

Supporting Parents: Report on the Diocesan Parenting Projects 2008-11



Marriage & Family Life Project Office
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
July 2012

Contents

Contents.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Executive Summary.....	2
Project Profiles – Parent Support Projects.....	5
Archdiocese of Birmingham Becoming a Parent	6
Archdiocese of Cardiff Parent Support Project.....	6
Beth’s Story	8
Diocese of Hallam Parent Support Project	8
Charlie’s Story	9
Diocese of Leeds Parenting Support Project.....	10
Daria’s Story	12

Executive Summary

Between 2008 and 2011 13 dioceses were funded to increase capacity for marriage and family life ministry with particular reference to the Bishops’ Conference priorities of developing family-friendly parishes, raising awareness of family spirituality and supporting parents and grandparents in passing on faith. This coordinated development is without parallel in the history of the Catholic Church in England and Wales and, so far as we are aware, in any other country of the world.

Eleven dioceses devised programmes that required the appointment of a part-time staff-member to achieve their strategic aims. Nine of these dioceses have successfully accomplished their objectives and five project workers have been retained in post, at least in the short-term. One diocese wished to increase the professional skills and competencies of their diocesan coordinator of family ministry, through a distance learning MA programme in Leadership. This led to an additional centrally-coordinated capacity-building project offering the same opportunity to other dioceses. Another diocese needed funding to pursue the development of an innovative printed and web-based resource for young adults to contemplate their relationship choices and behaviours, in order to prepare for responsible parenthood in the future. With publication approaching, *Choose Life Choose Love* will be a timely resource for the Year of Faith.

Short-term tangible outcomes in the dioceses that employed staff include at least:

- ✓ 3.25million new invitations to engage on family issues through newspaper articles, newsletters, phone calls, letters and emails
- ✓ 45% of parishes and 25% of Catholic schools impacted by resource and training developments
- ✓ 5,534 participants in workshops, courses, study days and trainings

- ✓ 6,130 participants in diocesan celebrations, retreats and seminars
- ✓ 458 participants in strategic planning and delivery
- ✓ 400 parents supported through group facilitation programmes
- ✓ 140 trained listeners for parish family ministry
- ✓ 100 additional trained parenting group facilitators
- ✓ 50 new Marriage Preparation Providers
- ✓ 9 graduates from MA programme in Leadership for Family Ministry
- ✓ 5 more schools offering RAINBOWS to children affected by loss
- ✓ 3 more dioceses able to organise annual celebration of marriage and family life for the first time
- ✓ 1 Marriage Care centre reopened serving Ipswich and Colchester

Behind these statistics are a wealth of hundreds of stories of personal and spiritual development, healing, inspiration, growth, development and empowerment. The opportunity to focus on relationship skills of communication, conflict resolution and commitment has helped couples prepare for a lifetime together. The opportunity to think about why children behave as they do and how to respond with encouragement, active listening, choices and consequences has helped parents to feel more confident, empowered and less stressed. The opportunity to be welcomed 'as I am' has delivered solace and hope to the bereaved and those in mental distress. The investment in training, of parish volunteers and school staff, and in resources for a range of family ministries, has equipped and empowered local communities to be able to strengthen family relationships and to respond practically in times of particular need.

"The fathers' course was excellent. Humour in abundance and some very valuable insights thrown in. Knock on effect: a sense of solidarity with men doing the dark and elusive art of fathering in parallel. Solidarity about its balance and tension with the reality of work, solidarity about how these may be managed both home and away."

"I think you can see a difference in the parish, with those 21 people being like 'yeast' in the dough – I hope we are becoming more of a listening community."

"My children are both telling me they love me more often. The changes in my behaviour and theirs have contributed to this...what more can I say!"

