



**SPEAKEASY - PARENTING FUND EVALUATION:
SUPPORTING PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH
YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND SEX AND
RELATIONSHIPS**

Final report prepared for fpa (June 2006)

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Dr Nigel Sherriff and Dr Lester Coleman

**Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA)
23 New Road
Brighton
East Sussex
BN1 1WZ
UK**

<http://www.tsa.uk.com>

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Since January 2005, the Parenting Fund has supported the **fpa** expansion of the Speakeasy intervention from accrediting parents, to providing free training to professionals working with parents – termed an ‘EarlyStart’ training course. To date, a total of 40 EarlyStart courses have been started, predominantly in The Midlands, London and South East, The North (20 courses), and The South West.

The EarlyStart training course consists of 3 full days with a gap between days two and three during which professionals work in pairs to deliver their first Speakeasy course. Days one and two provide the foundations for delivering the Speakeasy course. At least 10 weeks after day two, day three of the training allows participants to reflect on the courses they have set up and delivered, and familiarise themselves with the accreditation process.

The main focus of this evaluation report was to explore professionals’ experiences of their EarlyStart training. This has been done in three ways: 1) by analysing pre-and post - training evaluation questionnaires administered by **fpa** immediately before the start of the training and again after its completion, 2) conducting a focus group discussion with professionals whom recently graduated from their EarlyStart training, and 3) carrying out an in-depth telephone interview with EarlyStart’s trainer for the North of England.

Evaluation Findings and Conclusions

The findings of this evaluation clearly indicate that professionals have gained significant benefits from their EarlyStart training. For example, some professionals commented they had gained confidence, knowledge, greater awareness, improved delivery skills, and ideas, resources, and structures for the programme. These benefits were often tied in with what professionals had hoped to gain from the training in the beginning. Furthermore, these benefits often extended beyond their initial expectations.

Benefits of the EarlyStart training also extended to professionals’ respective workplaces. Amongst others, these benefits included raising awareness of the need for sex and relationships education, extending sexual health programmes already in-situ, assisted in creating and developing new health programmes for parents, and motivating some parents to go on and pursue other educational courses. Interestingly, professionals’ pre-and post-training responses to this issue were often quite different suggesting that some outcomes whilst valuable may also have been unanticipated.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the benefits experienced, all professionals whom completed the post-training questionnaires reported that they would like to continue delivering Speakeasy in their work settings if funding, work load, and demand permits.

In February 2006 five professionals whom had undertaken the 3-day **fpa** EarlyStart training took part in a focus group discussion in Newcastle. The duration of focus group was approximately 30 minutes and questions covered a range of issues such as changes in skills and confidence, enjoyable, and/or challenging experiences, possible barriers in delivering courses, and ideas for future development for the EarlyStart training and

Speakeasy for parents course. The focus group with professionals was a lively discussion, in which individuals reported very positive experiences of their EarlyStart training. Reflections focused primarily on issues concerning increases in personal confidence, preparation, and course timings. For example in terms of personal confidence, professionals reported that one of the most enjoyable experiences had been seeing their learners pull together to support each other and the increased confidence that ensued on behalf of the professional.

Despite its apparent successes however, there are still areas of the EarlyStart training that require further attention by **fpa**. For example, the training packs administered to professionals to assist in facilitation of the Speakeasy courses were described as being frustrating and time-intensive because of their idiosyncratic organisation. Professionals expressed that re-organisation of these packs by **fpa** would be particularly beneficial for future training courses. Other areas that require redress include the significant slippage or time-delay (and drop-out) between days two and three of the training. At the time of writing, 18 of the 40 courses started (45%) had completed their day three of training with a total of 12.7% participant drop-out rate to-date. This has meant a relatively limited amount of evaluation data being available for inclusion in this report.

This Parenting Fund section of the speakeasy programme is due to be completed before October 2006. **fpa** are confident of completing at least 38 of the 40 training programmes before this date. In response to feedback from course participants, the training pack is being revised during summer 2006. The successful outcomes from this intensive programme of training provide a sound basis for the further development of this work that is planned.

SPEAKEASY - PARENTING FUND EVALUATION:

SUPPORTING PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

1.0 Introduction

Speakeasy is a community-based educational programme run by **fpa**. Its overarching aim is to offer a non-threatening group based opportunity for parents to learn together and acquire the confidence and skills they need to talk to their children about sex, sexual health, and relationships. The course is designed to be informal and relaxed, and is run over a number of weeks delivered directly by **fpa** Speakeasy trained facilitators.

Since January 2005, the Parenting Fund has supported the **fpa** expansion of the Speakeasy intervention from accrediting parents, to providing free training to professionals working with parents – termed an ‘EarlyStart’ training course. These professionals include Sure Start workers, health professionals, and youth workers. This professional training builds upon packages of the commissioned training of parents that have been delivered since 2002. EarlyStart training enables professionals, who are experienced in group based working and are enthusiastic in supporting parents in talking with their children about sex and relationships, to deliver Speakeasy in their local settings. This report summarises the impact of EarlyStart training upon these professionals.

EarlyStart

Successful completion of EarlyStart training qualifies professionals to deliver the generic Speakeasy course to parents and train further facilitators if required¹. The main aims of the training are to enable professionals to:

- Develop an understanding of the importance of the parental role in helping to develop children’s attitudes, values and knowledge around Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)
- Provide an introduction to the meaning of sexual health, sexuality and the impact of personal values, attitudes and beliefs on delivery of sex education
- Provide an introduction to the Speakeasy approach, including portfolio based learning
- Develop an understanding of Speakeasy session outlines, learning objectives, group and individual activities
- Develop an understanding of the possible difficulties and obstacles in setting up an effective Speakeasy programme and how they might be overcome
- Develop an introduction to the principles and practice of NOCN accreditation and assessment.

