

# HAPPY PARENT INITIATIVE

## (HP1)A Review Report

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The contribution of personnel from Blue Drum and Family Resource Centres is acknowledged in compiling this report.

**Blue Drum** was set up in 2001. It is a specialist community arts body funded by the Family Support Agency to nurture local arts and cultural work in Family Resource Centres. It is a not-for-profit company with a voluntary board, with 3 staff employed part-time and 13 other practitioners contracted to a two year EU Culture Programme research study.

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## **1. BLUE DRUM - WWW.BLUEDRUM.IE**

Blue Drum is a community arts support body that was set up in 2001 as a result of on-going stakeholder discussions that were convened by the Combat Poverty Agency<sup>1</sup>, following the completion of a community arts initiative<sup>2</sup> and an arts research project and working group<sup>3</sup> it had sponsored during the mid to late 1990s. Following its establishment, Blue Drum was contracted by respective sponsoring government departments<sup>4</sup> to provide 2nd tier support to both the Community Development Programme (CDP) and Family Resource Centres (FRCs). In 2008, the provision of all 2nd tier supports to the CDP was discontinued – the programme was subsequently amalgamated with the Local

<sup>1</sup> Combat Poverty Agency (1995) *A Strategy for Developmental Community Art*. Dublin: Author

<sup>2</sup> Combat Poverty Agency (1996) *Creating a Difference: A report of the Creative Activity for Everyone and Combat Poverty Agency Pilot Community Arts Programme, 1993-4*, Dublin: Author

<sup>3</sup> Combat Poverty Agency and the Arts Council of Ireland (1997) *Poverty, Access and Participation in the Arts – A Report of a Working Group*. Dublin: Authors.

<sup>4</sup> The Department of Social Welfare, later called the Department of Family, Community and Social Affairs (2002-2011), and now called the Department of Social Protection (2011 - ), was the initial host department for both the Community Development Programme (CDP) and Family Resource Centres (FRCs). In 2002, the CDP moved to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; it is currently (2012) amalgamated with the Local Development Programmes at the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, operating under the overall direction of Pobal ([www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie)), an intermediary not-for-profit agency that works on behalf of Government to support communities and local agencies in programmes relating to social inclusion, reconciliation and equality. In 2011 the FRCs moved to Department of Children and Youth Affairs and operate under the overall direction of the Family Support Agency, which was established in 2003. In 2013, the FSA will merge with the new Child and Family Support Agency.

Development Programme<sup>5</sup> - and since then Blue Drum's support work is confined to FRCs only, under contract from the Family Support Agency (FSA)<sup>6</sup>, which was set up in 2003.

Blue Drum's 2nd tier support to FRCs operates at a number of levels: it aims to promote community art at individual FRC levels through workshops, and demonstration events; it supports the exchange of information, knowledge and experience at inter-FRC levels through network meetings and other events; and both nationally and internationally it promotes policy discussion and critique of arts and culture in society through its website, seminars and publications.

## **2. FAMILY SUPPORT AGENCY AND FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES**

Since their formation, which commenced in 1994, FRCs have operated as independent, autonomous community agencies providing needs-based, family support interventions, with an emphasis on community development and participation and family involvement. With the FSA's formation in 2003 the number of FRCs was expanded – currently 107 - and a nationally-based, strategic approach was gradually devised to ensure improved networking and coordination, a cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences, and the consolidation of FRCs as a hub for

<sup>5</sup> Pobal (2011) *Local and Community Development Programme Guidelines*. Dublin, Author.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fsa.ie>

the development and coordination of services to children and families within their localities. The current strategy is outlined in the "Strategic Framework for Family Support"<sup>7</sup> which was adopted by the FSA's Board in May, 2011 – referred to below as either the "Strategic Framework" or more simply the "framework".

### **3. BLUE DRUM HAPPY PARENT INITIATIVE - BACKGROUND**

The Blue Drum Happy Parent Initiative (HPI) is designed as a single experiential workshop for participating parents attending FRCs. Operationally HPI is delivered as an FRC-level support to FRCs, but it was also delivered, in some instances at regional, inter-FRCs level.

