

Nurturing Attachment Groups

A small-scale independent report

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February 2022

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1. Acknowledgements

The evaluator would like to thank Families Empowered (FE) for instigating and funding the research; this is the start of an ongoing process to which they are committed. We are grateful to the local authorities who commissioned and value the nurturing attachment group work. A particular thank you to the families, managers, therapists, social workers, those who agreed to be interviewed and who took part in the survey for this report. Also, a thank you to all those who cannot be named for reasons of confidentiality.

Additionally, I would like to express my thanks to Professor L. Dawkins and Dr. J. Dodsworth for their invaluable advice and support with reference to the research for this study. Also, R. Le Fevre for her indispensable help on all things administrative. I would like to acknowledge L. Hines and T. Davey for their contributions in collecting the data.

2. Glossary

1. FE – Families Empowered
2. NAGs – Nurturing Attachment Groups
3. SGs- Special Guardians
4. DDP- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy
5. PACE – Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy
6. LAs- Local authorities
7. SSD- Social Services Department

3. Contents

3.1 Introduction

After discussion with FE in 2020, this small-scale work was commissioned in 2021, it consisted of 30 working hours per month, the equivalent of 1.5 working days per week over the course of 4.5 months.

This is very much a part of an ongoing independent evaluation to which FE are committed. As stated earlier, FE have, from the very beginning, had their own system for collecting and analysing feedback. Each group has a robust feedback system and 80% of participants respond and contribute. Internal processes are in place which enable same to be integrated into FE's work, to support staff supervision and facilitate planning.

Referral to FE's already existing data offers potential scope to explore some of these issues more fully, both in this study and in future works.

About Families Empowered – Deborah Sharratt – Founder & Director

Families Empowered is a small team of dedicated professionals for whom children are always at the heart of the how and why. The company is based in East Anglia, but is commissioned by local authorities across the South East, London and, with the growth of zoom, across the country.

With warmth, understanding and empathy we offer a range of highly effective, therapeutic interventions for children and their families. Those families have experienced trauma which has ruptured the ability to form attachments and negatively impacted behaviours and relationships. We help families unpick what lies behind the behaviours that are draining family life, whilst supporting parents and carers in their own journeys to bring real and sustained change. We are skilled practitioners immersed in the principles of DDP and PACE, with an extensive background in social work and children's services. We are dedicated to improving outcomes for children and have seen how DDP-led interventions can positively transform the families we work with. From group programmes to individual support, our experienced team can balance the needs of each family within the context of social care. We understand the challenges. We speak the language. We care.

Families Empowered Nurturing attachment group

Nurturing Attachment Groups (NAGs) from Families Empowered are revelatory programmes designed to support, guide and develop insight for parents and carers of children who experience attachment difficulties following trauma and abuse. NAGS was developed by Kim Golding and is based on attachment-led research, and underpinned by Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and PACE (Dan Hughes). Families Empowered delivery of the groups breathes real-life into theory through practical discussion, videos and meaningful activities all facilitated by experienced professionals and DDP practitioners.

What led to the commissioning of the evaluation?

The Nurturing attachment group has been commissioned by Essex County Council adoption team and Special Guardian team for the last three years, the first one was commissioned in the Autumn of 2018 and Hertfordshire County Council joined us over the last 2 years. It is valued for the help and support it offers to families as well as a cost-effective provision of services, which reach families when resources are scarce. Following each group, the practitioner gathers feedback from participants so quality assurance is an ongoing and important process that has helped to shape the service that is delivered today. However, Deborah Sharratt who leads Families Empowered was keen to learn more about the longer-term impactful nature of the groups and how families continued to use the learning long after the groups had finished. Deborah was aware that there had been evaluations of other Nurturing Attachment Groups in other areas and the findings had been informative, so s/he wanted to discover more about the groups provided by Families Empowered.

Deborah was aware of Victoria Harris's work at the University of East Anglia. Therefore, s/he commissioned a phased study of the group with the first stage being a short evaluation using both quantitative and qualitative information gathered from people who had attended the groups over the past 4 years, people who commissioned the service and the practitioners who delivered the groups. This evaluation will be used to inform the management team of the effectiveness of the service and highlight any areas of improvement. The findings will be cascaded to all stakeholders in the groups and will inform practice and staff training.

D. Sharratt (February 2022).

4. Study Design

4.1 Aims of the study

The study was commissioned to evaluate the Nurturing Attachment Groups (NAGs) designed, facilitated, and led by FE.

The main focus was to highlight both strengths and weaknesses of the programme as experienced by the group members and commissioners. Also, to outline and examine the effectiveness of the groups. These findings would inform recommendations for improved outcomes for families.

In particular, the evaluation wished to consider how far the 'Families Empowered' work; through the Nurturing Attachment Groups, impacted on the experience of the children and families.

