



Single Parent Action Network

Independent Final External Evaluation

of

Capacity Builders Funded Project

IRP08SW00021AA

‘Empowering Family Self-help Groups’



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	9
1.1 Context.....	9
2.0 Evaluation Brief.....	11
2.1 Specific Evaluation Objectives.....	12
3.0 Findings.....	12
3.1 Partnerships and Collaborative Working.....	13
3.2 External Partnerships.....	13
3.4 Target Group.....	14
3.5 Groups that Benefited.....	15
3.6 Key Benefits of Grow Your Group Training.....	18
3.7 Participants (volunteers/parents).....	20
3.8 Project Statistical Achievements by Outcome Area.....	21
3.9 Outcome 1a.....	22
3.10 Outcome 2a.....	23
3.11 The Project's Overall Statistics.....	23
4.0 Supporting Parents in Self-help Groups.....	24
4.1 The Most Useful Sessions.....	27
4.2 What might be done differently?.....	29
4.3 Training Practitioners and Volunteers.....	29
4.4 The Critical Successes of GYG.....	30
4.5 The Impact.....	32
4.6 The Challenges.....	34
4.7 What Next?.....	35
5.0 Evaluation Observations.....	37
5.1 Key Messages.....	38
6.0 Conclusion.....	39
Appendices	
Glossary of Terms.....	40
List of Groups.....	41
Case Studies	

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The external evaluator wishes to record her thanks to Single Parent Action Network, in particular to Sue Cohen, Chris Gaine, Jacquie Linton and Lynn Campbell for their continued support and willing co-operation in the work leading up to this report.

I would like to thank Julia Bolt and the Family Education Development Trust (FEDT) for their supportive contribution. Thanks to all the groups who participated in the evaluation for their honesty, time, support and contribution.

My gratitude is extended to the practitioners and all who supported them for their valuable contributions.

I trust that I have represented their thoughts, feelings and learning points fairly and accurately.

Evaluator
Jo Muscat MBA MCFE
March 2011



Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Millpond, Baptist Street

Easton

Bristol

BS5 0YW

Tel: 0117 951 4231

Email: info@spanuk.org.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009 SPAN (Single Parent Action Network) was successful with their application for funding to Capacity Builders Improving Reach Programme.

SPAN led the delivery of the successful application in collaboration with The Family Education Development Trust (FEDT). The partnership worked for the purpose of the newly funded Capacity Builders project called Empowering Family Self-help Groups.

The aim of the project was to support groups through training to provide quality services and to build the capacity of frontline organisations to increase their sustainability in the long term.

SPAN's internal learning of delivering training to groups was enhanced by initial consultation with FEDT, which resulted in SPAN developing a training programme entitled Grow Your Group (GYG). The programme was delivered by trained practitioners to small community groups.

The project delivered the programme with one-to-one support to a diverse range of groups across Bristol, Devon, Dorset, Cornwall, North Somerset, and Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES).

The project also supported groups with bespoke training where groups such as Devon United Women received assertive communications and speak-up courses.

Key Evaluation Findings

The evaluation found that both GYG and the bespoke training worked particularly well in building the small groups' capacity to deliver quality support services in their communities.

Groups and practitioners reported that the training and support worked well with 'marginalised' groups and reported increased awareness and knowledge after participating in the GYG training.

They attributed a range of successes to the GYG training and provided examples of positive points that supported the groups' sustainability. These included:

- Clarity in understanding the roles of individuals within the group

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

- Understanding and developing policies and procedures
- Working towards appropriate structures for the group
- Working towards sustainability and growth
- Developing a better understanding within the group
- Networking and sharing practice

The practitioners concurred that GYG was a valuable training package that provided a wealth of knowledge and support to family self-help groups. The consensus amongst practitioners was that they considered Grow Your Group as having a wider application; the training could be used to support practitioners who work in community settings, commenting, "...skills are transferable and that the training sessions provide a good resource for problem solving and community work".

Practitioners reported the critical success factors of GYG as:

- Knowledge of the geographical area was helpful in signposting and sharing information with groups on existing support services
- Interactive facilitation encouraged learner participation and raised participants' confidence
- Formulating links with children's centres increased delivery
- Flexible training added value to delivery with an ability to adapt and pick sessions from the manual to meet the needs of the group
- Practitioners with prior knowledge of their group felt they could deliver to their needs immediately as they understood the group's journey
- A key person in the group to take things forward to encourage participation of group members and help to drive the training
- The GYG manual provided a valuable resource to groups as they could make use of this post-funding

Volunteers/parents and practitioners who were participants of GYG reported a marked difference in the confidence levels of individuals who had attended.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

“GYG training...had developed both groups’ and individuals’ learning and confidence” (Parent Participation Worker, 2011). Groups reported that they had grown in confidence and were more focused in working collectively and planning their next steps.

Overall, the project exceeded the proposal stated targets:

- Worked with **93 diverse groups** from various geographical locations against the stated bid figure of 90
- Supported **8 young mothers groups** against a target of 5
- Worked with **348 volunteers/parents** against its stated target of 180

The evaluation found that Empowering Family Self-help Groups provided valuable support to all groups. A key strength of the training was that it had provided practical, timely support to help groups focus their activities, consider growth and sustainability, and generally help individuals to develop personally.

There were notable and immediate successes with groups that implemented the GYG learning. The report provides case studies to demonstrate how groups used the training and the positive difference GYG had on those groups.

In some cases, groups were found to be some distance from a performing structure and not ready to implement the practice learned immediately. Participants have benefited with personal development, reporting a better understanding of group structures and using the learning to further their career aspirations.

Project Delivery

Two key strengths of the project were the outreach work that was undertaken and the one-to-one support provided to groups to help them identify their needs and customise the training to support those needs.

The outreach work supported the development of the project’s partnership approach in its delivery and this worked particularly well in providing an extended reach for SPAN, both in terms of the groups that the project engaged with, and also in reaching a wider geographical area.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

This partnership work, and the momentum built by the project has developed a new platform for SPAN that will continue to add value to future working practices.

The project's exit strategy used external partnerships to link groups with local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) and other local services and this worked well in supporting the groups' longer term sustainability.

The Evaluation Concludes:

The Capacity Builders Funding provided an opportunity for SPAN to expand its work with groups to test the methodology and application of GYG training. In doing so it has also highlighted the more profound range of support that is required in the future to address the needs of the groups.

The need for continued dedicated support to groups to build their capacity is critical if there is to be a shift towards more direct action by citizens. Groups appreciated the support and learning that GYG provided in raising the skills base of group. It has empowered both groups and individuals to provide better quality services.

The groups are more aware of their future needs and the elements of further support required to enable them to continue to grow and provide quality services to their communities.

They identified areas such as succession planning, engaging more participants in a voluntary capacity and support in accessing funding as critical needs to enable them to be self-sustaining.