HPI arose as an attempt to insert an arts-based intervention in support of existing programmes and actions undertaken by FRCs within the context of their own strategic plans and developments, and it emerged from internal Blue Drum consultations that considered undertaking practical initiatives that corresponded to the provision of direct supports and programmes to families as outlined within the "Strategic Framework". The framework envisaged FRCs playing a continued important role in the local coordination and development of services to children and families, including the development of

community arts initiatives and the provision of arts and crafts activities for children<sup>8</sup>.

Although community art is generally perceived as not lending too easily to research and evaluation<sup>9</sup>, there are nonetheless strong indicators it can play an important role within community development and its various sub- programmes.<sup>10,11</sup> For example, community art activities can contribute to establishing a stronger sense of community identity.<sup>12,13</sup> They can improve cultural exchange and knowledge<sup>14</sup>, and they can also generate activities that have additional local economic value<sup>15</sup>. There is furthermore, evidence that creative activities have more tangible individual, personal benefits, for instance for persons who live in stressful situations or conditions, or who have mental

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<sup>7</sup>McKeown, K. (2011) Strategic Framework for Family Support within the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. Dublin: Family Support Agency.

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<sup>8</sup> SPEAK Consulting (2010) The Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. Dublin: Author.

<sup>9</sup>Newman, T., Curtis, K., & Stephens, J. (2003). Do community-based arts projects result in social gain? *Community Development Journal* 38 (4), 310-322.

<sup>10</sup> Lowe, S. (2000) Creating Community Art for Community Development. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. vol. 29 n.3 357-386.

<sup>11</sup> Sardu, C., Mereu, A., Sorgiu, A., Contu, P. (2012) A Bottom-up art Event Gave Birth to a Process of Community Empowerment in an Italian village. *Global Health Promotion* vol. 19 no. 1 5-13.

<sup>12</sup> Carrington, A. (2010) Exploring Arts Organisations as a Catalyst for Community Development. University of Kentucky's Masters Thesis. Paper 24.

<sup>13</sup> Cullen, B. *Creating Connections – An exploration of the contribution of community arts to community development in five local projects*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> South, J. (2004) *Evaluation of Bradford District Arts For Health Programme*. Leeds: Centre for Health Promotion. v. 19 n 1 5-13.

<sup>15</sup> Marville, C. (2006) *Creating an Arts Destination: The Community Development Process in Waynesville, North Carolina*. A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the North Carolina State University, Raleigh, in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

health difficulties.<sup>161718</sup> Such activities can also play a role in improving children's confidence, self-awareness, problem-solving skills and capacities for collaborative engagement<sup>19</sup> and can also have an impact on reducing parents' social isolation and giving them new skills that contribute to their self-esteem, self-expression and ability to communicate with others, including their children<sup>20</sup>.

Blue Drum envisaged designing a workshop with a specific focus on enhancing the self-esteem and confidence of participating parents and that potentially this would have the outcome of improved family functioning, both directly in the sense that enhanced parent self-esteem has a positive effect on parental functioning, and indirectly in that it also has a positive effect on children's self-esteem and functioning. It was also envisaged that the positive experience of attending the workshop would have an effect of boosting parents

willingness and confidence to use basic creative activities at home with their children, thereby contributing further to overall family functioning.

HPI consists a 3-hour, hands-on, once-off arts workshop, targeted at parents of children between the ages of 4-8, primarily, with a specific focus on parents considered vulnerable within the context of the work of FRCs. The workshop's main aim is to help parents access their creative skills and to share their application of these skills in group projects with other participants. The workshop also aims to generate participant interest in replicating the workshop at home with their children, thereby encouraging parents to learn more about how to nurture, foster and develop their children's creative expression and to value the link between this and children's ongoing development.

The workshop was designed by the workshop facilitator in consultation with a small, advisory group. The main concerns influencing workshop design were:

1. to use low cost, easily accessed materials to make art projects;
2. to have a workshop structure that would involve paired and group interaction;
3. to encourage group-directed conversation with each other;
4. to ensure facilitator played a non-directive role; and
5. to ensure the overall atmosphere was easy-going and supportive.

<sup>16</sup> Hacking, S., Secker, J., Spandler, H., Kent, L. & Shenton, J. (2008) Evaluating the impact of participatory art projects for people with mental health needs, *Health and Social Care in the Community*, vol 16 no. 6. 638-648.

<sup>17</sup> Makin, S., Gask, L (2012) Getting back to normal: the added value of an art-based programme in promoting recovery for common but chronic mental health problems, *Chronic Illness*, v.8 n.1 64-75.