¹ Training further facilitators is not commonplace. However, it is explored on an individual basis assuming the professional is well versed in the area of sexual health and training.

The EarlyStart training course consists of 3 full days with a gap between days two and three during which professionals work in pairs to deliver their first Speakeasy course (which professionals set-up prior to attending the training). Days one and two provide the foundations for delivering the Speakeasy course. At least 10 weeks after day two, day three of the training allows participants to reflect on the courses they have set up and delivered, in addition to familiarising themselves with the Open College Network (OCN) marking process. Throughout the three training days, participants complete exercises and worksheets necessary to fulfil the EarlyStart accreditation requirements. EarlyStart covers the same topics as the parent course but with a greater element of critical evaluation as it is accredited at OCN level 3 rather than level 2. Professionals are required to work for an extended period of time (circa. 90 hours) in order to gain the National Open College Network [NOCN] accreditation at level 3.

Since starting in 2005, a total of 40 EarlyStart courses have been started (to date), predominantly in The Midlands (10 courses *this includes Lincolnshire and Milton Keynes*), London + South East (9 courses), The North (20 courses), The South West (1 course). Of these courses, 18 had completed their final 3rd day of training². This slippage (time-delay) in the delivery of courses had meant that some Day 3 dates were delayed and some participants who missed their allotted Day 3 were transferred to the nearest alternative.

Further day 3 training days are being planned, with all these intended to be completed by the end of September 2006. Hence this report summarises the evaluation of the 18 courses run to date.

The following table summarises the details of all participants to date, in terms of work / agency and location:

Table 1. EarlyStart participants who have completed courses to date (June 2006)

Location		N	Work / Agency	N
The North		12	Sure Start / Children's Centre	75
The Midlands	W Midlands	2	Other parenting support	17
	E Midlands	2	Health Promotion	20
The South	S East	1	Education	23
	S West	0	Other	5
Total courses		18	Total participants	140

² Data correct at the time of writing on 7th June 2006, but is likely to increase after this date.

Of the total 415 enrolled in the EarlyStart course at the outset, 34% (or n = 140) successfully completed the course (by June 2006)³ with a 12.5% (or n = 52) drop-out so far. According to **fpa**, explanations for drop-out have been due to a variety of reasons. Firstly, some participants had not been made fully aware of the commitment needed to complete the training, despite **fpa** producing an adequate pre-course information document; often participants arrived at the training having never seen it. Secondly, slippage and drop-out occurred due to participants having to fit the Speakeasy programme/requirements into their existing work commitments. For participants whose work role did not involve parent course delivery (e.g. health visitors), this sometimes proved difficult. Finally drop-out occurred through participants moving jobs during the training process; on occasion they would continue with the training, however the time constraints and changing roles often made this not possible.

2.0 Evaluation Indicators

The evaluation consisted of three main components as follows:

a) The administration of pre-training (pre-course) questionnaires (designed by **fpa** and issued by the Speakeasy Trainer prior to the start of the course) and a 6-9 month follow-up (post-course) questionnaire sent to all professionals who completed the Speakeasy training by **fpa** administration (see appendices 1 and 2 respectively).

At the timing of this report, 415 pre-training questionnaires were completed, and 75 post-training questionnaires were sent out 6-9 months later. Of these 75 distributed, 5 went to agencies in London, 36 to agencies in the Midlands, 34 agencies in the North.

To date, 20 post-training questionnaires have been returned and that could be matched to the pre-training questionnaire completed 6 months earlier by the same participants.

b) A focus group discussion held with five professionals who attended the Speakeasy EarlyStart training. This was held in Newcastle during February 2006 and aimed to explore the experiences of a small group of professionals of their **fpa** training and of running their first Speakeasy course for parents.

c) An in-depth interview with Lynnsey Bohn, Speakeasy's EarlyStart Trainer for the North of England. Lynnsey began her role in the Speakeasy project delivering Speakeasy courses for parents (2002-2004), moving on to delivering the EarlyStart training (**fpa**'s accredited training programme) in January 2005 (to date).

3.0 Evaluation Findings: Pre- and Post- Training Questionnaires

A total of 20 matched pre- and post-training questionnaires were returned. The findings derived from these questionnaires, completed by trainees, will be presented in a number of sections as follows:

3 Participants will be completing up until September 2006 with a few individuals delaying further after this date.

3.1 Location

Analyses of the geographical location of professionals completing the EarlyStart training and the related evaluation questionnaires are presented as percentages in rank order of frequency as follows:

- **West Midlands** including Coventry, Lichfield, Wolverhampton, Redditch, and Birmingham - 45% (n = 9)
- **East Midlands** including Nottingham, Corby, Mablethorpe, Skegness, Lincoln, and Gainsborough – 25% (n = 5)
- **London** - 10% (n = 2)
- **North West** including Burnley and Carlisle - 10% (n = 2)
- **North East** (Wallsend) - 5% (n = 1)
- **South East** (Belvedere) - 5% (n = 1)

3.2 Work Place and Role

Professionals' work settings and roles were wide ranging and were categorised into five main work areas. These areas are briefly summarised below:

Sure Start (n = 6) - Six professionals reported working in Sure Start settings all of whom described their main roles as being involved in supporting parents in various ways. Descriptions of job roles included community involvement worker (encouraging parents to become more actively involved in Sure Start), childcare and parent worker, midwife, assistant midwife, support worker, and nursery officer working with children and young parents.

Schools and education (n = 6) - A further six professionals said they worked either in schools (primary and secondary) or other educationally related setting (e.g. Local Education Authority, City Council, and support work for young people with learning difficulties).

