Overview of the Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 yrs)

(Facilitators from the Cork, Mahon, February 2009 Strengthening Families Programme)

This document provides an overview of the Strengthening Families Programme (12-16 yrs) aimed at agencies or professionals that may have an interest in planning, delivering and evaluating this programme in their area in Ireland in 2011 and 2012 with funds from the Le Cheile Ltd.
The Strengthening Families Programme Cycle (the Le Chéile model).

It can be useful to think about the different stages of a Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) and what needs to be done at each stage. In order to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people and parents, Le Chéile recommends that agencies place equal emphasis on the planning, delivery and evaluating of the Strengthening Families Programme.

Background to the Strengthening Families Programme:

What is the Strengthening Families Programme?

The Strengthening Families Programme is a USA evidence based family skills programme held over 14 weekly sessions aimed at parents and their teens aged from 12 yrs to 16 years. The programme was first created in 1982 by Karol Kumpfer, Professor of Health Promotion and Education, University of Utah as a programme for 6-11 years and has since been adapted to other groups, including the 12-16 years programme.

Important points about SFP:

-SFP is three Skills courses; Parents, Teens and Family Skills. (not therapy!)

-SFP skills are for all families, they are not just “special skills” for crisis families.

-SFP does make learning “Life Skills” easier for high stress families.

-An SFP “family” is one or more adults responsible for one or more children, a parent is an adult with that responsibility.
How long has the SFP been delivered in Ireland?

The first pilot of SFP (12-16 yrs) was delivered in Cork in January 2007 by an inter agency group consisting of the Cork local drugs task force, the Probation Service (YPP), HSE South drugs and alcohol services and other agencies. The programme was also delivered on a pilot basis in Ballymun in March 2008 by the Ballymun local drugs task force.

Since 2008, the programme has been rolled out by a number of agencies, including the above on a nationwide basis.

The Cork pilot (2007) and the Ballymun pilot (2008) were evaluated by the Lutra Group (creators of the SFP) and found to have been successful in terms of the retention of families on both programmes. Each pilot programme also was analysed in terms of family outcomes, parent outcomes and youth outcomes.

For more information on the evaluation outcomes, you can request copies of these reports and/or read the Strengthening Families Programme: An Inter-agency approach to working with families. McGagh, Mary, Lillis Rachel and Gunn Emma. (2009). Irish Probation Journal Volume 6, September 2009

Planning a Strengthening Families Programme

How does the programme work?

The programme runs over 14 weekly sessions. There is a group family meal to start with families and group leaders all eating together for approximately thirty minutes before the course commences.

The group then breaks into smaller groups:

- The Parents Group meets for a Parent Skills programme.

- The Teens engage in the Teen Skills programme.

Both groups join together for a Family Skills training class before the session concludes.

How much does it cost run a programme?

Le Chéile has worked with programme organisers that have delivered this programme for Euro 7,500 and also liaised with other agencies that have delivered the programme with a cost running over Euro 10,000. Le Chéile would recommend an overall budget of Euro 10,000 per programme for a programme of 12 families. (Note: A family may be up to an including four or five participants).

How does an agency go about organising an SFP in their area?

Le Chéile recommend that a working group is set up where a number of professionals from different agencies meet to discuss the need for such a programme in their common area, the resources that may be utilised to run such a programme and the expertise and experience available amongst themselves that will help them to deliver an effective programme.
A Steering Committee is generally organised following the above. Steering Committees need to consider a number of issues in relation to delivering an SFP, namely: personnel needed, funding, training needed, referrals, resources needed, policies and procedures, health and safety, evaluation methods etc.

Steering Committees source the Site Co-ordinator for the proposed programme. The Site Co-ordinator has an important role as they take the lead in the delivery of the programme with the support of the Steering Committee.

**What about training people in the Strengthening Families Programme?**

All SFP personnel do need to have attended an SFP Group Leaders Training course before they can act as a facilitator. The Probation Service through Le Chéile organises a small number of these courses a year in conjunction with the local Senior Probation Officer for that region. Agencies can also contact the creators of the programme (the Lutra Group) to have them come to Ireland to deliver this training.

