

**Research debrief prepared for COUI UK**  
**Teens and Toddlers Retrospective Analysis**  
**Focus Groups**

The Dream Mill



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# Background



## Background - Objectives

- To understand participants' general attitudes about Teenage Pregnancy
- To understand participants' attitudes about School and governmental approaches to Sex Education
- To source feedback about participants' experiences of the Teens and Toddlers programme

## Background - Methodology

- Three depth focus groups were conducted lasting between one and a half to two hours
- Groups were held in a community centre to provide a relaxed and informal environment to explore ideas and issues in depth.
- Where possible emphasis was given towards using participants' own experiences to base the discussions on
- Participants from different projects were mixed between groups

## Background - Methodology

- Structured discussion guide for consistency between groups
- 4 sections
  - Introductions and forming inquiry groups
  - Your Teens and Toddlers experience
  - Pregnancy and Sex Education in general
  - “If you were in charge ...”

## Background - Sample

- Participants were sourced from respondents to a recent retrospective analysis of Teens and Toddlers efficacy
- Participants had been involved in T&T projects conducted in the Borough of Greenwich between 2001-2003
- 16 Teens from were invited to participate, 12 attended the groups
- All participants in groups were female
- Age of participants ranged between 15 and 19 years old

## Background - Sample

Project	N invited	N attended
Greenwich 1	3	1
Greenwich 2	3	3
Greenwich 3	4	3
Greenwich 4	6	5

## Background – Approach Teens as experts.....

- Establishing Teenager's roles as experts about young people...
- Emphasis on no right or wrong answers, rather that we were interested in their opinions and how they feel about the programme
- Emphasis on the value of their contributions in helping us to create insight into the beliefs of other young people, and how we can create improvements in the Teens and Toddlers programme

# Analysis and Findings

- Section 1: General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy
- Section 2: Teenager attitudes about why teens get pregnant
- Section 3: Feedback about the Teens and Toddlers programme
- Section 4: Other feedback about Teens and Toddlers
- Section 5: Summary of Main Themes

# **Section 1**

## **General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy**



# General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy

## Media based communication strategies

- Participants have limited recall of print media and health promotion campaigns about sex education and pregnancy
- Participants reported seeing some material in magazines and brochures but the content was felt to be very distant and difficult to engage with
- Participants report seeing very little information about STDs
- Participants who were aware of print media about teenage pregnancy and sexual health felt it was a waste of money
  - Didn't understand the message
  - Didn't make sense
  - Wasn't relevant to their personal situation
- Most communication on teenage pregnancy is perceived as simplistic - listing all government services available, almost encouraging teenage pregnancy

# General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy

## Understanding of current messages

- Participants report that they have no real sense about what the government is trying to say about teenage pregnancy
- Participants report that most young people are aware of the public discourse around teenage pregnancy, but feel blamed and therefore become disengaged from the issue
- Confusion with the abortion issue and related issues of morality
  - “The government doesn’t talk about the real issues”
  - “They just think its our fault”
  - “It doesn’t feel like they really care what’s happening to us, they just don’t want us to do”
  - “They think shocking you will make you do what they want”

# General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy

## Effect of current messages

### The Blame - Services dynamic

- At one end of the dynamic is a blaming, authoritarian, moralistic, fear based attempt to reduce pregnancies
- At other end of the dynamic is a series of services providing what is perceived to be opportunities for care, independence and a social role
- The dissonance between the two messages can feel confusing and alienating for teenagers

# General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy

## In-school approaches

- Participants felt school based approaches were very basic
  - “It only touches the surface of issues that we want to know about”
- Participants report that the aim of school sex education is to “scare you” out of having sex
  - “They show us picture after picture of diseases and all the bad things that can happen to you, so much that you just switch off”
  - “They only tell you about the bad side of sex”
  - “It makes you want to do the opposite”
- Participants remember the very practical “doing” examples most easily :
  - Condom on banana
  - Robotic baby idea
- Participants reported that the sex education comes too late, when most of them have already had sex
  - “They should lower the age of sex education, I needed it when I was 13”

# General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy

## In-school approaches

- Large classes in school make it difficult to contribute
- No discussion of the issues
- No-one asks for their opinions
- Very mechanical explanations – too theoretical
  - “People are too scared to get personal – the groups are too big and you cant say too much about yourself”
  - “Its too easy to not listen and be silly because its so boring”
  - “When I see all those bad things that can happen I want to try it and prove that its not that bad”

