

# THE MINISTRY OF PARENTING

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## Report on the FLASH workshop model



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## **Introduction**

FLASH stands for 'Families Learning About Self-harm'. This programme was designed to address young person's mental health issues by supporting young people and their carers who self-harm, through offering a formal parent-based intervention in the format of a parenting programme to the parents/carers. This is to enable the parent/carer to integrate the role of a parent with how to manage and support young people who exhibit self-harming behaviours. The programme was originally designed to be delivered weekly for 10 sessions with each session usually lasting approximately two.

In 2014 the FLASH group programme was piloted by Jeannie Gordon and Sarah Brazier as a series of full day workshops to parents, carers and close family members. This was in response to parental requests for quicker and more 'work- friendly' access to the FLASH programme and to cater for parents who were unable to engage in the programme over a 10-week course due to child-care or concern about leaving their young person in the evenings. Also, the child age was extended to the age range of the young person, from 17 years to 18 years; this is following recent research which indicates self-harm has increased in college students.

The FLASH Parent Training Workshop Series is a re-arrangement of the standard FLASH ten-week programme setup, to deliver the programme in a sequence of four, full day, workshops, delivered on Saturdays over eight weeks, with the parents attending fortnightly. Parents were told they needed to be able to attend all four workshops.

Approximately 8-16 parents were invited to the workshops and each workshop usually lasted around five hours. The FLASH Parenting Programme workshop series includes the standard FLASH programme content divided over four workshops:

- **Workshop One:**  
An overview of the programme, what is self-harm, 'what is the difference between suicide and self-harm, exploring what self-harm is, reasons, risks etc.
- **Workshop Two:**  
Listening skills, praise and building self-esteem
- **Workshop Three:**  
Walking on egg-shells, consequences
- **Workshop Four:**  
Yourself as a parent, looking after the family, putting it all together, evaluation and ending

The delivery style of the workshop series is more about ‘teaching’ than the standard FLASH 10-week group programme; this is due to the faster pace of the content topics and the reduced time for feeding back on the sessional themes. However, the importance of the therapeutic relationship between facilitators and parent/s and the formation of the group process remain, therefore the delivery of the content information is tailored to each workshop series client group.

### **Workshop lunches and refreshments**

As in the standard FLASH programme high quality refreshments create a culture attentive environment within which everyone feels welcomed and valued. Conversations over a refreshment break provide opportunities for the parents to bond, plan, connect, and learn from one another. In the FLASH workshops we provided the parents with lunch as this models family communication by providing meals which parents share together.

### **In-between workshop phone calls**

As the workshops are fortnightly apart we ensured that every parent was contacted in-between the workshops to provide the parents with some individual consultation.

### **Demographics**

To date we have had 72 referrals to the Flash workshops. 45 of the parents referred have gone on to attend a workshop.

No. of parents attended the workshops	45	Owner occupier (mortgaged)	37
No. of Volunteers attended the workshops	9	Employed outside the home full time	23
No. of male parents	12	Student	1
No. of female parents	33	Employed outside the home part time	8
Married	28	Self-employed	4
Average age of parent leaving education	18	Children in full time care of parent	43
Foster carers	4	No. of young people	40
Grandparent	2	No. of male young people	7
No. of parents that completed the pre and post wellbeing scale evaluations in full	36	No. of female young people	33
White British	42	No. of siblings	53

### **Reasons for not accepting a workshop place have been:**

- Child-care
- Works on a Saturday
- Young person in hospital or on weekend leave from hospital
- Parents own mental health issues
- Young person’s self-harm has stopped

## Referrals on hold;

We have a number of parents who have not wanted to attend the FLASH workshops due to their young person's self-harm reducing, or stopping and the parents want to emotionally move on from thinking about their young person self-harming. However, they are also worried that the self-harming behaviour may return so we 'hold' the referral. This means we keep in contact with the parent and offer them the workshops termly. Parents have said this has been really helpful as they feel they have a safety net for "just in case".