Le Chéile recommends that all facilitators should be currently working with an agency and experienced in working with children, teens, parents and families. They should also be garda vetted, receiving regular supervision, have an excellent knowledge of child protection guidelines and a non judgmental approach to working with teens and families. It is recommended that most of the facilitators are experienced in facilitating groups.

**Who can refer?**

Agencies from the community, voluntary or statutory sector working with young people, parents or families.

The creators of the programme recommend that only those who have attended the two day Group Leader training should refer as they have a good working knowledge of the SFP programme.

Note: It is important for a referrer to recognise and commit to fully supporting the family on this programme-this means checking in with them on a weekly basis and supporting the family throughout the programme.

**How does a referrer encourage a family to attend?**

All Strengthening Families Programmes provide assistance to each family with transport, childcare and a meal is provided at the start of each session. There are also small incentives provided to the parents and teens to encourage attendance. Incentives can be phone credit, toiletry sets, cinema vouchers etc.

The Site Co-ordinator can also organise an orientation coffee morning or evening for the families a week before the programme commences. This orientation event helps to alleviate any fears that the participants may have. Steering Committees could also consider inviting an ex-participant of an SFP programme to this event to talk through their experiences of having done the programme.
How can a committee secure funding to deliver this programme?

The Probation Service is funding SFP programmes through Le Chéile in 2010 on a national basis in 2010. Where funding is approved, the programme does need to have a portion of the referrals allocated to the local Young Persons Probation Team, the local Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the local JLO.

**Delivery of the programme**

What are the personnel requirements needed to run a programme?

At the minimum you will need the following:

- Site Co-ordinator: One or it can be done jointly by two persons.
- Group Leaders (Facilitators): Teen Group: Two
- Group Leaders (Facilitators): Parent Group: Two
- Back up Facilitators: One for each group.
- Helpers/Floaters/Students: It can be useful to have one or two to assist throughout the programme.
- Childcare: If childcare is provided on site, then it is likely that at least two professional childcare attendants will be needed. Committees will need to discuss their own requirements around childcare. Committees may also choose to provide childcare off-site, thereby refunding the parents some of the cost of babysitting/child minding arrangements.

What topics are covered in the curriculum?

The following topics are included:

- Communication for Better relationships.
- Problem Solving and Giving directions.
- Managing Emotions, handling criticism, coping with anger.
- Encouraging Good Behaviour.
- Family Meetings.
- Peer pressure, alcohol, drugs and families.
- Setting Limits.
- Relationships, love and sexuality.
Can we adapt and modify the programme curriculum to best suit the participants in our area?

The creators of the programme (the Lutra Group) state that agencies can adapt the programme to best suit the needs of the participants (e.g., providing more cultural familiar examples) but any major modifications would need to be discussed with the Lutra Group beforehand.

What does the graduation involve?

The graduation of the families takes place at session fourteen and is a wonderful opportunity for the families and facilitators to celebrate the closing of the programme. A graduation generally has a guest speaker come along, certificates are presented to all families and some programmes have had a professional photographer take portraits of the families. There are refreshments provided also.

Evaluation

How do we evaluate the programme?

For programmes that are funded or co-funded from Le Chéile, it is a condition of funding that the Site Co-ordinator ask parents to complete a parent self-reporting questionnaire towards the end of the programme. These questionnaires are then sent by Le Chéile to the Lutra Group (creators of SFP) and analysed. The results are posted back to the funder and to the Steering Committee. These questionnaires analyse the impact that the parent feels the programme has had on them and their teen based on a range of outcome measures.

More information

-Le Chéile, info@lecheile.ie/01-2144350, or log on to www.lecheile.ie for a co-ordinator in your area.

-Karol Kumpfer and Henry Whiteside (creators of the programme and partners in the Lutra Group) hwhiteside@lutragroup.com and kkumpfer@xmission.com. www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org (Official website of the SFP)