Addressing the Impact of Mental Illness With The Whole Family- the Outcomes of the Family To Family Project in Western Australia.

Child Aware Approaches Conference
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Family To Family Workshops

A partnership between Wanslea Family Services, Ruah Community Services and People with Lived Experience of Mental Illness

- The need was identified by family members that included consumers, carers and children
- Voice of families about
  - What would contribute to their parenting?
  - What would support their children?
  - What would assist them in their recovery journey?
Presentation overview

- Brief overview of workshop content and process
- The evaluation framework outline
- Key outcomes of the evaluation of the workshops
- Some reflections
- And conclusions
Project Aims

- To increase resilience of children and families living with parental mental illness;
- To empower and equip families to take an active role in addressing the impact of parental mental illness on their children and on the family system; and
- To improve quality of family life and support the ‘recovery journey’.
How Do They Work?

- Each session organised around
  - Activities together as a whole family
  - Parenting partners talk
  - Children talk
  - All talk together

- Where are we at – self assessment/self reflection
  - What strengths we see in each other as a family

- Where do we want to be
  - Hope for the future- what we want (Goal Setting)

- What can we do to get there
  - Making plans
Whole family activities

Three generations working things out
Children Talk

Parenting partners talk

Working out what and how to share with parents
We all talk together

Parents sharing their ideas with their children
What is covered in the workshops?

- Building connections and relationships
- Family identity, strengths and resilience
- Concepts of mental health and wellbeing
- Mental illness and recovery
- Parenting well
- Stigma,
- Change, gain, grief and loss
- Communication and problem solving
- Finding support and services
- Planning as a family and hope for the future
Building connections and relationships

Family identity, strengths and resilience

Activities to support inter and intra family connections
When Mum is happy:

1. She smiles 😊
2. She likes to play with me.
3. She goes out.
4. She is active.
5. She is quiet.
6. She listens to music.
7. She hugs & kisses me.
8. My Dad does lots of things.
Parenting well

Getting to know the signs

My Dad gets angry, frustrated, loud.
She gets angry easily.
My Mum sleeps a lot when she's not well.

How we feel when our Mums or Dads are unwell.
Stigma

Change, gain, grief and loss

What has happened over time?
Communication and problem solving

Finding support and services

First you need to know what you feel
Planning as a family and hope for the future

Placing worries on the Worry Tree
Train the trainer

Building our skills, knowledge and experience in partnership
Youth mentors

Helping children settle in
How many workshops?

- 8 workshops
  - Weekend Series x 4 weeks = 4
  - Residential Weekend 3-4 days = 4

- The workshops were held between March 2010 and June 2011

- Evaluation continued to Jan 2012
Evaluation

- Pre test / post test/ 6 month follow up
- Quantitative and qualitative data collection

- **Family functioning**
  - The Family Assessment Device- General Functioning Scale
- **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**
Evaluation

- **Parenting partners**
  - Parent Stress Scale
  - Parent-child relationship Satisfaction
  - Hawthorne Friendship Scale - social isolation

- **Children**
  - Self-esteem, Coping, Knowledge of Mental Illness
Family functioning improved

"[We] go out more as a family, we have a family night which involves an easy dinner and DVD’s or games”

"As a family, listening to each other more and negotiating to ensure peaceful resolutions”
Improved quality of relationships with children

Perception of parent-child relationship

“I learnt that *some* times you just have to let kids be kids”
‘I am now in a group at (clinic), before I felt nervous, had panic attacks and anxiety, now I feel more comfortable and others are talking to me’.

‘Yes, I’ve connected with more friends, I share, talk more openly with them whereas before I was closed off’.
Self-esteem in children

**Global Self-esteem**

![Graph showing global self-esteem](image1)

**Self-concept subscales**

- Peer relationships
- Relationship with mother
- Relationship with father

![Graph showing self-concept subscales](image2)
Strengths and Difficulties

Total Difficulties Score

Mean score

4-7 year olds (Parent)
8-12 year olds (Parent)
13-16 year olds

Pre  Post  FU
Evaluation – Qualitative

- To increase resilience of children and families living with parental mental illness;
- To empower and equip families to take an active role in addressing the impact of parental mental illness on their children and on the family system; and
- To improve quality of family life and support the ‘recovery journey’.
To increase resilience of children and families living with parental mental illness

‘We’ve got together as a family to talk about what might need to change and how we feel about those changes (we’re communicating more)’

‘With my mum instead of getting angry I talk to her about stuff. I understood a bit more about her and why she’s sad sometimes’

‘[We] get out more, going to the beach, parks, markets, do free stuff, healthier being here with the beach (lived here 3yrs), more exercise’

‘Try not to yell as much, communicate on a level they understand’
To empower and equip families to take an active role in addressing the impact of parental mental illness on their children and on the family system

‘My mental illness makes me feel like I am not as good a parent as I should be’.
Emerging themes - Parents

- At Pre test - Complex lives
  - Over 2/3rds housing, money, court, relationship issues

- At Post-test - “Tuning in”
  
  I learnt that the kids are aware of when I am upset/ my mood changes’

  “learnt not to have too much expectation of them and need to do fun things with my son.”

- At 6 months – tuning into relationships
  - Around 20% of parenting partners felt they were doing pretty well

  Yes do more with each child- that’s hard to fit in’

  ‘I need to trust them more and be willing to be more vulnerable with them’

  ‘I’m communicating more with the kids, it’s given them more understanding of where I am at’
About a third at both post and 6 months mentioned spending more time together as a family:

‘We’ll do more things together, I learnt about things we can do’

‘We’ve been going to more family outings’

‘We’ve been doing things like going to the park and the movies’
The next biggest cluster is around communication - happening differently at post and 6 months.

‘Asking mum if she needs more help cleaning up’.
‘I’ve tried to get on with everyone better and talk to them about things’.
‘We’ll try and cope more by talking about things that worry us’.
‘I can tell my mum’s trying harder to deal with stress; to not get so angry and be more happy. That’s helped me a bit’.
‘Mum’s been more open about her medicine; talking more to us’.
‘Talk more as a family about problems, not just to mum’.
To improve quality of family life and support the ‘recovery journey’.

‘I was able to talk about things to do with my dad (he’s in jail) and my relationship with my mum’

‘Yes they know about mental illness from the camp, so they find it easier to understand and therefore we find it easier to talk with them’

‘We're a strong unit, we talk to each other most of the time and accept each other as individuals’
What did you learn about your family?

- At post - warm positive feelings about their family eg

  ‘That I have a pretty good family- nice, kind family’.

  ‘They are a lot easier to get on with than I thought’.

  ‘We enjoyed being together and having fun’.
What did you learn about your family?

- At 6 months they understood more about each other:
  
  ‘That sometimes people just need space, other times company (sometimes I know which it is, other times not)’
  
  ‘That they are going through the same experience as me so I can talk to them when I feel down’
  
  ‘Me and mum have become a lot closer and barely argue’
  
  ‘That we are all different and feel and think different about things’
Reflections

- Creating a safe space with a group of families
- Palpable relief at being accepted and understood - children and families
- Children seeing their parents valued and accepted
- Parents seeing their children valued and accepted
- Parents being acknowledged and supported
- It’s not ‘right’ for everyone
Conclusions

- Families value opportunities to talk
- It is helpful to be curious
- Children need to be recognised and helped to have a voice
- Many of the conversations had in these workshops can be invited in your work