Also, how it increases their capacity to improve the outcomes for the children and young people who are a part of their family.

The evaluation considered how far the Group work

- Increases the participant's capacity to improve the outcomes for the children and young people who are a part of their family.
- Increased the learning, contributing to a greater understanding of child development.
- Enabled the participants to analyse and reflect on their children's behaviour in a helpful way
- Enhanced their knowledge of Attachment and made it more accessible.
- Improved communication in the family.
- Empowered and supported the family through the group work process, both by the therapists and also as part of a participatory experience.

Case study: Interview with Rainee (mother)

Rainee described a very positive experience from the group work. It provided “a new way of parenting “. This was particularly helpful and exciting as she discussed her learning from the group after each session with her partner. She found this enriched their relationship as well as their parenting. It provided a way of “seeing us grow as a family”.

Another big plus for her was

“having time out with people who have similar experiences”.

It was a chance

‘to step back’,

“to remember where the kids were from “.

When diversity was discussed Rainee acknowledged that the group was “female heavy”. This comment was not pejorative. We talked about the structural reasons for this in terms of the economy and traditional roles .As part of this theme, Rainee described the group as having a “good age range”

and

“a recognition of disability”.

There was an atmosphere of respect and sound underpinning values. She felt able to say what she felt without fear of judgment; she just found support and understanding.

General points were made re the approachable nature of the trainers, the comprehensive reading material and notes.

She summed up by saying that they made a “great team”.

As in over 90% of the participants I interviewed, Rainee was reflective about the difference between face-to-face group work and use of Zoom. Rainee’s experience is very interesting as she spent the first half of the course meeting physically, and the second half virtually. Her preference is face to face, but she recognises the positive aspects of Zoom. She mentioned less travelling, less rush, less need for extra childcare.

The biggest negative was the lack of the informal coffee break chats. She felt they provided a space in which you could ask questions, for example, that you might feel are rather ‘silly’ or perhaps clear up a misunderstanding. Also, of course, the giving of a simple hug was impossible.

In terms of her learning, Rainee observed that a lot of families said that they “wished they had done these courses earlier”.

The course would have been so helpful when there were great difficulties at home. When there were issues at home whilst Rainee was attending the course, she found the one-to-one sessions, organised through the group, invaluable. The WhatsApp group compiled by the participants was also a positive aspect.

In conclusion, Rainee valued the expertise, the knowledge base, the appropriate use of humour and the ability of the trainers to retain the information about each child and family.

She described the group leaders as “stars”.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Method: The study employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods

- Questionnaires were sent to families from across 16 Nurturing Attachment Group Programmes. These cohorts were from Essex Special Guardians, Essex Adoption and Hertfordshire Adoption.
- All interviewees were informed that the interview itself would take up to one hour and twenty minutes approximately.
- The mode of interview was discussed with the participant/s beforehand, to allow for time, availability, and any mitigating circumstances.
- The evaluator gave the opportunity for any special needs considerations to be taken into account.
- Different options for interviews were offered such as phone or zoom. Due to Covid-19 the evaluator was unable to offer in person interviews.
- Attempts were made to be as flexible as possible.
- Interviews were conducted with families who had attended the above groups.
- Interviews were conducted with commissioners.
- Interviews were conducted with key personnel responsible for leading and delivering the groups.
- Interviews were conducted with social workers involved with referrals of the families.
- Interviews were conducted with social workers who have observed the groups.

4.2.2. Theory: The study was conducted using Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory, co-founded by Glazer and Strauss (1967) is the systemic discovery of data using methods of constant comparison and theoretical sampling, so that the theories remain grounded in observations of the social world rather than being generated in the abstract. (Surl 1998). The focus of Grounded Theory is to gather theory from the data. Glazer and Strauss (1967). This approach lends itself to the exploration of meaning and the development of a theoretical framework which derive from the ideas and themes that arise from analysis of that data. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to uncovering meaning people assign to their own experiences (Poshment 1989, Cresswell 1998). Grounded Theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding and provide a meaningful guide to action. (Strauss and Corbyn 1998) and therefore seem the most appropriate methodological approach to use for my study. As Chalmers notes,

“the focused enquiry of Grounded Theory with its progressive inductive analysis, moves the work theoretically and covers more empirical observations than other approaches. In this way, a focused grounded theory portrays a picture of the whole.” (2005:530)

Research findings were drawn from a mix of both academic and social work disciplines. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed including questionnaires, interviews with professionals, interviews with families, one of the therapists and analysis of data obtained from same and from background and historical data from FE.

