

Holding Space Parent Peer Support Project

**Connecting and empowering parents/carers
whose children have mental health issues**

This East Sussex-based project was set up to connect parents/carers whose children are struggling with their mental health, so they feel less isolated and more empowered to support their children at home. The project was facilitated by Holding Space, a local charity working with schools, colleges, NHS providers and local and national organisations, to support family mental health. Monthly, informal face-to-face sessions provided a safe, non-judgmental space for parents/carers to meet and share tips and experiences, and weekly, one-to-one telephone sessions offered individual support.



METHODOLOGY

The project provided monthly, two-hour, café-style sessions in local community venues facilitated by Holding Space's trained volunteers (some with lived experience). Some families were referred to the programme directly through an organisation, while others self-referred.

The informal drop-in sessions enabled parents/carers to:

- connect, chat and support one another
- ask questions and share information
- discuss their children's issues confidentially and without judgment
- develop strategies to support their children at home
- hear from professionals and outside speakers about coping with children's mental health issues.
- The project also offered parents/carers the option of weekly, one-to-one telephone support provided by Holding Space's trained volunteers.

To evaluate the project's success, Holding Space used qualitative methods including questionnaires, conversations, and feedback and testimonies from parents/carers. It also collected data on the families taking part to understand more about its users and for use in future funding applications.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Context

According to a 2020 NHS survey, one in six children aged between five and 16 are likely to have a mental health problem, with a 50% increase over the last three years. Given the prevalence of mental health problems, this places a massive strain on their parents/carers who themselves need support, encouragement and knowledge to care for and support their children.

Duration

1st November 2022 to 1st March 2023

Funding source

SLN Community Fund

IMPACT

Over the project's six-month duration, 120 parents/carers were referred to the project, some attending the group sessions and others receiving one-to-one phone support.

One of the project's main impacts was that parents/carers said they didn't feel so alone, with the face-to-face sessions helping them connect with others on a similar journey. They also said they felt their voices were heard and they felt listened to. Many have continued to support each other beyond the meetings and built up a sense of community.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the peer group meetings and phone support, parents/carers have gained a greater understanding of how to support their child/ren and how, by looking after themselves and their own mental health, they are better placed to support their children and improve parent-child relationships.

When the voice of the parent/carer is heard, when they feel supported, not alone and empowered, they are able to provide the best support for their child with mental health issues.

Holding Space will continue to seek feedback and monitor its services to improve its provision for parents/carers. For example, parents attending the face-to-face group have asked for an evening session as many of them work so it is exploring this at the moment.

For its work to continue, the project needs other sources of funding and more volunteers to help with its telephone service as well as fundraising.



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