For some of dioceses involved this project was a ground-breaking opportunity, literally, to scratch the surface of family needs and consider how best to respond. For others, with longer histories of family ministry, but finite resources, funding enabled an extension of services and a sustained investment in infrastructure development. With creative leaders now able to turn focussed attention to family ministry, the outcomes have included a range of innovative resources which will benefit the Church for years to come, such as *Creative Ways of Being Church* and *Catholic Traditions Alive at Home*. Annual celebrations of marriage and family life now feature highly in more diocesan calendars, giving voice to the blessings with which God has graced family life and fostering greater awareness of the contribution of marriage and family life to the life and mission of the Church.

"I am struck by the fact the church is adopting such a constructive approach to intimate personal relationships."

“All the people seemed so happy to be there.”

“A wonderful ceremony, it was truly a holy and memorable experience.”

Training delivered across the dioceses through the projects has ranged from accredited courses in Group Facilitation to non-accredited but respected courses in Listening, Marriage Preparation, Bereavement Support, Family Spirituality and Welcoming Ministry to one-off workshops in volunteer recruitment, fundraising, film-making and new media. Each of these programmes means an investment has been made in local people’s ability and enthusiasm to support each other where they are, which has benefitted them personally as well as the families they work with. Relationships have been made and developed and community networks strengthened.

“I have got lots of ideas to take back to families in our parish.”

“The more people feel supported and encouraged, the more confident they are at doing this most difficult of jobs.”

“We were all - facilitators included - amazed at the changes so little time could bring to our family lives. We all noted major improvements.”

On a more strategic level, the diocesan leaders who have been involved in devising, refining, delivering, evaluating and adapting these programmes of family ministry have grown in experience, skills and confidence and are now significant resources for spreading the development of good practices in other dioceses. Those that have completed the MA programme in Leadership for Family Ministry and Faith Formation are now the foundation for a planned new programme of formation for volunteers in parish family ministry.

“This course has changed my life, given me confidence, aided my thinking, added to my desire to do more and made me more effective at what I do for the Church. It is my hope that the on-going return on your investment in me will encourage you to invest as heavily in others who want to work hard to build up the Church.”

On a global level the Church in England and Wales now has a new body of practice-based literature to create detailing emerging good practices, challenges and solutions that will inform a generation of practitioners of family ministry nationally and internationally. We now have the tools, qualifications and experience to continue developing capacity for family ministry into the next generation. More importantly, the thousands of families who have been directly impacted by this work now know they have a Church that cares about their lives, believes in what they do and is on hand to support them through all their joys, sorrows, cares and hopes.

“The future is looking brighter.”

Project Profiles – Parent Support Projects



For the dioceses featured in this section, supporting parents as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith was the priority when the funding opportunity arose. In Birmingham, Archbishop Vincent Nichols had a vision of encouraging young people to reflect more deeply about the implications of parenthood and the relationship choices they were making. In Nottingham, Bishop Malcolm McMahon had a great desire to support parents in

praying more confidently with their children. Both projects were funded with the expectation of new resources and strategies becoming available that would be of practical value across the wider church.

In Leeds, Hallam and Cardiff dioceses, the goals were to work directly to support parents develop their parenting skills. The skills of respectful communication and effective discipline at home, of setting and reinforcing boundaries, of listening to and encouraging children, are all critical skills which have far-reaching impacts on the lives and wellbeing of persons, families, neighbourhoods and parishes. These skills are also prerequisites for the Christian life of the home and for the transmission of faith in God. The bishops of England and Wales have a long-standing commitment to supporting parents so that loving, healthy relationships can flourish at home and spill over into parish, school and community settings.

Inexpensive and effective universal parenting materials have been used in a number of Catholic dioceses over the last 20 years with many very positive results. The main obstacle to their use has been a lack of confident volunteer facilitators. Funding has enabled the Archdiocese of Cardiff and the dioceses of Hallam and Leeds to pilot different approaches to this challenge, resulting in significant and timely outcomes, bearing in mind that the Department of Education is currently engaged in similar work to increase access to universal parenting programmes.