Greater benefits could be achieved should funding be available for a continuation project that builds on the good work delivered by the Empowering Self-help Groups project.

Key Messages for Future Projects

1 Lead time to develop the project – the project lost opportunities due to a later than anticipated start. Although, this did not have a negative impact on the final outcome and outputs, it did place pressure on staff to deliver at an accelerated pace in the second year of the project.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Recommendation: Incorporate a reasonable project start-up time for example a three- month lead time to employ/deploy staff and develop a comprehensive project plan.

2 Partnerships and Collaborative Working - the outreach work extended reach for SPAN through a network of organisations. This provides an excellent starting block for a future project and provides an opportunity to engage partners at a different level.

Recommendation: Engage parenting support agencies and children’s centres at the outset of the project and ‘pitch’ at a relevant level i.e. the ‘movers and shakers’ so that they become advocates of the course and provide timely direction to their key staff.

Recommendation: SPAN and other organisations may need to consider how to reach marginalised family self-help groups in the future and how to engage in collaborative partner working to maximise resources.

3 Training Groups the training sessions and the manual

Recommendation: enhancement of the present GYG manual to incorporate more in-depth sessions on topics of interest. Condense some of the sessions which are presently seen as too lengthy by participants and consider the suggestions provided by groups on their future needs.

4 Wider application of GYG

Recommendation SPAN to explore in more depth the broader application of the training in particular:

- **Practitioner training** – further enhance the materials to train community practitioners
- Developing the materials to provide an additional dimension to groups as an **accredited course**
- Providing an **on-line training and support programme**

1.0 Introduction

SPAN is a nationwide umbrella organisation engaging and empowering one-parent families. The organisation has a history of effective working relationships with single parents in the community.

SPAN's aims are to:

- Support single parents to empower themselves and take control of their lives
- Give a voice to one-parent families from diverse backgrounds and cultures living in poverty and isolation
- Support the development of user-led, one-parent family groups by working with organisations and decision-making bodies
- Develop partnerships to improve policies for one-parent families in the UK and internationally
- Celebrate our diversity, our children, our lives

The Capacity Builders Improving Reach Programme funds were to support and deliver capacity building actions to:

- Raise the skills base and resources available to community groups
- Build community groups' capacity to provide high-quality support services to groups of young mothers, and empower them to develop their own user-led, sustainable, self-help projects

1.1 Context

The Capacity Builders Improving Reach Programme was part of the continuing ChangeUp Investment Programme, which was supported by the Office of the Third Sector at the Cabinet Office. It aimed to develop the capacity of frontline¹ organisations that delivered or were directly involved in providing services, working with communities or campaigning.

¹ 'Frontline' organisations as described by Improving Reach, Funding Guidelines 2008-11, page 4.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

The aims of the programme were set out as:

- Improving the performance of frontline organisations
- Developing their paid and unpaid workforce
- Making better use of information and communication technologies
- Improving the way they are run
- Improving their ability to recruit and develop volunteers and fund their activities

SPAN led the successful partnership with the Family Education Development Trust (FEDT) and as the lead body supported FEDT in managing and monitoring the delivery of the project. SPAN also had financial responsibility for the project application.

FEDT welcomed the partnership with SPAN, viewing it as “a further development of our partnership work with SPAN” because it provided “funding at a critical point” (Interview with FEDT Coordinator, July 2009).

SPAN’s existing working relationship with Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change (CN4C) provided an opportunity to add value through the Capacity Builders funding. It did so by mobilising and supporting existing CN4C Parent Participation Workers to provide training and support to groups. This additional resource capacity enabled SPAN’s Empowering Family Self-help Group Project to reach a broader geographical area than it would have otherwise. It also provided access to existing CN4C groups that required the training support that SPAN could offer.

The project partners were to deliver a range of interventions to support the proposed stated outcomes. These were to include:

- **Grow Your Group training** – a training pack developed by SPAN to support groups in setting up, developing and progressing their group
- **Support to access other services** – one-to-one support to interventions that enable the group to develop and link up with children’s centres and other appropriate mainstream provision
- **Customised training** to meet the specific needs of groups

2.0 Evaluation Brief

The evaluation brief provided by SPAN was to:

- In collaboration with SPAN and their project partners, observe and evaluate the project delivery practices providing specific consideration to two main areas of investigation:
 - Does Grow Your Group work well in supporting parents/volunteers in self-help groups to develop their group?
 - Does Grow Your Group work well in training practitioners and volunteers in developing family self-help groups?
- Observe and report on any impact identified by groups or individuals who have benefited from training and support
- Report on the performance of the project in meeting its objectives and outputs, as stated in the funding bid application
- Provide qualitative examples by way of case studies on how the project has made a difference to groups and/or individuals

2.1 Specific Evaluation Objectives

Evaluation Objective	Indicative Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work alongside SPAN to develop a tool to capture and monitor statistical data • Support in developing pro formas for groups and participants of the project • Qualitative data collections to provide the views of groups and of delivery staff • Interviews with key delivery organisations • Interviews with groups and participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provided a series of spreadsheets aligned to the bid application's stated outcomes to capture the required data ✓ Developed questionnaires for groups and participants ✓ Received, reviewed and extrapolated information from SPAN; course evaluation feedback and tutor diaries ✓ Analysed the data using Excel and provided graphs to illustrate the findings ✓ Visited and interviewed six groups, three in Bristol and three in Devon² ✓ Convened one-to-one interviews with practitioners from FEDT and SPAN

3.0 Findings

The report draws on a wealth of data provided by SPAN and the evaluator's own research to provide a balanced range of findings. The following section provides an overview of the project delivery. It outlines the partnership and collaborative working practices and how this supported the project targets. It offers an overview of both the participants' perspectives and that of the collective groups, providing a view of the critical successes of GYG and training.

² Groups visited: **Bristol** - Hartcliffe & Withywood Teenage Parent Project, Easton Young Mums, AMANA; **Devon** - Landmatters, Friends of Sure Start, Asperations.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

3.1 Partnerships and Collaborative Working

The formal partnership with FEDT and the collaboration with CN4C was a strategic model adopted by SPAN that provided the project with an opportunity to maximise its reach to groups in terms of geography and staffing capacity.

It enabled a much broader catchment of groups without the need to employ more staff and added a valuable resource capacity to meet the targets of the project. This strategic action assumes good use of finances as the project used existing frontline organisations to deliver training to groups.

The action also provided good practice to support the practitioners to increase their skills by providing them with new/different approaches to training groups and adding resource capacity to frontline organisations.

3.2 External Partnerships

The project worked extensively to develop new collaborative working partnerships and enhance existing ones. There were many examples where this worked well, in particular where links were made with children's centres and organisations in the voluntary sector that provided additional support to groups through a Development/Support Worker.

Partnerships with other voluntary organisations – for instance Barnardo's – also worked well and this may be because historically the voluntary sector tends to be creative in providing services for their target group.