<sup>18</sup> Bungay, H., Clift, S. (2010) Arts on prescription: A Review of Practices in the UK. Perspectives in the UK. *Public Health* vol 130 n. 6 277-281.

<sup>19</sup> Nilson, C. (2011) Teachers' and mothers' perception of using the creative arts to develop children's potential for critical thinking. Masters by Research Thesis. Murdoch University.

<sup>20</sup> Mulligan, M., Humphery, K., James, P., Scanlon, C., Smith, P., Welch, N. (2006) Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts and Well-Being Within and Across Local Communities. Melbourne. The Globalism Institute. Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).

#### **4. WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION**

The workshop commences with a short introduction by the facilitator which highlights the benefits of finding a “creative space” between parent and child, to improve communication and expression, to have fun, to improve the child’s skills, particularly in problem solving, communication, dexterity and understanding abstract concepts. The facilitator also outlines how developing such creative spaces with children can complement their formal education.

Following the introduction, the workshop has two practical 80-minute sessions, both of which involve the use of basic arts materials – pens, paper, markers and paint – and household materials and recyclables – cardboard boxes, magazines, event and greeting cards, egg boxes and home-made play dough. There is a break for tea/coffee between both sessions. There is background music playing throughout the whole workshop.

In the first session, participants work in pairs, and following short, simple instruction, they draw an outline of each others’ hands, following which they use colours and images to represent their individual profiles as related to each other through basic conversation and storytelling. Each participant pair then works with a neighbouring pair to create a group portrait -like a family or community portrait - from the individual hands, and create further imagery within the composition to represent the four-person group as a whole. These

compositions are displayed in poster fashion to the whole group.

The workshop facilitator illustrates how collections of hand drawings, including those on display, can be used, in a practical sense, to make costumes, decorations, cards and labels and for other everyday purposes. The facilitator generates a brief discussion about the collaborative, collective perspective within the session and makes observations about the general importance of this perspective in arts-based activities, particularly as it applies to family settings.

A wider collection of materials is used in the workshop’s second session, during which participants working as a group are asked to create a scenario based on the conversations that emerged earlier. Examples of scenarios, as developed by similar groups elsewhere are put on display. In this second session, recyclable materials are more to the fore and participants are encouraged to utilise these freely.

The workshop is concluded with a short facilitated reflection on the work, how the time was used, the different skills developed and what was learned. The participants are encouraged to consider how they might use this work with their own children and particular attention is drawn to the role of arts activities such as this in passing on family stories, interpreting school texts, exploring locality and in creating mythical creatures. The facilitator also draws attention to the workshop’s use of non-art-specific



skills used, such as problem solving, negotiation and communication.

Finally, each participant is given a handout containing other relevant ideas that they can explore. They are then asked to consider passing on this knowledge to other parents and to consider creating art exchange days/exhibitions of their's and their children's work with the FRC as a means of community celebration. They are also asked to feedback to Blue Drum their experiences and ideas so that this work can grow and inform other, similar developments into the future.

## **5. IMPLEMENTATION**

All FRCs were contacted by email to express an interest in hosting this workshop, and follow-up calls were made to centre personnel previously known to Blue Drum. FRCs who requested to host a workshop were asked, where facilities were available, to invite other FRCs in their region to participate also. Each participant FRC was encouraged to invite parents they felt would most benefit from the workshops, with particular attention to those who have already been identified as being vulnerable and needing on-going support; it was also suggested a centre worker/volunteer be available during the workshop.

The workshop was delivered in six different, regionally-distributed FRC locations, three of which invited-in participants from other FRCs within their region; in some instances FRC staff or volunteer personnel also participated. In all 51 persons across a total of 12 FRCs participated.

Location variables related to accessibility (public transport), quality of centre facilities, the availability of resource centre staff/volunteers to help get the workshop started and to help make a link between the workshop and follow-on activities. In general, the workshops followed the design, as outlined. Examples of scenarios, as developed in session 2 include:

1. a dragon, which was derived from a group conversation from participants in a commuter town about the importance of vehicle journeys in linking the community together and linking its members with external services.
2. a scary piece, from a mixed group of rural local and foreign-national participants whose discussion focused on the universality of childhood stories and myths about sacred places.
3. a day at the beach, from a group of suburban participants whose conversation evolved around an ideal day out.
4. super-heroes, from a discussion of the daily lives of parents
5. childhood street games, following a discussion about growing up in a old housing estate
6. the arrival of an Eastern princess, following a discussion of local legends about a Viking invasion and a decision to create a new legend for the future.

