

Using a coaching approach – the **xué** way – to support parents and carers of children with a disability.

A summary of the aims and outcomes of a small pilot programme undertaken by Right 2B Me in partnership with Nottingham City and commissioned and evaluated by the East Midlands Development Centre (EMDC) Children and families programme (including CAMHS)

Aims of the Pilot . . .

- to support parents/carers of children with learning difficulties or disabilities to become more independent by giving them skills, knowledge and understanding to influence service provision and to achieve their own personal aspirations
- to provide commissioners and providers of services with an evaluation of a differing approach to parental/carer support
- to evaluate the impact on parents/carers of a limited coaching intervention utilising the **xué** way approach to coaching, with both individuals and with a group, to provide comparison of the impact of the approach and of working with individuals and a group

Evaluation Process

Parents were interviewed prior to the initiation of coaching and then after the sessions using semi structured interviews. Parents received a series of 3 or 4 coaching sessions from Right 2B Me, a social enterprise, using **xué** way qualified coaches. Initial coaching sessions were allocated 3 hours with following sessions allocated 2 hours each.

INDIVIDUAL COACHING

The coaches worked with 5 individual parents (4 with a child with ASD and 1 with a physical disability) who received 3 or 4 sessions each (the number of sessions related to the need/preference expressed by the parent). All parents were mothers but lived in a variety of areas within the city, there were also variations in ethnic origin.

Initial interviews - with individual parents

Initial interviews focused on current experience of services in terms of how they met parents/carers needs as well as their expectations of the coaching interaction.

Parents/carers initial views on coaching as evidenced in the evaluation report:

“At the initial interview generally parents were unsure about the coaching approach expressing a lack of clarity about the approach and the rationale for adopting such an approach. The majority expressed a

willingness to “try it out” but also expressed some scepticism. Only one parent felt confident and felt they fully understood the concept.”

Final Interviews

*Parents/carers views following the work with Right 2B Me using the **xué** way approach, as evidenced in the report:*

“All parents interviewed had found the coaching extremely helpful and all expressed surprise at how helpful they had found it after their initial low expectations. No negatives were identified (except they would have preferred the coaching to have continued for longer). The following benefits were identified :

- Increased confidence (All)
 - Felt they could express themselves to service providers in a clearer way without getting angry and upset and this has resulted in a more beneficial outcome (3)
 - Felt able to ask questions and contribute in meetings (All)
 - One parent now felt able to go back to work
 - Had gained confidence to go to support groups

- Felt better able to cope and less stressed (all)
 - Felt happier
 - Able to express feelings
 - Less fear for future (3)

- Improved personal relationships
 - Did more with siblings
 - Had been able to use techniques with partner

- Lost weight and taking more exercise (2)

All felt that despite the small number of sessions the progress made was long lasting and that they could use the techniques gained in the future in a variety of situations. Four out of five parents did not feel more sessions were required although a number did say it would be helpful to have some contact by phone for help and advice, one parent would have liked more sessions.

The level of trust gained by seeing someone that was non judgemental and objective was seen as extremely important and it was also important to see someone who was concentrating on them rather than the child or young person.

One parent commented that the coach was the first person linked to issues with her child to address her by her name rather than as “.....’s mum”. All parents mentioned the importance of having someone who was non judgemental in this role.”

GROUP COACHING

This involved 4 parents/carers caring for young people with a range of physical and learning disability issues. Coaching was undertaken in a group setting.

Initial Interview – Group

As with the individual parents the initial interview with the group of parents/carers focused on current experience of services in terms of how they met their needs as well as their expectations of the coaching interaction.

Parents/carers initial views on coaching as evidenced in the evaluation report:

“The issues discussed in the group setting were extremely similar to those raised in individual interviews with short breaks being raised as a significant gap in services and once again the use of the term constant “battle” occurred regularly. ”

“There appeared to be a greater understanding of coaching and stronger expectations in the group setting and some clear aims were identified including help with negotiating with services, helping with the fear of talking to people, fear of being judged and coping with pressure and stress.”

Final Interviews

*The Parents/carers views following the work with Right 2B Me using the **xué** way approach, as evidenced in the report:*

“All group members had found the experience very positive and highlighted similar benefits to parents seen individually. Benefits highlighted by the group are listed below.

The main difference between the group and the individual feedback was that the group felt they required more sessions to be able to fully implement what they had learnt. They felt that being in a group was beneficial in that they were supported and could learn from others experiences but that initially it was hard to discuss very personal issues in an open context.

Benefits identified :

- Helped to clarify thoughts and re-evaluate situations (All)
 - Enabled parents to look at the situation from the services perspective and to be calm in communications without becoming angry or upset (3)
 - Improved self awareness and enabled parent to look at her own behaviour
 - Enabled parent to use tools with their children also
- Helped to be clear about what you needed and to challenge services
- Made it easier to be honest

- Reduced stress (3)
Provided “tools for life” and coping strategies (All)
- Increased confidence (All)
 - Valued self more

Next Steps

Funding available limited the number of parents/carers that could be involved in the pilot. However, it did provide enough evidence to demonstrate quite clearly that this approach has the potential to influence parents/carers lives significantly for the better as well as improve the way that they engage with services and service providers. Evidence also suggested that there could be a significant impact on reducing the costs associated with the provision of support to parents and carers that would be at least in line with those signalled in the March 2011 SEN Green Paper - 'Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability' states . . .

“Parents with disabled children have higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing than parents with non-disabled children. There are a number of preventable costs that could be saved if the stress involved in caring were eradicated. These costs amount to around £5,600 per year per disabled child (made up of lost earnings, sick days, GP visits, residential care, foster cared and family breakdown costs.)”

Following on from the pilot Right 2B Me is now:

1. in discussion with the Strategic Health Authority and with Nottingham City about how the recommendations from the evaluation can be taken forward in partnership. Namely:
 - to undertake a larger programme/pilot to quantify potential benefits as identified in this initial pilot and enable a full cost/benefit analysis to take place.
 - for providers and commissioners of children’s services to consider a coaching approach alongside interventions with children in the development of services
 - for children’s leadership courses to include some training on a coaching approach
 - to encourage staff to develop coaching skills
2. working with two PhD students from Nottingham University to explore and bring together current research evidence that will help identify the indicators that can be used prior to and post the coaching interaction to demonstrate impact both on parents and carers and on the financial savings that will be made by working in this way
3. beginning to train some staff working with parents/carers in the **xué** way coaching approach by linking them in to a coach development programme already commissioned.