3.3 Overview of Groups

The project supported 93 diverse groups against the target set at bid stage of 90; many of these groups were marginalised. The term 'marginalised' for the purpose of this evaluation is used to define small groups that would not naturally access or engage with traditional mainstream means of support.

The status of the marginalised groups SPAN worked with fit into one or more of the following criteria:

Components of Marginalised Groups

Structure – none or little

Formal constitution

Memorandums and Articles

Sustainability – low or weak

No or low income

Experiencing barriers/difficulties with:

- group dynamics
- engagement and participation
- loss of motivation

To engage these types of groups, SPAN mobilised funds through the Capacity Builder project to support customised, specific and tailored training that was not available via other means of funding.

This measure of support was an additional component to the targets set in the project proposal and aimed to empower groups to identify their needs at a time when help was critical to sustain the group.

3.4 Target Group

There was some discussion during the evaluation about the groups the project was targeting. One idea provided by practitioners was that the young parents groups were not always ready to accept the training; they did not want to grow as a group.

Practitioners felt that young parents were in transition and a commitment to dedicated training was overwhelming for them as they often had other priorities. However, practitioners generally agreed that individuals wanted the support of a group and their motivation for engaging with the group was to access support. Practitioners also agreed that young parents benefited from the training on a personal level and used the learning to enhance their skills base.

There was a suggestion that the training fitted well with older parents as they were more established. They found that once these types of groups engaged with the training they generally made a firm commitment to attend.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

There was also some discussion on the 'right time or stage' of groups to engage with GYG training.

Practitioners said that the level of GYG training was not always relevant to the more established groups. They stated that the sessions that were relevant may require more depth and additional materials to better support the needs of the groups. They provided examples of sessions that would benefit from added resources, such as funding. In validation of their statements, practitioners said groups that were ready to prepare proposals for funding needed more information than the manual provided.

Practitioners felt that one of the strengths of the training was being able to use the training as a menu to dip into sessions to enable them to deliver sessions that were useful to the group at that time. They also credited the training manual saying that it provided a good resource to groups at the time of training and as a future group resource.

The groups that the project worked with were varied and the feedback from the evaluators and the group forms has been incredibly positive. Groups have benefited from this training and there is no evidence that success with GYG is restricted to a specific group type or audience.

"This course is fantastic for all groups who are forming to take part in. I have worked to develop community groups for the last four years and I wish I had had this tool to use from the beginning."

"The course is very informative and interesting, as well as being interactive. There are lots of fun and practical activities for participant to take part in."

"The course resources are fantastic and the group I'm delivering to have gone on to form a formal committee. The course helped them to write their policies, form a constitution and take on committee roles."

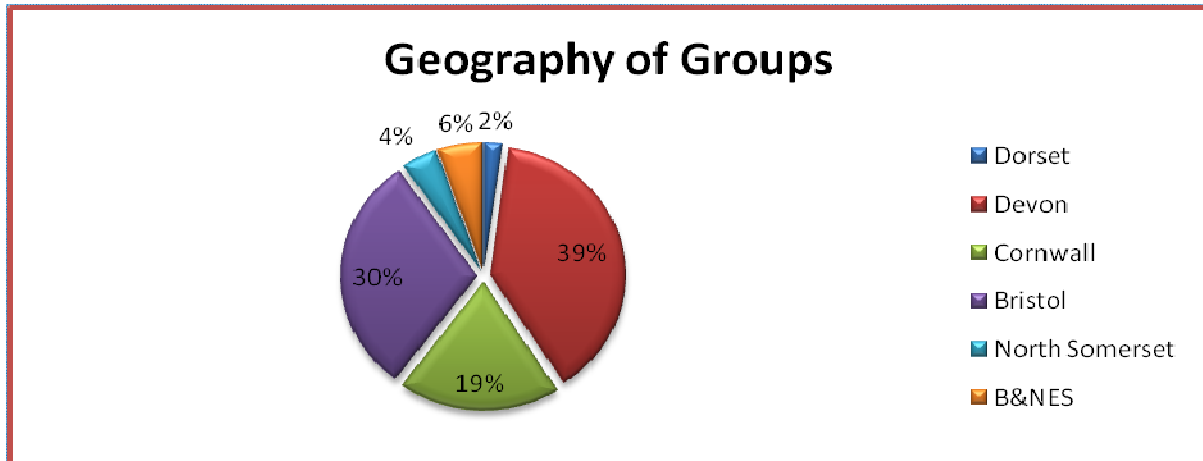
(Parent Participation Workers, quote 19 January 2011)

3.5 Groups that Benefited

A full list of the groups is provided in Appendix 1. The following data provide an illustration of the groups' diversity.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

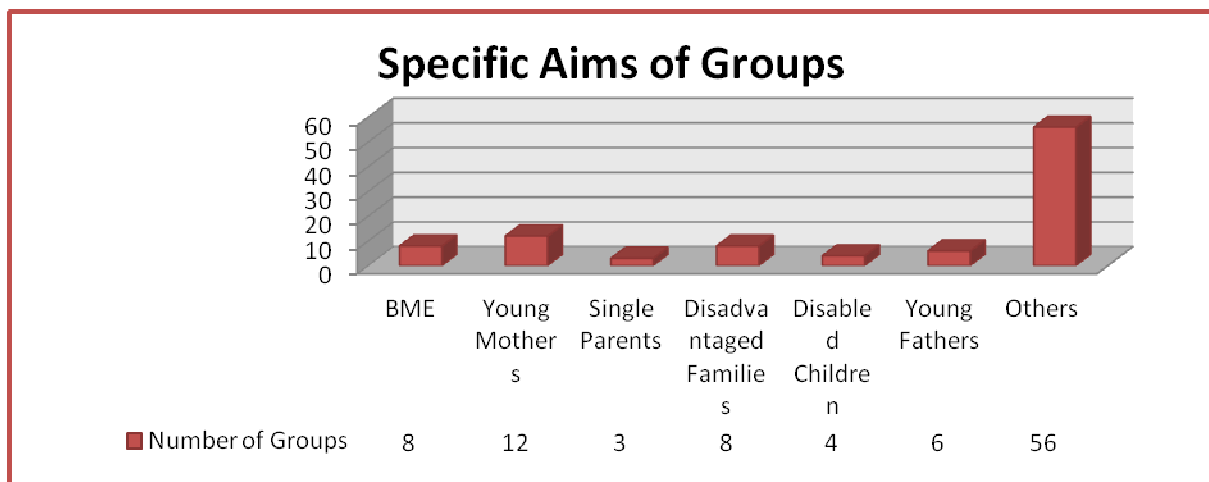
Figure I



(N=93)

The project provided support to a wide geographical area. Many of the groups supported in Devon, Dorset and Cornwall were from rural areas.