# General Approaches to Sex Education and Pregnancy

## Feelings evoked from current messages

General impact:

- Teenagers feel that they are seen as “the problem”
- Teenagers feel like “numbers to be reduced”
- Teenagers feel blamed and resent the focus being on them
- Teenagers feel “told what they should do”
- Teenagers feel “un-consulted”
- Teenagers feel “rebellious”

## **Teenage attitudes about how teenage pregnancy is perceived by adults / teachers / institutions**

- Young people consistently emphasise that there is an overwhelming emphasis on the negative side of pregnancy in their discussions with adults
- Pregnancy (and sex) is thought to be considered by adults as a “problem” and as “unacceptable”
- They would prefer to be invited to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of pregnancy more openly
- They resent the focus on “teenage” pregnancy and would like to talk about pregnancy as an issue in general

## **If you were in charge of communication with young people about sex education and pregnancy ....**

- Explain about all aspects of sex education and pregnancy
- Give both the advantages and disadvantages of sex and pregnancy
- Understand that everyone is different and mature at different times and therefore have different needs
- Enable people to understand the good and bad aspects and choose for themselves
- Not try and scare people out of having sex

## **Section 2**

# **Teenager attitudes about why teens get pregnant**

# Teenager attitudes about why teens get pregnant

## Accidental pregnancies

- Pregnancies occur due to lack of knowledge or poor planning
  - “They don’t know about the consequences, they do it by accident because they don’t know what they are doing”
  - “Its from having sex when you are drunk or on drugs”
  - They don’t know what’s going on, don’t know they are pregnant, and then leave it too long to have an abortion”
  - They think its not a big deal if they get pregnant because they can have an abortion - and then when they realise that they are pregnant – they don’t want to get rid of the baby”

# Teenager attitudes about why teens get pregnant

## Planned pregnancy

- A child is like a commodity, a prestige or status symbol
  - “They think you’re only a real woman when you have a child”
  - “People look at you differently when you have a baby, that you’re responsible and important”
- A method of ensuring stability in relationship with partner
  - “They want to do whatever the guy wants so he will love them more, even if it means having sex before they want to or when there isn’t a condom”
  - “They think if they have the guys baby he will stay with them”
- A replacement for love
  - “They want some one to love and who will love them back – someone who needs them”
- It’s the done thing, the next step when looking for a social role
  - “They think that it was good enough for their mums so its good enough for them”
  - “It’s the thing you do when you leave school”

# **Section 3**

## **Feedback about the Teens and Toddlers programme**

## Teens and Toddlers Primary feedback

- Overall, very positive feedback on Teens & Toddlers experience
- Primary feedback concentrated on strength of toddler/teenage relationship
- A lot of positive memories recounted by teenagers as they remembered the characters of their toddlers, and the play they had together
- High emphasis on watching how their toddler developed through the process – came out of themselves, became less shy, more able to play, etc., (a mirror for teenagers' own development as well)
- Getting a hands on experience of 'having a child'

## Teens and Toddlers

### Teenagers' views of most important learning outcomes

- The programme is appreciated because it is like 'Real life' – it is based in a real experience – not theoretical
- Hands on experience of being with and learning about children was highly valued
- Practical information about dealing with children and pregnancy – puts participants in a position where they felt they could offer advice to their friends
- Learning through seeing what is happening to the toddler is highly valued
- Most learning during 'classroom time' was considered to have occurred when teenagers were asked about their opinions and were involved in discussion/dialogue

# Teens and Toddlers

## Personal development outcomes

- Anger management
  - positive ways to deal with difficult situations and feelings
- Self esteem
  - ‘braving up’- making you more aware of personal ways of dealing with things and feeling good about yourself
- Self expression
  - able to discuss, express opinions, try and understand issue from more than one point of view
- Making choices
  - thinking about when to have a baby and what you want for yourself
- Planning for my future
  - thinking about security, having a job before having a child

# Teens and Toddlers

## Toddler time: positive feedback

- Learn about patience and responsibility
- Toddlers learn through constant repetition
- Watching your toddler grow in confidence
- Pride in the achievements of their toddler
  
