action for children

The Pinnacle Project

FINAL REPORT

Foluke Blackburn
Michael Murphy
Tony Long

THE UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

University of Salford
A Greater Manchester University

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as long as it takes

Contents

Initiation and aim

The Pinnacle project was set up in August 2006 with funds provided by central Government. This funding followed a continuing high level of public interest and concern about violent crime carried out by young people in South London, where a large proportion of offenders are young, male and from a minority ethnic group.

The project was based in Streatham in the London Borough of Lambeth. It occupied a converted house in a residential street and had no signage indicating type of use. Referrals were taken from agencies in Lambeth and the surrounding boroughs of Wandsworth and Southwark. The service was a small one and employed one full-time project manager, two full-time practitioners and a part-time administrator. Although the project was set up in August, the first family was seen in December 2006. Because funding for the project was time-limited the project ended in March 2009, effectively just over two years of operation.

The project's main aim was to provide interventions to boys and young men from minority ethnic groups who were on the edge of criminal activity, were underachieving in school and were at risk of social exclusion. As well as interventions offered directly to the young men, the project also offered concurrent services to their parents and families. The project was developed with the expectation that it would evaluate the impact of the service in improving the well being of children, young people and their families, paying special attention to levels of reported or suspected criminal or anti-social behaviour by young people.

The Pinnacle process

The different services or interventions on offer at the project were as follows:-

1) An initial assessment was carried out by one of the project workers after the family had been referred into the project. This assessment always included the child concerned and their parent or carer.

2) After the initial assessment children, young people and their families were offered opportunities for an individual casework service or attendance at group sessions run separately for young people and for parents.

3) The parents' group sessions utilised the programme set out in the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities* approach. This approach was developed in the USA and seeks to enable parents to identify solutions to family problems, with one another, in a group setting over a three month period. Early evaluations in the USA indicated some very positive success in mobilising families' abilities to overcome serious familial issues. Group sessions for parents and carers focused on questions of discipline, sanctions, coping with challenging behaviour and promoting positive interaction and relationships with young people entering adolescence. The group sessions were run by trained facilitators and the Pinnacle staff group had received such training from the London-based Race Equality Foundation (REF).

4) The young people's group work process was known as the Start programme. This programme also concentrated on feelings, behaviour and interactions with peers, parents and other adults. The programme aimed to build self esteem at the same time as challenging negative patterns of thought and behaviour.

5) The project was also asked to seek ways in which it could improve the relationships between boys and their fathers (many of whom were absent from the main family home) and to evaluate the impact on the boys' subsequent behaviour. However, as the work progressed it became apparent that this issue was much more complex than had been identified initially.

6) The project also undertook significant outreach work with children and young people, particularly offering a bridging or mentoring service that would help to promote positive school behaviour.

Closure of the project

The Government funding for Action for Children's Pinnacle project expired on 31 March 2009, which effectively was the last day of operation. Several users of the service expressed very strong views on the need for the service to carry on, or to be replaced by something similar:-

It is very important that projects like Pinnacle carry on to support single parents to be confident parents and to discipline children in the right manner – not to be wound up and hit out but to be firm and diplomatic.
I hope the project continues and achieves what it needs to. So many black males need support and understanding.
[My son] wants Pinnacle back - he asked the other day (at CAMHS) "Is there anywhere else like Pinnacle to go to?"

Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the impact of Pinnacle's services was agreed as a partnership endeavour involving Action for Children's performance improvement and consultancy arm and the University of Salford. The University of Salford agreed to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the first two years of the working of the Pinnacle project.

This final report is based on a review of files which included all the families assisted by the Pinnacle project up until April 2008. A total of 39 files for individual children were reviewed. In addition, the review team looked at files relating to both the parents and young people's groups run by Pinnacle. It also includes a literature review and a series of interviews with parents, children and involved practitioners that were conducted between August 2008 and February 2009.

Within the report *(P)* indicates a direct quotation from a parent, *(Ch)* indicates a direct quotation from a child or young person and *(Ip)* a direct quotation from an involved practitioner.

Literature Review

Working with Black Young Boys

This review explores literature about working with black young people and identifies what works or contributes to positive outcomes. A number of sources formed a part of this review which included literature reviews, project and evaluations reports, research reports, good practice guides and general literature about working with black young people. This review incorporates evaluations of over 100 projects or programmes that worked with black boys and their families (although it is should be noted that not all of these worked solely with black boys). What is clearly evident is that there is a need for programmes which are culturally sensitive, appropriate to ethnic minority families needs, and employ staff who are culturally competent. Certain interventions recurred across the literature and were deemed to be good practice. These were the use of black role models, group work, and parent management training. Alongside these interventions some of the literature noted the need for services for black young boys to be culturally sensitive, for professionals to be culturally competent, and for services to be community-based.

The growth of concern about black children and young people

The population from ethnic minority communities living in England has been growing rapidly over the last two decades. Between 1991 and 2001 there was an increase of 53% from 3 million to 4.6 million. Alongside this growth there has been an increase in public and political concern about black and ethnic minority issues. Some of this interest has arisen as a result of the high public profile given to asylum seekers, immigrants, clashes between ethnic and indigenous groups, the rise of right wing political parties, the increase of racist attacks, and the increase in gun and knife-related crimes.

It has been noted by a number of researchers that this high profile has given rise to research which focuses on what has led to these problems, highlighting what is not working, and represents the deficit view of black children (Robinson 2001, Barn 2006, Graham 2007). Lewis (2007) also notes that much has been reported about black boys and black young men experiencing multiple disadvantages: *"Black boys and young black men face serious challenges in every sector of society. They are less likely to do well at school, more likely to be unemployed and much more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system than their peers"* (Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2007 p6).

Focus on prevention

Barn (2006) further notes that for decades research has repeatedly highlighted the disadvantaged position of minority ethnic groups, including their experience of unemployment, ill health, poor housing, crime and low educational attainment. This can lead to a tendency to pathologies in black and ethnic minority people, and can communicate a sense of hopelessness about the future of young black people (Sallah & Howson 2007). The Government's position on some of these issues is changing (DfES 2007, Mamon 2004), but there is still very little published research on prevention strategies, which celebrates the successes and achievements of black young people, or which explores how these were realised (Ahmed 2005). *"Black children are constantly bombarded with images that suggest to them that their race is not the preferred race. Except in the spheres of sport and entertainment, when black children look around them they find few role models in prestigious positions in society"* (Robinson 1995 p108).

There is a need to identify more black role models in professional fields, and further work needs to be done to help to establish and develop the relationships between role models and black young people within the community (Salleh & Howson 2007). A number of projects that used role models identified this as a strategy for actively influencing young black boys in a positive way (O'Neil 2001, Harper & Dwivedi 2004, Rose 2004, Barn 2006, Salleh & Howson 2007).

The role of volunteers

However, there are more children with problematic externalising behaviour than professionals in the field working with them. This has led to national and local organisations creating opportunities for adult volunteers to participate in providing services to troubled young people through role model or mentorship programmes. This use of role models and mentors has become more popular in recent years and is seen as one way of increasing prosocial behaviour and strengthening resilience in black children (O'Neil 2000, Dwivedi and Harper 2004, Rose 2004, Barn 2006,Phillips et al 2008).

These role models (usually the same gender) come from all areas of life, the media, parents, friends, teachers, and the community. The aim is for the role models to expose their attitudes, lifestyles, and outlooks to young people, providing a frame of reference for them as they develop their own attitudes and lifestyles (Rose 2004).

Rose (2004) examined the research of Bucher who asserts that role models are one of the most pedagogical agents in the history of education. Bucher collected data from 1150 pupils between the age of 10 and 18 and found that those personalities of social nearness to the participants had the greatest role effect on them. Ahmed (2005) also notes that mentoring schemes are successful particularly within education, training and work.

