

March 2008

Report for Greenwich: How effective has the Teens and Toddlers programme been?

This report brings together a variety of evidence to illustrate the effectiveness of the Teens and Toddlers programme which took place in the borough of Greenwich between 12th September 2007 and 13th February 2008 with young people from Abbey Wood Secondary School, Eltham Hill Technology College for Girls, and Plumstead Manor Girls School. The teenagers worked at Boxgrove Primary School, Green Acres Children's Centre, Conway Primary School and Eglinton Primary School and Early Years Centre.

This report will look at the following:

- 1) Differences between teenagers' starting and finishing questionnaires
- 2) Young people's views of the Teens and Toddlers programme: Responses to the questionnaire's open-ended questions
- 3) Interviews with young people who participated in Teens and Toddlers
- 4) Case studies from groups
- 5) Group attendance and NA achievement
- 6) Feedback from nurseries
- 7) Brief conclusions

1) Differences between teenagers' starting and finishing questionnaires

Each teenager who starts the Teens and Toddlers programme completes a questionnaire which is designed to assess their attitudes on a variety of issues relating to the aims of the Teens and Toddlers programme. This questionnaire asks about their attitudes towards sexual health issues; pregnancy and parenthood; child development; the age at which they think they could look after a child; how easy/difficult they think having a child would be; and their views on the chance of them becoming pregnant before they are 20. Teenagers also complete the same questionnaire at the end of the Teens and Toddlers programme, thus enabling a direct comparison between their starting questionnaire (Time 1) and their finishing questionnaire (Time 2).

The questionnaires from those teenagers who participated in the Greenwich programme were analysed, in order to see if there were any differences between their Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaires. Results are presented in terms of who gave the two most positive answers at Time 1, as compared to Time 2. The questions listed below are those for which there was a positive change between Time 1 and Time 2. These questions have been put in to the following categories: the right age to have a child; knowledge about

sex, pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs); perceptions of the realities of parenthood; aspirations; and their views of Teens and Toddlers.

The right age to have a child

An increase in their perceived age that someone like them would need to be before they have a child: At Time 1 88% said over 18, but at Time 2 this increased to 100%.

An increase in the age at which they think they could look after a baby: At Time 1 21% said over 18, but this increased to 47% at Time 2.

A decrease in the view that they might end up getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant before they are really ready to have a child: 38% said they ‘strongly disagreed’ or ‘disagreed’ with this statement at Time 1, but this increased to 50% at Time 2.

A decrease in their view of the likelihood of becoming pregnant or getting someone else pregnant before they are 20: At Time 1 20.5% said 70% or over, but this decreased to 0% at Time 2.

Knowledge about sex, pregnancies and STIs

A decrease in the view that ‘sex is about excitement and feeling good – so it’s ok that people don’t always think about using protection’: 50% ‘strongly disagreed’ or ‘disagreed’ at Time 1, and this increased to 65% at Time 2.

Perceptions of the realities of parenthood:

An increase in their perception of the impact of having a child on family relationships: At Time 1 83% said having a baby would make family relationships ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 100% at Time 2.

An increased in their perception of the impact of having a child on love and partnerships: At Time 1 54% said having a child would make love and partnerships ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 79% at Time 2.

An increase in their perception of the impact of having a child on money: At Time 1 84% said having a child would make money ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 93% at Time 2.

Aspirations:

An increase in the statement ‘I see a lot of options for my future’: At Time 1 83% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’, but this increased to 100% at Time 2.

Young people’s views of Teens and Toddlers (all answers here are the most positive answers young people could give):

- 86% said they enjoyed doing the T&T programme ‘a lot’.
- 86% said the T&T programme had influenced their decision about the age at which they would like to have children ‘a lot’.

- 64% said the T&T programme affected their practice of safe sex ‘a lot’.
- 64% said that doing T&T made a positive difference in their lives ‘a lot’.
- 86% said that the programme would be ‘extremely’ useful to other teenagers.

Therefore, it is clear that there were positive changes in attitudes between the start of the Teens and Toddlers programme and the end, especially in the areas of the right age to have a child and their perceptions of the realities of parenthood. These findings show that the programme has important benefits to young people’s learning and awareness of important issues.

2) Young people’s views of the programme: Responses to the questionnaire’s open-ended questions

The questionnaire which teenagers complete at the end of the programme includes some open-ended questions regarding the most important things they learned, what things they would like to accomplish before having a child, whether their parents or the people they live with have noticed any changes in them, whether they think the programme could be improved, and any other thoughts and comments. Here are some examples of verbatim comments received from respondents. These comments show that young people have a very positive view of the Teens and Toddlers programme.

What was the most important thing(s) you learned from Teens and Toddlers?

