



FULL CIRCLE
MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

In Association with

Jack Houlahan Training

**Executive Summary of the Evaluation of the
Talking to Your Children About Tough Issues Programme**

For

The Eastern Drugs & Alcohol Co-ordination Team

June 2009

Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction & Background to the Evaluation

Full Circle Management Solutions, in association with Jack Houlahan, was appointed in September 2008 by the Eastern Drug & Alcohol Co-ordination Team (EDACT) to conduct an evaluation of the Talking to Your Children About Tough Issues (TATI) Programme.

The aim of the evaluation was to:

- Establish if the programme is effective in achieving its aims and objectives;
- Identify the defined outcomes from the TATI programme.
- Explore parents' motivation for taking part in the programme;
- Identify the impacts of the programme on parents;
- Identify the benefits that parents have experienced as a result of the programme;
- Establish whether the programme raises parents awareness of risk and prevention factors;
- Explore why some trainers have not subsequently delivered the TATI programme; and
- Identify options for further development of TATI within EDACT's area.

The final methodology was agreed as:

- A baseline questionnaire was completed by participants on the 1st and 3rd nights of the training;
- The baseline questionnaire was followed up by a 3-month post-course telephone questionnaire with parents;
- Stakeholder questionnaires were conducted with 6 key stakeholders;
- A focus group was held with staff of each of the DACTs;
- A database of 62 TATI trainers was targeted for telephone interview; and
- A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to identify best practice learning in other parenting programmes.

One of the key challenges the evaluation team faced as part of the assignment was accessing a sufficient sample size amongst parents and trainers. This was due to a number of reasons, these are primarily;

- A number of the organisations that offer TATI programmes were not delivering any during the evaluation period;
- A large number of courses were cancelled at short notice, due to falling participant numbers.
- On a number of occasions the research team did not receive timely information as to when courses would be happening and which trainers would be delivering them. This is due to the fact that there is no central source of courses timetabled and all appeared to be scheduled on an ad hoc basis;

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- A number of the parents who completed the baseline questionnaire did not fully complete the questionnaire, or did not provide contact details for follow-up assessment;
- The team had no means to identify parents who did not attend the training, as there were no contact details available. It is for this reason that these parents were not targeted as part of the methodology; and
- Another challenge was locating and gaining access to people who had completed the TATI Train The Trainers programme. Many of these people had moved onto different posts and were no longer available for interview.

It should therefore be noted that due to the low level of response to the survey element of the evaluation, survey evidence contained should be treated with a degree of caution. However, despite the limited sample size we are confident that the programme is effective.

2.0 Strategic Context

Our team reviewed local, national and international research and policy on Risk & Protective Factors, Harm Reduction, and Preventing Drug and Alcohol Misuse and have found that the TATI programme is in line with current policy.

The evaluation has highlighted that the programme could benefit from a stricter approach to evaluation in the future. Our research highlighted that the WHO manuals could offer an economical way forward and are highly recommended.

The TATI programme could be used within other contexts, beyond drugs and alcohol misuse. The potential cross-over of the programme could be promoted to relevant agencies within EDACT's area and ultimately to Government departments who have an interest in child and family work.

3.0 Programme Content & Materials

The *Talking to Your Children about Tough Issues* programme falls under the remit of EDACT's Action Plan to 'support the provision of universal prevention and early intervention initiatives for children, young people and families across the EHSSB area'. It emerged from its predecessor, the Chrysalis programme in 2004.

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TATI was developed to meet an identified need for a practical training programme for parents. One of the key drivers for the programme was that previous parent training programmes told parents what to do, rather than empowering them to assess their own family and community situation, and to take action based on a chosen range of options. Parents had been quick to identify the need to go beyond awareness raising and to build skills.

The TATI programme is designed for delivery in three 2 hour sessions, using a highly interactive and participatory methodology, including a number of techniques designed to demonstrate rather than teach. The programme materials are user friendly and designed to meet the needs the programme aims. The materials have evolved to meet parents changing needs and lend themselves to continue to do so. The programme materials also meet UN guide to implementing family skills training programmes.

It is not clear however, how the programme evaluation materials are collated or used on an ongoing basis. It would appear that there is no central source where evaluations are gathered, analysed and recorded over time. Moving forward, all evaluation materials should feed to a central source.

4.0 Baseline Research – Initial Programme Impacts

Baseline surveys were designed to enable the evaluation team to measure the **immediate impact** of the TATI programme. The surveys were distributed to parents at the first and third sessions, this enabled the team to ascertain the participants starting point and immediate impact, as a result of the programme.

The profile of the parents and carers that completed the baseline surveys was broadly similar, 58% were married females who lived full-time with their children.

Some of the immediate impacts of the programme include:

- Prior to the course, the majority of parents (35%) were slightly aware of protective factors, following the training, 65% of parents were very aware of the protective factors;
- At the outset of TATI, 58% of parents felt they have some ability to prevent their child from using alcohol and drugs and getting involved in risk taking behaviour, on completion of TATI this increased to 83%;
- Prior to the course 18% of parents were very aware of risk factors, this increased to 75% on completion of the course;
- As a direct result of the programme 90% of the participants felt they are doing a good job as a parent or carer;

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- 83% of participants felt the programme had given them the necessary skills to be a good parent or carer;
- After TATI, the majority of parents (38%) rated themselves as very confidence to talk to their children about risky behaviour; and
- Following the three sessions, the programme has been **successful in achieving a measured change, in terms of both knowledge and self-efficacy**. This highlights, that even though this is a brief intervention, it is a powerful programme that has a real impact on parents and families.