Accessibility to positive role models was something that the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (HCHAC) (2007) on Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System found to be significant. Many respondents to their inquiry emphasised the powerful impact of positive role models in helping black young people to imagine and achieve a different lifestyle. The report sets out some recommendations to reduce overrepresentation of black boys and black young men in the criminal justice system. *"It is important to take urgent steps to expand support for mentoring programmes which are focused on young black people. Government should evaluate promising schemes working with young black people currently, such as 'Generating Genius' and the 'From Boyhood to Manhood' programme, and, in the long term, should build on this research when prioritising funding. In the shorter term we recommend that there should be a presumption in favour of expanding the existing work of organisations which have grown from local communities and which are well supported by them"* (HCHAC 2007 pg 59-60).

Governmental responses

REACH was a group established in 2006, commissioned to focus on raising aspirations and achievement among black boys and young black men. The 25 members of the group were drawn from a wide variety of fields and most had direct experience of front line working. Over 2000 people attended their conferences and community engagement workshops. Visits and questionnaires helped them to engage with over 100 organisations which worked with or supported black young boys. In their final report they had 5 main recommendations, the first of which was a structured national role model programme for black boys and young black men (DCLG 2007).[1]
The Government's response to this report was to establish a national black role model programme in December 2008. Twenty black men were selected to act as role models. They were asked to go into schools and youth projects to talk about their personal journey and to encourage black young boys to set their sights high, offering advice and support. It is planned that they will help to build a much larger and wider programme of mentoring work in their regions and communities and work with national and local media to support black young men in raising their levels of ambition.

[1]Details of Reach can be found at http://campaigns.direct.gov.uk/reach/

Critical appraisal of these approaches

Although this focus on role models arose out of research which asked black young boys about their support needs and evaluated projects working with black young boys, it is not without its critics. For example, an article in *Socialist Worker Online (14th August 2007)*[2] held that:

"The idea of "positive role models" might seem like common sense, but ultimately it is a distraction that fails black children by dampening down the struggle to tackle racism, poverty and exclusion. We should be challenging and transforming the racist society we live in, rather than trying to cajole young black people into fitting into a system designed to shut them out".

Some studies present a mixed picture of the effectiveness of mentor / role model programmes, noting that behavioural improvements were not sustained (Slicker and Palmer 1993, Roberts and Cotton 1994). However, it should be noted that these evaluation reports were focused on short term projects (3 months and six months respectively). The length, type and quality of the relationship that could be developed in such a short time is questionable and may have had a bearing on the uncertain outcomes.

The importance of multi-faceted approaches

Access to a role model or mentor is not enough on its own but should be a part of a multifaceted approach to support black boys and black young men in achieving their potential. Messent (2004) advocated this approach after evaluating two projects that worked with ethnic minority young people. One of the projects (mentioned as an exemplar of good practice in *Every Child Matters*) worked with Bangladeshi boys and offered the following concurrent services.

- Initial individual support (boys referred from school)
- Home visits (to develop relationships with the families and make sure that they understood the support offered)
- Group work (using brief solution-focused therapy)
- Outings, weekends, and events (outside school hours)
- Specialist services (for those with the most severe difficulties)
- Group work with mothers

Over the first two and a half years the programme worked with 108 Bangladeshi boys. The project was found to be very effective in raising the boys' aspirations, achievement, and engagement with education (Messant 2004).

Noguera (1996) also advocated a multifaceted approach and noted that there is no blueprint or singular approach to prevent youth crime. He suggested that youth violence should be seen as *"part of a larger cultural phenomenon, one that is inextricably woven into the history and social fabric of our society"* which not only glorifies violence but is entertained by it (Noguera, 1996, p4). He examined a number of programmes and identified a range of strategies that have been effective in reducing youth violence and youth crime. These involved the community in the design of programmes and culturally relevant services for specific communities. Mentors and role models from the same cultural background as the young people were engaged. Volunteers from the community were used, and parents groups and family workshops were also used to great effect. Some projects trained teachers to be more culturally sensitive, ran groups for young people in school and after school, and set up coaching and tutoring for those who needed additional educational support. There were activities such as organised midnight basket ball games, parties within the community and other recreational activities. One of the programmes examined had been running for 7 years and had been successful in reducing violent behaviour, increasing school retention, reducing school exclusion and supporting young people through to graduation.

Supporting the enhancement of positive identity

Sheffield's Children's Directorate has a unique multiple heritage service which uses some of these methods to work with children who have black and white heritage. This service bases its provision on the findings from research about what children from multiple heritage might need. This includes increasing children's sense of positive identity; raising self-esteem and subjective well-being; improvement in educational attainment; reduction in rate of school exclusions and problem behaviours; and increasing knowledge and understanding of teachers and policy makers about the needs of this group (Phillips et al 2008). The services runs nine mixed-gender groups for black children; training groups for parents, carers and teachers; offers a mentoring one-to-one programme; and provides a range of other activities. There is a young person's management committee which meets monthly and which is actively involved in recruitment, feedback to managers and consultation about policy proposals. It also decides on the type and range of activities that should be undertaken in the holidays.

The evaluation of the multiple heritage service groups used 3 well-established and validated measures to identify improvements in behaviour and self-esteem and to measure wellbeing. Forty-three children (8-15yrs) completed a before-and-after questionnaire using the Rosenberg self-esteem rate. The result showed that there were general improvements in self-esteem, but the greatest improvements were in the younger children, and the boys' improvements were higher than the girls'. Wellbeing improvements measured higher in the older children. On the third measure of problem behaviour there was no improvement at all for the girls, but there was a significant improvement for the boys (Phillips et al 2008). This suggests that group work for black boys can be effective in addressing behavioural problems.

Group work with black boys has been used to address how to manage anger, racism, and other societal challenges that the boys may face. The group becomes a safe environment, a place of holding which allows them to explore their own thoughts and feelings. It helps them to sort out their priorities and gives them a sense of belonging. Having others who are experiencing similar problems to you is reassuring and seems to lessen the burden of the issues that any one individual faces (Sallah & Howson 2007).

Identity congruence in a racist world

"Achieving identity congruence in the face of racist and oppressive elements represents a significant challenge for most black people in the USA and in the United Kingdom" (Robinson 2001 pg 177). This post-custodial study that charted the experiences of young black people (up to 18yrs) in the youth justice system found that these young people had experienced significant racism from a young age and their habitual response was violence in many instances. The young people (10 boys and 5 girls) who took part in this study communicated their sense of hopelessness and acceptance of inequalities in their life experience, their material and social conditions of deprivation, exclusion, violence and low self esteem. They felt that they had no support from those in authority and at times experienced racism from them as well, though a few were trying to use education as a way of changing their circumstances (Hill 2007).
"Minority children share the hope dreams and aspirations of the majority culture. What they frequently do not share is the means to attain their goals" (Beale-Spencer 1990 p 268).

Group work with boys needs to be set within the context that acknowledges racism and discrimination and numerous other complexities: not as an excuse for violence and criminal behaviour, but as a means to explore alternative ways of responding (Hill 2007). Group work with black boys provides a forum for them to explore issues of racism as well as identity. *"By adolescence, cognitive awareness of culturally-based societal inequalities together with the normative stage-related developmental crisis, result in a complex, so far poorly understood, identity-formation process. Minority children seek on a personal basis to discover what it means to be a member of their specific group"* (Beale-Spencer 1990 p 268).

Banks (1992) discussed the process of black young people integrating their concept of self as an individual with the concept of belonging to a group as Cognitive Ebonization. He stressed that it is important to provide black children with some knowledge and language about racism without disabling them or causing paranoia. By raising the realities of oppression and racism as they arise in the child's experience, they can be encouraged to appreciate and respect their own colour without putting down other groups. He advocated a process which explores terminology, and alters the perception or societal portrayal of blackness, so that the young person begins to view blackness as positive. He suggested that the young person should be active in the discovery of the historical presence and achievements of black people, as well as highlighting the positive presence of black people today. There should also be the opportunity to discuss and affirm black people's role in society. This process is easily facilitated within group settings and could be a rationale for all black groups.

Working with parents

Izekor (2007) advocates not only for group work with children but for group work with parents as well. This will equip them with *"coping strategies that may in themselves lead to more young black boys being raised to stay engaged with the educational system and to more effective and equal partnerships between the school and parents"* (p 71).