Figure II



(N=93, Groups may fit in more than one category)

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

The categories listed in the graph above mirror those that were listed in the project specification. There were a significant number of groups in the category marked 'other'. These groups were aligned to Sure Start, schools and parenting support groups, a domestic violence group, parent forums, grandparents group, children's centres, and a dad's group.

Figure III

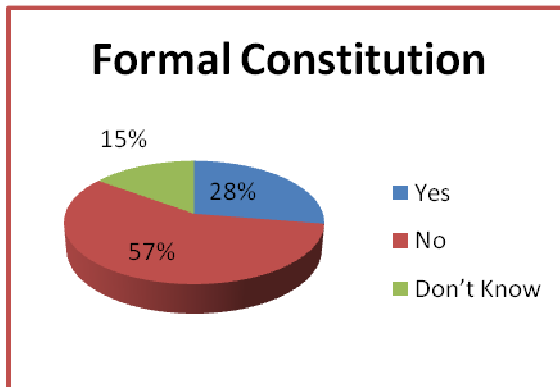
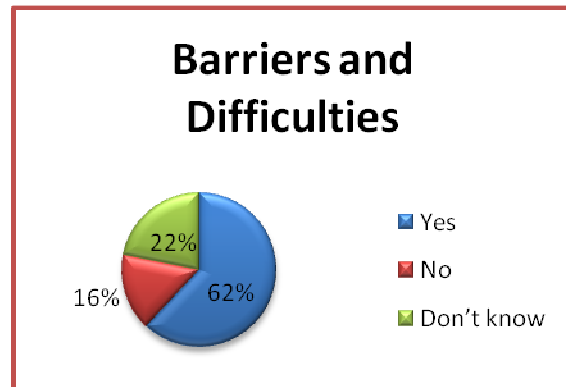


Figure IV



(N=93)

- In the majority of cases the groups had not developed a formal constitution
- 66% of the groups reported that they did not have an income to sustain their group
- Groups that did have an income were generally more established than those that did not; they received support from Local Authorities, family services, National Lottery and youth funds.
- Two of the groups charge members a small amount, which served as an income to enable them to continue
- 62% (fig. IV) of groups reported that they had encountered various difficulties in the past. These ranged from group dynamics, capacity and availability to attend meetings, engaging other members, changes in crèche rules and availability of venues and funding
- The project provided support interventions tailored to the needs of individual groups to address barriers and difficulties

3.6 Key Benefits of Grow Your Group Training

Groups were asked how these supports enabled them to progress and move forward.

The training worked particularly well in building the groups' capacity to provide quality support services within their communities. Groups reported on six main areas of increased awareness and knowledge after participating in the training.

- Clarity in understanding the role of individuals within the group
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Recognising each other's skills and capacity
- Understanding and developing policies and procedures
- Working towards appropriate structures for the group
- Supporting them to work towards sustainability and growth
- Developing a better understanding within the group
- Networking and sharing practice

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

“The Grow Your Group training helped us to think about the structure of the group, it helped us to sort one thing out at a time rather than try to deal with everything in one go.”

“It helped with the setting up and structure of meetings – minutes, defining roles, polices such as fire procedures and child protection.”

“We realised that we needed to update our policies.”

“It helped us to change our leaflets and posters and provide better advertising.”

(Face to Face Group Discussion, South Devon, February 2011)

“The training was very useful, particularly trying out a pitch for funding and how to manage group dynamics and dealing with different people.”

“The Grow Your Group training helped us to better structure the group. We began to focus on an action plan and what our next steps should be.”

“It helped with the detail of formal aspects to running a group – constitution etc.”

“Confidence in how to start and run a group and how to make it happen.”

(Face to Face Group Discussion, Dawlish, February 2011)

“Finding out what the chair, treasurer and secretary did and what else you need to do backstage in order to run a group.” (Volunteer/parent, October 2010)

“Meeting people that are already running a group was really useful, listening to their own personal experiences.” (Volunteer/parent, October 2010)

“It was good to identify the process of setting up a group in detail, the planning and organisation of doing it, what was involved, understanding the purpose and priority of the group and setting this out.” (Volunteer/parent, 2010)

3.6 Key Benefits of Support to Access Services

One example of support was of the one-to-one access provided to groups to help them formulate their ideas and plan:

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

“The group is now constituted with its own bank account and its own website.”

“We have facilitated a workshop and presentation to other groups in the county and have developed activities for the next 12 months.” (CN4C, 2010)

Another example is support provided to parent forums where events enable groups to gather and share best practice to enhance skills and know how.

“Seven parents forums from across the county came together to discuss how they could work better together and increase their capacity. Speakers at the event provided information on commissioning and Community Network Partnerships. This information provided parents with an awareness and understanding of how to bid for services and what services they could provide for their communities.” (CN4C, 2009)

The project supported groups' access to customised training and to build their capacity. The following example illustrates the benefit of capacity building interventions.

The Amana Trust is a local charity run by and for the Somali community in Bristol. Amana Trust accessed support through the Empowering Family Self-help Group Project to support two groups: a women's group that was keen to better understand the educational system; and a new group of Somali women with autistic children. The funding support enabled a volunteer to attend two conferences on autism and bring this knowledge back to the group.

The support group for parents of children with autism was set up as a direct response to parents of children who have autism. *“The general view of the Somali community was that autism was not acknowledged, they would not seek help or advice as they felt it would stigmatise them and their child”* (Volunteer Interview, February 2011). The group meets to understand and acknowledge the need for parents to have support.

3.7 Participants (volunteers/parents)

The volunteers/parents of the group were asked voluntarily to disclose their level of household income. There were 179 participants who responded and of these 21.7% reported a household income of £10,000 or less per annum. Eleven per cent stated their household income as between £10,000 and £15,000, suggesting that a

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

significant proportion of the volunteer/parents accessing support were low income families.

The participants reported how their engagement with the Grow Your Group (GYG) training had supported their personal development.

"I will include this course on my CV as I think it will look good."

"[It] has given me confidence in running a successful committee."

"I found the session on childcare the best as this is the career that would I like to move towards."

"I had very low self-esteem. I did really well on the course...I now have a job at the children's centre."

Quotes provided by volunteers/parents

The professionals who worked with the groups over a period of time reported how they noted a difference in participants' levels of confidence and their approach to aspects of their personal life.

"The support and learning provided through GYG enabled parents to progress personally. One of the parents progressed to enrol in college, another started work and two are now studying for their A levels. I was working with them for over a year and in that time noted a significant difference in their confidence."

"This work would not have happened had it not been for the project funding."

Development Worker Interview, January 2011

3.8 Project Statistical Achievements by Outcome Area

The core aim of the project was to:

- Raise the skills base and resources available to community groups
- Build community groups' capacity to provide high-quality support services to groups of young mothers by empowering them to develop their own user-led, sustainable, self-help projects

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

The aims were underpinned by a range of statistical targets and were described as Outcome 1a and Outcome 2a.