4.2.3. Interviews

In-depth open-ended interviews provided a way of accessing the stories and narratives through which families attending NAGs experienced the group. During this process several major themes emerged which are addressed later in the text. Also, checking back with interviewees and looking for exceptions to emerging issues, confirmed that the use of this technique allows the researcher to obtain affirmation of the areas for them which were considered to be the most important.

Changing the cultural story in child protection: Learning from the insiders experience(Child and family social work 2009, 14, pp 289-299)

Interviews with key local authority personnel.

A semi structured interview was held with a manager responsible for commissioning of the Nurturing Attachment Groups. S/he had also observed one cohort throughout the process.

Additionally, a social worker with responsibility for referrals to the groups was interviewed. S/he was also the lead support for the families who had special guardianship of their children.

Also, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a lead manager responsible for launching a regional agency for training and supporting adopters.

Interviews with participant families.

Five families, chosen at random, were interviewed about their experience of the NAG.

Interview with therapist.

The therapist is a leader of the NAGs.

All interviewees had been contacted by email, phone calls and through meetings in order to obtain consent. Details of the evaluation and the independent consultant had been circulated to all personnel... staff, LAs, and families.

This consent was verified by the independent evaluator. All interviewees have permission for these conversations to be recorded in note form. Anónimo was assured at all stages of the evaluation process.

Pre interview the protocol was explained once again, and interviewees were encouraged to ask questions about the interview itself and the evaluation in general.

All transcribed data from the interviews was analysed.

Case study: Interview with Denis (father).

*As a father who attended, he
'loved the group'.*

*He bonded with other parents which was absolutely invaluable. This led to a WhatsApp group being set up which was very supportive. They met last year and had a day out together with the children. He found it helpful that suddenly he didn't feel their family was
'out on a limb'*

but that they

"were understood by people"

This was a wonderful experience for him and his family.

The group therapist was very highly regarded. Denis felt safe within the group but also that he had been challenged. This aided his self-analysis and reflection as well as enhancing his parenting skills.

I asked him about values and diversity, one of his children is of dual heritage and this was very much discussed within the group and by other group members. There was another member of the group who had adopted a child from Hong Kong so there was a lot of discussion about different cultures, histories and backgrounds. Ways of acknowledging and valuing difference were discussed as were the experiences of the children and families. The context for this discussion felt very safe.

We did talk about how more fathers could be involved in the group work, but recognised that this is part of a bigger issue in terms of the tradition of women being more likely to spend, for all sorts of economic and cultural reasons, more time at home and being, more or less, the main care giver. Although Denis and his partner (the partner works part time) try very much to strike a balance in terms of the role models they give their children and that was discussed in the group.

Denis described the whole experience, although it was emotionally and intellectually very demanding, as comfortable and relaxed. He said there were big differences within people in the group, but what brought them together were the similarities in terms of what they had to cope with in their families. Also, they were able to share some of the educational issues which frequently arose.

One of the very important points that Denis wished to make was about the timing of the group. He understood the complexities involved with the various systems but felt strongly that undertaking the NAG when the children were first placed would have been tremendously helpful. When he started the course, the children had been part of the family for 8 and 9 years respectively.

For him the one aspect of the course that he felt was particularly important was use of the talking techniques and how to approach difficult discussions with children, It made him realise that he

"used to speak like his dad used to"

and that he recognised that he was following that pattern.

When asked to comment on positive and negative aspects of the NAG, Denis said that he found the examples given in the course material and in the videos very helpful and that these had impacted positively on the relationship between him and his partner and theirs with the children.

He couldn't find any negatives. The only negative he could think of was that he would have liked to have been offered the group soon after they had become adopters, because after that everything went very quiet, and he felt that to attend the group earlier would have been really helpful and supportive and enlightening in terms of the dramatic influence it has had on themselves and their parenting.

Denis said that he would trust the therapist totally and that he felt that very strongly. I asked him again about improvements that could be made in the group and he said, "no way it was well run, it was welcoming, there was lots of time, there was an opportunity to do one to one," He really looked forward to the group. He saw it as a good time even though it was emotionally demanding.

5. Questionnaire to Families

After initial piloting based on prior feedback obtained over the last 4 years by FE's own systems, it was indicated that the most robust responses would be obtained by composing an electronic questionnaire. A questionnaire comprised of 21 questions of which 6 sought elaborations on a previous response which was devised by the evaluator. This meant that the evaluator was using a system that had previously been tried and tested by the organization. Hence it would be familiar to the recipients. However, the evaluator was careful, in coordination with the organization, to clearly differentiate the evaluation questionnaire and the feedback obtained routinely from the groups. This was achieved by means of communication as can be seen in the appendices. (Appendix 2)

The questionnaire was adapted from the ongoing FE format and designed by the evaluator specifically for this study with help by the administration. It was initially sent in September 2021 to 56 previous and current participants in the groups.