## 6. REVIEW

The review approach undertaken to report on HPI consists a mainly, retrospective account based on the following:

- Two discussions / interviews with the workshop facilitator
- Telephone discussions / interviews with six FRC personnel who helped set up the workshops in their locations, and
- Telephone discussions / interviews with three members of Blue Drum's HP Working Group.

In addition, an observation of one typical workshop, was undertaken through its full operation. The review did not include any pre- and post-testing nor did it include direct follow-up discussions or interviews with participants. The review approach therefore is quite limited and clearly all conclusions drawn from this review need to be understood within the context of these limitations.

There was widespread agreement across all FRC informants that based on their observations and interactions, these workshops were positive confidence-boosting experiences for participants, with strong, positive impact on participants' self-esteem. Statements in relation to this were unequivocal, with informants stating that the workshops had an immense "feel-good" effect, and were beneficial for parents in a number of respects and they managed to engage some participants in a manner that had not

been previously witnessed at other events or programmes. There was a general air of enthusiasm in relation to the workshops both during and afterwards, although there is no clear indication that the benefits as experienced on the day, were sustained. Some FRC personnel reference that some of the participants continue to be positive and enthusiastic about the workshop, but the overall numbers of parents referred to in this reflection was low.

On the basis of the author's observation it was self-evident the workshop had a favourable impact. It was evident parents had acquired new skill and they themselves had a clear awareness of this – they spoke about it enthusiastically and they indicated how they might use it in home situations. They also spoke about how they might develop these skills further. It was clear the workshops were good, fun, joyful activities. There was constant communication between parents, even though many of them had not met beforehand – these conversations continued during tea/coffee and also at the end.

FRC personnel made references to parents' willingness to participate, that once the workshops commenced, there was an enthusiasm to continue and there was no sense of resistance in completing the sessions or of trying to re-direct or take-over the various tasks. In general a good spirit of cooperation prevailed and this

contributed to the overall sense of the workshops as positive.

Parents found the materials relatively easy to work with; they were used to these materials from their everyday lives, so they were able to adapt to them as art materials quite easily. It was felt that some parents were slightly inhibited prior to the workshops because they had a fear of art and art materials, but that the workshops' use of recyclable household items helped to demystify their sense and understanding of art and of the creative process. It was evident that other parents had previously undertaken art courses and for them also the exposure to recyclables opened up new possibilities for learning; indeed it is reported that some of this group led subsequent FRC discussions to set-up follow-through workshops and events.

It was stated that parents found the basic format relaxing and easy to work with, that it helped they were not pressurised but left free to generate their own conversations and communications with others as they went about familiarising themselves with themes and materials. It was clear that the creative process itself had generated connections between people. It was emphasised that working in pairs and small groups had helped break down barriers, particularly as in some instances workshops had mixed participants from settled, Traveller and/or migrant communities. It was felt that the workshops had helped create a space

for conversation between people that otherwise would not have happened.

The facilitative role was described as positive and supportive and that the non-directive approach was important in allowing participants get on with things themselves. The overall emphasis on cooperative rather than instructive structure was seen as important in creating a good, positive mood within each group.

Whether the workshops had a corollary positive impact on participants' children is not so immediately apparent. On the surface, it is reasonable to expect that if parents have even once-off positive episodes in self-esteem that this will roll-over in the impact on the children. However, it is impossible to assess this without direct evidence, except perhaps by proxy. It was expected that parents would utilise the experience they gained from the workshops to do more hands-on art exercises with their own children. However, FRC coordinators were unable to report any substantial evidence to support this, although, as already stated, there were references to some parents doing so.

The impact of the workshops in relation to other parent and child-based activities in participating centres is more evident. This was not necessarily an aim of the workshops but it is reported that the workshops, in some instances, generated a demand for more of the same type of activities to be developed within the centres, which in some cases has happened. This is a positive outcome



insofar as it has made a link between other FRC programmes and creative activities. It has been suggested that a higher dose of workshops might be required however, to sustain and build on this demand.

There was of course some negative feedback in relation to this initiative, although in the main this did not concern the workshop itself, but related more to matters concerning its organising.