A Canadian study (Cunningham et al, 1995) found parent management training (PMT) to be more effective in groups than with individual families. The group structure provided a forum for parents to discuss solutions to their individual and common problems, and to provide feedback and support to one another. The programme facilitators found that the parents were more committed to the group and took on more responsibility for explaining and solving their particular problems. In particular, they found that those who had English as a second language preferred the group setting above the individual one-to-one clinical setting.

Group work with parents has been found to be effective as has group work with children. However, a combination of the two is more effective than either on their own. This combined approach also had a significant impact on the improvement of children's relationship with their peers. Evaluation of projects found that the behavioural and relationships improvements were still evident 12 months after the end of the programme (Tremblley et al 1995, Webster Stratton and Hammond 1997, Hill 1999).

Butt and Box (1998) sent questionnaires to 84 family centre managers in the UK, interviewed 38 individuals, facilitated 15 focus groups and sought black service users' views on how the services had benefitted them. They reported that parent groups had helped them to feel less isolated, gave them time for themselves (ie: when the children were attending centre activities), and provided practical guidance and help. They felt that having separate groups and activities for the children had helped their children to develop skills within a safe space. They also noted that the support that their children received helped the children to cope better in times of crisis. They commented on how they had improved their relationship with their children (Chand & Thoburn 2005).

Improving the self-esteem of parents and providing a forum for networking where they can freely discuss their parenting have a direct impact on the way that they support and care for their children (MacPhee et al 1996). *"Children whose parents are non-supportive have lower self-esteem, more psychological disorders, exhibit more anti-social aggression and behavioural problems, and are more likely to show arrested ego development"* (McLoyd 1990 p330).

Engagement with parents is said to be an important feature of work with young black boys as the relationship between support and wellbeing impacts on parenting. *"Self-appraisals are shaped by interactions with others such that self-esteem, self-efficacy beliefs and self-identity arise through the regard of others and social comparison"* (MacPhee et al 1996).

Professionals should be encouraged to be aware of the additional pressures that the parents of black boys face. The parents themselves recognised that racism was an added stress in their children's and in their own lives. O'Neill's (2000) inspection report on services for ethnic minority children and families notes that black service users found access to services difficult. He concludes (noting agreement with MacPherson) that, in spite of legislation, the effects of discrimination and racism have serious consequences. Access to and use of family support services and parenting programmes was often difficult for ethnic minority families (Chand & Thoburn 2005, Barn 2006). Ahmed (2005) discusses a national survey of parenting programmes which found universal non-representation of black minority ethnic groups in these programmes. However, it was also found that ethnic minority families in need would participate when agencies sought them out (Ahmed 2005).

The Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities programme (released by the REU in 2001) is a parent training programme, which has been well received by black and ethnic minority parents. Ahmed (2005), who investigated early intervention and prevention services for black and minority ethnic children, and Barn (2006), who writes about improving services to meet the needs of minority ethnic children, both commend the programme for its effectiveness in engaging black parents, although there is the need for some caution as the programme had not been independently evaluated.

The Government aims to recognise the contribution of voluntary and community organisations that provide parenting programmes for ethnic minority groups. In its response to the Reach report it states that *"The drive to improve the availability and quality of diverse parenting support, together with the expectation that local authorities will plan, commission and coordinate services more strategically to develop a continuum of support for parents, offers greater opportunities for third sector providers, including those that specialise in support for the black community, to either enter or expand their contribution in this area"* (DCLG 2007 p14).

The need for cultural matching

The majority of parenting programmes are run in the community in groups. However, there are some parents for whom a home visiting scheme is preferable. An evaluation of a home visiting scheme which worked with vulnerable children and parents experiencing racism, bullying at school, mental health difficulties, domestic violence and suspected child abuse relates how project workers were matched linguistically to families. These family support workers acted as mediators, facilitating meetings at schools, listening to the children and representing them to other agencies. The scheme was successful in alleviating physical and emotional bullying, reducing family crisis and avoiding statutory interventions (Ahmed 2005).

Although this scheme matched families to staff from the same linguistic background, evidence for the specific need for black workers to work with black children is contradictory. Some research would suggest that when using black staff *"goals can be arrived at more quickly and qualitative changes more distinct"* (Banks 1992 p23). An ethnographic study of 30 ethnic families and their support workers concluded that *"cultural sensitivity, a shared language, and listening skills are the foundation of a multi-racial service"* (Chand & Thoburn 2005 p174).

However, some black young people have sometimes found black people in positions of authority to be noticeably harder on them (black children) than their white peers (Hill 2007). Furthermore, when there were child protection concerns, workers form the same culture were said by the families to be intrusive (Chand and Thoburn 2005) .

Given that It is not possible to match all ethnic children and families to workers from their same group, white staff working with black children is inevitable. This may be problematic as it has been said that *"adaptive reactions coping styles and adjustment techniques cannot be adequately learned by white teachers in a white environment and passed on to black children"* (Banks 1992 p 23). Furthermore, those white practitioners who provide services for ethnic minority families have themselves stated to researchers that they sometimes struggle with how best to address their needs. Although many are aware of the need to take into account race and cultural issues and the need for sensitivity to a family's culture, they find it difficult to translate this into practical terms (Chand & Thoburn 2005). According to Howson (2007), many professionally qualified people who work with black young people lack the ability, skills, knowledge and understanding to make any difference or to be effective. However, within the literature there is a strong theme that such workers and organisations can become culturally sensitive and appropriate. Authors emphasise the need for staff to develop cultural competence (O'Hagan 2001, Robinson 2001, Barn 2006).

A multifactorial model which should lead to culturally appropriate services is presented by Barn (2006). The model includes factors of multi-racial workforce, culturally competent practitioners, consultation with black service users, evaluation of service provision, ethnic monitoring, meaningful equal opportunities policies, and evidence-based practice. Barn also notes the need for effective partnership working with other agencies. Although it would be impossible for anyone to provide an overview of all the major cultural groups living in England today, there are some principles which can assist in the development of cultural awareness that can lead to cultural competence.

"Culturally competent professionals recognise similarities and differences in the values, norms, customs, history, and institutions of groups of people that vary by ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. They recognise sources of comfort and discomfort between themselves and clients of similar or different cultural backgrounds. They understand the impact of discrimination, oppression, and stereotyping on practice. They recognise their own biases towards or against certain cultural groups. And they rely on scientific evidence and moral reasoning to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Poole 1998 in O'Hagan 2001 pp163-166). Cultural messages shape our understandings of relationships and of how to deal with the conflict and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together. Working across cultures is complicated, but not impossible if the appropriate training is undertaken.

Conclusion

This review has highlighted that, where possible, a multifaceted, multi-targeted approach is recommended which includes agencies working in partnership to offer wider support, role models, mentoring, tutoring, activities, after school clubs and so on, as this has a wider impact than services with a single, narrow target focus. Crime and antisocial behaviour diminished significantly, and young people's educational attainment improved. A two-pronged approach, of groups targeted at black young boys and separate groups targeted at their parents, can also be very effective in addressing antisocial behaviour, violence, and relationship difficulties. It is beyond the scope of this review to examine more closely the exact content of these groups. However, what is evident from the available literature is that these groups offer hope, support and relief from family crisis. Young black boys and their parents who attend such programmes are able to improve their relationships with each other and with the wider community. There is a decrease in problematic behaviour which, in the long term programmes, was sustained.

Despite such successes there are those who do not feel that enough is being done to address the complexity and struggles that young black boys face growing up as a minority in Britain today. Howson (2007) claims that the plight of black young people is not about to change, as there are challenges to working with black young people within social policy which seeks to control, marginalise and perpetuate white supremacy. *"Neither the rhetoric of diversity inclusion, and choice nor the strategies or fetishes of standards are by themselves likely to bring equality for black children"* (Mamon 2004 p90). Exploration of the wider societal and government role in addressing inequalities would require a separate, dedicated review. However, as the impact of discrimination and racism is experienced by black boys and their families, in some instances causing violent responses, it is important to discuss and acknowledge these inequalities within groups.