The questionnaire comprised a mix of 'tick box' answers and questions which invited qualitative comments as well as the quantitative data that was obtained.

The areas covered included:

Expectations, organisational aspects, practical considerations, interpretation, knowledge, theory into practice, and the key concepts of attachment theory.

The questionnaire was sent by the administrator for FE by email. The results received were all anonymized.

Gradually as I began to accumulate interview data, I was using an unstructured free flowing format and then keeping an eye on the data and overseeing the interviewing schedule outlined. From this I began transcribing and open coding the data whilst simultaneously undertaking the interviews.

“CODING REPRESENTS THE OPERATIONS BY WHICH DATA ARE BROKEN DOWN, CONCEPTUALISED, AND PUT TOGETHER IN NEW WAYS. IT IS THE CENTRAL PROCESS BY WHICH THEORIES ARE BUILT FROM DATA”. (STRAUSS AND CORBYN 1990: 57)

Simultaneous transcription and interviewing enabled me to reflect on emerging patterns and informed the interviewing process, ensuring that a particular theme could be further explored or eliminated.

The mixed method study took place between August 2021 and January 2022. The evaluator spoke to family members who had attended the group, professionals who were social workers to the families and who organised referrals to the groups, managers who were partly responsible for commissioning the groups, and a therapist. 56 questionnaires were sent to individual families.

From this sample 33.4% responded. In conversation with Professor L. Dawkins (November 2021), she stated that this is considered a “good average result” within this particularly sensitive and sometimes fraught setting.

This group of participants, therapists, social workers, and managers, bring together information held by all of them, allowing for cross reference and give a holistic view of what is happening in the groups and how this is supporting families, young people and the children involved.

6. Data Analysis

All transcribed data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This allowed themes to emerge from the data and provided insight into families knowledge of nurturing attachment, professionals’ views of assessment and support and knowledge gained by families. Wherever possible, direct quotes have been used to ensure rigour and present voices of the participants. Also, several case studies have been included in part of the larger piece of work.

6.1 Charts and Graphs

[Click here for data](#)

Case study: Interview with Nancy (Social Worker/Co-ordinator LA)

Nancy has referred families to the NAGs over the last two years. She has also attended one of the groups herself as an observer. She “loved the group “.

She described, as part of the lengthy interview, how meaningful and valuable the group experience had been for the Special Guardians with whom s/he works.

She felt it was of particular importance to this group of service users as often, before children and young people are placed with these families, there is very little time for preparation and training. The very nature of the role of SGs is that due to usually extreme circumstances; an accident, a bereavement, illness, a Court Case or mental health issues, the child/children are placed with other family members, often grandparents or siblings. Hence the initial assessment period is often of a different nature from, for example, the fostering or adoption process. This can often leave the SGs feeling rather “in the deep end “, unprepared for such a major change in their family life, and in shock.

The NAGs provide an experience where the SGs feel valued, understood and respected. FE “had an understanding of the trauma upon trauma that can be the experience of SGs”

Nancy described the group as

“very much part of the SSD’s package for guardians”

It “fits perfectly “ with the building block that Nancy’s team try to create for these families when children are first placed with them. The group

“needs to be part of the Support Package “.

Nancy acknowledged that the group work is difficult and testing for the families at times.

Nevertheless, FE make it enjoyable.

Nancy likes FE’s flexibility. They

“tie in with the families and are part of the journey “.

Again, in this interview, it was mentioned that one disadvantage of the virtual groups is that they don’t allow for those informal “chats around the kettle” moments. It was felt that, especially at the beginning of the process, some people felt happier to ask questions of other group members e.g. what did that last example in the video mean?

That little space – away from the therapists and observers, allows one to speak up if unable to in the open, wider group. Although there was felt to be a loss of the informal element- at break time etc, the interviewee felt this was compensated for by FE offering 1-2-1 therapy work outside of the group. These views were reinforced in another interview.

When we discussed social work values and diversity, Nancy was confident of a high sense of commitment to best practice by all professionals leading and planning the content and context of the groups. Trusting relationships were built with the families by showing respect and understanding difference. Within this environment families felt understood. They felt confident in sharing doubts, misgivings and problems. Nancy had also observed that this atmosphere of mutual trust and safety meant that group leaders could challenge participants and help expand their thinking about issues such as stereotyping people or situations because they didn’t conform to what society viewed as the norm.

Nancy wished to emphasise that social work values and anti-discrimination were built into the training, reading and reflective materials.

