

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

This report brings together a variety of evidence to illustrate the effectiveness of the Teens and Toddlers programme which took place in the borough of Tameside between 13th September 2007 and 7th February 2008 with young people from Stamford High School; Astley Sports Centre; Egerton Park Arts College; and Copley High School. The teenagers worked at Rosehill Primary School and Rosebud Nursery; Yew Tree Community and Dukinfield Children's Centre; Manor Green Junior and Infant School; and Ridge Hill Primary School.

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 Tameside programme were analysed, in order to see if there were any differences between their Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaires. Results are presented in terms of who gave the two most positive answers at Time 1, as compared to Time 2. The questions listed below are those for which there was a noticeable positive change between Time 1 and Time 2. These questions have been put in to the following categories: the right age to have a child; knowledge about sex, pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs); perceptions of the realities of parenthood; and aspirations.

The right age to have a child:

An increase in their perceived age that someone like them would need to be before they have a child: At Time 1 41% said over 20, but at Time 2 this increased to 66%.

A change in the view that they might end up getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant before they are really ready to have a child: 55% said they ‘strongly disagreed’ or ‘disagreed’ with this statement at Time 1, but this increased to 84% at Time 2.

Knowledge about sex, pregnancy and STIs:

A decrease in the view that ‘sex is about excitement and feeling good – so it’s ok that people don’t always think about using protection’: 73% ‘strongly disagreed’ or ‘disagreed’ at Time 1, and this increased to 92% at Time 2.

Perception of the realities of parenthood:

An increased in their perception of the impact of having a child on love and partnerships: At Time 1 58% said having a child would make love and partnerships ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 64% at Time 2.

An increase in their perception of the impact of having a child on education and schooling: At Time 1 82% said having a child would make education and schooling ‘a little harder’ or ‘a lot harder’, but this increased to 100% at Time 2.

Aspirations

An increase in the statement ‘I see a lot of options for my future’: At Time 1 76% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’, but this increased to 80% 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 their attitude towards safer sex. 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?

“That I do not want children until I am financially and emotionally ready.” (Female)

“How to interact with toddlers and the importance of discipline and routine in the early stages of their life.” (Female)

“I’ve learnt to be confident, I’ve learnt about myself and toddlers and a lot about safe sex.” (Female)

“I learnt to emphasise with other people and listen to their problems.” (Male)

“I have learned a lot about how to handle different situations and also how to work better with toddlers.” (Female)

“I learnt that I can be helpful.” (Female)

“I learnt how to be nice and patient to my sister.” (Female)

“I learnt that I am not ready to have a baby at my age and it may make my life a lot harder if I did have one.” (Female)

“That I can be with little children and I can co-operate with them and I can speak to them while they listen.” (Female)

“To always go to someone when you need help.” (Female)

“How to listen more to other people.” (Female)

“That it’s hard to look after a child at a young age because it was even difficult for me just to work with them.” (Female)

“That being with a toddler is not all just fun and games.” (Male)

“I learnt that everyone in the group is equal and has their say.” (Male)

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

“Always use protection.” (Female)

“Use condoms, don’t just sleep around with anyone and do not get pushed in to anything.” (Female)

“To always use protection and to go to the doctor to get checked out and think about contraception.” (Female)

“To use protection.” (Male)

“Always use condoms, make sure it is what you want and that you are emotionally ready to do it.” (Female)

“To use a condom.” (Female)

“To use condoms and be careful she doesn’t get her heart broken by the lad.” (Female)

“Go to someone like a doctor or a clinic.” (Female)

“To respect yourself and make sure your partner respects your decision and you.” (Female)

“Not to rush in to things.” (Male)

“To use a condom for safe sex and to really think about who you want to have sex with.” (Male)

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

Get my A-Levels, go round the world, get the job I want, get married, have my own house.” (Female)

“A good education and a satisfying job I enjoy.” (Female)

“Get good GCSEs, do a two-year course in college on child development and then find a job so I can be a nursery nurse.” (Female)

“A good job, long-term relationship and a house of my own. A supportive family and a stable home-life.” (Female)

“A nice house, get money from a job and a boyfriend and a car.” (Female)

“School and maybe get a job and a home with a boyfriend who could help me with a baby.” (Female)

“To get a house and a decent paid job.” (Male)

“Go out with friends! Go abroad on my own! See the world! Experience new things.” (Male)

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

“Yes because I’ve thought a lot about choices and applications at college. I’ve also been to the doctor and I’ve been put on the implant (for 3 years). I’ve become more responsible.” (Female)

“Yes, they said I had more understanding and I had become more mature.” (Female)

“Yes my mum saw me change with my little sister.” (Female)

“My parents realised that I was growing a bit more confident and able to speak about what I feel.” (Female)

“Yes because I’m helping everyone in the house and I’m always with my little brother playing with him and his friends.” (Female)

“My behaviour, I am better.” (Female)

“I haven’t taken much anger home with me and I haven’t kicked off with my sister for ages.” (Female)

“Yes, my dad noticed some changes in me. I think he realised a sign of me growing up and he looked proud.” (Male)

“Yes I have been better at school.” (Female)

Any other thoughts or comments?