There are a number of projects that work with black young boys in England today, some of which have been identified as exemplars of good practice in government reports and papers. Yet when there are financial cutbacks, resources directed at black children and families were seen to be the first to disappear (Chand & Thoborn 2005). This seems to contradict the aims of new government initiatives. The Government has sponsored a nationwide role model programme for black boys and recognizes the role that parenting programmes have in supporting black parents. *"We recommend youth offending teams and social services should consider making greater use of voluntary organizations who have established success in providing parenting support to black families"* (HCHAC 2007 p59). Working with black boys and their families has moved up the political agenda as the long-term benefits of such programmes have been recognised. Even those boys considered statistically to be 'at risk' can be helped to thrive (DCLG 2007).

This section of the report brings together the objective review of case files with the subjective views of the practitioners, parents and young people involved in the process. A number of themes were mutually highlighted in both processes, particularly around the supportive and challenging nature of the interventions. It should also be noted that subjective views on service effectiveness can be a key indicator of family change (Trotter 2008).

A) Referral, service user profile, & engagement with the service

Reception

Without exception, parents and children reported a warm, welcoming reception at the project.

Reasons for referral

We asked parents and young people about the reasons for their referral to the Pinnacle project. The most common responses were:-
- Problems with temper – most specifically with angry/aggressive responses to peers, parents or other adults (particularly education staff).
- Problems with self-esteem and mental health.
- Problems fitting in to the school they were attending (some had been excluded).
- Problems with the police or the juvenile justice system.

These problems do not occur in isolation and often can significantly impact on each other. Many young people on referral reported a combination of more than one problem:-

(Ch) 'Cause of anger and trouble with the police
(Ch) For my anger – I was losing my temper
(P) My son was excluded from school; behavioural problems; constant arguing; everything was bad, nothing going right. Things were so bad you could not get nothing worse. I was at the end of my tether.

Some families referred themselves after publicity events at school. Most other referrals came from local children's social care services, education services or health care services, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Some of these problems were longstanding:-

(P) He [son] has always been different to the others [siblings] – problems in school since year 3 - long drawn out stuff – emotional, EBD, Asperger's stuff.

Background family issues

As well as the child-oriented reasons for referral to the project, it became clear that adult-oriented issues had also impacted on many families. Twenty eight families had experienced significant domestic abuse, eight families serious adult mental health problems, and two more had problems of adult substance misuse.

The impact of a combination of adult-oriented issues on child welfare has been well documented elsewhere (Cleaver et al 1999 and 2007, Harbin and Murphy 2000 and 2006, Forrester and Harwin, 2008). In 20 of the 28 cases where domestic violence had previously been an issue, the adults concerned had separated and there was no contact between the father or male figure and the young person concerned.

Service User Profile

The file evaluation involved a review of the case files of 39 service users of the Action for Children Pinnacle project. Some parents and young people who had engaged in individual or conjoint work with a key worker had also joined a parents' or children's group. There were a small number of those who did not engage at all. The breakdown of interventions received is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Interventions Received

Initial Meeting	37
Family work	17
Parents' programme	15
Parents' workshops	30
Young people's programme	17
Young people's workshops	9
No engagement after initial meeting	7
No engagement after referral	2

NOTES

Family work = parent and child sessions.

Parents workshops = 30 attendees who were not engaged in other services.

Young peoples programme: of the 17 attendees, 10 were aged 13-15 years and 7 were aged 8-11 years.

Total number of young people engaging = 34.

The ages of young people also varied and ranged from 8 to 15. The range of ages is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Age range of young people in the project

Age	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Number of participants	3	8	5	6	5	3	5	4

It is of some note that a significant proportion of children and young people were actually referred and picked up in a pre-adolescent stage, some before they had left primary school.

The length of engagement per family was also studied and is represented below. The average length of engagement for a family was 6 months.

Table 3: Average length of engagement

Length of engagement	6 months	12 months	Ongoing
Number of families	24	14	11

Engagement/Non-Engagement

For the majority of families which engaged, Pinnacle was experienced as being very helpful and positive in several key areas of their lives.

> (lp) Those who engaged worked really well. Permanent change is what they want to work towards
> (lp) But actually doing a session around their strengths from everybody's perspective that was coming to that meeting. Using a solution focus in it's entirety. I think that is where we get the engagement.

There were other occasions where a whole family approach (rather than a parent-child dyad approach) was felt to be more appropriate.

> (lp) Getting the whole family on board, siblings other adult figures in the household. Some opt in or out. Sisters were often used as comparisons: you need to have all involved to change the dynamic. Some had two boys, one fantastic, other not and at the project. Some needed family therapy to change the dynamics.
> (P) X and Y (Pinnacle staff) were very supportive, and they were also challenging to all 3 of us. He has a sister and they helped us look at patterns of behaviour between our family. It was upsetting at times to all of us, but they were prepared to tackle the difficult issues. They were not afraid about that. But they were warm and friendly, and it really helped us work things through.

It is also the case that some young people engaged without the full engagement of their parent and some parents engaged with the project, who doubted the commitment of their sons to the process:-

> (P) [Son 16years] didn't participate – he just chose not to.

Another carer was disappointed that her child had had to be excluded from the group because of his unusual behaviour, but was impressed that the Pinnacle team kept contact with him on an outreach basis.

(P) M (male worker) has been helpful – he has been several times to the school and to home trying to keep in touch. He has been good.

However, there were a number of families where, in spite of significant effort on the project's part, there was little or no engagement from parent or child after referral. It was difficult for practitioners to obtain a view about the reasons for lack of engagement, but this happened in families where engagement had been difficult for other agencies too. Involved practitioners speculated that the engagement phase for these families really needed to be even more flexible and offered when they feel that the time is right:-

> (lp) We could do a couple of visits first, or start the group with more flexibility…
> (lp) Some families are not ready at that time – maybe they are not ready now – there is a lot of stigma in sharing personal issues – we could do more work on the 'ready' issue.

Other provisions and proposals in Government policy around compulsory parental attendance at parenting skills classes may help to deal with this issue. However, it means that the most difficult families for services to access are unlikely to benefit as much from positive early interventions diverting problems at source in the same way that other families can benefit. It also could be evidence that 'new' projects need time in the community to build a sufficiently trustworthy reputation to attract families which hold an innate distrust of most mainstream services.

B)   Parenting and Family Relationships

> (P) [black] children are dying out there. We are doing our best to educate them. Why not educate us as parents? We all need to learn – parents and children – the world would be a better place.

The vulnerability of some parents

What became very clear during the process of the research was just how vulnerable some participating parents felt in their role:

> (P) Overall it was all very helpful – helpful to me – stretching out the hand - I needed that support.
> (P) At the time we were already linked in with other people – lots of referrals – I needed something and it did something for me – very warm.

This perceived vulnerability seemed to stem from three factors:
a) Most participants in the project were single parents at the time, and were struggling with lone parenting.
b) Most parents were female and felt the difficulty of parenting boys on the edge of adolescence.
c) For some experienced parents there was a feeling that parenting this child was different and particularly difficult. This was often combined with multiple problems with outside agencies.
In the face of this perceived vulnerability the Pinnacle service, particularly the group work service, was seen to be particularly beneficial.

Group work

The parents, carers and young people who had attended the group work sessions provided consistently positive feedback about how well they believed they had been assisted. It should be noted that the parents and carers concerned were predominantly mothers in employment. Some mothers were very positive about the impact of the service on their sons, but had not been able to attend the parenting group themselves (because of long working hours or the lack of a crèche). One parent regretted that the parents group and the young persons group did not run concurrently.
The comments of the parents who were able to attend the group work can be summarised as:-

1) Attendance at the project had encouraged special family time where parent and child could spend time together without significant conflict.

(P) Spending quality time with my children has taught me a lot as well – and they can pass it on to their children.
(P) Spending time together, individuals sitting and eating dinner and talking if problems arose. Listening much better now. Feel if I hadn't attended, dread to think where I would be now. We were arguing every day, major big ones. There were complaints from the neighbours. Decreased to once or twice a week, then one a month, then one maybe every 8 weeks.

2) The input on parenting and family relationships was especially valuable. Instructions, advice and homework were clear and explained in words that were easy to understand. There was often praise from the group and reassessment of their own skills and resources as parents. In the past, parents often felt criticised and harshly self-critical of their own efforts:-

(P) Seeing things on different levels I'd never seen before – all of us who are parents were there for the same reasons – to get something from it – food for thought and to learn.

(P)I did not have much confidence in my parenting skills and myself. But that has improved.

(Ip) The Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities programme was very positive. They [parents] came, they engaged, and they supported each other. They also do homework and home tasks. The women found it possible to open up well. By week 4 or 5 everyone was opening up.

(Ip) Using solution-focus, applying the strengths, enabling them to see that they do the work and you facilitate. Giving the expertise back to them.

(P) Within 2-3 weeks I felt the difference. Listening to the young person, taking time out, being direct to the point about what is wrong.

3) Meeting others helped parents to find ways of staying calm when challenged by their children's behaviour or by other stress factors in life. The process also helped parents and children to respond differently. For some, this support continued at an informal level after the group had ended.

(P) They were helping to give support to those parents that thought there was another way of dealing with and teaching their children – that Pinnacle could help them with that.

(P) I think before I act. I'm no longer ready to erupt at the slightest thing.

4) The quietness of the group was a place of solace and reflection at times.

(P) You can share things and its confidential – you don't have to feel ashamed. Respectful of what you said – that's what I got.

(P) If I had issues they would talk to me about it – they taught me the process of seeing it from a different angle.

(Ip) The programme requires people to go back and draw out their own experiences of being parented. That's quite hard. What comes out of it is a shared commonality. Light-hearted moments, when things are getting quite deep.

5) The group work was perceived as an antidote to parental isolation and vulnerability.

Individual casework

For those families which could not participate in the group work process, individual casework or discussions held in the family's own home proved especially useful to the participating families:-

(Ch) Me and my mum was always arguing. S [worker] came to do home visits – since then me and my mum started to get along fine.

(P) They have helped me to help him. There was a barrier between myself and school. They didn't understand. They wanted him to go to a pupil referral unit. X (Pinnacle staff) helped me with how to approach the school. We have meetings, and I have advice on behaviour. The school is on my side now.

C) Children and Young People work

Engagement

The young people who engaged with the project have reported a very positive reception at their first visit. This reception encouraged the young men to stay and join in the work. Three young men reported having a bad day before their first visit (two fights and one day of heavy criticism at school), but that disappeared on their positive reception at the project. These were all children and young people drawn from late primary and secondary school ages.

(Ip) The environment in which the group is held it is like being in someone's home. Feedback we have had says it doesn't feel threatening, it is welcoming. The environment is a significant part. We have a lovely kitchen back there with table and chairs. The fact that we have cooked food as well for young people and adults food has played a significant part. When we worked with the young people and we have done lunches and we have had a long table the facilitators would sit with them. It was there that you really got a grasp of the young people. It is the communicating when they are eating and more relaxed.

Group work

Children and young people reported positively about their experience of the Start programme. The groups were fun and very welcoming.

(Ch)Take part in the group recreation, respect and power or telling the difference between. I went everyday at one point, for 5 days. Did the qualifications, got my certificate. Got a prize for coming every day 'cause I didn't have to. Plus Mum and Pinnacle trusted me to come. I could have gone anywhere else.

The groups helped young people to think about things differently. Summary comments from children and young people were:-

(Ch) We were doing plays about what happened – about aggression – how would you react if someone took your phone – how would you react - it was really fun. I got some ideas.

(Ch) I also did the drama around power - the play we had to make – that was going to be in the theatre.

(Ch) Stuff to do with bullying – the bad person and the good person.

(Ch) Helped me control my temper.

(Ch) Yes it did – it helped me to think what to do around my temper – before I lost it.

(Ch) Made me do things better than I used to. Like I ain't coming home angry every day just 'cause of a teacher. Helped me be more me instead of being short-tempered and always get in trouble and back-chatting. Stopped all of that because of Pinnacle. Gave me a variety of ways of seeing how I could be better at school.

The groups also helped to enable young people to respect themselves more.

(Ch) If it could help me, I'm sure it could help many more people.

Boys commented that they had valued having the facilitators as role models (when they did not always have clear adult role models for all aspects of their lives). The groups helped the boys to be different in other areas of their lives. Some boys had a particularly good (if difficult) relationship with the male worker:-

> (Ch) M [male worker] was more open.
> (Ch) [Youngest son's] dad is now back, but at the time M was a role model. [Son] was quite disruptive at school – M would be around even though [son] tested him.

Many of the boys stated they would have liked the groups to have lasted even longer and that they would value attending another group in future.

> (Ch)Yes – it showed signs of improvement in my behaviour last year. When I stopped coming behaviours went down a bit – my 13 weeks was up.

Whereas parents had valued the more reflective nature of the parent's groups, for the young men, activity-based programmes such as making 'plays' and going to the theatre were valued highly.

> (Ch) The theatre was good – it was a one off – really good.

It may be pertinent that file reviews were undertaken some 4-8 months before user interviews were undertaken.

It is interesting that a significant part of the user feedback on the project was not about what the individual user had gained, but how their parent or their child had successfully changed in their interactions with them. This type of feedback on the 'other' in the family relationship is usually indicative of significant, positive interactional change within families (Murphy et al 2008).

Parents, carers and children also reported, at the end of their individual or group sessions, that there had been notable reported improvements in themselves and in their relationships with their children or parents. In summary, the most consistent comments were as follows.

1) Parents/carers – changes in response and behaviour

Parents and carers reported that they now listened more and had more patience within the family. This feedback was echoed in their children's comments on their own and their parent's behavioural changes.

> (P) It helped me to be able to deal with [my son] in a different way. It helped me to think and do things differently. He has had the benefit of that so that when I am with him I do it differently.
> (P) I probably got more out of it than my son. The parenting course really prepared me, and helped me take back the power, stay calm and not give in to provocation.

2) Parents/carers using a range of skills & strategies to manage behaviour

Parents and carers reported feeling much calmer, taking time out when necessary rather than becoming angry. Young people recounted being less angry and aggressive and more cooperative at home.

> (P) Parenting skills - how to deal with different situations. We all shout in our house. Hope to tackle situations without physically harming or shouting.
> (Ch) It helped my mum The way she acts and thinks before she goes and retaliates – she is different with me.
> (P) The stuff around anger was really helpful – how to avoid losing your temper – how I could handle him when it happened.
> (Ip) The young people really noticed the difference in their parents (there were more boundaries).
> (P) He still has his moments, but it has helped, and I still remind him of what they taught him.

3) Improvement in parent/carer and child relationship

Advantage was taken of the "special time" which had found fruition in closer relationships and continued use of special time with their children beyond the project.

> (Ip) Fundamentally, the young people want their parents to spend more time with them.
> (Ch) There was troubles before we went there – but then we went there and it all changed.
> (Ch) We would argue and argue, and I would smash things and walk out – its not like that any more.
> (Ch) Right now am getting on good with my mum.
> (Ch) Me and Mum get along better. Sometimes she ask me to do things and I don't like tidying my room. Always arguing before; always this and that. Times that I disappoint Mum. Has changed - no longer disappointing Mum.
> (P) The service helped us to communicate.
> (P) He has grown out some – more mature – but he still has some of his ways. I have changed how I looked at him. Pinnacle helped with this.
> (P) I have learned to have an element of faith in [son]. He had fallen behind, but he might just be OK, you know.

4) A greater sense of control over life and more confidence.

Parents, carers and young people sometimes noted that they felt that the situation before Pinnacle was out of control, and a few had begun to blame themselves or felt that others would blame them. As Beale-Spencer (1990) points out: 'Minority children share the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the majority culture. What they frequently do not share is the means to attain their goals' (p268). Pinnacle helped them to build their self confidence, set goals and address their issues and problems. This gave them a greater sense of control.

> (Ip) We begin by trying to be non-intrusive – we start the introduction on their strengths.
> (Ip) We try to offer choices and empowerment in the initial phase – get to know the families first – they do not have to engage.
> (Ip) The plan is done by them, what they want to get out of it.
> (P) I was at the point of putting (son) into care because of the aggression. I had already contacted Social Services saying "I can't take no more." Now, no violence or angry outbursts, boosted confidence, self satisfaction. Things are better. He knows that and is pleased.
> (Ch) Helped me a lot, very grateful that I might have a chance in the future.

5) Friendships and the development of informal support networks

Parents and carers often reported that they now had more friends as a result of meeting others in the group work situation.

> (P) I have kept in touch with the group of parents. Every so often we call or text.

6) Understanding child development

A key part of the parenting intervention was to explore child development, specifically the different demands of parenting children at different developmental stages. There was greater understanding of childhood development norms reported, and an ability to respond differently to different children in the family.

> (P) …also to go in on different levels for different children. I have a X year old and a x year old – it has helped me with my other children – which has helped a lot.

7) Improvements in the originating problem

It was too early in the process to comment on long-term changes in parent, child or family life. However in the medium term, parents, carers and young people offered positive feedback on the influence of the project on relationships within the family, and on the young people's relationships with school and with the police. They also consistently claimed significant improvement in the originating problem that led to the first referral. This included problems with anger and aggression, problems with school, problems with self-esteem and mental health, and problems with the police.

Following Pinnacle intervention, the noted improvements indicated on file records in the behaviours and presentation of the young people concerned were as follows.

Aggression/peer relationships	17
Reduced risk of offending	5
Family relationship difficulties	17
Mental health concerns	4
Self esteem	13

This is not to suggest that young service users were no longer challenged by these issues, but the figures showed improved reports of behaviour for a number of the boys. The figures above were not related to separate service users: one boy may have improved across all dimensions on the table shown and therefore be shown as improving in 5 separate ways.

8) Impact on Identity – The importance of being in a black boys group, run by black staff

Pinnacle was an unusual service in that it managed to completely match the ethnicity of the young people involved with the ethnicity of the workers. Chand and Thoburn (2005) report that practitioners working with black children see the advantages of ethnic matching as 'cultural sensitivity and the awareness of the impact of racism and racial abuse and how to challenge racism at both the institutional and individual level' (p176). The same research comments on 'high levels of satisfaction for minority ethnic families, through the specific use of ethnically matched social workers and family support workers' (p 176). The practitioners and parents involved in the Pinnacle process commented positively on the impact of a black project group working with black boys.

> (Ip) We have made it specific to black families. Drawing on the cultures, customs and traditions. That had been quite empowering for the women we had on the programme. Who they are, where they are, and the actual strength.
> (Ip) She [parent] went through a whole learning process as to who are her children [their identity]. She never thought of her children in that way. The children's dad was involved with that. Her children actually said Mum has opened up.
> (P) It was just about supporting young African-Caribbean boys and men – an invaluable service for African-Caribbean boys. M [male worker] was a positive role model – the boys could identify and relate to him.
> (P) We need more, not less, of services like this. At the moment, black-on-black crime – shootings – they need role models and more facilities.
> (P) Get the boys when they are younger – services like Pinnacle can reduce bad things happening.

The issue of a black boys group appeared to be more important and pertinent to parents and involved practitioners than to the children themselves, although one young man stated that:

> (Ch) It was good to be in a black boys group.

The other young men seemed to seek a more heterogeneous group.

> (Ch) Better more concentrated if at least one girl – more mixed.
> (Ch) The group is better with girls in it.
> (Ch) It was OK being black, but if you had white people you would get their views as well.

This does not mean that the Pinnacle model would not work using a more diverse client and practitioner group. In some ways, having matched ethnicity and having at least one male member of staff was the 'value added' if not essential part of the process.

Suggestions for improvement of the service

The Pinnacle project itself has now been closed. This section of the report concerns the development of services of a similar type.

Young people

The young people interviewed were generally very positive about their experience of the Pinnacle process. However, they made several suggestions for improvement. Two young men indicated a definite view about the need for younger teenage members of the project team.

> (Ch) It would be different. It would be run by teenagers. Teenagers find it easier to talk to teenagers rather than older people.
> (Ch) If they had youth running it as well as adults it would be good.

Several young people wanted a service that would engage with them for longer periods of time and over the weekend.

(Ch) Have a youth club on a weekend.
(Ch) Also be able to come back after 13 weeks.

Parents

Parents were generally very complimentary of services on offer but seemed also to be interested in longer periods of involvement, of follow up and of more flexible arrangements around the timing of groups. They also expressed a need for child care provision (the lack of which prevented some from attending the parenting groups).

> (P) I don't have a lot of friends and had child care problems. In the end social services found a sitter. It needs formal funding as child care for the younger child was an obstacle.

Involved Staff

The involved staff also offered a series of suggestions for the improvement of the process. There was a strong desire to extend the process beyond the casework and group work process.

> (Ip) Follow-ups: we need to track families after the interventions have finished – we could do follow-ups or open surgeries to do follow-ups.

There was also a desire to establish a more integrated referral system.

> (Ip) When referrers see that this is an agency that works with black boys they think every black boy should come here. They need to go through the referral that we have go through. You will see quite obviously that that shouldn't be coming through here. More informed referrers. Take time to think about where they are referring them to. They get overwhelmed with the issues that they think refer them to wherever.
> (Ip) We need to get our referral process and CAF to fit together.

It was also felt that an ongoing mentoring service might work in partnership with services of this kind.

> (Ip) The RAMP mentoring service option would be really useful – to work with YPs for a longer period of time on their level.

Views of Partner Agencies

The involved practitioners report developing and improving relationships with other agencies.

> (Ip) Initially, they [partner agencies] saw us as a threat, now it is much more positive and there are more referrals.
> (Ip) We now have a really good and positive relationship with all agencies, with very regular and open communication with SSDs and Education (child protection referrals are the most interesting with some resistance from families).

The most frequently cited views of other agency representatives were the views of head teachers of schools where boys were attending and where there had normally been a history of challenging behaviour and temporary exclusions. There were cases where head teachers were clearly able to link improvements in behaviour and attitude to the time of attending the Pinnacle project. These instances were always those young people who were highly motivated at Pinnacle. In other cases, there was no discernible improvement at school.

The views of health service providers and children's social care services operated by the local authority were not well-recorded on files as these agencies most commonly did not continue involvement once the Pinnacle project had accepted responsibility for working with the family.

Role of Schools

> (Ip) Individually, some young people are very bright but don't fit into the school system.

The greatest apparent success stories related to children and young people who were still attending mainstream school on a full-time basis. These accounts include details of significantly improved relationships with peers and with teachers (particularly around behaviour and school work).

> (Ip) Schools and Pinnacle have seen a really good relationship. How we can support, education plans…

Schools were important in reinforcing the lessons around good behaviour and behavioural boundaries. It also suggested that the Pinnacle service better met the needs of children and young people whose involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour was identified at an early juncture and before such concerns had escalated to the point of school exclusion. Parent and school cohesion was also an important factor in reinforcing different behaviour. Often the project acted as a 'bridge' between the parent, child and the school where potentially significant problems were successfully overcome and exclusion avoided. The project also noted significant problems in some schools in encompassing the needs of black males.

> (Ip) Educational experience was concerning. They [the boys] talk about who has the power and look at it in relation to the identity of the black male. In an environment that was supporting who they were. You are a young black male you do have different experiences - we acknowledge them and do not shy away. Feel open to express your feelings and learn how to deal with these things without feeling that you have in some ways to justify how you feel. The fact that all in the project come from a black perspective is empowering. Same experience of school and how people perceive them (eg, teachers see them as aggressive). We will challenge that and look at what can you do differently.

Action for Children's research in 2007 for its Growing Strong campaign highlighted the importance of children's emotional well-being and also found an important link in practice and in research literature between positive school experiences and emotional well-being and self-esteem. For the young people at the Pinnacle project, if school life included repeated experiences of failure or boredom it would be difficult for young people to have the sense of achievement necessary to develop improved behaviours in the wider community. This is an issue at the heart of further development of this kind of approach in working with children and young people on the edge of criminality.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Issues

Some of the children and young people had apparent mental health difficulties. These were most notably around self-harm, with several children demonstrating signs of other issues. The team was concerned that for some of these young men the local CAMHS service did not seem to be actively involved and instead appeared to rely on the Pinnacle service as being one which could achieve good outcomes through its ability to reach out and link with the local community. It was therefore encouraging to see that the project staff made significant effort to seek to reach an understanding with the local CAMHS service about roles and responsibilities. This resulted in the two services now working in partnership where appropriate in a number of cases.