“About children. Safe sex, drugs and alcohol and now I know a lot.” (Female)

“I learnt that being happy with young children makes you feel happy and playful.” (Female)

“How to handle your toddler and how important it is that you play with your toddler and interact with them.” (Female)

“I learned that I can control my temper and things that provoke me.” (Female)

“That I have to stay calm and use different skills when in front of children.” (Female)

“That kids all have different personalities and they are all different. That they have different emotions and need tender loving care.” (Female)

“How a toddler develops.” (Female)

“The importance of bringing up a child and how it’s not that easy.” (Female)

“That looking after children can be hard and you have to know for sure it’s what you want.” (Female)

“Interpersonal skills, blind spots, boundaries, the effect of alcohol and drugs on the foetus.” (Female)

“I learnt that I can ask for help and help others.” (Female)

“How to work with different toddlers and other adults in a workplace.” (Female)

My best advice to a sexually active friend would be...

“Make sure you use a condom, make sure he/she is the right person and it’s the right time.” (Female)

“Always make sure you use a condom.” (Female)

“To use protection.” (Female)

“Always wear a condom, it’s really important to do that not just to prevent pregnancies but to avoid STI infections.” (Female)

“Make sure you use a condom. The morning-after pill, go to the clinic and get the other person checked out too.” (Female)

“To think about things clearly and ask herself if she really wants to put herself in a position where she could get pregnant or get STI. But use a condom if you do.” (Female)

“Use a condom!” (Female)

What things would you like to accomplish before having a child?

“I want a good paying job, nice house, car and a good loving husband.” (Female)

“Money, job, house, husband.” (Female)

“To join this program and see for yourself how useful this is.” (Female)

“Having a good place and a good job and a partner.” (Female)

“Have a qualification and be in a stable job.” (Female)

“A job, stable money, an education, my own life with accomplishments.” (Female)

“A good job, well-earned money. My own house. Travelled the world, experienced life, have good friends and a decent husband that would be a great dad.” (Female)

“Job, money, reliable boyfriend/husband.” (Female)

“Get a place to live, a well-paid job and a respectful partner who is committed.” (Female)

“Getting a full-time job, going to college/university.” (Female)

“Go and see the world, I would go and live in Spain.” (Female)

Did your parents or the people you live with see any changes in you during this project?

“Yes, my mum said I’m a totally different person with the way I act now.” (Female)

“My friends saw me as very aggressive before but now I’m less (so they say).” (Female)

“Yes my mum said my behaviour has changed. I control my anger more.” (Female)

“That I became more confident.” (Female)

“When I looked after my cousins before I never interacted with them, but since Teens and Toddlers I have been more involved with them and enjoy playing with them.” (Female)

“I was working better a lot better with my little sister and towards my mum.” (Female)

“Yes I have acted older and I like children.” (Female)

“Yes, me being more loving to my brother and sisters.” (Female)

I think the programme could be better if...

“If it was on two days a week. We could have a choice whether we go outside or not and for us to make our own way there.” (Female)

“We could spend a few days with babies.” (Female)

“I think that it would be good to come back in a month and see how the toddlers are doing.” (Female)

“If it was longer, like through the whole year.” (Female)

Any other thoughts or comments?

“I think T&T is fantastic and it teaches teens a lot and helps them.” (Female)

“It’s good for your education.” (Female)

“No, only I wish I could carry on.” (Female)

“Thanks for the opportunity.” (Female)

“I loved it, it was fabulous.” (Female)

“I love Teens and Toddlers.” (Female)

3) **Interviews with young people who participated in Teens and Toddlers**

Three telephone interviews were conducted for the purpose of this report. These interviews asked the following, and one of them is summarised here:

- Their views of the project
- Whether they think the project caused any changes in them in terms of:
 - Their views on parenthood, the right age to become a parent and aspirations
 - Their views on sexual health issues
 - School and education
- Any other comments or things to say

Their views of the project: Kathrin¹ said that she thought Teens and Toddlers teaches teenagers a lot and helps them. She said it had made her feel calmer and better able to discuss her feelings, as opposed to just getting angry.

“I think it teaches teenagers about the importance of life, and how you only get one. It’s really important how you treat people and stuff, and only you are responsible for what you do. Like, before, I was really angry and lashed out when I felt bad – but now I can talk about my feelings more and explain it to people.”

Changes: Parenthood, the right age to become a parent and aspirations: Kathrin said that her sister had a child when she was still at school, and that she was close to her nephew. She didn’t know if she would go down the same route, but now seems adamant that she will not. She listed things that she wants to achieve before settling down to have a family.

“I want a well-paid job, a nice husband, qualifications, some money and all that stuff before I have a baby. Then its’ more likely it will work out and you won’t be stuck on your own with it, still living with your mum and dad.”

Changes: views on sexual health issues: Kathrin said that she already had good knowledge of safer sex and how to reduce your chances of getting an STI. However, she did say that she now thinks more about the situation where young women put themselves in a vulnerable situation, and that they should question whether they really want to.

