

Research Ally

Social and Marketing Research Consultancy

Independent Evaluation of The School & Family Works Family Group Intervention January/February 2017

The overall objective of this independent evaluation was to obtain feedback from parents with first-hand experience of Family Group, current or past, and to assess how The School & Family Works (SFW) proprietary 'Theory of Change' explains and predicts the observed impacts and outcomes of the Family Group intervention and to establish to what extent this theory is complete and comprehensive.

One to one interviews took place in January and February 2017 with 23 parents selected by me from a population of 43 Family Group participants. Most of the interviewees had been, or were, dealing with difficult or challenging family situations, with some children at risk of exclusion or removal from the family home. The focus children were aged between 8 and 13 years from 7 West London schools.

The SFW Theory of Change explains a complex, non-linear journey that occurs in Family Group through a four-phase healing process. Firstly, **Support** is established, so children and families experience the security required to **Develop Self-Functions** (ie the skills, resources and capacities essential to enable change). With the right support and the necessary skills established, children can **Undo, Re-do and Mourn**, investigating and re-viewing experiences from a new, empowered perspective. In the final **Reconsolidation** phase, participants integrate new parts of themselves in preparation for their graduation from Family Group.

Parents reported that, in Family Group, they had experienced a change in their approach to parenting their child and had seen a measurable improvement in terms of the child's behaviour, socialisation at school and at home and academic progress. They felt that they had learned a better way of relating to their child. This study suggests 8 out of ten children and at least 6 out of ten parents sustain this positive change after they leave the Family Group. The child and parent relationship is re-built so they feel they are in a better position to cope when more challenging situations may arise in the future - for example, at 'transition'.

Parents talked positively about their experience of Family Group; the flexibility in terms of time – as a multi-layered intervention, Family Group is not time-limited and this is appreciated; the fun and inventiveness of the tools and techniques; the support of the one to one bond between parent and child; the knowledgeable contribution from other parents; witnessing change in others; the affirming, non - judgemental nature of the group; the recognition of all the hard work everyone puts in and the celebration of achievement. Parents attribute linking targets between home and school, allowing parents and school to work together with the child, as important, and this was evidently crucial to the development of their capacity for containment.

There was minimal negative feedback around delivery; for example, response to those few parents who feel the special needs of their child are not fully met in relation to the 'rules' of Family Group; in feedback from the school or the school based person; a more comfortable physical space for the group. Family Group could benefit from better communication about what it is and what it does, as parents are often confused, and schools do not always present Family Group in the most positive way to overcome prejudice about Family Group.

The strength of the Family Group model, from the evidence provided by these 23 families, is rooted in the 'physical' co-productive nature of the intervention. The therapist, the school based partner, the other families, in a safe environment, in school 'the child's daily world', all contribute to effect positive change for parent and child.

The practical outcomes include improvement in the behaviour of the child and academic performance; improvement in family relationships and between school and parent. The emotional outcomes for parent and child include improved confidence; a sense of achievement after hard work; improved self esteem and happiness; the new experiences of reflective thinking and emotional containment.

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Signed:

