

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

This report brings together a variety of evidence to illustrate the effectiveness of the Teens and Toddlers after-care programme which took place in the borough of Southwark between 2nd October 2007 and 19th February 2008 with young people from Peckham Academy Secondary School; Geoffrey Chaucer Technology College; Harris Dulwich Secondary School; Highshore Secondary School; Notre Dame Secondary School; and Sacred Heart Secondary School. The teenagers worked at St.James the Great Nursery; Kintore Way Nursery; Rye Oak Nursery; Peckham Park Primary; St.Judes Nursery; and Ann Bernadt Nursery.

This report will look at the following:

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

1) Differences between teenagers' starting and finishing questionnaires

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

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

to have a child; knowledge about sex, pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs); perceptions of the realities of parenthood; and aspirations.

The right age to have a child:

An increase in their view on the age at which they think they could look after a baby: At Time 1, 23.5% said 20 and above, but this increased to 48% at Time 2. 51.5% said over 18 at Time 1, and this increased to 62.5% at Time 2.

A decrease in their perception of the chance of them becoming pregnant or getting someone else pregnant before they are 20: At Time 1 17.5% said 70% or over, but at time 2 this had reduced to 10%.

An increase in those disagreeing with the statement ‘all things considered, I think that I might end up getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant before I am really ready to have a child’: At Time 1 51% said ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, but at Time 2 this had increased to 76%.

Knowledge about sex, pregnancy and STIs:

An increase in their view on the amount that they know about STIs, compared to other people their age: At Time 1 59% said ‘a little better’ and ‘a lot better’, but at Time 2 this had increased to 71%.

Perception of the realities of parenthood:

An increase in their perception of the impact of having a child on family relationships: At Time 1 66.5% said having a baby would make family relationships ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 86% at Time 2.

An increase in their perception of the impact of having a child on love and partnerships: At Time 1 63% said ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 95% at Time 2.

An increase in their perception of the impact of having a child on money: At Time 1 79% said ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 85% at Time 2.

Aspirations

An increase in the number of young people agreeing with the statement ‘I see a lot of options for my future’: At Time 1 81.5% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’, but this increased to 100% at Time 2.

Therefore, it is clear that there were positive changes in attitudes between the start of the Teens and Toddlers programme and the end, especially in the areas of the right age to

have a child and knowledge about STIs. These findings show that the programme has important benefits to young people's learning and awareness of important issues.

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

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

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

“Safe sex and anger management. Toddlers are hard to look after.” (Male)

“Learning how to be with a toddler.” (Male)

“How to look after a toddler.” (Male)

“I learnt about sex and that it is nothing to rush in to.” (Female)

“Child development, contraception.” (Male)

“Sex isn't something you rush in to.” (Female)

“Understanding people, personal opinions and putting myself in to their shoes.” (Male)

“Learning how to look after the toddlers. Understanding them and how they react to things.” (Female)

“How to communicate with toddlers and different experiences you might have in your life and how to deal with it.” (Female)

“The way the children act, you can see they have been influenced by someone by the things they say.” (Female)

“I learnt that I'm not ready to have kids whilst I'm a teenager.” (Female)

“That I am not ready to look after any children and that toddlers only like to do what they want.” (Male)

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

“Tell them that they shouldn’t have sex at a young age.” (Male)

“To go to a clinic for advice.” (Male)

“Always use a condom because if you don’t there is a chance of catching STIs.” (Female)

“Be safe and wait for the right time with someone.” (Female)

“Use a condom, get more information on sex and the risk.” (Male)

“To use a condom when having sex.” (Female)

“use a condom, because it will definitely help if you don’t want to be pregnant or have any STIs.” (Female)

“To use a condom unless you are ready to have a child and are old enough to care for one.” (Female)

“Always use protection!” (Female)

“Use a condom.” (Female)

“just make sure you use protection at all times and understand the importance. Don’t let anyone force you.” (Female)

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

“Finish school and college and get a job.” (Male)

“To have a job and money.” (Male)

“I would like to further on my education.” (Female)

“Good education, good job, stable relationship.” (Male)

“Qualifications and a sturdy job.” (Female)

“Getting a good job and a good education.” (Male)

“My education, and to start the job that I want.” (Female)

“I would like to finish my education and get my degree. I would like to be married before having a child and I would like to be doing what I plan to do.” (Female)

“Becoming a social worker, a trip around the world.” (Female)

“Have a stable job with good money and to get married.” (Female)

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

“Yes, I am more sensible.” (Female)

“Football, school and college.” (Male)

“My mum thinks I’m more polite.” (Male)

“That I am more confident in myself.” (Male)

“I don’t know, my mum says I’m happier.” (Female)

“My mum noticed that since I started the project I talk about the toddlers a lot.” (Female)

“Playing with my mum’s friends’ children.” (Male)

“Yes, they can see that I understand toddlers better.” (Female)

“Yes. They have seen that I am more responsible with children and, also during this project I have become more mature.” (Female)

“I worked better with my nephew and my knowledge has grown.” (Female)

“Yeah my mum noticed I have got more patience with toddlers than she thought.” (Female)

Any other thoughts or comments?

“I would have liked it to go on for longer.” (Female)

“I have really enjoyed this programme. It has helped me learn more.” (Female)

“I really enjoyed the programme and I am going to miss it.” (Female)

“It would be better if we had a bit longer every week.” (Female)

“More people should have the chance to go on this project.” (Male)

“It should have been more than once a week.” (Female)

“Yes, I would like to say thank-you for getting the opportunity to take part in T&T.” (Female)

“It was really good, the teacher was wonderful and children were great. I really enjoyed it. Thank you.” (Female)

“I’ve really enjoyed it. My toddler has progressed, I’ve learnt a lot about myself – its; been great.” (Female)

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

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

James¹

What are your views of the Teens and Toddlers project?: James said that he enjoyed Teens and Toddlers and felt it was a good experience for young people to have.

“I liked being out of school for a while, cos it made me think more than I normally do and have some time out from who I normally hang around with. You get the chance to be more yourself, and the toddlers are really funny [laughs]. You get treated differently than in school, which I liked.”

Do you think that the project caused any changes in you in terms of:

Your views on parenthood, the right age to become a parent and aspirations: James said that he thought Teens and Toddlers made boys think about what kind of father they might want to be in the future.

“It’s good for making boys think about babies and how you want to be there for them and not just be a father but be a proper dad instead. And you can’t always be there for them when you’re like a teenager, so it’s bound to work out better if you leave it ‘til you’re older and you’ve got a job and stuff.”

Your views on sexual health issues: James said that he had always been aware of sexual health issues, and the importance of always using a condom but that doing the programme had made him realise that it only takes one occasion of unprotected sex to get an STI or get somebody pregnant.

“I think I learnt that you just don’t think like, when you’re in the moment [laughs] that it could just be that one time. And you shouldn’t always take the girl’s word for it that she’s on the pill, cos some girls trick you. Just like girls shouldn’t always trust boys. And then what are you gonna do? So if you’re gonna use them you should, like, use them all the time.”

¹ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Your views on school and education: James said that he used to hate school and feel that it was pointless, but that now he wants to do better so that he can go to college and train to be a mechanic.

“When I was doing the project I started thinking about what I want to do with my life, and I think I want to go to college now. I want to be a mechanic. It made me realise that school’s not for me, but that there’s no point in messing up.”

Do you have any other comments or things to say about Teens and Toddlers?

James thought that more teenagers should do Teens and Toddlers and, in particular, more boys. Importantly, he also said that doing the project had made him realise that he wants to wait until he is ready before becoming a parent.

“Boys get left out of stuff sometimes, so I think you should get more boys on it. They might get put off if everyone else is a girl though, and cos there are babies there, but you need to get a few boys on and then they’ll feel better about it y’know. It has made me think that I only want to be a parent when I’m ready, y’know, older and stuff.”

4) Case studies from groups

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

Ali¹: Ali was very shy in the class and lacked confidence; she found it difficult to express her own views during discussion time. This appeared to alter mid project and Ali was better able to express herself. She still got embarrassed at times but it was evident that as her toddler’s confidence grew, so did Ali’s. She was usually confident in nursery time and she never had any difficulty in communicating with toddlers – in fact, she appeared to become a different person in the nursery. However, Ali did struggle with her toddler sometimes. He was very withdrawn and would only respond to his key worker. This improved gradually over time and he began to respond to Ali more. In the last few weeks of the project he started mixing with other children, which he had not done previously. To increase Ali’s confidence in classroom time she was encouraged to share her thoughts and ideas with the group. She was praised when she did this, with this support she was able to complete pre and post toddler check-in more confidently. Ali feels that she has not been getting into as much trouble at school since commencing Teens and Toddlers. She feels that is due to the interpersonal skills she has developed during the project, because they have improved her communication skills with her teachers and her peers.

Sarah¹: Sarah presented at the start as a thoughtful, cautious character. She was concerned she would not know what to do in the nursery and felt shy being there. When

she first met her toddler she struggled to make a connection as the toddler was dismissive and isolated himself. He refused to join in with any activities. Sarah's persistence was 100% and this paid off with her toddler now interacting freely with both Sarah and some of the other toddlers. Sarah's written work has evolved considerably and she demonstrates a considerable understanding of the course content, reflects deeply on her own behaviour and contributes immensely to group discussion. Other group members benefit from her contributions and she has increasingly challenged her peer's behaviour with sensitivity and great success.

4) Group attendance and NA achievement

Started: 37 teens

Left: 5

New-starters: 4

Left: 3 (all new-starters)

Remaining: 33

National Award (NA): 31

Attendance Certificate (50-70% attendance): 7

Achievement Certificate (71% or more attendance): 24

5) Feedback from nurseries

The Teens and toddlers Project Manager did feedback meetings with all nurseries, and the general views from nursery staff were very positive. Most nurseries had experienced the programme before, and so they felt that it was getting nicely entrenched in their way of working. It was felt that communication channels between the nurseries and the Teens and Toddlers Project Manager is good, and so any issues are ironed out quickly. They felt that the teenagers behaved very well in the nursery and the toddlers seemed to benefit from their input and from having them around.

7) Brief Conclusions

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

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