For example, there were mixed views on the value of using this particular workshop format regionally on an inter-FRC basis. While this approach meant the workshop had broader penetration, it can also dilute attempts to target it at vulnerable parents. In a couple of instances it was also suggested that the logistics of setting up a workshop might be more easily handled if the facilitator was already quite familiar with the project and regionally-based.

The facilitator indicated there were significant differences in the organisational / logistical facilities available to FRCs: whereas some had back-up resources and volunteers to help set up and operate the workshops, others had very little, and some vital workshop-time got lost as a result. The limitations of

implementing an initiative such as this with one nationally-based sessional co-ordinator with a potential participating project list of 107 were indeed self-evident.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

In providing an overall discussion of HPI it is important to locate and contextualise it within an FSA / FRC operational framework, particularly as Blue Drum exists primarily by

way of its contract to FSA, and HPI emerged, as already mentioned, from Blue Drum's consideration of FSA's "Strategic Framework for Family Support", which deals mainly with the work of FRCs.

The Strategic Framework envisages that FRCs target families and communities where social needs are greatest. It also envisages FRCs use an overall community development approach underpinned by bottom-up developments, local management, community participation and the involvement of families in programme development and implementation.

The framework uses a standard public health conception of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention to outline a typology of FRC support services, as outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Typology of Family Support Services in FRCs**

<b>Primary Prevention</b>	Developmental family support	Universal support services to help strengthen families	-personal development -children & youth activities -adult education -recreational activities
<b>Secondary Prevention</b>	Compensatory family support	Programmes to address specific family-based problems	-counselling -group work -parent training -family work
<b>Tertiary Prevention</b>	Protective family support	Specialised services to protect children from abuse and neglect	-procedures/protocols for reporting -inter-agency working - risk monitoring and assessment

In general, FSA’s network of 107 supported Family Resource Centres (FRCs) draw primarily from both developmental and compensatory models (primary and secondary prevention) in developing programmes of family support and intervention, taking account of local needs, resources and contextual priorities. Protective family support is based primarily within an alternative statutory service framework and in general FRCs would maintain links with these services, thereby contributing to a continuum of interventions, although the nature and extent of collaboration and cooperation that can be achieved across service boundaries varies.

The FSA’s framework for developing local strategies identifies the challenge of establishing a coherent, logical link between the needs as identified and outlined, the proposed actions, and the desired outcomes. The framework sets out a template (Table 2 below) for establishing this coherence and this is framed around

seven national outcomes for both families and children; these outcomes are specified – but for children only in The Agenda for Children’s Services<sup>21</sup>. The framework suggests these actions operate across two domains:

- **developmental actions**

- refer to bottom-up initiatives and services whereby targeted persons are brought together, identify their shared experiences and needs and devise and manage various, flexible self- help and mutual support programmes and responses; and

- **programmed supports**

- are identified as more refined responses to specific, tangible problems with more clearly defined aims and outcomes, target groups, modes of delivery and skill requirements

<sup>21</sup> Office for the Minister of Children (2007) Agenda for Children’s Services: A Policy Handbook. Dublin: Stationary Office.

**Table 2 Template for coherence between need as identified and outlined**

			Targets
Developmental	Programmed		Personal and group-based
		1. Healthy physically and mentally	
		2. Supported in active learning	
		3. Safe from accidental and intentional harm	
		4. Economically secure	
		5. Secure in the immediate and wider physical environment	
		6. Part of positive networks of families, friends, neighbours and the community	
		7. Included in the society	

In some instances programmed activities will include quality monitoring, and will have been developed, tested, replicated and modified through research and evaluation techniques. Such quality monitoring is usually associated with programmes that follow prescribed pathways, whereby practitioners – usually at graduate level at least and with specialist, programme training – adhere to a relatively tight manual and timescale in delivering individual (parent or child), group work (parents or children or mixed) or family (family members as a group) interventions.

As developmental actions are more contextualised and not necessarily transferable across time and different locations, they are less likely to have been subjected to quality testing or monitoring and can be delivered with more flexibility by a wider range of both specialist and

non-specialist personnel, including, in some instances, voluntary personnel. The range, type and amount of developmental actions that have potential application at this level are limitless. In general, such programmes and activities will reflect context, which in itself is hugely variable, depending on individual families, the circumstances and settings in which they live and the structure, staffing and resources of the support service or agency that arranges or sponsors the activities.