The approach was holistic and over time, tailored to the needs of the families as the course

7. Ethical considerations.

The study abided by the psychological practices of the British Sociological Association (2002). At this stage of the evaluation, children had not been interviewed although this is a consideration for the next stage of the study which will be in the Summer of 2022. All participants received clear information about the study. (Appendix 2, 3, 4) and all those interviewed were debriefed and offered appropriate support where necessary. The evaluator made clear that all those interviewed knew the context of the study, aims of the study and what would happen to the information that they have provided.

7.1 In reporting the findings

- All questionnaires were sent at random by FE's administrator to group participants/families. It should be noted that a number of questionnaires were sent to both parents in the same family. Hence, in some instances only one was returned of two sent. Clearly, due to the random selection and anonymity, the individuals have not been identified. However, this numerical anomaly came to light during the interviews.
- Steps have been taken to preserve the anonymity of the participants.
- Specific areas have not been identified.
- No interviewees have been named.
- No specific groups and dates and geography have been identified.

7.2 Consent

FE sent out the questionnaires, They ensured that consent was given by all parties either verbally or in writing. FE also gained consent from those the evaluator interviewed. FE confirmed consent had been obtained in all cases and the evaluator clarified the situation both by writing to the interviewees and speaking to them by phone.

8. Themes

8.1 Values and Diversity

The values expressed by FE were described as

“excellent”.

They were felt, and experienced to be, an integral part of the programme. This enabled an atmosphere of trust from which followed openness, understanding, and a feeling of being in a safe place. 90% of respondents mentioned this aspect. It was particularly important as the participants were sharing complex, intimate, intense, and sometimes overwhelmingly emotional details. Some facets of which they had never revealed/discussed before.

Due to mainly sociological, cultural and familial reasons, in this context, the group work environment is “predominantly female”

This can be both positive and negative.

(Case study: Nancy and Case study: Rainee).

It was felt that an important positive aspect of this was that there was an openness to the particular problems that women face and a genuine, warm, honest relationship in which the therapist does not become a manager who attempts to fit the individual into an imperfect world, but a facilitator.

However, interviewees also expressed the positive aspects of having fathers/male therapists present in the group to offer other perspectives, balance and with whom to share ideas.

Participants felt that they did not feel patronised, they felt supported and encouraged. They didn't feel that the group work model used was hierarchical.

It seems appropriate to use a quote from Werner (1995) as the evaluator has gleaned from both the ethos of the organisation and attendees that

“the typical hierarchical pyramidal system where the doctor (or in this setting, the therapist) is ‘on top’, should be developed into a lateral pyramid where the doctor is ‘on tap’ and ‘the people come first’.”

The groups were described by participants as containing a

“good age range”

And

“recognition of diversity”.

(Case study: Rainee)

Some groups contained parents of

“children with dual heritage”

or who were adopted from different cultures and/or different countries. This created an opportunity for the group to look at this issue in general, and if the families wanted to explore the specific issues for them, within the parameters of the group, this was extremely helpful. (Case study: Denis). It was also mentioned that

“the organisation as a whole and the groups themselves learned about diversity and values as an ongoing issue of great importance.”

(Case study: Paula)

8.2 Virtual and face-to-face group work

‘Both are working well’.

The two group work models that FE have been using were virtual and face to face. All participants acknowledge that there will always be people who prefer one or other of the above models due to personal and family circumstance. Other factors include geography, transport, availability, and transport links. It was mentioned that Chelmsford families, for example,

“are content to travel to groups in the city,”

whereas for those from Clacton it was more difficult and disruptive to family life.

On one level virtual group work has been

“a very good experience, convenient and helpful if the connection works well. However, some people struggle with the media.”

Given this positivity within the group, participants usually set up supportive WhatsApp sub-groups and also attempt contact in an outside setting if possible.

However, virtual arrangements mean that subtleties are missed. Being together physically in a room is a very different experience for families, therapists and observers.

Some families also describe virtual work as intimidating at times.

The therapist felt that they experienced

“a different person if they were both physically in the same room”.

One disadvantage of the virtual groups, as mentioned in interviews, is that they don't allow for those informal “chats around the kettle” moments. It was felt that, especially at the beginning of the process, some people felt happier to ask questions of other group members e.g. what did that last example in the video mean? That little space – away from the therapists and observers, allows one to feel a bit ‘silly’ if unable to speak up in the open, wider group.

During interviews the topic of whether virtual interaction was more effective at breaking down differences and potential barriers between participants arose. There was no consensus about the different models.

Some families felt that virtual group work increased equality between them. However, at the other end of the spectrum, some families refused to attend until the group was face-to-face.

Virtual groups also, for many practical and logistical reasons, seemed to allow more partners of the main care giver and certainly more men to participate. Face to face groups were predominantly female. Of course, this could be experienced by the participants in both positive

and negative ways. Again, this factor, as part of the accrued data, needs more detailed consideration in future evaluative work.