Health centre settings (n = 3) – Three professionals reported that they worked in primarily health related settings such as health centres. Descriptions of job roles included working with parents and young people, and providing (sexual) health and sex education support.

Family/Parent/Community Centres (n = 4) - Four professionals said they were employed in various family related settings such as parenting centres, community projects, and social services. Amongst others, job roles in these settings were reported as including working with young mums and pregnant teenagers, providing sex and relationships training programmes, and running parenting groups.

Youth Offending Team (n = 1) – One professional reported working in a Youth Offending Team and described their role as working with parents whose child/children have offended or who are at risk of offending, and working with parents in relationship building.

3.3 Reasons for Attending the Speakeasy Training

The trainees could respond to more than one answer to this question, hence the percentages are provided for each individual question. The main reasons for attending the Speakeasy training, in rank order of importance, were as follows:

- To increase confidence in talking to parents about sex and relationships – 80% (n = 16)⁴
- To increase their setting's priority to sex and relationships – 75% (n = 15)
- Their job role requires a greater understanding of sex and relationships issues – 65% (n = 13)
- Parents have expressed a need for support in talking to their children about sex and relationships – 65% (n = 13)
- To respond to the local Teenage Pregnancy Strategy – 60% (n = 12)
- It was recommended by another setting – 20% (n = 4)
- There was no choice, my manager has sent me on it – 5% (n = 1)
- Other – 0%.

3.4 Perceptions of Workplace SRE Priority

In both pre-and post-training evaluation forms, trainees were asked to rate how much they either agreed or disagreed with two statements (see below):

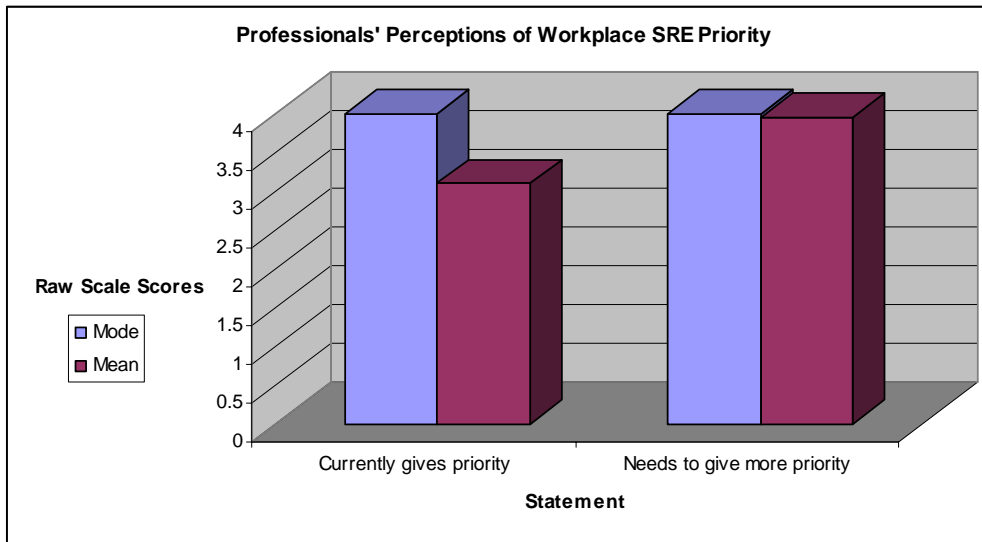
- **Statement 1:** 'Our setting already gives high priority to sex and relationships issues'
- **Statement 2:** 'Our setting needs to give more priority to sex and relationships issues'.

Using a Likert type scale, respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they (dis)agreed with the statements by circling one of the following four indicators: "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neither", "agree", "strongly agree". Scale scores were calculated so that strongly disagree = 1 and strongly agree = 5. Thus, a high score indicates a stronger level of agreement and vice-versa. Initially it was intended that responses to the statements (pre and post) would be compared statistically (e.g. t-test) to explore for potential differences in attitudes over time. However, due to **fpa** administration difficulties with the questionnaire, post-training responses to these two statements were not available. Consequently, only pre-training responses are presented in the following paragraph.

4 'n' refers to the number of responses, out of 20, who ticked a particular question.

As can be seen in figure 1 (following page), of the 20 matched responses most individuals indicated their agreement to both statements ($M = 3.1$ and $M = 3.95$ respectively; mode = 4 for both statements). These data suggest that whilst professionals generally agree that their current work setting does currently give a high priority to sex and relationships issues, they also feel that more still needs to be done in this regard.

Figure 1 Professionals' Perceptions of Workplace SRE Priority



3.5 Benefits of Speakeasy EarlyStart Training

On their pre-training questionnaires, professionals were asked what they hoped to gain from their EarlyStart training. In the post-training questionnaire respondents were asked to describe what they had actually gained from completing the course, and from delivering their first Speakeasy for parents course.

At the start of the course over half of the professionals who completed the evaluation forms said that they hoped to gain increased knowledge about sexual health, but also learn how to disseminate such knowledge to parents. In addition, many professionals said that they wanted to gain more confidence in talking about sexual health to parents, to other staff members, and to be able to deal with parents in a range of circumstances that may arise. Other hopes professionals said they had for the Early start training included:

- Raising own and others' awareness of sexual health issues
- Increasing parents confidence and developing longer-term parenting skills
- Feeling comfortable when speaking to parents about sex and sexuality
- Learning and dealing with group dynamics
- Developing new ways of disseminating information to workplace staff.

It was clear from the post-training questionnaires that all 20 professionals gained some significant benefits from completing the EarlyStart training. For example, some professionals commented they had gained confidence, knowledge, greater awareness, improved delivery skills, and ideas, resources, and structures for the programme. Moreover, these benefits were often tied in with what professionals had hoped to gain from the training in the beginning. In other words, for some, EarlyStart met professionals' expectations of their training.