> (Ip) [We have] a good relationship with CAMHS. We give them another perspective on black families - provide consultation, and they do the same for us.

There was a level of concern about the mental well-being of boys referred to the project which warrants some attention. It appeared clear that a small proportion of those referred as being at risk of involvement in criminal activity had significant issues around their mental health. This would suggest a need for some thinking about assisting primary schools to screen accurately for such issues prior to transition to secondary school.

The Role of Fathers and Male Role Models

The inclusion of male parents has been a ongoing challenge in most children's welfare work (DH 1995, Ryan 2000). The absence of a father in most of these children's lives was not a hidden issue. Many mothers voiced the difficulties involved with this paternal absence:.

> (Pa) He lost his father nearly 6 years ago, and I was thinking "how can I teach a boy to be a man giving him firm discipline and stuff?"
> (P) [Son's] dad is now back, but at the time he wasn't.

At the start of the project it was presumed that it would be relatively easy to re-establish contact between the child and their father. In most cases this proved not to be possible.

> (Ip) Getting fathers or alternative role models on board was difficult. One or two engaged, but it was difficult if the relationship had already broken down [with the child].

There was, in fact, relatively little involvement with fathers in the families whose files were reviewed. Of the 39 case files reviewed, there was direct contact by the Pinnacle team with a father in three cases, with a stepfather in two cases and with a grandfather in one case. In other cases, mothers reported an increasing interest of other adult males in the behaviour of the young service user as a result of them taking actions suggested in group work sessions (to secure support from wider family networks).

In some families the project manager and staff chose not to proceed with direct paternal involvement. In these families the project team was concerned about the potential child protection implications of re-introducing an absent father to a child and their younger siblings. The frequency with which files spoke of a history of domestic violence and parental separation seems significant. It is impossible to know whether the separation or the violence had the greater impact on the child, although it is known from other research that domestic violence between adults in a household is strongly associated with a range of negative outcomes for children in teenage years and beyond (Cleaver et al 1999, 2007).

This issue of domestic violence and potential risk to children also led the research team to conclude that improving the relationship between some boys and their fathers was not a viable strategy in improving anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour. However, what was clearly of value for many of the boys was discussion with them about the role of boys in households where there was no adult male. It is in this area, with regard to the role of men in the family, that future efforts are probably best directed. The role of extended families and males as role models has been promoted and encouraged. Staff members at the project have seen a gradual improvement in developing alternative relationships among families with uncles, grandfathers and elder brothers encouraged to take a more active interest in the young person.

> (Ip) Family group conferencing may help pull the males in the family into the process. We have had a few grandfathers involved.
> (Ip) Fathers didn't engage with the project, but because of some of the changes in Mum that the project inspired, some engaged further with their child.

Some young men in the project developed very strong relationships with the project's only male worker.

> (P) M [male worker] has contact. He likes M a lot to the point of ownership. M has to draw him in at times and say "there are other people who I need to speak to as well".
> (P) M [male worker] was a role model. He would be around even though my son tested him.

Conclusions

The file review and service user feedback have demonstrated clear conclusions and offer some other indications about ways forward, in the future, in trying to stem growth of crime and anti-social behaviour amongst socially excluded minority ethnic boys in London. These indications are also likely to have implications for similar work undertaken elsewhere. The Pinnacle model of concurrent service provision to parents and children offers some lessons to those working with other vulnerable populations. Certainly, apart from their employment status (many Pinnacle parents were in employment), most of the Pinnacle families fitted into the government's Think Family agenda (DCSF 2009). This model of early intervention aimed both at parent and child to improve child well being and behaviour is one that seems well-designed to fit current child care policies.

In the short term, the Pinnacle project was not able to engage or assist all those families referred to it. Where families or young people actively avoided or rejected contact with professionals, the Pinnacle project was not able to break through this strong level of resistance. Further thought is therefore needed for the future in working with reluctant or hostile service users. Pinnacle confirmed the experience of other family support service evaluations that the service users who appeared to benefit most were those who were able to demonstrate insight into their situations and full commitment to participating in the interventions. Most of the users of the Pinnacle project were aware of their vulnerability. Parents were actively worried about their capacity to guide their children away from 'trouble' and the young people were interested in improving their relationships with the adults around them. It is not that those without insight did not benefit at all, but the greatest reported behavioural improvements and the most positive user testimonies were from those with relatively high levels of motivation.

Future Development

1) The model of combined and concurrent use of individual casework and group work to support and challenge parents and children should be rolled out by Action for Children in partnership with local authorities and offered as an early intervention to divert those young people at risk of crime, anti-social behaviour and significant family conflict.

2) This model of concurrent provision should also be considered in the development of other services for children, parents and families in other vulnerable communities.

3) Future projects should be organised in partnership with schools and with agreements with local CAMHS services about working together in cases where children and young people have apparent mental health difficulties.

4) Consideration should be given to setting up projects that can benefit from extended provision (crèche, mentoring services, etc).

5) There seems to be significant value in establishing projects where staff and users can explore cultural and gender issues and identities from a shared perspective. Consideration should be given to the possibility of some ethnic matching of users and practitioners within a project.

6) Projects of this kind should encourage the inclusion of fathers in all work plans unless there are indicators that such involvement could place children or women at risk of harm. Alternative male role models should be sought whether or not fathers are included.

7) Future projects should be planned to provide a greater outreach component and greater flexibility of access. This should attract reluctant and hostile service users to persuade them of the likely benefits of attendance at a programme.

8) A longitudinal research or evaluation approach should be taken in respect of services provided to seek to deter young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. This programme should include services set up in the mould of Pinnacle as well as others. Further discussion is needed within Action For Children as to whether this should be a regional approach led from London or a national approach taking into account the various projects run by Action For Children throughout the UK.

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Evaluation of the Pinnacle Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Pinnacle project was set up in August 2006 following continuing public concern about crime carried out by young people in South London, where a large proportion of offenders were young, male and from a minority ethnic group.

The project was based in Streatham in the London Borough of Lambeth, occupying a converted house in a residential street. Referrals were taken from agencies in Lambeth and the surrounding boroughs of Wandsworth and Southwark. The service was a small one, employing one full-time project manager, two full-time practitioners and a part-time administrator. Because funding for the project was time-limited the project ended in March 2009.

The Pinnacle Project worked in a variety of ways, using a raft of supportive interventions.

- An initial assessment including the child concerned and their parent or carer.

- An individual casework service or attendance at group sessions run separately for the young people and for their parents.

- Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities group sessions for parents focused on discipline, sanctions, coping with challenging behaviour and promoting positive interaction and relationships with young people entering adolescence.

- The young people's group work process, the Start programme, concentrated on feelings, behaviour and interactions with peers, parents and other adults to build self esteem while challenging negative patterns of thought and behaviour.

- Actively seeking ways to improve the relationships between boys and their fathers (many of whom were absent from the main family home).

- Outreach work with children and young people, particularly offering a bridging or mentoring service to promote positive school behaviour.

EVALUATION METHOD

The purpose was to undertake a rigorous, comprehensive evaluation of the first two years of the working of the Pinnacle project.

The evaluation was based on a review of files which included all the families assisted by the Pinnacle project until April 2008. A total of 39 files for individual children were reviewed.

In addition, the review team analysed files relating to both the parents and young people groups run by Pinnacle.

It also included a series of interviews with parents, children and involved practitioners that were conducted between August 2008 and February 2009.

A systematic literature review was completed.

The research team abided by the research ethics guidance offered by the British Sociological Association 2002[1] and the Royal College of Nursing 2007[2]. Guidelines from INVOLVE[3] for the involvement of service users and children in research projects were followed. Formal ethics approval was secured from the University of Salford Research Governance and Ethics Committee.

[1] British Sociological Association (2002) Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association. London: BSA.

[2] Royal College of Nursing (2007) Research ethics: RCN guidance for nurses. London: RCN.