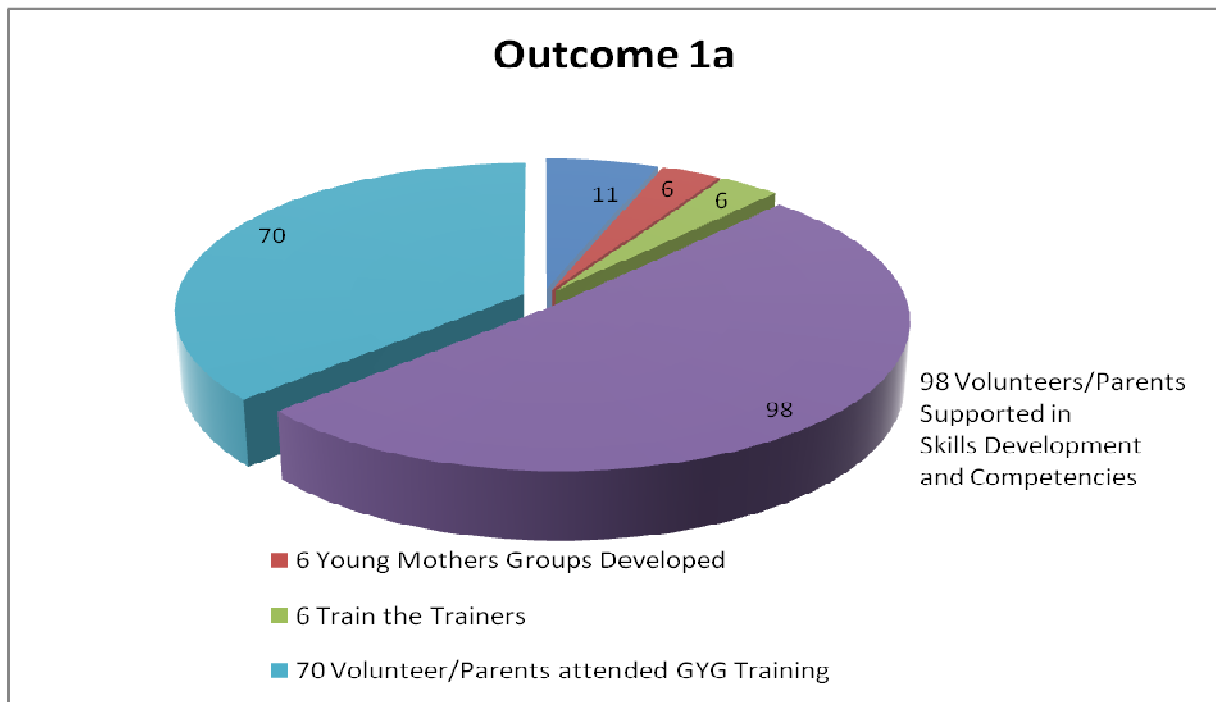
Outcome 1a is related to FEDT. SPAN provided support to build the capacity of FEDT by providing training to development workers to facilitate GYG courses. It also provided funds to enable courses to run with the dedicated one-to-one support and the provision of a crèche, subsistence and venue.

The evaluation on each of the outcome areas provides a final overall snapshot of the project deliverables.

3.9 Outcome 1a

Overall, FEDT worked with 19 groups, of which 12 engaged with GYG training and 7 received dedicated support from FEDT to help them to engage with their local CSV and other local support networks.

Figure VI



- 6 of the 19 groups were young mothers groups (*Proposed target: 30 groups and 5 young mothers groups*)
- 6 FEDT development workers have been trained to deliver SPAN’s Grow Your Group (*Target: 5*)

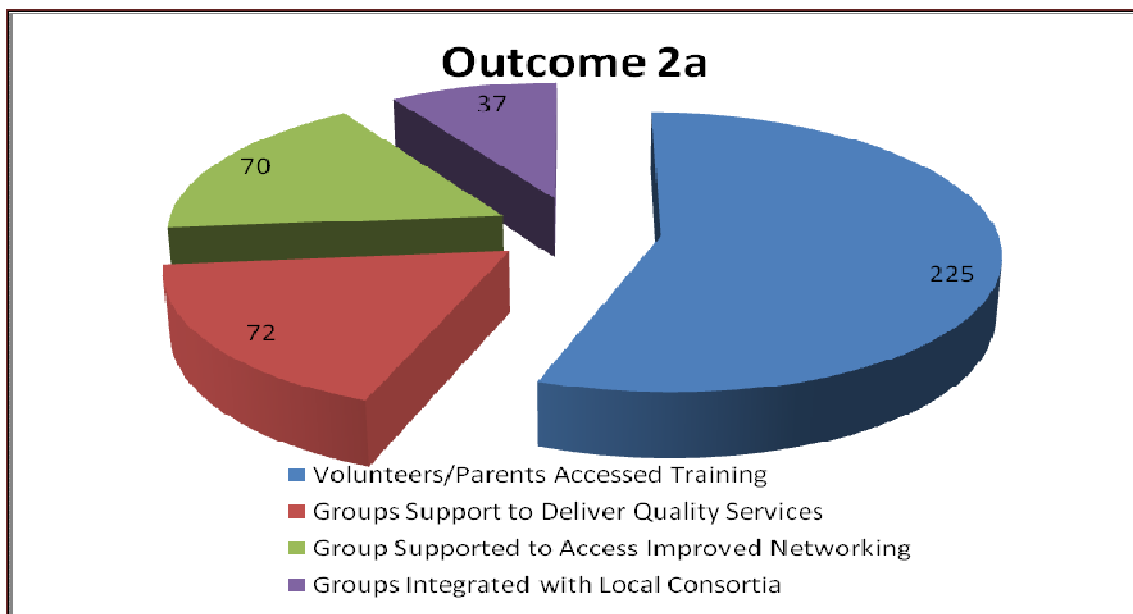
Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

- 98 volunteers/parents have received support from FEDT in skills development and competencies (*Target: 60*)
- 70 volunteers/parents accessed GYG training to gain skills in running self-help groups and user-led projects (*Target: 60*)

3.10 Outcome 2a

- 225 volunteers/parents received training in skills development and competencies, against a target of 120
- 72 groups supported to deliver quality services, against a target of 60
- 70 groups accessed improved networking and other skills support to promote growth and sustainability of the group, against a target of 60
- 37 groups were supported to integrate with local consortia networks and Children's Centres, in support of their sustainability

Figure VII



3.11 The Project's Overall Statistics

The project has exceeded its original stated targets. The figures below present a range of statistics drawn from a combined outcome of 1a and 2a.

- Worked with **93 diverse groups** from various geographical locations against the bid stated figure of **90**
- Supported **8 young parents groups** against a target of **5**
- **348 volunteers/parents** against its stated target of **180**
- Of the 348 volunteers **89.4% were female and 9.2% male**
- **25.6%** were single parents
- 285 volunteers disclosed their age. Of these, 62.4% were 29 to 49 years, 13.2% were 18 to 24 years, 3.7% were over 50 and 2.6% were under the age of 18. 18.1% did not respond

4.0 Supporting Parents in Self-help Groups

Does Grow Your Group work well to support volunteers/parents in self-help groups to develop their group?