Case study: Paula: (Group Leader)

The interview began by focusing on values and diversity. Paula felt that FE had values very much at its core and “embraced difference”

As an organisation they were “really good “ at ensuring this area was integrated. Also, that the organisation as a whole and the groups themselves learned about diversity as an ongoing issue of great importance. It was central to the work.

Paula stated that, as reflected in the wider society, a higher percentage of women than men attend the groups because of their respective roles. More men tend to work outside the home, whilst women tend to take major responsibility for the familial and domestic areas. Paula was confident that FE are fully aware of this and aim to provide services which are adaptable to the needs of the different families.

As the groups have progressed and developed, Paula has seen more people becoming interested and encouraged to participate. Another major observation was the recognition of difference between the different geographical areas. Together FE and the team learned about the geopolitical situation in the various communities. This included looking at rural and coastal aspects, living in a large city, infrastructure, local economies and cultural variations.

This emphasis was very important to her own commitment to increased diversity through referrals and staffing and was concurrent with FE’s aims. Paula works directly with the families in the group on a self employed basis. She has considerable experience of working within a number of organisations.

In the NAGs she feels that in parallel with the participants she shares in the learning process and the development of the group process.

“There have been many light bulb moments“.

She described the groups as meaningful and valuable in her professional opinion and based on the feedback she receives. In particular she felt a major strength was that the families felt

“safe to speak“

That FE had succeeded in creating this space for them. Then they were able to explore issues in depth.

9. Findings

In-depth open-ended interviews provided a way of accessing the stories and narratives through which families attending NAGs experienced the group and implemented its learning into their family coping/nurturing strategies.

Participants were keen to learn and be proactive about their learning and training requirements.

Families learning together was much preferred.

It was clear the information was shared in a comprehensive and sophisticated way by all parties.

Given the complexity of arrangements, the connections between FE and the various different agencies and authorities involved were not always fully understood by the participants. However, in my view this reflects the complex systems and structures within government agencies and is not an unusual point.

Clearly agencies and professionals need to work together and there were lots of examples of robust and positive working relationships. It was evident that the practitioners from the different agencies effectively networked.

Professionals interviewed commented that they were:

'Very pleased by the organisation generally. It was very well managed'.

They felt it was 'certainly value for money'.

Meetings were regular and productive. Feedback from colleagues and families was overwhelmingly positive.

As observers they stated that the group was
'amazing,' 'excellent', 'outstanding,'

and

'very supportive of children.'

In interview with a group therapist, she felt, and it had been relayed to her, that the families felt that through the work they had been enabled to
"take the power back.... into their own homes"

That they had found the facility to think and reflect in an informed way. The shared experience led to a feeling of being more supported generally. They also commented that it made the
"whole family experience important".

9.1 How have you used knowledge/experience?

The survey interview comments to this question had many elements in common. The family's approach had become more therapeutic, the families felt that the course had encouraged them to continue to build on their learning and how it had been used. Several mentioned that the knowledge they had gained had been integrated into their practice. One family gave an example of how the implementation of learned strategies had helped them to cope with extremely stressful situations encountered at the child's school. A situation which previously they would have found almost impossible to manage. Additionally, the support and understanding exhibited by the groups was greatly valued. Experiences and situations could be shared, problems explored and examples of how the knowledge could be applied by the group members themselves enhanced the learning and helped to integrate same into their daily lives. The group was also valued as a forum in which 'wins could be celebrated'.

Has your approach to parenting changed?

100% of the parents interviewed answered a resounding 'yes'.

PACE was found to be extremely helpful and relevant. Several examples were given about how learning, analysis and reflection from the course has caused a huge and very real impact on their approach generally. It has also contributed to a calmer, more measured, less judgemental atmosphere within the family. Those families consisting of shared parenting found it improved their personal relationships. In response to the survey, 94.1 % answered yes to the question above.

This is very much a part of an ongoing independent evaluation to which Families Empowered are committed. As stated earlier, FE have, from the very beginning had their own system for collecting and analysing feedback. Each group has a robust feedback system and 80% of participants respond and answer that feedback form. Internal processes are in place which enable same to be integrated into FEss work, to enable staff supervision and facilitate planning.

In my opinion attendees were more likely to participate in appropriate training, engage in supervision and utilise support networks once they started attending the NAGs.

10. Recommendations

In this chapter the recommendations based on the findings of this study will be explored. Clearly the NAGS combine a wealth of education, information, and analysis. They also employ an impressive array of educational and therapeutic materials as part of the group experience. They give the families opportunities to explore and demonstrate how the work undertaken contributes to a more positive family dynamic and better outcomes for the children in the family. Individual one-to-one work with the families, whether it is felt to be necessary, or in order to enhance the group experience, is also a much valued and appreciated service provided by FE.