“This has been very helpful for me.” (Female)

“I think the programme could be better if it was a longer course and more time in nursery and classroom time.” (Female)

“I think that the T&T project is really good and helpful to teenagers.” (Female)

“I have really enjoyed T&T, and I think it is a valuable project.” (Female)

“It would be better if we had longer in the nursery and came here from 10am to 4pm even 3 days.” (Female)

“That this programme was great.” (Female)

“I wish it was for a longer period of time. I would like to say thank you for the amazing experience of T&T!” (Female)

“I really enjoyed it.” (Female)

“Thank you so much for everything.” (Female)

“T&T helped me a lot and I’m glad I had the choice to come and I said yes.” (Female)

“Thank you to everyone, I have had the best time and it’s because of our great team.” (Female)

“Just thank you to T&T for letting me take part in the programme.” (Male)

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:

Kara¹

Their views of the project: Kara said that she enjoyed the Teens and Toddlers project, and is very glad that she took part because it made her think about her life and its direction.

“I think I’m more mature and I think more before I open my mouth [laughs]. It’s cos we did stuff about interpersonal skills and I think that’s changed me a bit, for the better I listen more to other people now.”

Changes: Parenthood, the right age to become a parent and aspirations: Kara said she felt that doing the project had made her realise that having a baby young is not the right thing for her at the moment.

“I’ve learnt that I do not want children until I am financially and emotionally ready. It also made me see how to interact with toddlers and how to discipline them and make sure they are in a routine in the early stages of their life.” (Female)

Changes: views on sexual health issues: Kara was very definite in her view that now she sees practising safer sex as the responsibility of both sexes. She also said that she has learnt that it is much better to wait until you are emotionally ready to have sex.

“Always use condoms. Make sure you are really emotionally ready and that your boyfriend knows that you won’t have sex unless he uses a condom.” (Female)

Changes: School and education: Kara said that she feels that the programme made her think more seriously about her options regarding her education.

¹ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

“I’ve thought a lot about choices and applications at college, because the project taught me that I can make my own decisions, so if I want to go to college then I am in control of that y’know? It would be harder to mess things up now and then have to go back and do my exams again.”

Any other comments or things to say?:

“I just loved the project and I wish it was longer. The leaders were really good and understood me. I talk about the project all the time now.”

4) Case studies from groups

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

Leona¹: When Leona first joined the group she was loud, shouting out inappropriate, immature comments, initially struggling within the group setting but through treating her with respect & giving her time to air her views, she began to positively contribute to the group & listen to the opinions of others. She became quieter, more reflective & able to challenge in a mature rather than in an immature manner. Leona found it difficult to write her journals on a weekly basis, resulting in 6 needing to be completed towards the end of the course. To her credit, due to her wanting to 'pass' the course, she completed all remaining journals with help from the facilitators & her peers in just one session. This demonstrates real determination & commitment. The first toddler Leona was assigned failed to respond to or bond with her, so she was assigned another toddler. Despite this drawback, Leona continued to offer support to both toddlers whenever she could. Leona’s persistence paid off by both toddlers regularly wanting her attention & play skills. Leona’s confidence and people-skills increased dramatically during the project. She became able to initiate conversations with the nursery staff, project facilitators & counsellor in an adult & mature manner. She developed verbal skills to take part in group discussions & was able both to make her feelings known in an appropriate way & take constructive criticism. She became a very valued & integral part of the group. She realised that other people do like her.

Fiona¹: During the first two weeks of Teens and Toddlers I formed my first impression of Fiona, she appeared withdrawn quiet, non smiling and offering very little contribution to the group when choosing ground rules etc. During toddler time, initially Fiona was quiet but as the weeks progressed she began to blossom and become more and more confident with her toddler and most of the other children in the nursery. This confidence slowly extended into the class room time when Fiona would quietly offer her valuable contribution to the discussions. Fiona’s interpersonal skills have steadily progressed and recently I observed her asking for help in a positive and firm manner. Fiona is able to

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reflect on her experiences and make choices. She has gained the ability to ask for support when required. Fiona has gained respect from other members of the group. This is excellent progression in such a short time. When filling in the questionnaire Fiona believes that she finds it impossible to become pregnant. Fiona feels the course has enhanced her choice in a positive way and would like a career working with children. I can say with confidence that Fiona has benefited from the Teens and Toddler project.

5) Group attendance and NA achievement

Teens started: 24

Teens left: 5

Replacements: 7

Teens completed: 26

National Award (NA): 24

Attendance Certificate (50-70%): 7

Achievement Certificate (71% or more): 20

6) Feedback from nurseries

The feedback from the nurseries was very positive. The staff said that they were very impressed with the young people's behaviour and attitudes in the nursery. It was also noted that they liked the fact that the programme is a sustainability programme, and not simply something which will end abruptly after one project. The Teens and Toddlers Project Manager said that the contact people at the schools were extremely efficient and always returned calls, and this helped the project run a lot more smoothly (i.e. the school contact people found replacement teenagers etc.).

7) Brief Conclusions

The evidence presented in this report shows that there are many positive effects of the Teens and Toddlers programme in Tameside. It is clear to see that there are significant positive effects between questionnaires completed by teenagers before and after the programme. There were particularly noticeable changes in their views on the right age to have a child and their attitude towards safer sex. Their personal responses to questions are very pertinent and allow an insight in to their views, as do the interviews. The statistics on project attendance and National Award achievement show how successful this Tameside 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 Tameside.

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