



Upskilling Project Summary Report

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Summary

The South London Listens campaign identified a need for increased provision of peer-to-peer support for parents. To address this need, the Upskilling Programme was co-developed with existing PACT parents who were subsequently trained as Parent Facilitators.

The goal of the course was to have dual benefit in developing leadership skills among the Parent Facilitators and share the PACT expertise in establishing community-based support groups with other organisations.

This report includes perspectives from the Parent Facilitators (PACT parents) and the course attendees.

The content of the course was co-designed with trainee facilitators. Within this design phase, the Parent Facilitators reported very positive experiences. They felt well supported and were able to reach personal goals during the process.

Once delivery of the course began, many facilitators reported increases in confidence and self-belief, as well as improvement in skills like time keeping.

Feedback from attendees was very positive, particularly in relation to the Parent Facilitators themselves who were viewed as a considerable asset to the course. Unfortunately, attendance was low and only two programmes were completed.

The main challenge faced by the facilitators was the misunderstanding of the goals of the course, which led to mismatched expectations from client organisations in some cases, from which followed low attendance. In addition, although the aim of the course was to bolster parent-led support within other organisations, the success of the course heavily relied on some level of existing parental engagement which was not always present within client organisations.

Despite challenges, the upskilling course demonstrated the value of peer-facilitated programme both to the facilitators and attendees. Facilitators identified that future work should focus on establishing and communicating a clear programme goal and ensuring client organisations were well suited to benefit from participation.

Background and Rationale

The Covid-19 pandemic put an unprecedented strain on mental health. The impact was particularly severe among ethnic minority groups and low-income families. To respond to this challenge, community leaders in South London Citizens worked with local NHS Mental Health Trusts, NHS Commissioners and Local Council leaders to develop a plan to support the community in recovering together.

Parental Mental health was identified as a top priority, as parents were recognised as a group that had suffered immense pressure and the stigma of 'not coping' over the pandemic. Parents said that they needed mental health support but didn't know where to start. Many who tried to access services experienced long waiting lists, often while struggling with feelings of depression and anxiety. In response to this, parents asked for more co-produced peer-to-peer support to help overcome these challenges (<https://www.southlondonlistens.org>).

In response, PACT developed an 'Upskilling' course to help organisations offering parental peer-support to develop their approach and harness the power of parents to support mental health and wellbeing. The first step was to train existing PACT parents as parent leaders and co-design the course. The second step was to deliver the course to existing peer-to-peer support groups.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the Upskilling course from two distinct perspectives. Firstly, the perspectives of the parent facilitators who were trained to develop and disseminate the course, and secondly the course attendees.

Methods

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach for both facilitator and attendee perspectives.

Facilitator Perspectives

Qualitative and quantitative feedback was collected from the newly trained facilitators on completion of the Parent Facilitator training and co-design process. In addition, a focus group discussion with a sub-sample of facilitators was conducted following the completion of both courses to gain a deeper understanding of the facilitators' experiences.

Course Attendee Perspectives

Following completion of the Upskilling course in both cohorts, feedback was collected from attendees via survey, which included their satisfaction with the course content and facilitation.



For the 2nd Cohort, additional demographic information was collected, and questions were included relating to understanding of the course concepts and confidence using new skills. It should be noted that sample sizes were small and equivalent data was not collected before the course for comparison, therefore statistical analysis was not possible.

In addition to survey data, attendees were given the opportunity to consent to a follow up phone call to discuss their experiences on the course, and any subsequent impact, in more depth. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with consent.

The results section is organised as follows:

PART 1 - Parent Leader Training and Co-Design of the Upskilling Course

PART 2 - Delivery of the Upskilling Course

PART 3 - Reflections

Results

PART 1 Parent Leader Training and Co-Design of the Upskilling Course

Part 1a. Who are the PACT Parent Facilitators?

Existing PACT parents were approached by staff and invited to join the PACT Parent Facilitator training.