## Outcome measures

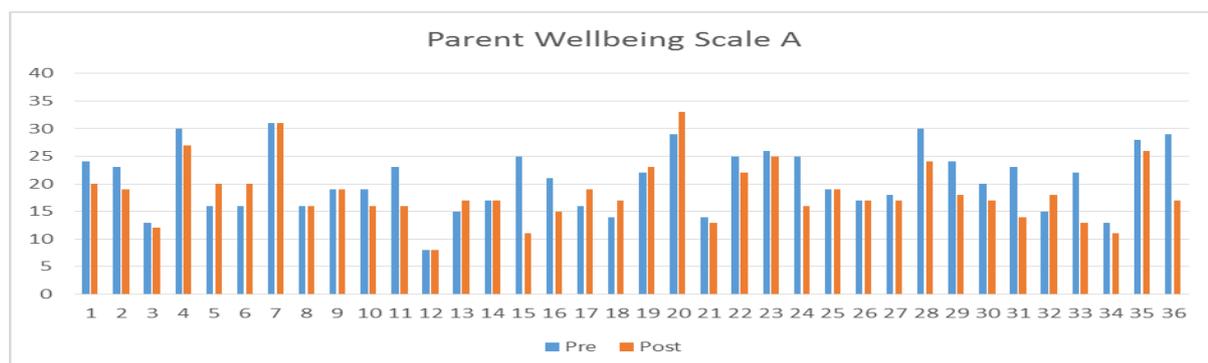
Evaluation of the groups included short questionnaires at the end of each session and a parent's experience evaluation questionnaire at the end of the group.

For each workshop set we also conducted pre and post adolescent wellbeing scales as part of our outcome measures. The adolescent wellbeing scale was devised by Birlleson to highlight possible depression in adolescents. The score has 18 questions relating to the adolescent's life and how they felt. The scale was offered to the parents to complete and also to the young person they were concerned about. Not all the parents were comfortable at the start in asking their young person to complete the scale. A score of 13 or more indicates likelihood of depression.

To date we have data on 36 parents who completed the pre and post adolescent wellbeing scales in full. See Table A. The results show:

- 21 scores reduced
- 8 increased
- 7 remained the same

Table A



The Adolescent Wellbeing results indicates that 58% of the parents felt the wellbeing of their young person improved after taking part in the workshops. In exploring the reasoning for the 22% of the parents who felt the wellbeing of their young person had decreased after taking part in the group, we conclude this is to do with:

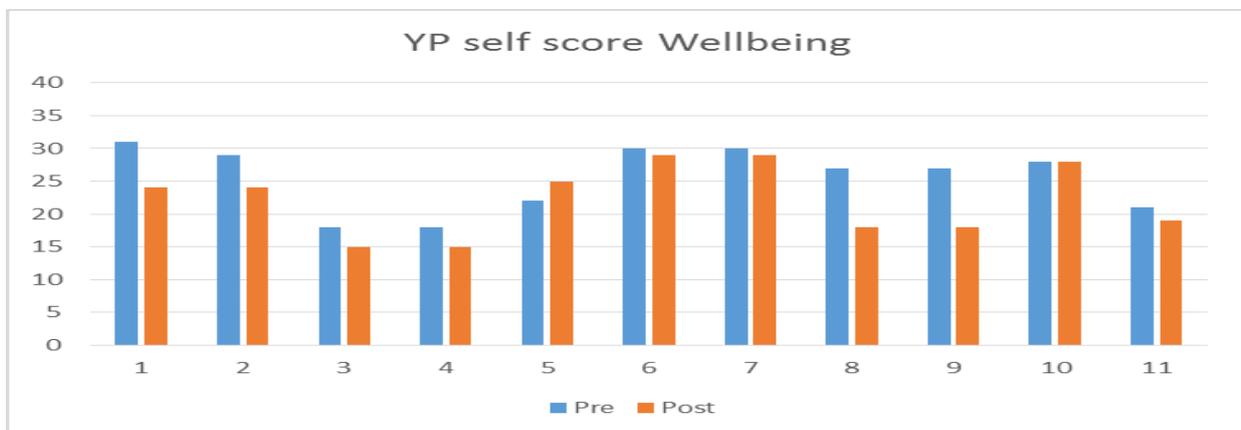
- 1) the parents increased awareness to their young person's state of wellbeing
- 2) the parents increased awareness to the risk factors
- 3) The parent's recognition that their young person may have a long term mental health illness

To date we had data on 11 young people who completed the pre and post adolescent wellbeing scales (Note: we do not see the young person in the workshops)

See Table B. The results show:

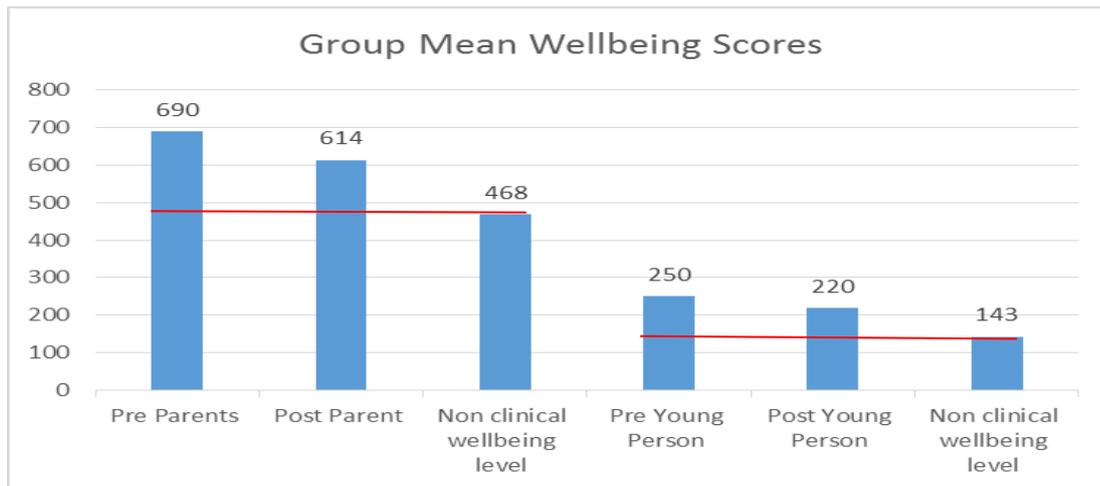
- 9 reduced scores
- 1 increased
- 1 remained the same

Table B



The Adolescent Wellbeing results suggest that 82% of the young people personal view of their own wellbeing improved after their parents had taken part in the group. This sample however is very small and as the mean score for the Wellbeing scale measures (Table C) show; all the parents and young people self-scores remained high and above a level of "normal wellbeing". This would indicate the likelihood of all the parents' young people having a depressive condition. It was therefore important that we encouraged the parents post the workshop completion to continue to have on-going discussions with their young person about how they are feeling and that the parents continue to be aware and mindful of their mood and energy levels. We also advocated that the parents continue to support their young person's counselling/ treatment plan.

Table C



### Summary of the outcome measures and user feedback

A decrease in mean score for the Wellbeing scale measures from pre to post was found and this alongside the parents and young people experience feedback (see appendix 1 & 2) would indicate that parents benefitted from attending the workshop.

Feedback from parents and volunteers experience questionnaires produced some very positive feedback showing that parents enjoyed the groups in terms of what they learnt, what they liked about the group, what changes they had noticed from attending the workshops and comments about the workshop facilitators.

Feedback from the young people was also very powerful especially considering we had no contact with the young person and all the feedback and wellbeing scores were conducted in paper format in sealed envelopes. The comment that says in mind for me and makes the giving up my Saturdays most worthwhile was this comment from a young person *"Your child will thank you so much for doing it (the workshop), it may become the difference between losing your child and changing their life for the better"*

The results mirror the results we have obtained from the FLASH 10-week group programme which shown that The FLASH programme, where implemented weekly, or as a workshop model, is a success. The workshops have led to positive changes in the parent's family life, their relationship with their young person and on their views of their young person's wellbeing. This provides additional evidence to support the existing data on parenting programmes, showing that they are a successful intervention tool. The results support the fact that behaviour is something that can be changed (new behaviours can be learnt) and that parenting groups are able to fully engage with families to work on young people's emotions and behaviours.

Changes in the young person's self-harming behaviours are harder to predict as the programme does not directly aim to reduce the self-harming behaviours. However, it is clear from the results that the workshop programme did improve parent and young person's

relationships, thus supporting both during this difficult time, which has been shown to increase parental acceptance and empathy which in turn we believe had a direct link to the reduction of the young person's self-harming behaviours.

As in the 10-week programme the most common verbal feedback was that after the workshops parents did not feel alone anymore as they had met other people going through what they are going through.

### **Barriers and benefits of the workshop model**

The main barriers to the workshops were staff availability to work on the set Saturdays over a longer period of time and for some single parent's childcare was a problem. However, these are the same barriers for staff working in the evenings and all the parents who could not attend a Saturday due to child care said an evening group would also be an issue. This would suggest that alongside the 10-week group and workshop delivery models there is a need for the FLASH programme to be delivered on an individual family model.