With reference to group work clearly both models are helpful and positive in their different ways as described earlier.

The relationship between therapists and participants were another key factor in the positive experience that the families described in interviews. The confidence and trust described were phenomenal. They represent an important presence in the lives of the families and deliver a key role both inside and outside the NAGS in creating greater confidence, stability and understanding.

- I recommend the NAGS continue as they currently operate.
- I recommend that (as is underway) NAGS are enabled to run both virtually and face-to-face.
- Keep the momentum going.
- Continue with the feedback process as is, and as is planned in late summer, the evaluation.
- Monitor success.
- Maintain a clear understanding of the rules and responsibilities of each agency. There is clearly a commitment to this on all sides.
- Use the data collected to give a comprehensive picture of the issues facing parents and facilitators attending NAGS. It has shown some areas for further exploration such as better understanding of group dynamics.
- It may be beneficial to have gender specific groups as well as mixed groups and one-to-one sessions.
- Whilst this study robustly supports the fact that FE aim to embrace diversity and inclusion, and NAG attendees felt strongly that this aim was met, it is not known due to anonymity what the demographics were of the sample taken. There needs to be further exploration into whether enough minority, disadvantaged and disabled families are invited/referred to join and subsequently attend the groups. Extra encouragement/support to participate could be established.
- Referral to FE's already existing data offers potential scope to explore some of these issues more fully, both in this study and in future works.
- I recommend further exploration of responses to interactions of families with schools to facilitate the process of developing FE's services for schools.

11. Conclusion

This first phase in the research explored the experiences of parents participating in NAGs and the therapists/facilitators/managers involved. It concentrated on the overall experience, theory into practice, values and diversity and explored their views regarding virtual and face-to-face group work.

Overall, this study was able to generate rich data which indicated the measurable impact which the NAGS made on the lives of the participants, the development and behaviour of the children and the overall well-being of the family as a whole. What was clear from the survey, the interviews and the case studies is that the families who have attended the NAGS have an ongoing awareness of the relevance and importance of their learning and training which enhances their day-to-day lives. Also, they, and the therapists and staff of FE have a strong sense of commitment to working together to improve the development and experience of the children in their care. After participating in the group work, families were keener to engage in supervision, in future courses and in support networks.

Overall, as a consequence of my research and evaluation, and in my opinion, the NAGs are operating at a high level. Therapy and learning combine with the centrality of values and reflective practise in a setting that is coping extremely well, despite a climate of immense change and disruption for the families and the organisations due to the impact of Covid-19.

In my own role within the study, I have experienced and discussed the worries and difficulties that the families have faced through the consequences of the recent pandemic and its effect, especially in terms of schooling, access to resources, healthcare and usual support networks. Most families commented on the impact it had on their daily lives.

PACE was found to be extremely helpful and relevant. Several examples were given about how learning, analysis and reflection from the course has caused a huge and very real impact on their approach generally. It has also contributed to a calmer, more measured, less judgemental atmosphere within the family. Those families consisting of shared parenting found that it improved their personal relationships. In response to the survey, 94.1 % answered 'yes' to the question above.

This is very much a part of an ongoing independent evaluation to which Families Empowered are committed. As stated earlier, FE have, from the very beginning, had their own system for collecting and analysing feedback. Each group has a robust feedback system and 80% of participants respond to that feedback form. Internal processes are in place which enable same to be integrated into FE's work, to enable staff supervision and to facilitate planning.

In my opinion attendees were more likely to participate in appropriate training, engage in supervision and utilise support networks once they started attending the NAGs.

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13 Appendix

Appendix 1: Victoria Harris Biography

Victoria Harris *BA (Hons) MA CQSW GSCC Cert PTA* is an independent consultant specialising in the mentoring, supervision and management of professionals working in Safeguarding and Criminal Justice.

After a secondment by the Home Office to undertake Masters Studies, her thirty year career has included roles as Senior Probation Officer and later as Director of Practice Education at the University of East Anglia.

Her contribution in both areas of expertise include roles as External Examiner for both Royal Holloway and Kingston Universities (Social Work with Children and families). Also as Evaluator for Norfolk Youth Offending Team and INCLUDE (Brent/Norfolk Alternatives to Education).

S/he has a specific interest in evolving women's needs, and was the original founder of a group work programme for women survivors in Norfolk (1990s). Anti Oppressive Practice is at the core of her work.

Publications in this area include :

Harris, V. (2003) 'Images of Women's Health and Healing: Cultural Prescriptions?'. In G. Boswell, F. Poland, F. Palgrave (eds.) **Women's Minds, Women's Bodies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Women's Health**. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Thoburn, J. and Harris, V. (2004) **An Evaluation of INCLUDE: Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Brent**. Norwich: UEA.