For all quotes, the pre-training and post-training responses for individuals are presented in tandem to note any differences between the completion of these questionnaires:

Professional A:

[Pre-training] Confidence and knowledge to facilitate the Speakeasy training...**[Post-training]** confidence personally and in delivering speakeasy. More in-depth knowledge of sexual health. Facilitator skills

Professional B: (BM5/8)

[Pre-training] Confidence, techniques, and extended knowledge base for sexual issues...**[Post-training]** knowledge of course content, confidence

Professional C: (E5(N)18/8)

[Pre-training] Increased confidence to deliver the programme to parents...**[Post-training]** – Added confidence in delivering sex education, gained more rapport with our young women who access the project

Furthermore, these benefits often extended beyond their initial hopes for the training. For example, some professionals reported that in addition to developing confidence (their pre-training hope for the course), they also gained other benefits from EarlyStart such as learning new ways of delivering information to parents, developing rapport with services users, having fun, gaining a qualification, and developing further knowledge of sexual health (e.g. sexually transmitted infections and contraception):

Professional D: (NS/01)

[Pre-training] I want more confidence in training. Better awareness of talking to children about sex...**[Post-training]** Confidence. Experience of a new course and new ways to deliver valuable information. Knowledge of the need for such a course for parents. The value of offering a course at an accredited level for parents, and one which is achievable for them

Professional E: (E5(N)8\11)

[Pre-training] Information and confidence to facilitate awareness to parents...[Post-training] I have gained confidence in delivering the course, have also learned more about STI's and contraception that I was unaware of before

Professional F: (E5(N)5/7)

[Pre-training] I want to gain a better knowledge and understanding of speaking to parents and my own child and family about sex and sexuality and to feel comfortable doing it...[Post-training] Knowledge (personal), group working, a qualification, and time management

3.6 Workplace Benefits of the Speakeasy for Parents Course

Professionals were asked in the pre- and post-questionnaire to comment on how they felt the Speakeasy parents course might benefit their individual work setting(s). In terms of the pre-training responses, respondents proposed a number of potential benefits including:

- Helping parents to feel more comfortable and less embarrassed when talking about sex
- Provide broader opportunities for parents/carers
- Enable parent to access appropriate information/resources in order to relate to their children
- Will allow the dissemination of information in a fun way
- Help to break down barriers and encourage young parents to talk to their children about sex and relationships
- Encourage partnership working
- Provide a structured format for the delivery of sex and relationships education to staff and parents.

In general, professionals reported that the Speakeasy for parents course had indeed benefited their work settings. Amongst others, these benefits included raising awareness of the need for sex and relationship education, extending sexual health programmes already in-situ, assisted in creating and developing new health programmes for parents, and motivating some parents to go on and pursue other educational courses. Interestingly, professionals' pre- and post-training responses were quite different suggesting that some outcomes whilst valuable may have been unanticipated:

Professional F:

[Pre-training] Parents in our setting will be able to talk openly and freely about sex and hopefully not feel embarrassed...[Post-training] Raised awareness, given parents new opportunities to learn.

Professional D:

[Pre-training] I feel that this would be a very valuable training programme for parents...**[Post-training]** Extended the sexual health programme that we already offer and deliver. Some parts of the training can be 'woven' into other sexual health programmes.

Professional G: BM1/4

[Pre-training] Should allow parents to access the appropriate information/resources in order to relate to their child(ren) and not have sex as a taboo subject or something that is swept under the carpet...**[Post-training]** By being able to signpost parents to other service providers and ability to address concerns/health issues. Supported with the resources included in the pack, especially the demo-kit.

Professional H: (E8(M)9)

[Pre-training] The programme will provide a structured way to deliver sex education to staff and parents...**[Post-training]** Offering this course as an accredited course certainly increased the interest of both parents and referring organisations.

3.7 Specific Concerns Expressed by Parents

In the pre-training questionnaire only, professionals were asked to describe any specific concerns expressed by parents from their work place around the subject of sex and relationships (e.g. the influence of TV, internet etc.). Whilst responses to this item were generally quite few and far between, professionals reported a broad range of concerns that parents had raised during the various Speakeasy courses. Some specific comments from professionals are included below:

They [parents] don't know where to begin! (Professional J)

How to explain the subject to children with learning disabilities. (Professional K)

Parents feel 'out of date' and under confident to speak to their children about sex and relationships. (Professional L)

Teen magazines, peer pressure. (Professional G)

Over sexualised behaviour/dancing copied from MTV or music videos. Concerns about internet chat rooms and issues about 10 year olds wanting boyfriends. (Participant A)

Most concerns relate to supporting children with SEN for whom mainstream support may not be suitable/appropriate etc. (Professional M)

3.8 Continuation of Speakeasy Courses

As part of the post-training questionnaire only, professionals were asked if they planned to continue with the Speakeasy programme and the delivery of further parents courses in the future. All 20 professionals whom completed the post-training questionnaires reported that they would like to continue delivering Speakeasy in their work settings if funding, work load, and demand permits:

Yes. We are working towards running our next course in April/May [2006]. (Professional F)

Yes if asked for - as I work independently in the community delivering courses on all aspects of parenting by invitation. (Professional J)

Yes definitely – I will be delivering certain aspects of the course within the special schools. (Professional K)

Yes plan to roll out course in other schools for parents – may use some material (STI jigsaws, timeline etc) with secondary school pupils. (Professional B)

We would like to but we have no funding. (Professional N)

Yes, we are taking Speakeasy out into the community. (Professional E)

I hoping to arrange future Speakeasy course in near future. (Professional P)

Yes – I would hope to pass this on to some of our young women to facilitate some aspects of the course to others. I will be delivering this course in the future and I hope our support staff will be able to also. (Professional C)