The framework envisages that each FRC utilise an “if-then logic” model to devise its strategy. This model is described as using “evidence and argument to show that if a particular model is undertaken there are particular grounds for believing that the desired outcomes will then be produced.

As a corollary the “if- then logic” provides a basis for reviewing the overall application of all actions undertaken within FRCs. It is a given that the “if-then logic” is more easily applied with respect to programmed than developmental actions, given that the former lend more easily to a research structure dealing with tangible aims, targets and outcomes.

For example, the application of the “If-then logic” model to pre-designed, programmed activities may be illustrated by using the example of an FRC deciding – following a needs assessment and consultation process – to put into place a formal positive-parenting programme, that has previously been well- researched, and assessed, as having an appropriate application with respect the needs and target groups as identified. A programme such as this would be located broadly within National Outcome 2 involving - Supported in Active Learning, and more specific outcomes would be outlined within the programme and relate to improved positive parenting, across a range of different domains.

Provided this programme is targeted and delivered as pre-specified, it would be logical to assume it will achieve the desired outcomes with respect to positive parenting and in this regard it could be stated there is, from the outset, good evidence and argument to support FRCs using and implementing this programme, in such circumstances. The actual implementation of the programme within an FRC context can of course

be separately evaluated, thereby providing even further evidence to support its use.

The inherent logic of this model does not always hold, and, as is often the case with FRCs other factors can have significant impact on whether an intervention can be logically applied. So, for example, the following factors could inhibit the simple insertion of a formal positive parenting intervention into an FRC’s active- learning programme – even though the objective need for such a programme is established.

Firstly, FRCs are generally based in communities of social disadvantage, and in some instances social problems are over-bearing and embedded in structural deficits, such as poverty and unemployment. Although FRCs lack capacity to respond to these larger issues they could dominate the community consultation in a needs-assessment process, making it difficult for FRCs to bring focus to specific, tangible issues that can be dealt with locally – such as active learning and positive parenting interventions.

Secondly, some of the families whose needs have been identified as greatest might be most excluded and isolated within their own communities, and might not have directly participated in a needs assessment, and might not concur with the need for positive parenting programmes as defined. They might not see the value of participating in active learning programmes dealing with family issues, but yet to proceed without their involvement

might be perceived as counter-productive, and leading to further exclusion.

Thirdly, although some parents might have agreed the need for a positive parenting programme, they might also lack the self-confidence to extend their participation into a social learning programme with other parents. Such participation might constitute a step too far, especially with parents who experience a lack of confidence or a lack of social engagement with their peers.

Fourthly, formal training programme participants might find an active learning or parenting programme difficult to sustain because of its relatively fixed structure, content and language, its attendance and participation requirements and in terms of the programme's latent capacity to generate negative self-reflections with respect previous learning or schooling experiences.

These factors, and others, mitigate the application of a straightforward "if-then logic" in developing programmed actions in FRCs. An indirect approach – drawing from developmental actions – is often indicated, and as previously stated, these are less likely to fit the "if-then logic". So, for example, in relation to the factors outlined above, an FRC might seek to overcome these by putting into place developmental actions, such as community events that draw attention to parenting issues through exhibition, demonstration or audio/visual presentations; once-off taster learning programmes that encourage

people in to expressing an interest in participation; and using creative activities by way of introducing or sustaining an interest in other, more formal programmes.

In its design HPI includes both programmed and developmental features. As a programme it has a specific, relatively fixed design that potentially provides for it to be operated as a stand-alone intervention within any particular FRC or as a separate component to other FRC programmes. Although it has broad aims, the most envisaged outcome from its central component (the workshop) is that participating parents will have improved self-esteem and self-confidence.

The HPI workshop however has not been tested as an intervention to achieve this aim in a classical research sense, nor indeed was it utilised within the FRCs as a specific programme to be used in response to a specific need, and moreover the workshop's aims, targets and anticipated outcomes are often represented in both variable and generalised terms, at times with an emphasis on untested broader effects in terms of the creative dimension or parenting, and at other times bringing focus to its more immediate, identifiable, tangible impacts.

It is with respect to these latter impacts that the albeit limited retrospective account, as outlined above, can make conclusions, in the sense of being able to state that the workshop did have a positive impact on participant self-esteem and



confidence. Such positive claims cannot be made here with respect to the wider aims; for example it cannot be stated that an improved sense of confidence was sustained nor indeed that the workshops had direct impact on improving parenting, or child self-esteem, although there is nonetheless a strong indication that such impact could be possible.