- The opportunity to play was highly valued
  
- Feeling part of the “teaching group” or “adult group” was highly valued
  
- Positive role of mothering or fathering
  
- Understanding how much work a toddler is to deal with

# Teens and Toddlers

## Toddler time: challenges

- Those participants on early programmes expressed wish to be able to choose toddler
- The positive aspect of this was reinforced by those who had this experience although all said it was hard to do
- For some they would have valued the opportunity of interacting with other toddlers and children of different ages – participants explain that some people are good with certain ages

# Teens and Toddlers

## Classroom time: positive feedback

- Participants mostly remember the discussions
- Participants feel very good about their opinions being appreciated
- Participants enjoyed learning that there can be many perspectives on one issue
- Participants emphasize practical learning that they could observe in “real-life”
  
- Overall, the experiential format works – the balance between toddler time (play) and classroom time (lessons) is acceptable

### Group size

- Small group format is considered to help this learning environment
- Creates time and room to express your opinions on subjects
- In contrast, large classes in schools make it difficult to contribute

## Teens and Toddlers

### Classroom time: challenges

- Classroom time was seen as boring by some participants
- Some of the class time can be seen as repetitive information – particularly how to treat children if you already have experience
- Some participant would have liked more ‘hard-facts’ on STDs, abortion and other consequences
- Some participants would have liked more opportunities for discussions in classroom time
- Some participants reported the need for less talking by facilitators and more listening
- Some participants found sharing their experience in the group very challenging (e.g., check-ins, role plays)

## Teens and Toddlers

### Overall tone and feel of teaching

- Empowering - not didactic in tone
- Felt to be the opposite of governmental and school messages in which pregnancy overall is often presented as a bad thing
- The focus on 'understanding' the issues and preparing participants to make informed 'choices' for themselves was highly valued
- Role-plays and discussions were enjoyed
- Examples to look at of positive and negative parenting examples was considered to be very useful
- Overall 'real-life' feel to the learning experience was important

## Teens and Toddlers Facilitators

- Friendliness was appreciated as the strongest quality in facilitators and assistants
- Participants reported that they felt that facilitators really cared about them as people, and respected them
- Participants appreciated the efforts made to listen to them during the programme and seek their opinion about the course content
- High degree of support for the inclusion of younger staff on the programmes (e.g., Marvin, Terry) as participants find it very easy to talk to people closer to their own age

## Teens and Toddlers Training materials

- Training manual was seen as too large, big book was hard to relate to – felt like school
- Would like more “friendly feel” to training materials
- Page numbers would help
- Examples and pictures worked well in groups to help them understand issues
- In one case, training folder was used outside to show people at work
- Need ideas of how to present information in more accessible format

# Teens and Toddlers

## 1 to 1 sessions

- Some participants expressed that they felt it was useful to the have possibility to talk in private
- Others were more negative
  - ‘I didn’t need counselling’
- Counselling sessions were often seen as an intrusion into toddler time
  - “why couldn’t they do those sessions during classroom time?”
- Some participants who had received counselling felt that they were negatively identified as being different from others in the group as having more problems or being more needy
- Some participants who did not receive counselling felt that those who did get counselling needed it more because they were more screwed up
- Participants felt they would like a choice of whether to refuse counselling

## **Section 4**

# **Other feedback about Teens and Toddlers**

## Teens and Toddlers - other feedback

### How would you explain T&T to other teenagers?

- “A hands-on experience with toddlers”
- “A place to learn about what it would really be like to have a child and how hard it is to look after them”
- “You talk about sex, drugs and alcohol... but not rock and roll”
- “It’s interesting, it’s an interesting thing to do”
- “It’s a place where you want to be - not told to be, it’s a place where you choose to come to – it’s better than school”
- “It’s a place where you learn about yourself”

## Teens and Toddlers - other feedback Boys

- For those who had boys in their groups it was considered to be a very positive experience
- All participants agreed it was important to include boys in the training
- Appreciated male facilitators who provided a good role model
- Some positive stories about boys who were more mature and kinder as result of the programme

## Teens and Toddlers - other feedback

### Fitting in with Schools

- Participants could feel the tension between Schools and Teens and Toddlers and resented School resistance to the programme
- The time taken to undertake Teens and Toddlers was often seen as negative by the schools
- Afternoons was often seen as inconvenient by teachers
- Some participants had concerns about what they missed in school when they are at Teens and Toddlers
- Worked well in tandem with Health and Social Care options chosen at school
  - Participants who had selected this option explained that Teens and Toddlers really supported the work they did in class time