The evaluation consisted of one-to-one interviews, discussion groups and evaluation forms, all of which asked volunteers/parents if and how the GYG training had supported them to develop self-help groups.

Parents overwhelmingly stated that the training had provided them with enhanced skills and knowledge to support and develop their group.

“Training ties everything together”

“This training has been very useful to us; it helped us gel as a group and [has] given us direction.”

“The training has helped us process and refocus on our aims and objectives.”

“[The] course made us realise if you fail to prepare then prepare to fail.”

“Details of formal aspects to running a group – constitution etc.”

“How to manage group dynamics and dealing with different people.”

“Confidence in how to run/start the group and make it happen.”

(Information provided by discussion groups, January 2011)

“There are those who make things happen, there are those who watch things happen, there are those who say, what’s happened?”

“The course has given us the confidence to get to grips with the nuts and bolts of running our group successfully.”

“Enjoyable, informative.”

“Eye opener, a great group.”

“Found it very useful and helped us to understand how to keep our group going strong.”

“It does what it says on the tin – Grow your group that’s what it does.”



Participants of GYG: Friends of Sure Start – Dawlish



Asperations Group – South Devon

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

What has been the value of training to the group?	What difference has it made?	Impact / Legacy
<p>Reassessing our aims was very useful. Our aims had become less clear a year on</p>	<p>More focused and moved in a new direction</p>	
<p>Engaged new members at a key turning point</p>	<p>Enthusiasm and motivation has come back – new wind</p> <p>Focusing more now on objectives rather than activities</p>	<p>We've come up with equal opportunity policies and ground rules because of this training</p>
<p>Distributed roles and workload better, recognising our different skills</p>	<p>Gelled as a group, became a team, particularly with new members</p>	<p>Helped us recognise our power and position in the community</p> <p>How to deal with difficult situations, negotiating etc. in committee</p>
<p>Gave information that we needed. it was tailor made to our needs</p>	<p>Helped identify skills needed when trying to change something in your city and who to work with, who to contact, e.g. council, police</p>	<p>We came away from the course with a lot more knowledge; it made us more aware of what was needed and what we needed to change</p>
<p>Finding out about all the different organisations you can get involved with to change problems in your local area</p>	<p>Helped identify skills needed when trying to change something in your city and who to work with, who to contact, e.g. council, police</p>	<p>Empowering</p>

4.1 The Most Useful Sessions

Volunteers/parents were asked which of the sessions were of most use to them. The responses were overwhelmingly positive for each element of the course. However, the most popular responses were Funding, Group Dynamics, Equality and Diversity. Participants in the course also highlighted the importance of sharing experiences and practice within the group training sessions. It was generally stated that the training provided an opportunity for the group to sit together and discuss group matters. They reported this as an important benefit to the training session.

The participants provided the following comments:

General comments	<p><i>“I knew nothing about running a group and I learned a lot.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am hoping to set up a new group and it has given me the information I will need to know.”</i></p> <p><i>“I learned about self-esteem and how to work in a group.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think the training was very useful and interesting, very well planned.”</i></p> <p><i>“I thought all of the sessions were useful as I have now found out how a group should work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning about the different things you need to think about and what is involved in setting up a group.”</i></p> <p><i>“The positive thinking was really useful giving me plenty of ideas and motivation.”</i></p>
-------------------------	--

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

	<p><i>“The positive effect it will have on the group and the rest flows with it.”</i></p>
<p>Funding</p>	<p><i>“Knowing how to fill in forms for funding and who to ask for funding.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning about the ways you can apply for fundraising for our group.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very, very informative with latest research and funding figures.”</i></p>
<p>Group Dynamics</p>	<p><i>“Knowing how to apply for funding and how to run my own self-help group.”</i></p> <p><i>“What to do in a group with problems and how to deal with this in the right way.”</i></p> <p><i>“Discussing how to solve problems in the group.”</i></p> <p><i>“This session has really opened my mind about things and how not to be so judgemental.”</i></p>
<p>Equality and Diversity</p>	<p><i>“I found the information useful as it let me know what was politically correct.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very useful as I have no contact in my day-to-day life with people of different cultures or communities.”</i></p>
<p>Sharing Experience and Know How</p>	<p><i>“To think about my group in a space created to do that.”</i></p>

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

	<p><i>“Hearing other people's journeys and group ideas.”</i></p> <p><i>“Listening to the ideas of the other people on the course.”</i></p> <p><i>“Meeting people from different groups and backgrounds.”</i></p>
--	--

4.2 What might be done differently?

Volunteers/parents were asked if they felt that the course required changes or could be improved to support them better in the future. They offered the following suggestions:

Method of delivery – participants felt that some sessions might be condensed, particularly the introduction. They stated that this should be left to the tutor’s discretion and would depend on the level and stage of the group.

Content – volunteers/parents were generally happy with the content of the course with a few asking for more role-play to be included and more practical sessions on funding. It was also suggested that the course could provide more hand-outs and worksheets.

Facilitation of the course – volunteers/parents were complimentary on the facilitation of the courses and thanked the tutors for their support. They stated that the course had been taught by “experienced, informative and patient tutors”.

4.3 Training Practitioners and Volunteers

Does Grow Your Group work well in training practitioners to develop family self-help groups?

The evaluator spoke with development officers, development workers, parent participation workers and practitioners. They provided their experiences and views of Grow Your Group. Collectively, they concurred that GYG was a good training

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

package that provided a wealth of knowledge and support to developing family self-help groups.

“A well-presented manual, easy to facilitate and flexible in terms of dipping in and out of sessions to meet the needs of the group.”

It was generally accepted by those who delivered the training that the popularity of sessions depended on the stage of the group; for instance, groups at the stage when they were ready to develop funding options, found funding most useful for them. However, in every case the groups benefited from all the training provided.

In all cases the practitioners that delivered the training were well placed to do so. They had backgrounds in training and expertise to provide an excellent grounding for working with diverse groups. However, they concurred that an opportunity to attend a one-day session, with a network of colleagues who were also delivering training, would have been beneficial to them.

The practitioners overwhelmingly found merit in GYG training and provided the view that the training may have a wider application to support practitioners who work in community settings: *“These skills are transferable – someone who has started working in a community would find the course really useful – particularly the sessions on funding, equality and diversity. This knowledge would be good if one is working in the community. The sessions provide a good resource for problem solving, and the training could encompass community workers and those providing community orientated work. Some people who work or volunteer in their community – found this really useful”* (Development Worker, February 2011).

4.4 The Critical Successes of GYG

The following table offers a list of the key components of the GYG success from the perspective of groups and practitioners.