While HPI's, structure, focus and content are relatively fixed these do not exclude it from operating from within a developmental context and indeed HPI's implementation as described above reflects the relatively flexible application of developmental actions within FRCs. For example, the selection of participants lacked uniformity across FRCs suggesting that in some a relatively non-targeted approach was used, which is unsurprising as often FRCs need to avoid coming across as targeting specific parents for fear this will put people off or lead to them becoming even more marginalised within their own communities.

Furthermore, from discussions held with FRC personnel it is clear that the workshop was perceived, not in a programmed way, but as one of a number of several developmental interventions that they use, from time-to-time and that contribute, in no particularly ordered manner, to sustaining the commitment and engagement of parents to participate in other social learning programmes and in response to specific problems as encountered.

In general community-based family services and centres are open to the incorporation of creative activity approaches either as new activities in their own right or as additional to existing creative activities, already commenced; as already noted community art activities are currently an important component of the overall work programme of FRCs. Therefore, the incorporation of HPI into the general, everyday operation of such services is unlikely to meet any conceptual resistance, although issues such as time, cost and resources, will, as they do in relation to all programmes, have influence.

Obviously, decisions in relation to how individual FRCs might seek to incorporate this work is a matter for them individually, particularly as they set about developing their work programmes and strategies in a manner that is consistent with the "Strategic Framework". For Blue Drum, the issue is how does it represent this work and initiative so that FRCs perceive it as consistent with these plans. Table 3 below summarises – in broad terms – how the initiative might be represented to FRCs in a manner that allows them to attach this work to their own plans. Some elaboration of this outline however, is obviously required, and these are presented below within the overall context of suggestions or recommendations to Blue Drum for developing this work.

First, Blue Drum should more precisely define the need it is responding to. At a broad level it is obviously concerned to make an

impact on parenting and improve the overall parenting experience through the work of the FRCs. However, Blue Drum is not a parenting specialist body and it needs to be mindful there are others who have operated parenting programmes for longer and are potentially more adept at both programme design, and in anticipating the inherent pitfalls of implementing such programmes,

particularly with respect to child protection issues and protocols, professional boundary matters in relation to families who present with serious psycho-social problems, and in managing expectations that are often unintentionally aroused that once-off, time-limited programmes can make a significant impact into multi-dimensional family problems, which they often don't.

**Table 3 Blue Drum Happy Parent Initiative within a FRC Framework**

	<b>ACTIONS</b>			<b>TARGETS</b>
<b>NEEDS</b>	<i>These actions aim to put into place hands-on, experiential arts, group-based workshops - based on easily available recyclables and basic art materials – to generate an improved self-confidence among family members to improve and sustain their participation in social learning programmes</i>		<b>OUTCOMES</b>	Personal and group-based
	<b>Developmental Programmed</b>			
A lack of self confidence  A lack of participation in social learning	HPI as a once-off workshop used to support family members participation in active learning	1.HPI as a stand-alone set of workshops  2. HPI as a set of workshops integrated into other active learning programmes	2. Supported in active learning	Parent groups  Grandparent groups  Child/youth groups  Extended family groups

Blue Drum evidently brings freshness and creativity to programme design and clearly it has a capacity to use community art activities to motivate and inspire people and to help them become more confident, not so much to be better parents, but to be more engaged with and interested in creative learning, which in turn, potentially leads to positive parenting outcomes. These capacities have application across a wide range of fields in addition to parenting and include after-school programmes, youth programmes, elderly support groups, to name a few. There are potentially common needs and gaps across such activities, and Blue Drum should perhaps identify and be more specific about how it can bring creativity and added value to these programmes in a general sense rather than bringing too much focus to more specific aims, such as improved parenting, which, in any case, is so difficult to define and quantify.

In this latter respect it would also be useful to adopt a broader vision of family and to avoid – especially from an arts perspective – a language that confines it to parent-child relations, especially when so many other configurations have creative possibilities also, such as grandparent/grandchild, sister/brother, uncle/niece and so forth.

It is recommended therefore that the core need and aims that are central to this initiative be re-defined both in terms of improving prospective participants' self confidence to

participate in social learning and in terms of the role of creative activities in helping to bring this about and to sustain it.