5.0 Feedback from Parents Follow-up Consultations

Overall the feedback from parents was very positive during the follow-up interviews. The follow-up research highlighted that the majority of parents retained and continued to use the information from the TATI programme. In addition, following on from TATI, parents retained the confidence to talk to their children about risky behaviour, in some cases, parents grew more confident.

- During the post TATI follow-up 36% of parents felt very confident to put in place family rules;
- The percentage of parents that strongly agreed that they have the necessary skills to be a good parent increased from 8% after completing the course, to 14% during the follow-up research;
- Parents found the TATI programme to be of real benefit to them. They commented that the programme had been practical in its approach and allowed them to share experiences;
- Parent also noted that they could easily relate to the programme materials and examples used;
- The follow-up research has highlighted that parents retained the skills and confidence that they developed during the programme; and
- A number of parents commented that they would like a booster session to follow on from the TATI programme. The evaluation team note that this could be difficult to achieve with the programme organisers.

6.0 Stakeholder Consultations

The programme is well supported by all stakeholders. The majority of stakeholders identified a weakness of the programme as its current co-ordination.

The stakeholders felt that the programme content is relevant and valuable to parents. The programme is considered to deal with the real world and engages the interests of parents. The programme focuses on best practice and provides parents with a basic tool kit to use on an ongoing basis. It was agreed that TATI is a programme which parents can connect to, relating the content to their own situation. In addition, the Programme provides an opportunity for parents to share experiences, removing feelings of isolation.

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7.0 Benchmarking

The parenting programmes reviewed, all promote positive parenting and aim to develop parenting skills. The other parenting models are marketed within the local communities, through advertisement in relevant press and at information sessions. Outreach work and the use of peer volunteers have much to commend them.

The other models highlighted that evaluation is a critical issue for the future development of parenting training programmes. One of the key issues that each of the other models face is securing parents attendance for TATI has been difficult. Barnardos' example of information sessions and the current literature, point in helpful directions.

8.0 Conclusions

On the whole the programme has been well received and is supported, both within the EDACT area and across Northern Ireland. TATI has proven itself as a well-designed parental training programme. In its third edition, it reflects current best-practice and is in line with research at local, national and international levels.

The TATI programme can be readily adapted for use in other contexts, to highlight 'tough issues' other than substance misuse. It should be of interest to any service or group doing child and family work.

Even though this is a brief intervention, it is a powerful programme that has a real impact on parents and families.

However, the programme would benefit from active promotion and recruitment to maximise numbers attending and to promote the programme in a positive light. The programme promotional materials should be reviewed to ensure they are positive in their approach.

9.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings from our research and consultations the evaluation team would propose the following recommendations for future delivery of TATI. The evaluation team conclude that implementation of the following recommendations would maximise the outputs of the programme, whilst ensuring best use of public monies.

Recommendation 1

Develop an Action Plan for the Delivery of the Programme Within the Eastern Area

TATI is an excellent, but underused, resource. We recommend that EDACT look to develop a 36-month action plan for the delivery of the programme in the future.

This should include the promotion and co-ordination of the delivery of the programme, and the best way to monitor its development. To date the programme has been driven by the enthusiasm of its creator and the good will of a number of trainers who have actively promoted it.

Recommendation 2

Recruit a Part-Time Co-ordinator for the EDACT Area

The programme requires a dedicated co-ordinator to drive the programme within the EDACT area. This role would focus on the management, co-ordination and further evaluation of the TATI programme, rather than delivery.

The co-ordinator's primary responsibility would not be the delivery of the training, but would actively promote and recruit participants and trainers for the programme. The co-ordinator would need to undertake a review of the existing database of trainers. In addition, the co-ordinator would maintain a register of trainers (see Recommendation 5) and centrally collate the ongoing evaluation of the programme.

This post should be reviewed in 12-18 months time to assess if there is a need to increase this to a full-time post and if there is potential to develop a regional roll-out of the programme and its co-ordination.

Recommendation 3

Improve & Standardise the Delivery Mechanisms for the Programme

As previously stated an action plan and co-ordination resource would improve the delivery mechanisms of the programme, namely; the marketing, recruitment and ongoing evaluation.

In addition to this the co-ordinator could work with the programme designers to develop standardised delivery mechanisms, for both the workshops and Train the Trainers programme.

Recommendation 4

Review the Marketing & Promotional Strategy

Attention is always needed to the need to remove and reduce the stigma attached to attending a TATI programme. This may involve modifications to marketing materials and message, and adjustments to any promotional or outreach work. Marketing also needs to target fathers, as it is mainly mothers that attend the training programme.

The programme should be marketed across all relevant Agencies and Government departments as an evidence-based brief intervention for parents

Lastly, the marketing activities for the programme should fully engage with the community to secure their buy-in.

Recommendation 5

Develop a Register of Trainers

We recommend that a register of trainers is established, maintained, and reviewed. This will help identify when trainers should undertake a refresher course.

Recommendation 6

Introduce a Quality Assurance Scheme for the Programme

Introduce a quality assurance scheme for the delivery of the TATI programme, which would be implemented by the co-ordinator.

The programme could benefit from formal evaluation on an ongoing basis. The WHO evaluation manuals could offer a suitable option and should be considered as a template for evaluation.

As part of the Quality Assurance scheme, progress with the Programme's Action Plan should be reviewed.

Recommendation 7

Review Programme Materials

The current stock of programme materials should last until approximately mid 2010 in the EDACT area. It is recommended that a review of the materials (including the DVD) be undertaken in early 2010, with a view to re-printing materials in Spring 2010. It will be the responsibility of the co-ordinator to centrally manage the stocks of programme materials.

Following on from this, programme materials should be reviewed and updated every 5 years. As the programme develops, material reflecting other types of anti-social behaviour and risk-taking in general may be added, especially if the programme is used in other contexts than for the prevention of substance misuse.