[3] http://www.invo.org.uk/Publication_Guidelines.asp

Overview of Findings

Learning from the literature on working with black youth

The greatest impact is achieved by a multifaceted, multi-targeted approach with agencies working in partnership to offer wider support, role models, mentoring, tutoring, activities, and after-school clubs. Crime and antisocial behaviour diminished significantly with this approach, and young people's educational attainment improved. Separate groups targeted at black young boys and their parents were also effective in addressing antisocial behaviour, violence, and relationship difficulties.

The impact of discrimination and racism is experienced by black boys and their families, in some instances causing violent responses, and positive change cannot be achieved without acknowledging these inequalities within groups.

A number of projects working with black young boys in England have been identified as exemplars of good practice in government reports and papers. Yet when there are financial cutbacks, resources directed at black children and families were seen to be the first to disappear (Chand & Thoborn 2005)[4].

The Government has sponsored a nationwide role model programme for black boys and recognizes the role that parenting programmes have in supporting black parents. "We recommend youth offending teams and social services should consider making greater use of voluntary organizations who have established success in providing parenting support to black families" (HCHAC 2007 p59)[5].

Working with black boys and their families has moved up the political agenda as the long-term benefits of such programmes have been recognised. Even those boys considered statistically to be 'at risk' can be helped to thrive (DCLG 2007)[6].

Learning from the file review, service users & practitioners

Some children, parents and families did not engage with the Pinnacle project. From the project's point of view this was because the families were not 'ready' to engage or that some families did not trust the project enough to openly share their difficulties with them.

The project team also stressed the importance of not being a short-term project: a long-established family project could build over time a reputation for trustworthiness and effectiveness in the local area.

For the families which engaged, there was strong evidence from files and from user and practitioner feedback that the project had been successful in helping both children and parents, not just in their family relationships but in their relationships with outside agencies (particularly schools, the police and the CAMHS service).

Boys & young men as service users

The ages of the boys and young men involved in the service ranged from 8-15 years, with an average age of 11.3 years (exactly the transition point between junior and senior school). The young people themselves reported problems with anger and temper, relationship problems at home, trouble with the police and with school. Some also reported mental health problems.

The boys and young men reported a very positive response to the part of the service that was aimed at them. Their welcome and inclusion into the project was appreciated. The service was seen to help them to achieve significant improvements in self-esteem; performance, attendance and relationships in schools; and, without exception, improved relationships at home, particularly with their mothers. Some boys also reported significant improvements in involvement with the police. The boys also reported significantly positive changes in their parent, and that this had made family life and relationships more positive.

As far as suggestions for improvement of the service was concerned, most young men wanted a service that would not be time- limited and would encourage them to participate over a much longer period of time. Two boys would also have valued other young people actively working for the project.

[4] Chand A, Thoburn J (2005) Research review: child & family support services with minority ethnic families: What can we learn from research? Child & Family Social Work 10: 169-178.

[5] House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2007) Young black people and the criminal justice system. London: TSO.

[6] Department of Communities and Local Government (2007) REACH: An independent report to government on raising the aspirations and attainment of black boys and young black men. London: TSO.

Relationships with fathers

At the start of the project it was hoped that as part of the process boys and young men would be encouraged to re-establish contact with their estranged fathers. In most cases this proved impossible. In some cases (because of significant previous family violence) it was not felt to be in the child's best interests to re-form this relationship.

As an alternative, the project team was very active in helping the boys to explore alternative male role models inside and outside the family. For some boys the sole male member of project staff became a very important role model.

The isolation of mothers

Most of the parents involved with the project were mothers who were parenting alone. Most of these reported that they struggled with the parenting task, particularly parenting angry boys on the edge of adolescence.

Some experienced parents felt parenting this child to be different and particularly difficult, often combined with multiple problems with outside agencies and this particular child.

To these parents the individual, family and group sessions were seen to be helpful in the following ways:-

- It reduced isolation, giving parents an experience of not being on their own with the problem. Many parents formed good relationships with other members of their group.

- It encouraged positive interaction between mothers and sons, and offered practical parenting techniques and advice that helped to make parents more confident in their own ability to reduce conflict with their sons. Several parents reported feeling much more in control of what was happening inside the family.

- The project helped to 'build bridges' between young men, parents and outside institutions (particularly schools). This helped boys, parents and members of staff in these institutions to understand better and relate to each other.

- The improvement to the service suggested by parents included longer-term involvement, more groups held at times that were accessible to working parents, and the provision of a crèche to help care for younger siblings during the groupwork phase.

"It is very important that projects like Pinnacle carry on to support single parents to be confident parents and to discipline children in the right manner – not to be wound up and hit out but to be firm and diplomatic."

Involved practitioners

The achievements of the project perceived by the practitioners and manager of the project closely mirrored the feedback from users. Practitioners reported enhanced self-esteem in parents and children; improved children's behaviour; significantly improved options, skills and understanding of the parenting task (particularly around conflict management); improvements in relationships between mothers and sons, and between children, parents and other agencies. Finally, some mothers discovered greater understanding of what it meant to be a black adolescent male in London.

The staff from the project believed that it was important for future projects to be flexible (particularly around the time of engagement), to offer a longer-term input to both parents and children, and to develop mentoring and leisure programmes that would develop other interests and self esteem. The staff group also believed that the work with CAMHS, schools and the police should be extended.

"I took part in the group recreation, respect and power or telling the difference between. I went everyday at one point, for 5 days. Did the qualifications, got my certificate. Got a prize for coming every day 'cause I didn't have to. Plus Mum and Pinnacle trusted me to come. I could have gone anywhere else."

'Matching'

Some level of ethnic (and gender) 'matching' between the young users of the project and the staff who worked with them added value to the young people's experience and also helped the adults around them to understand issues of identity and racism from the child's perspective. Some element of matching was also seen to be helpful as it offered appropriate role models to the young people.

"I hope that the project continues and achieves what it needs to. So many black males need support and understanding."

Relationships with other agencies

The Pinnacle project was able to build up effective working relationships with several different local agencies with a crucial role to play in the lives of the young men and their families. The most rewarding relationships were those with Social Services, CAMHS and schools.

Extensive miscommunication between children, parents and external agencies was a common cause of young men being excluded from services and suffering even more from low self esteem. The project helped to improve the levels of understanding between the children and the agencies which were working with them.

Future Development

1) The model of combined and concurrent use of individual casework and group work to support and challenge parents and children should be rolled out by Action for Children in partnership with local authorities and offered as an early intervention to divert those young people at risk of crime, anti-social behaviour and significant family conflict.

2) This model of concurrent provision should also be considered in the development of other services for vulnerable children, parents and families in other communities.

3) Future projects should be organised in partnership with schools and with agreements with local CAMHS services to work together in cases where children and young people have apparent mental health difficulties.

4) Consideration should be given to setting up projects that can benefit from extended provision (crèche, mentoring services, etc).

5) There is significant value in establishing projects where staff and users can explore cultural and gender issues and identities from a shared perspective. The possibility of some ethnic matching of users and practitioners within a project should be pursued.

"It was just about supporting young African-Caribbean boys and men – an invaluable service for African-Caribbean boys. M [male worker] was a positive role model – the boys could identify and relate to him."

6) Projects of this kind should encourage the inclusion of fathers in all work plans, unless there are indicators that such involvement could place children or women at risk of harm. Alternative male role models should be sought whether or not fathers are included.

7) Future projects should be planned to provide a greater outreach component and greater flexibility of access. This should attract reluctant and hostile service users to persuade them of the likely benefits of attendance at a programme.

"I don't have a lot of friends and had child care problems. In the end social services found a sitter. It needs formal funding as child care for the younger child was an obstacle."

8) A longitudinal research or evaluation approach should be taken in respect of services provided to deter young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. This should include services modelled on Pinnacle as well as others. Further discussion is needed within Action For Children as to whether this should be a regional approach led from London or a national approach taking into account the various projects run by Action For Children throughout the UK.

Wendy Moran (Research Administrator)
Tel: **+44 (0) 161 295 2768**
E-mail: **w.e.moran@salford.ac.uk**

http://www.nursing.salford.ac.uk/research/ childrenandyoungpeople

CYP@Salford.ac.uk