Archdiocese of Birmingham Becoming a Parent

"It is a challenge to consider the importance of how to love well, choose wisely and build family." Choose Life, Choose Love

The Archdiocese of Birmingham received an award of £25,000 towards the costs of developing a resource for young people (18-25) to explore the realities and the meaning of parenthood.

Project Achievement: The publication of *Choose Life, Choose Love*, a catechetical resource for young adults in school, university and parish settings (due November 2012).

The support structures for marriage and family life in the Archdiocese of Birmingham are largely centred on parishes and 246 Catholic schools. Archbishop Vincent Nichols conceived of the 'Becoming a Parent' project while he was Archbishop of Birmingham. He was keen for the Church to initiate a conversation with 18-25 year olds to facilitate a deeper reflection on the Church's teaching on marriage and the vocation to parenthood.

Choose Life, Choose Love has been developed in collaboration with schools, parishes and the residents of a Young Offenders Institution. The first draft was piloted and revised during 2010 and 2011 in the light of feedback from young people, parents and teachers. In May 2012 Archbishop Vincent, Archbishop Bernard Longley and Bishop David McGough jointly expressed their desire for *Choose Life Choose Love* to be seen as a practical interface with the Year of Faith – in recognition of how young adults live out their faith in their daily lives. It is hoped that *Choose Life, Choose Love*, along with a website offering support materials, will be ready for a joint launch in Westminster and Birmingham Archdioceses in spring 2013.



Archdiocese of Cardiff Parent Support Project

"The Archdiocese now has a team of volunteers to sustain the provision of parenting support programmes in the future, under the direction of a fully trained and experienced leader."
Anne Ballard, Chair, Family Life Commission

The Archdiocese of Cardiff received an award of £47,000 to employ a part-time Parenting Support Worker to strengthen the skills and confidence of parents across the diocese which includes the counties of Glamorgan, Gwent and Herefordshire, through the delivery of parenting programmes and the development of a volunteer network.

Key Project Achievements: Direct delivery of 13 courses in diocesan primary and secondary schools; a qualified Archdiocesan parenting programme facilitator trainer; the recruitment and training of 14 volunteers to expand and sustain parenting support in the future.

The urgent need for the Church to affirm and support parents to *"fulfil their vocation in today's world"* was identified as a priority during the diocesan 'Listening 2004' gathering and reinforced during a 2007 consultation day hosted by Archbishop Peter Smith when the

opportunity for funding arose. The Family Life Commission, appointed following a Diocesan Pastoral Congress in 1995, operates on a voluntary basis. Having had one unsuccessful attempt to develop a parenting network, the Commission jumped at the opportunity to employ a dedicated worker for this task.

Joanne White, a deanery volunteer who had been involved in the Listening 2004 process in the diocese, was appointed to the role of Parenting Support in June 2008. She received initial training from the Marriage & Family Life Ministry Coordinator in the Diocese of Shrewsbury and more locally from Barnardo's. Working closely with the Family Life Commission, the Vicar General and the Director for Religious Education, the initiative was publicised and parish priests and schools came forward to set up programme delivery. Despite working just two days a week, nine programmes for parents of children ages 5-15 were delivered in schools in the first eighteen months of the Project and further courses for the parents of teenagers and of pre-school children were booked for 2011. Although some parents were initially sceptical, they welcomed the affirmation and encouragement they received in the course of the programmes. One mother wrote, *"I am far from the perfect parent, if there is such a thing, but attending the Parenting Programme has made me realise that I am doing okay."*

In 2010 the Parenting Support worker successfully applied for funding to train two of her contacts locally with Care for the Family, in their 'How to Drug-Proof Your Children' programme. She has also been involved in raising awareness of domestic abuse issues through a series of presentations to diocesan clergy and through her involvement with a national safeguarding working party.