“Girls should think about things clearly and ask herself if she really wants to put herself in a risky situation, you know? I don’t think girls realise how easy it is to get pregnant or get an STI, and everyone is having sex so it seems ok to do it. But I’ve learnt to say no if I mean no, and be more confident.”

Changes: School and education: Kathrin said that she disliked school, but that since doing Teens and Toddlers she felt more like she wanted to work harder and pass her GCSEs so that she could get a better job.

“It [T&T] made me think what am I gonna do if I leave with no exams, y’know? So even though I hate it I’m gonna try to work harder and go more often from now on, cos I want to go to college and get a better job. Otherwise I know I’ll be bored when I leave school and then I might get in to more trouble. If I’ve got a job I’ll be ok I think.”

Any other comments or things to say?: Kathrin said that her mum said that she has really changed for the better since doing Teens and Toddlers, and her friends said that she is less aggressive. Kathrin also said that she wished she could carry on doing the programme.

“Yeah my mum said I’m different now, and my friends say I’ve calmed down and I’ve got a hold of my anger now! They’re less scared of me (laughs). I wish I could carry on, and all teenagers should be able to do it I think. I’m glad I had the chance to do it and I’ll miss my toddler.”

4) Case studies from groups

Here is a selection of case studies from the four projects in Greenwich. They give examples of how Teens and Toddlers is affecting teenagers. These accounts were given by Facilitators.

Sophie¹

When Sophie started the T&T project she lacked the self-belief to say what she was really thinking and often followed the more dominant personalities in the group in order to ensure she remained popular and was not rejected. By the end of the project she was voicing her own opinions and standing her ground a lot more. She took more responsibility for her work and chose not to go along with those who were opting out or acting out.

Half-way through the programme she got in touch with her vulnerability and shared an important awareness that she 'shuts down' when she is upset or angry. From this point onwards we really affirmed her congruence and by the end of the project she was able to celebrate this in herself. She wrote in her last journal: 'I learnt about empathy and congruence.' Sophie’s low self-esteem was also initially evident in her relationship with

¹ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

her toddler. She easily felt rejected when her toddler did not want to play with her and reacted angrily, in turn cutting off from her toddler. She was able to reflect with support, as to the many reasons why this was happening and realised that she needn't 'take it personally.'

Her self-esteem was much more robust at the end of the programme. I believe she learned that she was of value to her toddler, that she felt empowered when she made her own choices, and that her feelings were respected by others.

Jess¹

Jess was incredibly shy and quiet at the start of T&T. Her lack of self-confidence was apparent in the group where she allowed others to speak for her. In relationship to her toddler she was very hesitant about even approaching her and initiating play /conversation. Jess indicated to us that she wished to become more vocal in classroom time and we gave her opportunities to do this. Her peers also put her on the spot and encouraged her to speak more. Approximately 2/3 through the programme she was contributing as much in the classroom as most of the talkative girls. It was moving to see how her friends all listened to her when she spoke.

With her toddler she was taking more steps to be proactive and initiate conversation. She managed to communicate with an autistic child who was very much in her own world, by mirroring the child's play and I think she realised that this was an important change for her.

At the certificate giving ceremony when the teens were given an opportunity to share something about T&T she stepped down to the front of the theatre and affirmed that before T&T this was something she would never had imagined she could do. It was a powerful moment for all of us.

5) Group attendance and NA achievement

All teenagers from this borough were female.

Teens started:

25 young people

- 7 from Abbey Wood Secondary School at Boxgrove Primary School
- 6 from Eltham Hill Technology College for Girls at Green Acres Children's Centre
- 6 from Plumstead Manor Girls School at Conway Primary School
- 6 from Plumstead Manor Girls School at Eglinton Primary School and Early Years Centre

Teens left: 10

Replacements: 3

Teens completed: 18

National Award (NA): 17

Attendance Certificate (50-70%): 3

Achievement Certificate (71% or more): 15

6) Feedback from nurseries

The feedback we have received from nurseries has been very positive. Generally the nursery staff has been very accommodating and the young people have felt welcome. The programme is not currently running, and at the end of this project one nursery actually expressed the view that they would be very interested in taking part again if it was to ever re-start in the future.

7) Brief Conclusions

The evidence presented in this report shows that there are many positive effects of the Teens and Toddlers programme in Greenwich. It is clear to see that there are significant positive effects between questionnaires completed by teenagers before and after the programme. There were particularly striking positive changes in the right age to have a child and their perceptions of the realities of parenthood. Their personal responses to questions are very pertinent and allow an insight in to their views, as do the interviews. The statistics on attendance and National Award achievement show how successful this Greenwich programme has been, and the feedback from nurseries and case studies confirm this. It is clear that the Teens and Toddlers programme is making a difference to young people in Greenwich.

Suzanne Cater

Research Officer, Teens and Toddlers (COUI UK)

Tel: 020 7089 6180, E-mail: scater@teensandtoddlers.org.uk