Second, at the heart of the HPI is the workshop, which, as already stated, was well received and popular within FRCs where it was operated. As a once-off, stand-alone entity however, this workshop is self-limiting, although potentially, it provides the core for a more substantial intervention. Obviously, preserving this core is important and key aspects of this include the use of recyclables, paired and small-groupwork, supporting story-telling and conversation, use of background music, group project, and so forth.

This core could be expanded. It is not for this paper to spell out how this might happen in detail, but a broad range of development possibilities are worth considering. It is important to note that within the context of FRC strategies, HPI could potentially operate as either a developmental or programmed intervention. It would be useful to distinguish these in practical terms.

The workshop as it is currently structured lends as a once-off, stand-alone intervention that could easily be modified, as appropriate, within the context of any individual FRC's pool of developmental actions, to be utilised in a range of ways to support families' engagement in both formal and informal active learning programmes. A set number of such, once-off workshops could be provided to individual FRCs on an offer or request basis, in much the

same way that HPI has been operated to date, save that alternative arrangements would need to be put into place for more effective, national coverage.

The workshop can also operate as a programmed action, dealing specifically perhaps with an FRC's identified need to more directly incorporate this type of work into their strategies either as stand-alone or incorporated into other programmes, for example some parenting programmes might benefit from incorporating aspects of HPI into their design and obviously these would need to be worked out through discussion.

An initial sketch outline for two specific programmes would need to be devised and negotiated in more detail at an FRC level. Both would deal primarily with aims around boosting one's own self-confidence, encouraging participation and creating the conditions whereby participants become more engaged in active learning. Each would need not one but a set of workshops, using a wider range of recyclables, and bringing together more themes for group projects, and also generating more scope for story-telling and conversation. In both instances arrangements for pre- and post- data collection should be put into place in order to generate reliable evaluative information on the value and usefulness of this type of intervention.

Third, the HPI workshop should not be confined to parent groups. There is considerable scope for using this

format and approach with children's groups, youth groups and also with older people attending local day centres, or indeed inter-generational projects are also worth exploring.

Fourth, although this paper did not address the issue of resources it is obvious that the HPI has had greater ambition than what is feasible within the context of its very limited budget. In the current climate, every agency is required to cut the cloth to suit, and in this regard therefore it does not appear to make sense for HPI or any follow-through initiative to have national scope through a single East coast-based worker. Blue Drum will need to bring some new thinking to addressing the challenge of national coverage, perhaps through focusing its own energies on a single region, or some other workable alternative. Indeed, it could focus on a single region for 2 years, and another region later. Whatever, it seems clear that current energies and resources get quite diluted through the worker's attempts to have such wide coverage. Changing this will help bring more focus to developing the programme itself with less time spent travelling.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The underlying, often untold, stories in community projects and services, concern the very many challenges they face, both individually and as a group, in trying to bring about real improvements into the functioning of families and into children's lives, in the midst of serious, seemingly intractable social problems alongside multiple personal traumas arising

from relationship breakdowns, financial problems and mental health and addiction issues.

In these stories, personnel will often speak of serendipitous encounters or random, once-off insights that lead unexpectedly to significant life-changes. But, they also speak of the value and potential of a whole range of formal and semi-formal programmes for families, children and parents, as well as counselling and individual coaching that they see as offering some prospect of instituting change and of re-configuring future family pathways and outcomes. What they often find difficult to contemplate is how they are going to get to a place where these supports can be implemented, a place whereby there is a strong community leadership that supports interventions on family issues, and promotes the value of family interventions across the community, particularly among families who are most vulnerable, and that families who need to turn up to participate and are given the support and assistance to sustain this participation in an on-going manner.

Getting to this place obviously requires resources, but more often it requires considerable creative thinking, and FRCs – amongst other groups and agencies – putting into place a whole range of activities designed to simply get people interested in doing something, prior to finding other ways of more intensely supporting them through the journey. Community arts and creative activities can play a role

with respect to getting to this place; other activities can also play this role and many of these are outlined in the Strategic Framework.

Potentially, the BPHI can also play a role. On the basis of its implementation as outlined above there is a sufficient basis for claiming it can make an impact within this process. As matters stand, this impact is relatively small and it behoves those behind the initiative to work out how it can be expanded and brought to greater scale and having done so to ensure adequate arrangements are put into place to tell that story too.