



Service users' experiences of The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families



Introduction

This report summarises the views of service users that received emotional health and well-being support from The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families, to show their experiences of its accessibility and impact.

General Information

The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families provide emotional health and wellbeing support to parents living in the Ribble Valley that have been identified as vulnerable. This is carried out during group activities and one to one counselling sessions, to help identify changes that can be made in their lives and improve mood and enjoyment in their daily living. The overall aim is to promote the health and wellbeing of its service users and to prevent the mental ill health of their families.

The service is delivered from Ribblesdale Nursery School and Children's Centre and offers free childcare to parents attending.

For more information on the work of the The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families please visit:

<http://www.stephenblackburnassociates.com/partner/foundation-ribble-valley-families-2/>.



Methodology

Why did Healthwatch Lancashire undertake this project?

East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group provided a grant to The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families to provide 20 parents with counselling and support. In turn, The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families were required to provide evidence on the impact of these sessions to East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group; in respect of the health and wellbeing of those who undertook the above programme. Healthwatch Lancashire was asked, in its capacity as the public voice for health and social care, to gather the views of the service users.

For Healthwatch Lancashire, this project enabled the organisation to speak with parents about their general experiences of health and social care services in Lancashire whilst also asking their experiences of receiving therapeutic support from The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families.

What did Healthwatch Lancashire do?

Amanda Higgins, Project Officer from Healthwatch Lancashire, carried out this project and undertook the following activities:

- Produced a questionnaire for service users
- Scheduled meetings with service users
- Undertook interviews
- Produced a report collating the findings
- Presented the report to East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group and The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families

Under the funding provided by East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group, 22 parents received counselling support from The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families. In total Healthwatch Lancashire interviewed eight of these parents.

Healthwatch Lancashire asked service users questions in group settings concerning two main aspects:

- How accessible the group and counselling sessions were.
- The impact that attending the sessions had on the services users' health and wellbeing.



Findings

Accessibility - Themes Identified:

- Some service users were referred to the counselling by their GP and one from Citizens' Advice. Most service users had heard of the service from taking their children to the centre.
- Some service users walked to the sessions and one travelled by bus and walking. Some service users travelled to the sessions by car.
- One service user found the travel to the sessions difficult. Most found the travel easy.
- The crèche was important to service users to enable them to access the sessions.
- Service users felt comfortable with the crèche staff taking care of their children.
- Some service users felt that having the sessions in the children's centre was important as it was not obvious to others that they were attending counselling sessions.
- Some service users felt the nursery was important as it represented a space that they felt familiar and safe.
- Service users found that other people attending the group was reassuring and important to them feeling comfortable during the sessions.
- Being able to access the centre to meet outside of the sessions was important for some service users, particularly once the sessions had finished.
- Some service users did not attend any other support groups. Most service users attended several additional others.

At the end of the accessibility questions, service users were asked to score overall how they would rate the accessibility of the counselling sessions at The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families.

Out of the eight service users interviewed, seven felt that the accessibility of the counselling sessions was excellent, and one person felt it was satisfactory. None of the service users felt that the accessibility was poor.

Accessibility - Quotes from Service Users

We asked “Was it easy for you to find out about the sessions?”

“I was recommended it after seeing the course leaders for counselling.”

“I self-referred so it was easy.”

“My doctor referred me to the group leader whilst I was on the Healthy Minds waiting list, so it was easy.”

“A key worker at the centre told me about it.”

“A Citizens’ Advice person told me about it.”

“I was homeless and a person from the children’s centre came out and told me about it.”

“My GP referred me to it.”

“They text me with courses available.”

“The staff get to know people but if I didn’t have children here I wouldn’t know about it.”

“I had to ask about it, I didn’t see it on a wall or anything.”

We asked “Did you find it easy to travel to the sessions?”

“I walked and didn’t have any problems.”

“I drive so it’s fine.”

“I drove myself and it was easy.”

“Yes, I drove myself.”

“Yes, I walked.”

“Yes, it’s easy, I get the bus and walk.”

“No it’s not easy but it’s worthwhile.”

We asked “Were the days and times of the sessions convenient for you?”

“The group sessions were 6 - 8pm. I either put the kids to bed or brought them to the crèche so it wasn't a problem. I don't know what I would have done without the crèche. They bend over backwards for us. All of the staff are DBS checked.”

“The times could be better. It starts at 1pm so it's a rush to get here and do the school run.”

“It is a rush to get here and be finished in time to pick the kids up.”

“The days and times are fine but only because they help with childcare.”

“The crèche means I don't have to worry about the time.”

We asked “Did you feel comfortable during the sessions?”

“Yes, the first day was strange but the course brought people close. It was an all-female group which was good.”

“I felt comfortable because I was walking into nursery and not a medical centre. I could have been going there for anything.”

“I wasn't at first but once I started talking to people I felt comfortable.”

“You know there can't be anything dangerous here because it's a nursery school. You know they'll tell you if there's a problem with your kids.”

“The staff are very reassuring so yes I was comfortable.”

“Yes, we practically live here. It's like a second home. We came in the other day and just had a brew and cake. I didn't have friends before.”

We asked “Do you attend any other support groups?”

“No.”

“Yes, I attend a parenting course and play group.”

“Yes, I attend the parenting course, play group and CV course.”

“Home Start help me voluntarily with ironing, cleaning, giving me time to myself, cooking and taking the children out.”

“I go to empowering parents, popping and play.”

“I don't go to groups; I don't like them really but I have tried.”

“I used to go to other support groups but they made me feel unwelcome.”