Groups	Practitioners
<p>Provide training to suit specific needs</p> <p>Facilitators understanding the needs of the group</p> <p>The content of the course provided them with timely information</p> <p>The provision of crèche facilities and the opportunity to meet as a group and openly discuss issues</p>	<p>Flexible training – to adapt and pick sessions from the manual to meet the needs of the group</p> <p>Practitioners with a history of knowing the group felt they were better able to deliver to their needs immediately – understanding at what stage of the journey they were</p> <p>Knowledge of the geographical area helped in signposting and sharing information with groups on existing support services</p> <p>Interactive facilitation of the courses encouraged participation and raised participants’ confidence</p> <p>Where practitioners had an opportunity to link with children’s centres it maximised provision – adding support to the group by contributing to child care/venue costs – and enabling a tapering of support to promote the groups’ sustainability</p> <p>A key person in the group to take things forward to encourage participation of group members and promote the training</p>

4.5 The Impact

Practitioners provided their views on the impact the GYG training had on individuals and the group. They reported a marked difference in the confidence levels of individuals who had attended the training. They said that after the training a number of participants had started to consider their own development and had enrolled on college and further learning courses. A couple of attendees found employment. *“GYG training developed their learning and confidence”* (Development Worker, February 2011).

Groups – Practitioners reported that groups were more confident, more focused and already planning their next steps and producing work as a group. *“It’s a very comprehensive course easy to deliver and participate in and of great benefit to the group that I worked with they enjoyed it”* (Parent Participation Worker, February 2011).

Empowerment – *“The group feel very proud to be part of the group and proud to be working to help their community”* (Development Worker, February 2011).

“The groups I am working with would not have achieved sustainability as quickly as they have – the funding to keep supporting them could not have been sustained – they are more self-aware and the support that I now provide is at arm’s length with only one meeting a month” (Development Worker, February 2011).

“Initially the group did not want to stick to one training course. GYG added value in supporting the group to recognise what they needed. One of the groups organised an outing with buggies and children, this involved communication and organisation, health and safety it was all due to the GYG training and added value to the groups learning” (Parent Participation Worker, February 2011).

“The training has increased confidence and self-esteem. It has provided techniques on how to facilitate a group discussion and public speaking” (Parent Participation Worker, February 2011).

Groups provided their perspective of the impact GYG had provided in:

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Personal development – Participants welcomed the training, appreciating the value of the course on a personal and group level.

“SPAN training is so worthwhile, informative and educational.”

“Going on the Grow your Group course has been really interesting and now I want to know more. I hope to find a course in September 2011 to learn more about equality and diversity, as it is so important.”

“This course has given me the confidence to grow my own group.”

“Finding out about ourselves and what skill we bring to our group.”

“I will use the skills that we have learned to help our group progress.”

“This has helped me be part of our group and be able to put my thoughts forward in how it’s being run.”

Group development

“This is a great training programme which gives a solid base for a successful committee.”

“A great way to bring a group together...It has been a great opportunity for the group to gel and progress.”

“A very valuable course which I feel has made a difference between making and breaking our committee.”

The course has really helped us to become much more focused about our aims and objectives.”

Would you recommend GYG?

“Grow Your Group is an inspirational course. All small groups/organisation should take part.”

“Really enjoyed it, a lot more fun than I expected.”

“A very informative course, really easy to do.”

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

“The course has been great and I have really enjoyed every minute.”

“If there is a GYG 2 I will definitely go on it.”

(Quotes provided by volunteers/parents)

4.6 The Challenges

Project Set-up – There was a sense of lost opportunity amongst some of the practitioners due to a late start to the project. In part this was due to the funders not having provided sufficient systems across the programme to monitor and evaluate the delivery of the project at the outset. This lack of information delayed SPAN from providing a clear structure to set up the project’s monitoring system. It meant SPAN had to develop their own monitoring and evaluation framework, which took time to develop and consequently detracted valuable resources from the delivery process.

Additionally, in order to provide a more comprehensive training package, SPAN took a decision to review and make adjustments to the GYG training materials. This decision resulted in a delay in providing ‘train the trainers’ sessions to FEDT staff.

Project Delivery – Project staff met with challenges in terms of buy-in from some support agencies; this was generally seen as support agencies not naturally linking the value of GYG training to their targets.

The process for project staff to generate buy-in for the training from these agencies expended time and effort. Children’s centres initially were seen as a natural fit to the objectives of Empowering Family Self-help Groups. However, there were differences in how children’s centres received the project. As centres are run autonomously across the country what worked well in one region did not necessarily transfer to another.

The evaluation found that where children’s centres were engaged it provided the groups with added support and resources, which in turn raised the groups’ chances of sustainability.

Engagement of participants – The project partners successfully encouraged engagement. Groups and practitioners noted the amount of time required to generate interest from potential participants in the training. The project partners also

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

stated that participants who had expressed interest often did not have the time to complete a full course due to other commitments.

The geographical remoteness of some groups, in particular the groups in Devon and Cornwall, presented some travel challenges for some groups.

Remote Management – The frequency of face-to-face contact was difficult to maintain as practitioners were working remotely.

Intensive level of support required by some groups meant the project staff/practitioners provided higher levels of support than originally anticipated.

The economic climate – pressure as small organisations and groups increasingly compete for limited funds.

The loss of jobs across the sector has presented resource capacity issues; with fewer staff providing frontline support, organisations tend to set organisational priorities and are less likely to have the resources to work in partnership.



Succession planning and funding for groups – The recruitment of new people into the groups is challenging, as one of the practitioners stated: *“It’s critical that new people come on board, people’s lives change and circumstances change and this is a voluntary role.”* Another practitioner stated that relationships within the

group could upset the dynamics. In some instances these may be personal relationships, in other cases it might be where the work was left to one or two people and this becomes burdensome. In either case, getting new people on board was seen as critical for groups.

4.7 What Next?

The groups were asked about their views on future support needs.



Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Groups would like:

A recap of sessions – an opportunity to discuss the course content further.

More information – to share with the rest of the group, e.g. booklets, leaflets on the sessions provided.

Follow-up course to keep the information timely and useful.

A contact person for questions and advice after the training is completed. An opportunity to reflect and then address specific issues/further support.

Reference material from which groups might be able to provide a briefing for new members.

Opportunities to share practice and to find and meet similar groups either face to face or remotely.

Link groups with other compatible (buddy) groups to swap information with groups that have the same or similar needs.

Help-line support – a single information point

Guidance with future problems – family groups expressed concern as to whom to contact after the project. They suggested that it would be useful to have an on-line service with a person to advise if the question/problem could not be resolved at first point of contact.

Support/back-up – someone to work with the groups periodically to check things are working well and offer additional support if needed.

A one-off session – taster courses where everyone in the group can attend to create interest and encourage more members to attend.

Accreditation – by providing accredited courses participants might be more inclined to attend as they would have a credible personal benefit.