The Archdiocese recognised the importance of securing the future of parenting support and in 2011 the Parenting Support worker qualified as an accredited (City & Guilds) trainer, through the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTTLS) award. A volunteer recruitment campaign was then successfully launched, through which 17 parenting facilitators have been identified and trained in facilitating Family Caring Trust programmes. Two of these volunteers have the qualifications, skills and experience to undergo additional training in 2012 so that the Archdiocese can benefit from a team of facilitator trainers, with further potential to extend services beyond the Archdiocese. With this expanding network and a developing contact list within local authorities, voluntary organisations, related charities and schools, there are now plans to engage more broadly in partnership work alongside Catholic school clusters to promote parenting programmes to over 10,000 parents, many of whom live in areas of social and economic deprivation.

Under the direction of Archbishop George Stack, and with the development of the volunteer network, parenting programmes will gradually become more widely available across the seven deaneries of the Archdiocese. With the project funding coming to an end, the Parenting Support worker completed an online fundraising course during 2011. A Fundraising Strategy Committee was then set up, through which several successful applications have been made. The Archbishop of Wales' Children's Fund made an award of £5000 in 2011, the Newport Catenian Circle adopted the Parenting Support Project as their named charity for 2012-2013 and the Archdiocesan Trustees covered six months running costs by dedicating the Christmas 2011 crib donations to the project. Financial constraints mean that the Archdiocese will be unable to offer continued financial support after July

2012 but the Fundraising Strategy Committee are working hard to raise the necessary external funds to keep the Parenting Support worker in post.

This investment in personnel and training coupled with the support of key diocesan leaders, especially the Archbishop, are now reaping dividends in terms of opportunities for parents to receive the encouragement and support they so richly need and deserve. As Project Manager, Anne Ballard writes: *“As a small group of volunteers, we had been unable to sustain our early efforts to spread the work of the Family Caring Trust as we would have wished while undertaking and developing so many other aspects of our work. We are delighted that we now have a team of facilitators newly trained and ready to go.”*

Beth’s Story

Beth is a primary school head teacher in what she describes as a ‘challenging area’ with many families with specific support needs. Beth embraced the Parenting Support Project, having read about it in an email circulated by Joanne, and was particularly pleased when Clare decided to attend the course. Clare’s son had serious behavioural problems which neither the school nor Clare and her husband had been able to resolve. Over the six week course Clare talked openly to the other parents about the family’s problems, and her shame and demoralisation. Any discipline she tried was ineffective and her son’s increasingly difficult behaviour was becoming difficult to cope with. It was suggested she try a different, active listening, approach which allowed her son more freedom of expression. After the programme had finished Joanne learned that Beth was keen to run another parenting support programme. She commented on the positive impact that the course had had on Clare and her son. There were still concerns about the boy’s behaviour, but communication was better with the family and the boy was much more inclined to talk about the problem. Beth had also observed that Clare had grown in confidence, both in her ability to work with teachers to address any issues and in her increasing involvement in the daily life of the school.



Diocese of Hallam Parent Support Project

“The parenting programmes which the Project has delivered acknowledge the messiness of family life and the sacrificial love parents have for their children. Parents are encouraged and offered skills to develop ‘good enough’ parenting and to celebrate effort and success in this area.” Susan Tym, Coordinator for Marriage & Family Life

The Diocese of Hallam received an award of £56,409 to employ a Parenting Skills Facilitator within the diocese’s Family Focus Office.

Key Project Achievements: The testing of an embedded approach to delivery of parenting programmes; a qualified and experienced parenting facilitator trainer; delivery of parenting programmes to 65 parents.

The diocese of Hallam has been at the forefront of parenting support in the Catholic community for a number of years, having developed a nationally recognised Open College Network accredited training programme for parenting group facilitators. However staff changes and re-structuring meant that by 2007 only a handful of diocesan schools were still able to independently offer parenting programmes. The Family Focus team were keen to explore other ways of embedding parenting support more firmly within the Catholic community. The Celebrating Family grant enabled them to place a dedicated project worker within a recently merged parish with three primary schools, to develop the relationships with staff and parents necessary to encourage and develop parenting support. The parish is in a former mining area affected by high levels of unemployment and deprivation and includes sizeable Polish and Traveller communities.