## Teens and Toddlers - other feedback Follow-up

- Participants felt that an afternoon follow-up workshop after their teens and toddlers group to refresh and find support if needed would be helpful
- Create follow-up learning devices – e.g., Material that is visual and youth friendly – “magaziney” in feel ; easy to understand and digest
- Idea of website was evaluated positively by about half of the participants
- A website would need to include possibility for young people to comment and give their advice – participants quote problem pages, etc.,
- Some participants wanted to use Teens and Toddlers training to help in their own career choice – they see it as potential vocational qualification
- Some showed interest in taking part in the programme as assistants

## Teens and Toddlers - other feedback Recommendations from Teens

- Have ex teenage parents come in and talk
- Expand programme to include more schools
- Have a qualification for doing Teens and Toddlers
- Create a career structure through Teens and Toddlers
- Include more boys too!

# Section 5

## Summary of Main Themes

## Main themes

### The value having practical knowledge

- Participant felt proud of the knowledge and practical experience they gained during the programme
- They enjoyed the experience of responsibility that came with working with toddlers
- Being able to advise friends about the issues that are covered in Teens and Toddlers was seen as real and tangible benefit
- A few research participants had convinced friends to take part in programme
- Participants value hearing advice from people their own age

## Main themes

# Empowering Choice

- Learning about their ability to choose when to have children was a key take-out for most participants
- Participants reported a shift in personal belief systems about the best age to have a child
  - their own security became more important before then providing security for a child; therefore move age upwards
- Participants found the approach of asking their opinions and giving them the power to choose during the course very appealing
- Participants reported that they feel like rebelling when they are told what to do
  - “That the decision of when to have a baby isn’t just about me and my needs – its about what the baby would need and being able to provide that best”
  - “I used to want to have a baby as soon as I left school but I have decided to wait until I am about 25”

## Main themes

### Taking the pressure off

- Participants valued the fact that during the programme they felt valued, respected, and not under pressure to perform academically
- They compared their experience of Teens and Toddlers with school where they felt the constant pressure of being evaluated and treated as the “bad kids”
- The focus on play with the toddlers was highly valued
- The emphasis on learning through their relationship with the toddler creates a mechanism for reflexivity and an opportunity to express emotional literacy
- Talking about their own experience through talking about their toddler
  - “Focussing on the toddler and what he needed took the focus off me”

## Main themes

# Main psychological needs met by Teens and Toddlers

- Assertion and choice
- Caring and taking care of
- Identity and doing what's right for you
- Play and experimentation
- Belonging role – being needed

## Main themes

### An educational experience

- Teens and Toddlers was not described as a pregnancy prevention programme by participants but rather - as an learning opportunity or training tool that promoted understanding and discussion around important issues of pregnancy and child care
- The emphasis on seeing both the positive and negative side of having children was highly valued
- The emphasis on **trusting them to make a their own choice** based on learning about the issue was appreciated
- Learning needs to be fun
- Through play and working with the toddler the learning became fun, even discussions during classroom time became fun

## Main themes

### Communication and discussion

- Teens and Toddlers was seen across the board as a positive and different way of communicating the issues
- Traditional adult communication (schools, government) were criticised in that, most often, they present the issue of teenage pregnancy and sex as a “bad thing” with an implied negative judgement
- The seeking of participants’ opinions during class discussions and via informal discussions with facilitators and assistants was strongly appreciated
- Small groups were seen to facilitate communication

## Main themes

### Non-judgemental

- Participants felt their opinions were welcomed and that they were not seen as the 'bad kids' to be fixed
- This contributed to them making the effort to listen, learn, and take the time needed to make informed decisions about their own lives
- Learning about the facts in an experiential and non-judgemental way was considered to be very important
- Learning about the individual characteristics and uniqueness of each toddler led to a greater understanding and acceptance of individual differences in other teenagers

## Key words

- Choice
- Understanding
- Real-life
- No bullshit
- Discussion
- Training
- Respect

**And finally**



## **In 10 years time if you could have the toddler that you worked with undertake the Teens and Toddlers programme what would you like them to learn?**

- “That their opinion counts, and not to be afraid of what other people say or think of them, to do what they know is right”
- “That little children have minds of their own and that they understand what older people are thinking”
- “To learn about sex and drugs and how to be safe”
- “To help them understand that they are not on their own, and that someone will always be there to help them out”

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