



REACT- one year evaluation

In an area of significant social exclusion and economic isolation, where 48 percent of all mothers are under 25 and 87 percent of young people identified experiencing relationship difficulties, family support charity Scottish Marriage Care has established an innovative project to break the cycle of deprivation.

SMC established the REACT project in Greater Easterhouse in January 2005. With funding assistance from the Camelot Foundation and the Scottish Executive, the aim was to deliver an innovative young parents course with a focus on relationships. The team was led by the newly recruited Young Parents Development Worker whose mandate was to establish partnerships with other regeneration projects, deliver the workshops and enlist and train peer educators to work with young parents directly.

At the outset REACT and SMC wanted life transforming outcomes for each young parent. Personal development and communication were essential components of the project as was body language and social inclusion.

Throughout the project the views of young parents were obtained to ensure the service being provided best met the needs of the recipients. The participants provided the REACT team with important feedback.

Young parents felt the **stigma** attached to being a young parent impacted upon their self esteem. They felt people constantly reinforced the idea that being a young parent was a bad thing. **Gender** was another significant factor. The lives of young female parents changed dramatically after childbirth while young male parents were able to continue life in much the same way. The **support** received from the State and immediate family members was varied and often created numerous problems for young parents returning to school, taking up employment or simply in being a teenager. The participants also stated that many of their **relationships** had changed leading to feelings of isolation, insecurity and uncertainty. Meeting people through REACT proved they were not alone.

“We’ve got so many skills we don’t realise we have, because there’s this stereotype, being a young parent is bad and it’s automatically drummed into you.”

It has now been over a year since the REACT project was launched and the First Year Evaluation Report details some important findings.

Communication with participants is essential as it establishes trust and demonstrates that their input is valued and respected. Patience and **persistence** is necessary in order to engage those who would most benefit from the service.

For the successful delivery of a young parents project, access to a **creche service** is a fundamental necessity. Young parents would not participate unless there was a high quality, reliable care system in place for their children. **Professional training** in relationship counselling is essential for all project workers. This ensures a seamless service is delivered to the participants. Delivering the right **support and service** that can be **sustained** encourages young parents to respond while building and maintaining trust. REACT was unable to engage any **young fathers** to the project. In future an attempt will be made to recruit young fathers as peer educators. It became apparent that the project worked better in **small groups** as they were more personal and encouraged open exchange between participants. **Peer educators** are essential to the project.

Investment in a small group of people can yield huge results. In all cases the young parents relationships have improved and friendships have been made, increasing confidence, self-esteem and reducing their sense of isolation. The project has helped to overcome the perceived stigma and given young parents the confidence and skills to move forward with all aspects of their lives.

This project is a success not only because of what it has achieved directly with young people but because of what it creates for the future, a bank of capable young people who are sharing their expertise and skills with children, other young adults and the local community.



“I’m totally where I want to be and I’m more happy than I have been in ages. I don’t think that I would be this happy if it wasn’t for doing the course with REACT cause it gave me direction, where I want to go, what I want to do with my life. And I feel that I’m on the road to having a better life and I would say that it is all through being a part of REACT. Definitely.”

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