We hope to be able to incorporate elements of Speakeasy in the range of training we provide to parent groups and schools. (Professional M)

3.9 Barriers to Success

In the post-training questionnaire only, respondents were asked to note any barriers they had experienced or could foresee in the continuation of Speakeasy for parents courses. From the matched responses received, there were three main themes that were perceived as possible barriers to the success of Speakeasy for parents. These themes were focused on funding, time, and attracting learners to courses in the first place. For example:

Time, time, time, - funding implications. (Professional M)

It is difficult to engage the community in any kind of training and learners are slow to come forward. Costs of OCN accreditation also present concern for us and offer community organisations. (Professional Q)

Initially poor response to flyers, however for this course we are having face to face contact with carers to raise profile of course and information being placed in foster carers newsletter. (Participant A)

Time constraints. It would only be possible to run one course at a time, although ideally it would be excellent to make this course more widely available. (Professional L)

In addition, two professionals reported that language barriers had been particularly problematic in terms of interpreting worksheets and obtaining interpreters to work with parents:

Interpreting the worksheets in Punjabi. Additional resources would have been good for parents/cares to take home and work with their child. (Professional K)

Problems getting interpreters to ensure sufficient understanding for 1 parent – but a very large French dictionary came to the rescue! (Participant A)

4.0 Evaluation Findings – Focus Group Discussion

In February 2006 five professionals whom had undertaken the 3-day **fpa** EarlyStart training⁵ took part in a focus group discussion in Newcastle. The aim of this focus group was to explore the experiences of professionals who were not graduates of the Speakeasy parents course, but who had recently been trained by **fpa** to run Speakeasy for parents in their respective organisations (e.g. sure start, children's centres etc). The purpose of the Newcastle focus group was to explore the experiences of a small group of professionals of their **fpa** training, and of running their first Speakeasy course for parents.

Demographically, four of the professionals reported that they were White British and one individual reported being of Bangladeshi origin. Two individuals said they were single and two reported that they were married. Four of the participants said that they were in full-time work and one reported currently working part-time. Ages ranged between 25-29 and 40-44yrs. Two parents reported having children who were aged 12yrs or under.

The duration of focus group was approximately 30 minutes and held in a room specifically allocated for the purpose. Questions covered a range of issues such as changes in skills and confidence, enjoyable, and/or challenging experiences, possible barriers in delivering courses, and ideas for future development for the EarlyStart training and Speakeasy for parents course (see appendix 3).

It was initially hoped to talk to professionals who had all delivered at least one generic Speakeasy course following their **fpa** training. However, for two of the individuals in the group, this had not been possible due to logistical difficulties in their respective organisations. For the three individuals who had delivered their first course, reflections on their previous experiences were very positive and focused primarily on issues concerning increases in personal confidence, preparation, and course timings. For example in terms

⁵ These five individuals are additional to the 20 matched questionnaire responses.

of personal confidence, professionals reported that one of the most enjoyable experiences had been seeing their learners pull together to support each other and the increased confidence that ensued on behalf of the professional:

“For me, what was really nice was that there was one person who had difficulty reading and writing and everybody else in the group supported her, and that was really nice to see...it gave me confidence - seeing them start to pull together – that I could deal with things that might come up.”

“One on our course who needed some help, it gave me confidence as a trainer that other people in the group will look after each other - ‘cos you get in a bit of a panic when you first get there that you won’t be able to deal with it, what am I gonna do – but actually found myself realising that I could do it, and they would also support each other.”

“It gave me confidence that I was doing the right thing - it didn’t give me confidence in dealing with people ‘cos I was already good with that anyway, but confidence that I was doing the right thing in terms of being able to manage a group.”

Managing group dynamics was clearly an important concern for the professionals in the focus group. Some of the narratives expressed additionally revolved around the recognition and understanding that whilst the EarlyStart training had been a valuable learning experience for the professionals in terms of working with parents and delivering Speakeasy, no training course can fully equip individuals because every parent group (and learning) situation is so different:

“It was good but when you are doing a course with parents, there’s no one way of doing it, every group is so different.”

In the discussion, professionals also commented on parental recruitment and issues of timescale. For example, professionals reported that during their course delivery, some parents had asked for the course to be extended beyond the current seven week duration as sometimes topics felt ‘rushed’. However, professionals believed that the current format of the generic Speakeasy (taster session followed by 6 weeks of topics) was appropriate because parents are sometimes daunted by the thought of signing up to something over a number of weeks, and that to go beyond seven weeks might be detrimental to the recruitment of some parents:

“There is so much scope for parents really...initially for the parents when they sign-up, it might be a bit daunting the thought of doing a longer course, but when they get started they – you know – they can see the end of a 6 or 7 week course.”

Other discussions around recruitment referred to the lack of fathers on the courses that the professionals had delivered and the need for training to perhaps reflect these circumstances. Some specific comments included:

“One guy came along at the start but found the all women environment quite domineering really and so he left the course.”

“There is a real need to get men on board, men are very [pause] traditional around here, and they don’t talk about sex, they talk about football.”

“It would be good if the training talked more about ways of recruiting fathers...and keeping them when they do turn up.”

Data from **fpa** suggest that these views are in-fact quite accurate, for *nationally, and since the start of the project, approximately only 5% of attendees have been fathers.*

Professionals were asked whether they had experienced any challenging or difficult aspects to their EarlyStart training. On the whole, responses from the group were generally positive with the exception of one issue raised by all five members of the focus group. Professionals conveyed frustration in that whilst the training pack they received to help them run Speakeasy courses were generally excellent and extremely useful, the packs were also poorly organised and required professionals to do a great deal of photocopying in order to facilitate their courses:

“The pack that comes along with the training, it’s so good - it’s full of information, and provides a really good foundation to get you started.”