Impact on Health and Wellbeing - Themes Identified:

- All service users enjoyed the sessions.
- The social elements of the sessions were important to service users.
- All service users felt the sessions had improved their mental health.
- In particular, service users talked about being better equipped to deal with everyday pressures, feeling less isolated, feeling optimistic about life and having more energy and determination.
- Creating friendships with lasting support was important to most service users.
- Some service users felt the sessions had improved their physical health, in particular by being more physically active.
- All service users felt the sessions had positively impacted on their family relationships.
- In particular, service users talked about their children being calmer, having a closer bond and generally being happier.
- Some service users felt the sessions had positively impacted on relationships within their wider family.
- One person would have liked the sessions to have been longer. Other service users would have liked the group to arrange more informal get-togethers outside of the sessions.
- Some felt that sessions provided everything that they needed.
- All service users recommended the counselling sessions.

At the end of the impact questions, service users were asked to score overall how they would rate the accessibility of the counselling sessions at The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families. Out of the eight service users interviewed, all felt that the impact of the counselling sessions on their health and wellbeing was excellent.

Impact on Health and Wellbeing - Quotes from Service Users

We asked “Did you enjoy the sessions?”

“Very much so. There were ten sessions. There was a sense of not being alone. Making friends, being able to relax and deal with problems at home. It had a knock on effect for the children.”

“Yes, mixing with other people has been really good.”

“I feel better after I’ve been here socialising - I feel normal.”

“We love it. We’re never away. They just need to put some beds in.”

We asked “Have you noticed an improvement in your mental or physical health and wellbeing as a result of attending the sessions?”

“Absolutely, emotionally I am now able to cope with pressures. In the past I’d explode if something went wrong.”

“When I had my first child I was isolated. Having someone to talk to was incredible. I felt it was too much effort to make conversation or speak to adults. I’d try to talk in the playground but it would be difficult and die off.”

“I’m more determined to get the control back in the family.”

“I’m a bit calmer now - things that used to affect me don’t as much anymore.”

“I have quite a few problems - I don’t have anything. It’s made every day a little bit easier and gives me hope. It makes me think things are going to get better.”

“100%. I’m nothing like I was when I started. I’ve lost two dress sizes from walking to the school.”

“I feel happier. I’ve met people.”

“I’m not sat around at home anymore - I have so much more energy.”

We asked “Have you noticed a difference in your family’s mental or physical health and wellbeing, since you have attended the sessions?”

“I have money to join the gym now.”

“My children were biting at nursery and I used to react. I wasn’t blowing up anymore. I was able to deal with it calmly. When you have an unhappy mother you have an unhappy child. I haven’t had any problems since coming on the course.”

“You don’t realise you need help until you get it. I’m able to support my husband more now. The knock on effect is fantastic.”

“It’s improved so much with my family.”

“My mother and I have problems but this had led to me dealing with problems better. If friends and family see you happier they don’t worry about me.”

“We seem to have a closer bond. I love it.”

“I’ve always done my best to not let my son be affected by my moods. But since coming on the course I’ve realised how much it did affect him.”

“When I came here I wasn’t speaking to my parents but coming here gave me a new family. It gets me thinking. I got a lot of advice and support from the centre and it helped me make friends.”

“The children are happier and this makes me happier.”

“The children are generally a lot calmer and happier.”

We asked “Would you have liked the sessions to provide anything additional?”

“No, it provides more like a drop in sessions on ‘Mindfulness Mondays’. They still do things for us even after the course.”

“No.”

“I would have like it to run for longer periods of time.”

“I think it should do coffee clubs to meet up. We try to have a bit of a conversation but we are there to do something so we don’t get much chance.”

We asked “Do you think that attending the sessions has had a long term impact on your health and wellbeing?”

“My life feels so much fuller now. Before I wouldn’t have been able to cope with anymore. It opens so many avenues. It’s opened employment opportunities as well.”

“It’s given me better strategies and outlook on life in general.”

“It’s a way of life - if you’re happy right now nothing else matters.”

“It’s like taking off a pressure cooker.”

“I remember things that I plan on teaching my son.”

“It helped me get into college and volunteering.”

“It’s given us goals to look forward to. It changed my outlook on life.”

“Just having somewhere to go. I can’t believe how I was to how I am now - it’s a permanent change.”

“All I had before was my daughter giving my grief which was depressing. The counselling has helped me deal with things emotionally.”

We asked “Is there anything additional that you would like to add that I have not already covered?”

“It’s just amazing.”

“It’s amazing. It’s outstanding what they all do.”

“Absolutely brilliant work.”

“The minute you walk through the centre it’s caring and they remember stuff. They talk to your kids.”

“I’d recommend it to anyone.”

“They bend over backwards for us and do extra things.”

“I’ve always been into expressive arts and the course got me into making a film.”

Response from The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families

This report was shared with Fiona Owen and Stephen Blackburn, co-founders of the Foundation for Ribble Valley Families. They provided the following response:

“We are delighted with the feedback contained in this report.

Anecdotally, the service users backup the positive impact that we continue to see through our outcome measurement system.

If the other 14 people who have accessed the support had an opportunity to give their views, we are certain they would say similar things to this group of eight.

It is particularly pleasing to note the positive impact for the children within the family units. This is The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families whole raison d'être.

Through collaborations with other partner charities, we are now in a position to be a one stop shop for emotional health and well-being activities for whole families right across Ribble Valley.

The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families will play a critical role for vulnerable families going forward, especially so in the light of the new Lancashire County Council Well Being Prevention and Early Help structure from April 2017.

Now we need ongoing funding to support our vision and we believe East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group represents our best opportunity to secure this.

We look forward to exploring options in the near future.

Finally, we would like to thank Healthwatch Lancashire for taking the time and trouble to compile this valuable report.”

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