaluation.

- All but two of the responses indicated that they had noticed positive differences since attending the Strengthening Families Programme. It is noted that of the two families who did not, one had consistent poor attendance at the programme 64%, and the members of the second family did not live together and it was therefore difficult to practise the weekly skills.
- 5 of the respondents were making time for themselves regularly since starting the Strengthening Families Programme; the two individuals who were not making time for themselves were also the adults who had not noticed any differences since attending the programme.
- 6 of the respondents stated that they communicated better with their teen since attending the Strengthening Families Programme,
- 6 of the respondents felt more confident as a parent since attending Strengthening Families Programme, while the other respondent indicated that they felt the same as before the programme.
- 6 of the 7 respondents now use “I” statements since attending Strengthening Families Programme. They indicated that this has changed communication as they *“are more conscious of how they are feeling”, “I am more conscious of what is going on”, “my teenager seems to understand more”*.
- 5 of the 7 respondents now have a regular family meal since attending Strengthening Families Programme, of the two respondents who do not, these are the same families who did not notice any differences at home.
- All respondents confirmed that they are more comfortable approaching subjects that are important in their teen’s life since attending the Strengthening Families Programme.

The following table shows how comfortable parents are about approaching subjects that are important in their teen's life.

	<b>Yes, I'm more comfortable</b>	<b>No, I'm (still) uncomfortable but I did improve a little</b>	<b>No, I'm (still) uncomfortable and there was no improvement</b>
<b>Relationships</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>School Attendance</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Friends</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Offending behaviour</b>	<b>7</b>		

- Most of the respondents rated their confidence around parenting at 6 / 7, while one parent rated their confidence at 3 prior to the Strengthening Families Programme. The parent who rated their confidence so poorly beforehand finished the programme rating their confidence at 8. The other respondents all rated their confidence at the end of the programme between 7 and 10.
- All of the respondents indicated that they recognise that each of their children are different and have different parenting needs since attending Strengthening Families Programme. All of the respondents identified different parenting needs of teens.
- All of the respondents reported noticing and praising positive behaviours of their teens daily since attending the Strengthening Families Programme. All parents noted praise as one of the rewards that they now use to acknowledge the positive behaviour of their teens, other examples were more freedom, increased trust, make up and trips to the cinema with their teen.
- 5 of the 7 respondents find that they are more consistent when they are disciplining their teen since attending Strengthening Families Programme, of the 2 respondents who

find they are not consistent; these families also saw no differences since attending the programme.

- 5 respondents feel that they set realistic consequences for their negative behaviour following the Strengthening Families Programme while 2 respondents did not answer this question.
- 6 of the respondents identified “togetherness” as a benefit of the family meal as well a “platform for communication” being identified as a benefit also.
- 6 of the 7 respondents indicated that they would use the hand-outs again and all the respondents would recommend this programme.

The respondents were asked to share some of the special moments that they experienced as a family at Strengthening Families, the following are some of their experiences.

*“It means I get to see my child, it’s the only time he really speaks to me.”*

*“We get to talk en route to and from the course, which at times has been a good laugh.”*

*“It’s rewarding to see the kids and us getting involved and enjoying ourselves.”*

*“It was great when both of us picked out each n others work as it shows we do have an understanding of each other.”*

*“Each occasion was special time with her, focused specifically on her, the drive home always ended in serious discussions.”*

*“The fun we both had in relating to each other when completing a task.”*

*“Meeting others who were going through the same thing.”*

*“Seeing my daughter be more comfortable in a group.”*

*“Being praised and supported by the facilitators.”*

## **Bibliography**

Dooley, B. & Fitzgerald, A. (2012), *My World Survey, National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland*. Headstrong, Dublin.

Government of Ireland (2001) Children Act. Stationary Office, Ireland.

Sarac, S. (2001), "Parenting Styles: How They Affect Children". *Fountain Magazine*, Issue 34, accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/Parenting-Styles-How-They-Affect-Children>



## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1

### Strengthening Families Programme Logic Model

<p>Need for SFP in west Cork has been articulated by;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Southern Regional Drugs Task Force</li> <li>Dept. of Social Work (West Cork)</li> <li>Dept. of Community Work (West Cork)</li> <li>Young People's Probation Services</li> <li>Le Chéile Mentoring &amp; Youth Justice Supports</li> <li>An Garda Síochána</li> </ul> <p>Proven programme, which provides tools to families to improve their communication skills.</p> <p>The rurality of Bantry means that many families are not able to access services due to the location of the service and transport costs</p>	<p>This collaboration with other agencies in the area will be an opportunity to adapt and interagency approach and allow for the sharing of skills and information.</p> <p>The programme is a skills based approach</p>	<p>Site Coordinator</p> <p>Facilitators</p> <p>Funding</p> <p>Venue</p> <p>Materials</p> <p>Equipment</p> <p>Time</p>	<p>Advertising/ PR</p> <p>Welcome Night</p> <p>SFP x 14 weeks</p> <p>Support to facilitators</p> <p>Liaising with referral agents</p> <p>Linking with the families referred to the programme</p>	<p>Provision of Strengthening Families Programme</p> <p>16 x Teenagers</p> <p>16 x Guardians</p>	<p><b><u>Short term:</u></b></p> <p>Improved knowledge</p> <p>Increased family time</p> <p>Improved awareness</p> <p>Improved action &amp; process skills</p> <p>Improved communication skills</p> <p><b><u>Medium term:</u></b></p> <p>Practise skills learned at SFP</p> <p><b><u>Long term:</u></b></p> <p>Improved parent and family relationships to decrease all risks and influence a young person during their teen years.</p>
--	---	---	--	--	--



## **Appendix 2**

### **Facilitators**

The following organisations released staff members to facilitate the Strengthening Families Programme.

- An Garda Síochana
- Bantry Community Resource Centre
- Dunmanway Family Resource Centre
- HSE Social Work Dept
- Le Cheile Mentoring & Youth Justice Support Services
- Matt Talbot Services
- School Completion Programme
- The Caha Centre
- West Cork Development Partnership

## Appendix 3



**.southern.regional.drugs.task.force.**



### West Cork Strengthening Families Programme Referral Form

Course: Bantry / October 2011

*(subject to funding and minimum no. of referrals)*

**REFERRAL AGENTS: PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM WITH THE NOMINATED FAMILY.**

#### Referral Agent:

Name of Referral Agent: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Work Landline: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Referred:** *(One referral form per family-please outline all the family members, even if they are not participating in the programme as it helps us to understand the family better)*

**Family Contact**

Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Surname	Forename	Address	Gender	d.o.b.	Attending the programme?


**Are there other people living in the home e.g. grandparent (please tick)**      ☐ Yes    ☐ No.

**If Yes give details:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Does the family require assistance with the following to attend the programme:**

Transport:                      ☐ Yes                      ☐ No (Please talk to Site Co-ordinator for more details).

Childcare                      ☐ Yes                      ☐ No If ticked yes for childcare services, after school activities may be provided for school going children (please talk to Site Co-ordinator for more details).

**What are the family's strengths?**

---



---



---

**What is the main presenting issue with the primary Teen leading to this referral?** *(A primary teen is the one Teen in this family that you have selected to be the primary focus of this programme).*

---



---



---

**Please tick the following categories that are applicable to the Primary Teen?**

☐ Eating difficulties      ☐ Suicidal feelings                      ☐ Self harming                      ☐ Literacy

difficulties

☐ Violence                      ☐ Substance abuse

☐ Learning Difficulties (Please Specify e.g. Dyslexia, Dyspraxia) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Health Issues (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Is there any additional information about the Teen that you might like to make the Site Co-ordinator aware of?**

---



---



---

**Parents/Caregiver: Please tick the following where appropriate**

**Parents/Caregivers:**

**Family**

<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol / substance misuse <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting alone <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health issues <input type="checkbox"/> Separation and Bereavement <input type="checkbox"/> Literacy and numeric difficulties <input type="checkbox"/> Health problems, please specify <input type="checkbox"/> Convictions for sexual offenses <input type="checkbox"/> History of fire setting <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual / physical disability, please specify: _____  Other, please specify: <hr/> Additional Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty with extended family <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of support <input type="checkbox"/> Child in foster care <input type="checkbox"/> Child in residential care  Other, please specify: <hr/> Additional Comment:
---	---

**Is there any additional information about the family that you would like to make the Site Co-ordinator aware of?**

---



---



---

**What do you hope the family will gain from the Strengthening Families Programme?**

---



---



---

**Any other relevant information you feel is applicable to their participation in this programme, accessibility issues etc.?**

---

---

---

**Signed: (Referral Agent)** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed: (Parent/Parents)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to: Lorraine O'Donovan (Site Co-ordinator) West Cork Development Partnership, Bantry Business Park, Bantry Co Cork / Contact via E-mail: [lorraine@wcdp.ie](mailto:lorraine@wcdp.ie) or Mob: 0862183252**

**Closing Date for Referrals: August 4<sup>th</sup> 2011**

<b><u>Office use only:</u></b>	<b>Date Referral Received:</b>	<b>Selected for SFP: Yes/No</b>
<b>Comments:</b>		

## Appendix 4

### Evaluation Questionnaire

Since attending Strengthening Families Programme you have been introduced to new skills. This questionnaire will help us to evaluate the programme and identify where improvements could be made to its delivery. This questionnaire is confidential.