“Once you’ve done one [Speakeasy course], you’re fine, the most work was the amount of photocopying you have to do, it’s a lot of work.”

“Yeah, its frustrating, all the copying - and the ordering of the pack was really strange so we, like ended up just taking it all out and re-doing it – it took a lot of time to sort it out, it was quite frustrating, all the paper shuffling.”

Other comments in the group concerned brief but specific issues in terms of the freedoms afforded to the professional to run Speakeasy courses in the respective organisations. Experiences ranged from professionals having particular designated job roles to further sexual health awareness to other professionals facing some barriers, perhaps most notably time issues in their organisations. One positive comment from the discussion reflects the former with the professional in question having autonomy in her organisation to get things moving:

“Doing the course was part of my role really, getting it up and running so I can just get on with it really, so I’m fine.”

In summary, the focus group with professionals was a lively discussion in which individuals reported positive experiences of their EarlyStart training, and for some, positive experiences of running their first generic Speakeasy courses for parents. A number of issues arose within the group and included discussions about increases in confidence (e.g. in managing groups), discussions about the low recruitment of fathers, and acknowledgement that the training pack for professionals needs some (minor) revisions in order to be more user-friendly.

5.0 Evaluation Findings – In-Depth Interview

In addition to the focus group with professionals who had completed the EarlyStart training, an in-depth telephone interview (circa. 30 minutes) was conducted with Lynnsey Brohn who is Speakeasy’s EarlyStart Trainer for the North of England. Given her

knowledge and experience of all aspects of Speakeasy, Lynnsey's views on the EarlyStart training were sought to provide additional 'richness' to the current evaluation.

The discussion with Lynnsey covered a range of topics around her role as an EarlyStart trainer, but also around the learning outcomes for the professionals delivering Speakeasy courses, and the benefits for parents more generally. As noted in both section three (pre- and post-training evaluations) and section four (Newcastle graduation focus groups), perceptions of the EarlyStart training course were overwhelmingly positive with professionals reporting a number of individual (e.g. increased confidence) and workplace benefits (e.g. raised awareness of sex and relationships priorities). Lynnsey's narrative reflected these findings by commenting that her experiences as a trainer had been very positive and that professionals tended to benefit from a number of outcomes such as increased knowledge of sex and sexual health and improved communication skills:

"I've learnt that although you have professionals in front of you, it doesn't mean they are necessarily in any better position in terms of their knowledge and previous experiences. Often they learn more about things like STIs on the course, so we hope that in delivery the training, with a certain base level of background knowledge, but that they might also learn something themselves in the process of going through the EarlyStart training."

During the TSA evaluation of the generic Speakeasy course (see Sherriff and Coleman, in preparation), parents commonly reported that one of the benefits of Speakeasy was developing communications skills beyond talking about sex and sexual health. In other words, once parents felt more confident in talking openly about sex and relationships, many also felt more confident in talking about wider parenting issues such as schooling, alcohol, and other difficult issues. Lynnsey's narrative also revealed that not only did professionals agree this was an important and useful outcome for parents, but that it was also a benefit experienced by professionals following their completion of the EarlyStart training:

"Professionals often agree, particularly on the third day of the course when they do their evaluations - that if parents can come onto the course and talk about sex and relationships, there is often a huge leap of confidence. But they can then often talk about anything because they already have the confidence to talk about one of the most difficult subjects."

"Speakeasy is a communication tool as well as a sexual health course - professionals have found it useful in learning to communicate with parents more generally about other issues in addition to sex and sexual health."

As a reminder, in their post-training questionnaires professionals were asked if they planned to continue to delivery Speakeasy in the future (see section 3.8). The findings revealed that all 20 (matched) professionals intended to continue Speakeasy in some way. Elaborating on this issue, Lynnsey reported that one of the main impacts of EarlyStart training on professionals, has been that although individuals may not necessarily continue to deliver accredited courses for parents in their respective settings (e.g. because of funding, other work commitments etc), what often continues is the model or concept of Speakeasy. Although the following passage is rather lengthy, it articulates this point well:

“...on the 3rd day of training, because they [professionals] are taking Speakeasy into their work settings, whether or not they choose to deliver accredited course, one of the things they want to continue is the Speakeasy model – one of the ways of doing that is having general workshops with parents who have been on the Speakeasy course, and come back to talk and discuss issues they have had in the home, or any more questions they have about the Speakeasy approach – it’s a real positive because it offers continuation for parents as oppose to just a one of course. For parents coming onto the course it encourages them to continue to communicate with their children all the way through to adulthood. So maybe a one of 7 week course needs to be backed up with continued contact, and I think that’s one of the main benefits of professionals taking Speakeasy into their own settings and continuing the model, if not the course – parents can have that continuation of support.”

In the above narrative, Lynnsey not only elicits the direct impact EarlyStart training can have on professionals in terms of the continuation and engage with the ‘Speakeasy model’, but also the more indirect impact the training can have for parents who complete the Speakeasy course in terms of sustained support. Extending the notion of impact further, the interviewer raised the question of the lack of fathers on Speakeasy courses, and how EarlyStart trainers (and professionals) had attempted to address this. Lynnsey reported that one of the valuable aspects of EarlyStart training was that it can be steered in order to target specific groups of parents (such as fathers, and parents of children with learning disabilities).

“Part of the way is trying to work directly with fathers workers and the discussion that it can be and should be a mixed group approach as well. As a professional, you go and deliver your first course (which is free), but after that we then hope professionals can target harder to reach groups after that first initial experience – one professional who had recently worked with a group of mums, also encouraged their partners to take the course – they are now in the process of setting up a fathers only group. So whilst fathers may not always come on to the first course, we always have them in mind and positively encourage them to attend.”