Laura Rendell was appointed as Parent Support Worker early in 2008 and began training as an accredited Group Facilitator and then as an accredited trainer through the City and Guilds programme Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTTLS). The first year was devoted to relationship building with staff and parents, which involved participating as fully as possible in the life of the schools including assemblies, parents' evenings, coffee mornings and so forth. Mothers' Prayers groups were initiated as a further means of engaging with and supporting parents. The head teachers of the three schools in the parish had voiced concerns for the children in their classes and a year later, one of those head teachers wrote, *"It is comforting to be able to give parents real help. Parents have remarked how much they appreciated speaking and meeting with Laura and how much more able they feel to cope. It is such a tremendous bonus to be able to refer parents to someone who really can help."*

By the end of 2010 parenting programmes had been successfully delivered in the three primary schools and the remit was extended to two neighbouring deaneries. The job-title of the Parent Support Worker was redesignated as Parenting Skills Facilitator in order to clarify the limits of the role. The bonds created between participants on the parenting programmes have proved to be enduring and there has been a recognisable impact in that children are behaving better at home and subsequently in class, which has benefitted the whole community.

The dedication to building relationships of trust in the community particularly within the first few months has been the project's main success. The Parenting Skills Facilitator developed a credible profile, is trusted by local families and has an excellent track record for delivering empathetic and practical parenting programmes. The diocese has found the necessary funds to extend her employment for an additional year and is actively exploring ways to sustain her role in the longer term. Having developed formal links with the Diocesan Schools Advisor (Primary), the project now has a forum to promote volunteer Facilitator training courses in schools to extend the provision of parenting support across the diocese. Project Manager Susan Tym estimates that to date 65 families have been affected in a measurable way by the project and over 600 people have participated in parenting support events and celebrations.

Charlie's Story

Annemarie and Mark were unable to have their own children, so they adopted Charlie when he was three years old. He was lively and affectionate but occasionally suffered violent

outbursts of anger, which worsened when he started school. Annemarie and Mark didn't want Charlie to be seen as different from the other children because he was adopted. They also needed reassurance that, in spite of their problems, they were good parents. Annemarie attended a parenting programme and found that it affirmed her in her vocation as a mother, and offered her some new skills and approaches. Annemarie learned that she could help Charlie during his outbursts by 'actively' listening to him. The implementation of these new approaches resulted in Charlie feeling more secure and his parents felt empowered in their ability to support him. Annemarie and Mark have now adopted another child, a two year old boy, who will be a very welcome brother for Charlie.



Diocese of Leeds Parenting Support Project

"This Project is of real relevance to all aspects of building the domestic church, and is of universal application and importance as it strives to meet our human hunger for the love of God that families themselves are designed to bear witness to 'not in word or speech but in truth and action' (1 John 3:18)."

Breda Theakston, Coordinator of Family Life Ministry.

The Diocese of Leeds received an award of £75,000 to develop a network of trained volunteer facilitators to deliver parenting programmes so that capacity for supporting parents as first teachers of their children and as leaders in their communities could be extended.

Key Project Achievements: The creation of a network of 43 accredited volunteer parenting facilitators embedded in their local communities with the capacity to reach at least 200 families per year, plus countless residual impacts on families and children in the course of developing this network.

The Diocese of Leeds has employed a Family Life Ministry Coordinator for many years, who has successfully developed marriage preparation programmes and networks of providers, amongst other achievements. The grant provided for the employment of additional staff, a Parent Support Worker and an Administrative Assistant, so that a carefully planned recruitment, training and accreditation programme for volunteer Parenting Facilitators could be delivered. The rationale behind developing this network was threefold: it would enable the diocese to support families in their striving for happier family life, with more positive, respectful and loving relationships; it would respond to increasing political, social, scientific and cultural attention to the importance of good parenting as key to children's outcomes in all areas; it would support the objectives of developing family-friendly parishes, deepening family spirituality and supporting parents in passing on faith in God.