I feel the main benefits of the workshop model are;

- 1) High attendance levels. The attendance/completion of the workshops was 80 %. This was due to the parents feeling more relaxed about leaving their young person in the day than in the evenings. Parents finding child care easier on a Saturday than on a school night and it was more assessable to working parents.
- 2) Group bonding; The day format with a shared sit-down lunch provided a safe nurturing environment which I feel enabled the parents to bond quickly and feel able to participate in the workshop exercises and activities.

Currently FLASH is being delivered as this workshop model in Colchester, Essex (funded until 2018).

## **Appendix 1**

### **Parent's Experience Report**

We asked the parents a range of questions on how they experienced the workshops. Below is a summary of the most common answers.

#### **Question 1: Reason why you wanted to attend the FLASH workshop**

- My daughter was self-harming and suffering from anxiety and depression, I felt very helpless and didn't know how to help and support her
- To help understand and stop my child self-harming and preventing visits to A+E!
- To develop an understanding of self-harm and learn strategies which can assist and support my family
- To better understand issues around self-harm and to assist my teenager in more positive approach
- My daughter self-harming by cutting I wanted to attend to be able to understand it more and to gain strategies to deal with it
- To get all information to help young adults about self-harming

#### **Question 2: What was the experience of coming to the workshop like?**

- Very positive, I didn't know what to expect and it has been a good thing to feel part of a small group and learning how to cope with our shared experience
- Great!! Very informative and supportive
- Very positive
- Positive experience, friendly, warm, confidential
- Very interesting, all materials used was very interesting

#### **Question 3: What did you get out of the workshop?**

- A huge amount- listening skills, learning to understand the teenage brain, talking to our daughter more and sharing our experience with others
- A deeper understanding of the teenage 'mind-set', coping strategies
- Support needed to develop strategies and mind-set to cope with difficult behaviour
- It's not just me going through this there are other families we can support each other
- To be able to use information regarding the workshop

#### **Question 4: What changes have you seen in your family?**

- Very positive changes- our daughter has stopped self-harming and our family's channels of communication have really opened up
- My husband realising his parenting style conflicting with mine

- Home more calm
- Positive
- Ability to talk and communicate to me
- Very positive changes

**Question 5:**

Have the workshops made any difference to your relationship with your young person?

- I try to spend more time with her
- I have a far better understanding of her so more patient
- It is easier to talk to them about self-harm and made me calmer to discuss bad behaviours
- We are a little closer
- We talk more and I definitely listen better
- Same as above really, we're talking more about this subject
- My responses are more balanced and gone are the days of the knee-jerk reactions
- They have helped his father and I develop a joint parenting strategy
- Have a better ability to discuss the issue from a more informed perspective
- I think more about wording things to her, try not to be angry
- Channels of communication are more open, she is delighted that we've attended the course and I think this has made her feel more supported
- Better communication has improved relationships and there is conflict
- I can share information I now know with her

**Question 6:** Has the group made any difference to your young person's behaviour?

- Has told me she loves me!
- She is more open and likely to spend time with the family
- She talks to me more and wants to spend time with me, she hasn't cut 'as much' since I've been on the course
- He hasn't self-harmed for a while
- She is more open, bit more relaxed
- She seems more of a consistent mood and generally much happier
- She wants to know what we've been doing, so she's talking more about things
- (young person's name) feels that by attending the FLASH programme, I am showing a genuine interest in her and learning about self-harm, I believe she is harming herself less as a result
- She has been encouraged by our continued support and become more aware of the issue, much more willing to talk about the problems
- Keener to get help for herself
- She has not self-harmed for several weeks and is more willing/able to talk about it and about her feelings

- Behavioural improvement, more respect and understanding, better communication
- We can still communicate with each other

**Question 7:** What do you think could be done differently?

- Let participants have an idea of numbers in advance, perhaps run 9.30-2.30?
- Longer course! Not enough time together
- None

**Question 8:** What message would you like to give to funders about the workshop?

- Keep it going - please! It's so very valuable
- The workshop is an absolute necessity for parents!!! It prevents use of other service such as A+E and is needed throughout Essex, we had to travel two hours each way for each session!
- It has been invaluable to us as a family in a time of crisis
- It is such a worth-while course and is so necessary as more young people are self-harming, it is important to know that parents have support too
- We need more funding to keep this workshop going as there is still more people needing this and help for parents