Whilst it is clear that EarlyStart training has generally been a positive experience for those involved (trainers, professionals, and parents), it has not been without its problems. The researcher asked Lynnsey to comment on any difficulties that had arisen either during or as a result of the EarlyStart programme. As noted in section 1.0 of this report, drop-out by professionals has been an issue for some trainers. In her interview, Lynnsey proposed that retention problems were probably due to a number of possible causes including: 1) professionals’ lack of awareness of the course is about including understandings of workload, 2) provision of a free course, and 3) lack of support (including funding) from the professional’s work setting.

In terms of the former, Lynnsey cited logistical problems as sometimes getting in the way of professionals receiving the detailed **fpa** course outline sent to either directly to them or there institution.

“...The difficulties for me is that although before the start of the course we have given out detailed pre-course information, it may go not always go to the person who is going on the training. Professionals come to the training without knowledge about what that the training is about. They don’t receive it and don’t know what the

training is about, and what it involves. They don't realise how much work us involved in the accreditation and completing the folder – it's such a shame because it can be quite a bit of a shock and I think in some ways, it has led to quite a bit of the drop-out."

Following on from, and related to this discussion, Lynnsey also tentatively explored the possibility that drop-out may also result from EarlyStart courses being free. More specifically, she suggested that organisations may not always take the time to read the pre-course information closely given they had no financial investment in the short-term:

"I think they sometimes see the word 'free' and probably don't look at the training information carefully because its free...and its something we will probably clamp down on in future...possibly using some sort of verbal or written contract with professional's work setting to ensure that they deliver what they set out to – that they come on the training, they know what they intentions are, why they came on the course, and the continue to deliver one or two course in their settings after their initial course that comes with the free training."

Finally, the discussion focused briefly on the difficulties some professionals face in terms of trying to fit EarlyStart course requirements into their existing work commitments. In terms of drop-out, Lynnsey suggested that organisations tended to vary quite considerably in their commitment to supporting professionals in their training and delivering of Speakeasy courses:

"Some staff do drop out once they realise how much work the course involves – But I think what happens sometimes is that staff get sent on the training, because hey its free training – I don't think its always that the staff think its too much, rather that when they go back to their settings, there have been a few occasions where they ring me up and say either its fine or there's been friction in the team – because of the time needed for preparation and delivery, and having to do folder in their own time. In other circumstances, staff are fully supported by their work settings."

6.0 Summary of Findings and Conclusions

This evaluation report has been financed by the Parenting Fund and represents the evaluation of Speakeasy EarlyStart training programme that ran from January 2005 to August 2006. EarlyStart is one facet of the wider Speakeasy programme that has been run by **fpa** for parents and professionals since January 2002. The main focus of this report was to explore professionals' experiences of their EarlyStart training. This has been done in three ways: 1) by analysing pre-and post-training evaluation questionnaires administered by **fpa** immediately before the start of the training and again after its completion, 2) conducting a focus group discussion with professionals whom recently graduated from their EarlyStart training, and 3) carrying out an in-depth interview with EarlyStart's trainer for the north of England.

The findings of this evaluation clearly indicate that professionals have gained significant benefits from their EarlyStart training such as increased confidence, knowledge of sexual health, facilitating skills and so on. Furthermore, benefits of the training have also extended to professionals' respective workplaces e.g. by helping parents to access

appropriate information and resources, assisting the development of structured SRE programmes, and providing staff with the skills and knowledge to refer parents to other service providers where needed.

Despite its apparent successes however, there are still areas of the EarlyStart training that require further attention by **fpa**. For example, the training packs administered to professionals to assist in facilitation of the Speakeasy courses were described as being frustrating and time-intensive because of their idiosyncratic organisation. Professionals expressed that re-organisation of these packs by **fpa** would be particularly beneficial for future training courses⁶. Other areas that require redress include the significant slippage (and drop-out) between days two and three of the training. At the time of writing, only 18 of the 40 courses started (45%) had completed their day three of training with a total of 12.7% participant drop-out rate to-date. This has meant a relatively limited amount of evaluation data being available for inclusion in this report.

As discussed in sections 1.0 and 5.0, reasons for this slippage have been due to a variety of reasons including participants having to fit the training into existing work commitments, lack of support for professionals from their work settings, logistical issues, lack of awareness about the course demands, and the provision of free training probably leading some organisations to not recognising fully the demands of the training on professionals. Although these issues are not easy ones to deal with, they nonetheless require some form of redress in order to improve both retention and slippage rates for the EarlyStart training. A closer examination of how organisations 'commit' their professionals to undertaking the training may be a useful exercise and lead the way for practical improvements to ensue.

Next Steps

The EarlyStart programme of free training is set to continue as a consequence of **fpa** successfully obtaining further funding from the DfES Children, Young People, and Families grant. As part of this, regional networks will be established in an attempt to encourage best practice, update on new resources and course developments, and link in with local OCN quality assurance systems. This forthcoming work ties in with the governments Every Child Matters programme and contributes to its five main aims of: being healthy, staying safe, enjoyment and achievement, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.

7.0 References

Sherriff, N and Coleman, L.M. (in preparation) Evaluation of the **fpa** Speakeasy course for parents: 2002 to 2007. Draft report on research commissioned by the **fpa**.

⁶ Based on the draft version of this report, **fpa** have already begun to revise the course resources and publicity materials. **Fpa** report that "the course manual will be made more user friendly and increased emphasis will be given in promotional material to the role of fathers" (Speakeasy Project Manager).

8.1 APPENDIX 1: Speakeasy Pre-Training Questionnaire



This pre-training questionnaire has been designed as part of the Speakeasy evaluation. It will help us to determine how well Speakeasy is helping support your work around Sex and Relationships.