- 1) What made you decide to attend Strengthening Families Programme?

---

---

---

---

---

- 2) Have you noticed differences at home since attending Strengthening Families Programme?(Please explain)

Yes ☐ No ☐

---

---

---

- 3) Do you make time for yourself daily/ weekly since attending Strengthening Families Programme? (Please explain)

---

---

---

- 4) Do you notice that tiredness or stress affects parenting? How did you manage this before Strengthening Families Programme and after?

---

---

---

---

---

- 5) Do you spend more time with your teen since attending the Strengthening Families Programme? (If yes, how?)

Yes ☐ No ☐

---

---

---

- 6) Do you communicate better with your teen since attending the Strengthening Families Programme?  
(If yes, how?) Yes ☐ No ☐

---

---

---

- 7) Are you more confident as a parent since attending Strengthening Families Programme? (If yes, please describe) Yes ☐ No ☐

---

---

---

- 8) Do you use “I” statements since attending Strengthening Families Programme? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 9) How has that changed communication for you since attending Strengthening Families Programme?

---

---

---

---

- 10) Do you have a regular family meal since attending Strengthening Families Programme? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 11) What are the benefits of a regular family meeting?

---

---

---

- 12) When do you hold family meetings (since attending Strengthening Families Programme)?

---

---

---

- 13) What family traditions have you started celebrating since attending Strengthening Families Programme?

---

---

---





**16) What improvements could be made could be made to Strengthening Families Programme?**

---

---

---

---

**17) Please rate your confidence around parenting before the Strengthening Families Programme?**

*Not Confident*

*Very Confident*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

**18) Please rate your confidence around parenting after the Strengthening Families Programme?**

*Not Confident*

*Very Confident*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

**19) Do you recognise that each of your children are different and have different parenting needs E.g Help with education, patience since attending Strengthening Families Programme?**

Yes      ☐      No      ☐

**20) What are some of the parenting needs of teens?**

---

---

---

**21) Are you noticing and praising positive behaviours of your young person daily since attending the Strengthening Families Programme? (Please explain your answer)**

---

---

---

---

**22) What rewards do you now use to acknowledge the positive behaviour of your teen since attending Strengthening Families Programme?**

---

---

---

---

23) Do you find that you are more consistent when disciplining your teen following Strengthening Families Programme? (Please describe)

Yes ☐ No ☐

---

---

---

24) Do you feel you set realistic consequences for negative behaviour following Strengthening Families Programme? (If yes, please describe)

Yes ☐ No ☐

---

---

---

---

25) What do you see are the benefits of the family meal?

---

---

---

---

26) Did the contact person visit or ring you weekly while you were doing Strengthening Families Programme?

---

---

---

27) Would you use the handouts again?

Yes ☐ No ☐

28) Would you recommend this programme?

Yes ☐ No ☐

29) Would you be interested in attending Welcome Nights to inform other parents about the programme?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, please leave your contact details with Lorraine, site coordinator

**Thank you for completing the questionnaire!**

**Appendix 5**

*Strengthening Families Programme*

*The West Cork Strengthening Families Programme*

*Cordially invites*

-----  
*to attend*

*Strengthening Families Graduation Ceremony*

*We would like to take this opportunity*

*To celebrate the completion of the programme*

*And thank the participants for their commitment and support.*

*Please join us for the graduation at the*

*National Learning Network,*

*Bantry, Co. Cork*

*On*

*31<sup>st</sup> January 2012 at 7 p.m*

*We hope you can attend and we can look forward to seeing you!!!*

*RSVP to Lorraine O' Donovan 086 2183252*

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAMME

### *Certificate of Completion*

This is to certify that

---

have successfully completed the Strengthening Families Programme  
which took place in Bantry from October 2011 to January 2012.

*31<sup>st</sup> January 2012*

Date Certificate Awarded

*Lorraine O' Donovan*

Site Coordinator

## Appendix 7

### Special Moments We Captured

Santa visited the families at Christmas and delivered their Christmas incentives.



## Appendix 8

### Special Moments We Captured

#### Our Christmas Dinner Table Setting



## Appendix 9

### Special Moments We Captured

Mr Chris Black, Steering Committee Member addressing the families at the Graduation Ceremony