**Question 9:** What message would you like to give to other parents who are thinking about attending a workshop?

- Do it! It's not scary and you'll get so much out of it, it will make a noticeable difference to the well-being of your young person and your whole family
- It may not give you the answers you are looking for but it sure will give you a greater understanding!
- Don't deprive yourself and your child/family of the opportunity to make things better!!
- To come
- Please do go if you have the opportunity, it is a rewarding course for parents, everyone is friendly, warm and confidential
- To do this workshop to get the help for the parents that need it

**Parents were given the opportunity to make further comments:**

- I found I could express emotions, something I can't do and I will use this advice and understanding of how hard it is to have a child who self-harms but understand self-harm as well and that means I can help and support my daughter better
- It was interesting having trained/training counsellors on the course and sometimes a bit annoying

- Thank you so much!
- Many thanks, best of luck for the future
- An overall positive and enabling experience
- Very helpful facilitators and always providing useful assistance and information to help the group, very friendly and made all attendees feel very comfortable which could be difficult when dealing with an issue such as this
- Both facilitators were fantastic, eloquent and easy to communicate with, they are a great team and work well together, I feel privileged to be able to have had the chance to do this course
- The facilitators were absolutely great - wise, kind, knowledgeable, understanding and good people managers, the other participants were very generous in sharing their experiences and it was very comforting to feel that we are not alone in this situation
- Would like to thank the facilitators for all the information and support given over the last four workshops
- I have found this invaluable and think the course is amazing, I feel I would have cracked if I didn't have the support of the facilitators and understanding and empathy of other parents, facilitators were kind and caring and informative

## **Appendix 2**

### **Adolescent Experience**

We asked the adolescents a range of questions on how they experienced the workshops. Below is a summary of the most common answers.

**Question 1:** Reason why you think your parent wanted to attend the FLASH workshop?

- Because I self-harm, on anti-depressants and am suicidal
- To learn how to deal with my self-harming and how to cope emotionally, as well as understanding me and listening to me
- To help herself cope, when I have my episode of self-harming, also to get help for me
- "Because they want to help me and support me. They wanted to go so they can learn about self-harming so then they can support me and understand."

**Question 2:** What was the experience of them coming to the workshop like for you?

- I don't have much opinion but happy my mum cares and is trying to learn
- They were far easier to talk to and I didn't like that I had to keep everything to myself because I didn't think they would understand or deal with it emotionally which was important to me
- I didn't really mind, it was nice to know that I was thought about and I was actually cared for
- "I am really pleased that they went to the workshop because I feel like they do care about me and they want to understand me."

**Question 3:** What do you think your parent got out the workshop?

- Not too sure, really
- A better understanding of why I was self-harming and how to talk about it effectively with me
- Help and advice, how to control my episode

**Question 4:** What changes have you seen in yourself/family

- Stopped the cutting, brought me to be more honest with mum
- I have stopped the self-harming!!! Mainly because I have felt like I can talk about how I am feeling rather than keeping my feelings in
- Mum is more confident on the problems
- "I think that my parents got so much out of the workshop because they always came back looking happy and every time they have been more understanding."

**Question 5:** What do you think we could do differently in the workshops and what could we add to the workshops?

- Bringing us along one week to meet other people and talk about it
- I wish there was a workshop for the young people as well as the parents
- You do a great job as it is 😊
- “There is not anything that you should do differently. You have done a fantastic job!”

**Question 6:** What message would you like to give to funders about the workshop?

- It does help it’s really important that we get help and our parents get advice too
- I think it’s great as a lot of parents don’t seem to understand and this opens up the channels of communications about an important topic
- Thank you
- “My parents wish to thank you for making this workshop available.”

**Question 7:** What message would you like to give to other parents who are thinking about attending a workshop?

- If they ever struggle, they need to talk to someone its very helpful
- Your child will thank you so much for doing it, it may become the difference between losing your child and changing their life for the better
- It can help more than you may think and although they may not show it, but they will feel like you care 😊
- “It is definitely worth going because it has really helped my parents so it will definitely do the same for you. It is very beneficial to the whole family so just give it a go and I can assure you, you will be glad you went.”

Report completed by Jeannie Gordon – FLASH author

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