



Helping Children Through Positive Parenting

Safer Western Cape Conference

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"The necessity and complexities of delivering parenting programmes in high –risk violent communities

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A. INTRODUCTION

- Good morning esteemed guests and colleagues.
- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share The Parent Centre's thoughts and experiences regarding "the necessity and complexity of delivering parenting programmes in high risk, violent communities.
- For the past 35 years The Parent Centre has been working with parents and caregivers across Cape Town and across the country.
- In 2018 year we had direct contact with more than 15000 parents and caregivers- through counselling sessions, home visits, clinic talks; parenting training sessions; parent support groups.
- Our best practice programmes (such as our Thula Sana Home Visiting Programme for at-risk pregnant women) have been shown to be effective – through research and also regular, impact feedback from beneficiaries.
- Most of work is done with parents and caregivers living in adverse conditions in some of the most violent communities in Cape Town.
- All of our staff delivering parenting programmes are parents.
- Many of them also live in these high risk violent communities.

- The Parent Centre was established 35 years ago as a project of Cape Town Child Welfare – after research with parents indicated that what was needed in order to prevent child abuse and neglect from happening was to provide parents with support and parenting information and training.

- In our daily work we get to see and hear the struggles and pain, DESPERATION of parents and caregivers, and are reminded that this work is still very necessary. ...

- But delivering parenting programmes to parents, especially in violent , high risk communities is complex and comes with many challenges.

B. WHY ARE PARENTING PROGRAMMES ARE NECESSARY FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION – WHAT RESEARCH SAYS?

- Research tells us that there is no single reason that explains why people become violent. There are multiple risk factors, at an individual level; at a relational level; at community level and society level that may interact to cause a person to become violent.
- Preventing violence then requires co-ordinated action on multiple levels.
- Relational risk factors for violence include:
 - i. poor parent-child attachment
 - ii. harsh and inconsistent parenting
 - iii. parental rejection
 - iv. parental neglect
 - v. exposure to high levels of family violence and conflict
 - vi. young parents
 - vii. insufficient parental supervision and guidance
- Relational protective factors –that can help prevent violence:
 - i. positive parent-child attachment
 - ii. loving and respectful interactions between parent-and child, and within the family
 - iii. parental attention and supervision
 - iv. A sense of belonging within the family
 - v. Parental support for school performance

This is what research says.....

C. WHY ARE PARENTING PROGRAMMES ARE NECESSARY FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN – THE PARENT CENTRE'S EXPERIENCE

- Many of the parents we see in programmes are from high-risk violent communities – where poverty, violence; gangsterism; drug abuse is rife.
- Parents access our services because they have harsh, neglectful, abusive experiences with their own parents. They realise the damage it has done and want to do better for their children.
- Parents access our services because they feel desperate - their relationships with their children have broken down or they don't know how to deal with their children's behaviour – e.g children who are depressed, on drugs, self-harming; aggressive; refusing to attend school; involved in gangs.

- Parents also access our services because they have been sent by the children's court - they are under investigation for child abuse or neglect and face the possibility of their children being removed from their care.
- What we see is that often the child's behaviour is symptomatic what is happening with the parent; in family relationships and in the parent-child relationship – the parent may be depressed/ on drugs and emotionally unavailable to the child; there is conflict between parents and other family members; the parent is subtly or overtly rejecting towards the child or physically violent.
- What we also see is that supporting and caring for parents (showing them love and care); building their self-esteem and confidence; giving them knowledge and tools to understand child development and needs; to build positive relationships with children and implement positive discipline can turn things around – and quite quickly.

Some examples

1. Feedback sent to The Parent Centre via Facebook recently :

"My one patient was a result of incest rape. A gang member in their community raped all his daughters, and one daughter fell pregnant with my client, who was the only child that survived into adulthood. Attending The Parent Centre's support groups weekly changed his parenting style completely and he was assisted with counselling as well.' Hajiera Samsodien, Occupational Therapist
2. Feedback emailed to The Parent Centre

"Thank you for the advice they gave me when my son was 16 years old. At the time, my marriage broke up and my son became involved with unsavory friends and started smoking dagga and bunking school. I phoned the Parent Centre for help and because of the advice I received in my counseling sessions, my son completed his matric. He is now in his 2nd year at university. (There were 2 things that the counselor told me that made all the difference - don't be afraid to parent; find something that your son enjoys that the 2 of you can do together). If not for the Parent Centre, It could have gone so horribly wrong."
3. Feedback from a participant in the Teen Parenting Programme at Harry Gwala High, Khayelitsha. (AR, 17 year old mother of 1 year old son)

"When I started this group, I was a mess. I had no confidence at all in myself and I didn't have love for my child, because of the anger I had for the father. But since I started the programme I learnt about the importance of self-esteem. I began to apply the skills to myself. Then I learnt about feelings and to talk about them, and also about grief. I became the better person each and every day attending the group. Now I love my son like never before. I trust myself and my school work has improved a lot and at home, I am a child again.

D. THE COMPLEXITIES OF DELIVERING PARENTING PROGRAMMES IN HIGH-RISK VIOLENT COMMUNITIES

- Delivering parenting programmes is not easy. There is often a lot of pain. And it can also put you in touch with your own painful parenting experiences (your own growing up; and parenting of your own children).
- One comes up against long held norms and values e.g hitting children is okay. We see many parents and caregivers change ... but this does not always happen. There have been occasions that we have had to refer parents to child protection services.
- Delivering parenting programmes in high risk violent communities brings programme implementers face to face with the harsh realities that parents have to deal with – violence; poverty; gangsterism; drugs, illness; mental illness, etc
- Safety of programme staff has become a huge concern. It has always been a concern but communities have become more violent and the risk to staff has increased considerably.
- I can't emphasise enough how important it is to select suitable staff and to care and support them in their work. Regular, frequent supervision is essential, as well as counselling when necessary.
- M & E is critical as well, for quality assurance and programme fidelity and to assess programme effectiveness. Rigorous research is necessary but also comes with challenges.
- Financial sustainability is also an ongoing challenge. Most funders want to fund only part of the work e.g. programme facilitation but not the essential administration that goes with programme implementation.
- This work requires collaboration. But that too is not easy. Ironically it often requires the skills that we are teaching parents – respect, good communication, limit – setting etc.

E. CONCLUSION

- Thank you again for inviting me to present and to share some of our insights and experiences. I hope it has been helpful.
- Parenting programmes are a critical part of a violence prevention strategy and can make a significant impact.