Three accredited Group Leadership Training programmes have been delivered as a result, in the North Leeds Deanery in Spring 2009, at Hinsley Hall, Leeds in Spring 2010 and in the

Wakefield Deanery in Autumn 2011. For each participant the training involved ten two-hour sessions in the classroom, plus written work, delivery of a parenting programme and one-to-one tutorials. For the team involved, each training programme required at least 560 staff hours. By selecting this approach the diocese was not only investing in up-skilling individuals through the training programme but guaranteeing that a minimum number of parenting programmes would be delivered. At least 200 parents and 311 children have benefitted directly to date from the training of the first 25 facilitators in 2009-10.

The impacts have been enormous. As Project Manager Breda Theakston reported at the end of 2009, *“This works! People are hungry for this and flourish when fed. They thrive when affirmed, encouraged and supported. Touching people in one area of their lives (parenting) can have resounding, unexpected and wonderful consequences elsewhere, most of which we will never know. Two stories: a young mum, after just a few of the parenting sessions, started attending church and has brought her partner to start to prepare for marriage; three children have been brought for baptism through their mum’s contact with a parenting course.”*

The Project team have refined their recruitment process over the three years finding that Parenting Facilitators work more confidently in pairs and need the committed support of a nominator with responsibility and authority where the volunteers would be running parenting courses. They originally adopted the strategy of using a local high school as a recruitment and training hub, working with the feeder primary schools and their parishes to nominate volunteers. However, the most recent trainees were recruited after the Wakefield deanery invited the team in to train parents, parishioners, school governors, teaching assistants or social workers from all, but one, of the parishes and schools in the deanery. This approach has been much more effective and has enhanced the development of community in a deanery which already worked extremely well. 19 volunteers attended the part-time ten week course and 18 are on schedule to gain the OCN Level 3 qualification after completing delivery of programmes to parents. Most pairs have launched or completed their parenting programmes already, engaging mums, dads, grandmothers, grandfathers, foster parents, adoptive parents and step parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds, all of whom are finding new community and confidence in shared values and love for their families.

During the life of the Project the diocese has successfully realised its vision of starting to grow confident, capable, local parent leaders in the existing web of school and parish relationships and has seen many positive outcomes as a result. Five mums have used the training to move on in their lives: one from home to an assistant’s role in school; three from home and assistant work in school to further and higher education in early years’ child care and teaching qualification; one in English language and refugee residence status. A pregnant teenager from outside the Diocese joined a mixed age and mixed ethnic course and still maintains links with the people on the parenting course whose warmth and down to earth practicality encouraged and sustained her during a very difficult time (now happily mothering a lovely 2 year old!).

Because of staff sickness during 2009 which disrupted the timetable, this project will run until the end of 2012. The team hope to find additional funding to enable them to more fully assess the impact of the Project and to develop appropriate support to sustain all those

trained as facilitators. In Project Manager, Breda Theakston's words, *"I would like what we have done here to be a brighter light, a beacon, to help the whole of the Church and society to see parents for what they are: the first educators, the formers of future citizens and of future parents."*

Daria's Story

Daria wrote to the team in September 2011 to share her good news. "Several weeks ago, after 13 years in the insurance industry, I decided to take a dramatic step towards a change in career. I applied, via clearing, to universities and colleges. There were no places left but I managed to get on a foundation degree course: Children's Care, Learning & Development at Leeds City College. I am elated! It's a two year course and I can take a further year of study at university afterwards to achieve BA (HONS). Although I am involved with children at Church and am also a school governor, it was your Parenting Facilitator's training course that really inspired me to go further. I am also convinced that the evidence provided by my Parenting Folders coursework positively influenced the interview panel's decision. Thank you all so much."