5.0 Evaluation Observations

GYG fits with the Government's proposal for a Big Society as it can provide training for practitioners who work with communities and provide training directly to groups.

GYG has worked well with marginalised groups over a three-year period and has proven that it can engage with such groups in a valuable and meaningful way, providing them with the support and help they need to participate. If there is to be a shift towards more direct action by citizens then GYG provides groups with the skills required to fulfil the role. It provides raised confidence and knowledge for both participants and practitioners.

Empowering Family Self-help Groups has provided SPAN with an opportunity to develop, test and deliver a model of good practice for supporting small groups. It has enabled them to source a pool of practitioners who are now well versed in delivering GYG and have built a rapport with small groups.

SPAN is able to provide support and training to groups and may wish to consider enhancing the GYG programme to add the following dimensions:

- **Direct outreach work** with parents, practitioners and organisations. Working collaboratively with organisations aligning with their targets/outcomes to become part of the solution
- **Direct marketing** of GYG to parents, groups and practitioners
- **Wider marketing** to include schools and community development workers
- **Taster sessions** to offer parents and practitioners a better understanding of the content of the sessions, which has increased engagement in the past
- **Themed or networks of groups** allow for better information sharing
- **Accreditation** and qualifications provide an incentive for individuals who wish to use the training for personal development
- **Awards and recognition** – providing a certificate to the group with some publicity would build credibility and raise awareness
- **Practitioner training** would ensure practitioners fully understand the principles and delivery methodology of the training and allow for best practice sharing
- **Follow-up, individual support for groups**

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

- **On-line** support for groups that have already completed the training
- **Training course available on-line** for both practitioners and groups

5.1 Key Messages

Grow Your Group training worked well with groups and practitioners, providing an opportunity to test the methodology and application of GYG. The evaluation has provided an opportunity to note what has worked particularly well and what has not. In an attempt to support future projects of this nature, the report highlights some key messages.

Key Message 1 – Partnership and Collaborative Working

SPAN has built momentum with existing groups and with an extended network of organisations. This provides an excellent platform for a future project and provides an opportunity to engage partners in various ways.

SPAN and other organisations may need to consider how to reach marginalised family self-help groups in the future in a collaborative approach. Combining resources and sharing knowledge to service the needs of groups.

Key Message 2 – Training Groups

SPAN may want to consider enhancing the training materials to incorporate more in-depth sessions on topics of particular interest to groups with a mind to condensing some of the sessions that are seen as too lengthy by some participants.

Key Message 3 – Practitioner Training

The GYG training has a wider application and could be used to provide sessions to community workers by adding a module to make practitioners aware of how to set up groups, group dynamics, and to give an overview of the GYG training.

Duplication – practitioners accept that CVS presently deliver similar training in some areas. However, there are differences in the method and flexibility of the training provided by CVS and SPAN. These differences may be more subtle in some geographical areas than others; this presents a difficulty in defining a consistent methodology across the regions. There are a number of regions where CVS do not

have the resource capacity to deliver comprehensive training programmes with the flexibility required by groups.

Therefore, GYG would not be duplicating if:

- Delivery was in areas where CVSs were not providing the training support required by small groups
- GYG retained its flexible delivery
- GYG added a dimension to accommodate the Big Society agenda
- GYG widened its target audience
- SPAN considered accrediting the course

6.0 Conclusion

The evaluation shows that Grow Your Group works well in supporting parents/volunteers to develop their self-help group by increasing their knowledge and empowering them to progress towards sustainability.

- 1) Grow Your Group training has raised the skills base of community groups by providing them with resources and skills development training.
- 2) The training has empowered groups and individuals and has encouraged groups to provide better quality services.
- 3) Grow Your Group has a wider application and with some enhancements can train practitioners and volunteers in developing family self-help groups.

Appendix 1

Glossary of Terms

The list below provides working definitions of acronyms, abbreviations and terms used in this report.

Capacity building	Empowerment activities to strengthen the ability of community sector organisations/groups to build structures, systems and skills to improve governance and delivery
Frontline organisation	Voluntary and community sector organisations working directly with the public or particular communities
Outcomes	The benefits, changes or other effects as a result of the output.
Outputs	Activities, services such as resource packs, training courses and events
Practitioners	Professionals that delivered the training
Participants	Parents, volunteers – recipients of training
Grow Your Group	GYG training developed by SPAN (output)
FEDT	Family Education Development Trust
CN4C	Cornwall Neighbourhood for Change
CVS	Council for Voluntary Service
SPAN	Single Parent Action Network

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Appendix 2

List of Groups

Amana Autism
Amana Women
Asian Young Women's Group
Axminster Young Parents Group
Barnardo's Central WSM
Barnardo's Norton Radstock CC
Barnardo's Parent Group
Barnardo's Parent Voice
Barnardo's Wellbeing
Beacon Heath Young Parents Group
Bere Alston Mini
Braunton Family Support Group
Bushara
Carrick Parents Forum
Childminder
COPS
Cornwall Parents for Parents
Crime Reduction Initiative
Dads and Little uns
Devon United Women Family Group Little Stars
Dundry Pre-school
Easton Young Mums
Exeter Mosque
Exeter Parent Forum
Exmouth Young Parents Group
Falmouth and Penryn Parent Group
Family First Barnardo's
Flying Start CC
Friends of Glenfrome
Friends of Surestart Dawlish
Gemma

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Grandparents Group
Hartcliffe Parents Support
Helston Parents Forum
Homestart Torbay
Joint Parenting Group
Junction 3 Group
Landmatters Parenting Group
Lark Children Centre
Launceston Forum
Lifton Parent Council/Forum
Little Angelz
Little Rascals
Little Stars Toddler Group
Looe Children Centre Parent Forum
Messy Play
Moors Edge Children Centre
More 4 Mums
Mothers for Mothers
Mums on Strike +1
NCT
Newquay Early Years
Orchard School Bristol Parent Council
Out & About
Parent Carer Council
Parent Participation Forum
Parent Participation in Early Learning (PPEL)
Parents Group Exeter
Peeps
Penzance Parent Forum P.I.G.
Pipa Group
Princetown Parent Forum
Seaton Young Parents Group
Seeds
SEN Group
SFSC Parenting Group SPAN

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

Shine On
Signposting & Advice
South Devon Aspergers Group
Southernhay Toddler Group FSCC
Southmead Community Centre
Southmead Imps
Sparkle Saltash
Spirit Parent Forum
St Columb Children Centre
St Columb Major CC Advisory Group
St Judes Women
Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parents
String of Pearls
Support Mother & Child
Sustainable Families
TACT
Taking Steps
Tavistock CCTG
Teen Y Tots +
Teenage Parents Project
Torbay Grandparents Support Group
Touchstone Project
Treloweth Children Centre
Twinklestars Hele
Twinklestars Windmill
Wadebridge Parent Forum
X Centre
Younger Down's South