Building Anti Oppressive Practice Workshops : **Practice Education Workshop series**. UEA (2005-18)

Victoria's recent work has included an assessment related to a British/Spanish family adoption (Families Empowered), and a consultation about a new group work project (SOS).

She has produced a number of 'Quick Guides' for professionals. These address 'Reflective Practice' and 'Professional Capability'.

www.socialworktoolkit.com

Personal

Victoria raised her daughter as a teenaged single mother. She is also a proud grandmother. Aside from her work, s/he loves to travel and learn about other cultures. Swimming, dancing and socialising with family and friends are favourite pursuits. She is also actively involved with a 'Time Bank' Project which brings a variety of volunteers together to work within the community, giving advice and support on anything from collecting the shopping to learning a new language.

Appendix 2: Evaluation of Families Empowered Nurturing attachment group

Dear Families,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the enclosed questionnaire. We are aware that you are busy people with full schedules, so your participation is much appreciated.

As you know, it will contribute to a wider evaluation of our work. It is part of Families Empowered's commitment to gaining a clear understanding of the impact their work has on families.

It will help us to know what is working well and what may not be so helpful. Along with other systems, it will enable change, development and improvement.

Thanks again. I look forward to meeting you at some point as part of our ongoing and shared project.

Kind regards,

Victoria (Harris)

* Required

Email *

Your email

Which group did you attend? *

Your answer

Was it conducted... *

face to face

online

Can you remember what your expectations were before the group started? *

yes

No

If yes to previous question, Please expand if possible *

Your answer



Did the group meet your expectations? *

Didn't meet expectations

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Did meet expectations

Did you feel that the groups were well organised? *

Not at all

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Very much

Did you feel that your arrangements around child care, school, travel, times of meetings, venue etc were facilitated? *

Yes

No

If answered No on previous question, please expand *

Your answer



Did you feel that these arrangements were understood by the group facilitators and the Organisation generally? *

No

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Yes

In terms of content, did the group expand your knowledge of Attachment Theory? *

Not at all

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Very much

Were you able to apply this knowledge in relation to your child? *

Not at all

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Very much

Did the group expand your knowledge of relational trauma and loss in early childhood? *

Not at all

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Very much

Were you able to apply this to your child? *

Not at all

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Very much

Can you name 3 key concepts of attachment and trauma that you learned from the group, that enhanced your understanding of your child? *

- Yes
- No

If yes to previous question, please expand your answer *

Your answer



Was the information delivered in a way that was easy to access and later, to apply? *

Not at all

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Very much

Has your approach to parenting changed? *

- Yes
- No

If yes to previous question, please expand your answer *

Your answer

Has the group improved your relationship with your child? *

Yes

No

If yes to previous question, please expand your answer *

Your answer

How have you used the knowledge and experience gained from the course ? *

Your answer

We are currently in the process of developing our services for schools have you had any interactions either positive or negative that you would be willing to talk about with our education team *

Yes

No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Submit

Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This form was created inside of Families Empowered. [Report Abuse](#)

[Forms](#)

Appendix 3: Sample of initial letter to professionals

Dear ME,

I understand that you have been contacted by Families Empowered with reference to an "Independent Evaluation of the Families Empowered Nurturing Attachment Groups".

We very much appreciate your participation in this study. As you are aware, Families Empowered is committed to a process of ongoing analysis, evaluation and reflection. We anticipate that this research in action and subsequent three year evaluation will, alongside education, training and development, enhance the group work's impact on the families with which they engage.

I would like to talk with you, by telephone, if possible, about your experience as a commissioner with the organisation and about the service they provide for the families you refer.

Please let me know if you are available at anytime on the 7th,16th,21st or 28th September. The interview will take between 40 - 50 minutes.

Thank you for participating. We appreciate that you are extremely busy and that time is at a premium. I look forward to talking with you.

Kind regards

Victoria Harris.

Appendix 4: Example follow up letter to professionals

Subject: Evaluation: Families Empowered

- Dear LS,
I wrote to you recently regarding a possible interview about your experience with Families Empowered. I understand that the organisation have been in touch with you about our aims in this regard and my specific role.
I'm very aware of how busy you are. Perhaps you could send me some dates when you are available?
I look forward to hearing from you.
The interviews are by phone and for approximately forty minutes.
Thank you,
Kind regards,
Victoria Harris.

Subject: Evaluation: Families Empowered

- Dear FC, I wrote to you recently regarding a possible interview about your experience with Families Empowered. I understand that the organisation has been in contact with you about our aims in this regard and my specific role.
I'm very aware of how busy you are. Perhaps you could send me some dates/times convenient to you?
Much appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you.
The interviews are by phone and last approximately 40 minutes.
Kind regards,
Victoria Harris.

End