A post-training questionnaire will be sent to you in six to nine months time by Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) who are externally evaluating Speakeasy. Your responses will be used for evaluation purposes only, once we have received both of your questionnaires back your name will be removed and replaced with a code. Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

What is the name and address of your work place?

(Please note: we will use this address to send you the follow-up questionnaire in 6-9 Months)

Nature of Workplace (e.g. Sure Start, Children's Centre)

Please give a brief outline of your work role

Please give a brief outline of work done in your setting relating to specific groups (e.g. teenage parents, fathers, parents with English as a second language)

PTO

Why have you chosen to attend the Speakeasy EarlyStart Training? (Tick all that apply)

- It was recommended by another setting []
- I had no choice, my manager has sent me on it []
- My job role requires a greater understanding of sex and relationships issues []
- To increase our setting's priority to sex and relationships []
- To respond to the local Teenage Pregnancy Strategy []
- To increase my confidence in talking to parents about sex and relationships []
- Parents have expressed a need for support in talking to their children about sex and relationships []
- Other (*Please specify below*) []

What do you hope to gain from the Speakeasy training?

From your current knowledge of Speakeasy, how do you feel the Speakeasy Parents Course will benefit your setting?

Please circle one answer for each statement, to show whether you agree or disagree with them:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Our setting already gives high priority to sex and relationships issues.	1 5	2	3	4	
Our setting needs to give more priority to sex and relationships issues.	1 5	2	3	4	

Please describe any specific concerns expressed to you by parents from your work place around the subject of sex and relationships e.g. influence of T.V , internet.

FOR SCHOOLS ONLY

How would you rate your schools ability to get parents involved in SRE?

Excellent Very Good Good Poor Very poor

8.2 APPENDIX 2: Speakeasy Post-Training Questionnaire

Speakeasy Early Start Evaluation Form

Code for office use:

Name:

Work Organisation and address:

Approximate date first speakeasy parent course ran:

Date of final (Day 3) training day on Speakeasy Earlystart:

Questions:

Having now completed the Speakeasy Earlystart training and delivered your first parent course, what have you gained from this?

How has the Speakeasy course benefited your setting?

Our setting already gives high priority to Sex and Relationships issues (please circle)

1 2 3 4 5

Our setting needs to give more priority to Sex and Relationships issues (please circle)

1 2 3 4 5

Are you intending to continue with the Speakeasy programme including the delivery of further parent courses. Please explain

Have there been any barriers to the success of this work? Please explain.

Please return this form in the attached pre paid envelope

8.3 APPENDIX 3: Focus Group Interview Schedule (Newcastle)



fpa Speakeasy

Focus Group 'Professionals'

Reminder of main objectives of interview (for the benefit of the interviewer):

The main focus of the interviews is to explore the experiences of professionals whom are not graduates of the Speakeasy parents course, but whom have been trained by **fpa** to run Speakeasy for parents in their respective organisations (e.g. sure start, children's centres etc). Individuals are from a variety of professional backgrounds and complete a 3-day Earlystart training course.

Introduction:

Thank you for giving up your time to be interviewed. Before we start, there are a few general things I need to tell you about:

- I work for an organisation called TSA (young people's charity – aims to help improve the lives of young people and families, does research, organises conferences, and produces publications).
- The reason we are doing this research is to evaluate the Speakeasy programme to find out if it has been/has not been effective in meeting its main aims (e.g. increasing parent's confidence, communication skills, and knowledge etc.), and explore the peer educators' experiences of training other parents.
- All the things that you and other parents tell us will be strictly confidential, and it will only be used in the research. Nothing you say will be told to anyone else and no parent will be individually identified.
- you don't have to answer any questions you chose not to
- there are no right or wrong answers – we are just interested in your views and experiences
- I will be making written notes/ a verbal recording of our conversation –no one outside of the research team will see/hear them – it's just so I can remember what we have talked about. Is this ok?

The discussion will lasts for about 30 minutes. Any questions before we start?

Warm-up Qs

- Name tags
- Outline purpose of focus group
- Each person introduces themselves, name, organisation, reason for attending Speakeasy EarlyStart Training, and favourite food!

Individuals

1. Now you have all completed the Speakeasy EarlyStart training and have all delivered at least one parent course, can you tell me whether it was generally a positive/negative experience?
2. What do you think you have gained from the Speakeasy training and experience? e.g skills, confidence, communication, teaching, planning and preparation
3. Did you find any particular challenging aspects to the EarlyStart training? e.g. difficult or dogmatic parents, beliefs in your own abilities to answer parents' questions, planning and preparation time etc. If so, how did your training help you overcome these?
4. What aspects of your training/experiences have been particularly enjoyable? e.g. sense of achievement seeing parents' confidence grow and develop, own knowledge base increasing etc
5. What barriers have you experienced in delivering courses? How did the training help you deal with these issues?
6. How did the training equip you for delivering Speakeasy in your organisations? What was good about the course, what was not so good?
7. So now you have trained for, planned, prepared, and delivered a Speakeasy programme to parents, are there any changes you would like to see in:
 - a) the EarlyStart training
 - b) the Speakeasy for parents course?

Organisational Impact

8. Has being a trainer helped your respective organisations? In other words, do you feel the Speakeasy parents course has impacted your setting? E.g. in terms of teenage pregnancy, SRE priority and institutional policy etc
9. Do you hope to continue with Speakeasy and deliver more courses in your organisation in the future? If so why, and if not why not? What are the problems, issues etc?
10. What suggestions do you have for other organisations thinking of delivering the Speakeasy course for parents?

So that's the end of the interview and thanks very much for sharing your views
Further information on this evaluation can be obtained directly from Nigel Sherriff.
E-mail: nsherriff@tsa.uk.com