To date, PACT has trained and employed 12 Parent Facilitators, of which nine were actively involved in the programme post-training. The active Parent Facilitators were aged between 27-47 years and each had between 1-3 children. Seven out of the nine identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group, as is representative of the local area. Parent Facilitators have been involved in all aspects of the course, from design, to promotion, identification of clients and delivery of the course content.

When asked what first inspired them to join the training, the most common response among Parent Facilitators related to giving back to a community that had supported them or wanting more people to experience the benefits of a group like PACT, in the same way they had. The financial benefit was also a mentioned a key motivating factor.

"You feel like you are part of this community and you want to give back to it... having an idea of what this group has given to me I want to give back to it. And not just giving back to it but to the rest of the community at large because it's key to stretch your arms to other organisations."

"She said there is going to be training... it will be a form of employment once you finish the trainings so that was the incentive to start with"

Part 1b. Developing the Upskilling Course

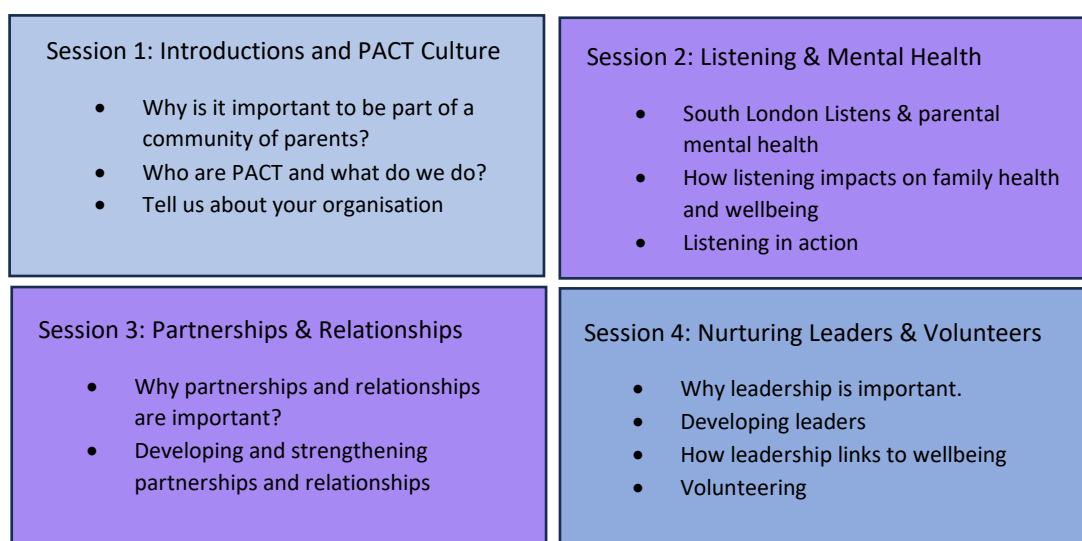
Across a series of 9 training sessions and workshops, 12 PACT parents and the PACT team co-designed the Upskilling training course. The co-design process followed a series of steps described below.

1. Determine client needs.
2. Establish the course objectives.
3. Design the course content and materials.
4. Identify PACT parents' skills and development areas.
5. Course delivery training.
6. Explore potential clients.

The product of the co-design process was a curriculum that consisted of four 2-hour sessions, for which in-person and online resources were produced. PACT Parent Facilitators were involved in promoting the course, contacting potential clients and were responsible for the course delivery.

Within the course, each session covered a different topic but followed a similar format, which focused on creating space to share stories and ideas, taking part in group discussions, and completing activities. The course content is outlined in Figure 1 below. Although the same broad syllabus was covered with all clients, the parent facilitators tailored the content to focus on the clients' needs and priorities. These needs and priorities were reported in a pre-course questionnaire, which was sent to client organisations in advance of the first Upskilling session.

Figure 1. Final Structure of Structure of Upskilling Course



Part 1c PACT Parent Facilitator perspectives on Co-Design

Nine Parent Facilitators completed the feedback survey following the training and co-design process. Overall, they reported very positive experiences. Most commonly, Parent Facilitators mentioned enjoying the style of delivery and the parent-friendly set-up which included refreshments and a creche.

“Having the tea and coffee and snacks was appreciated as I know myself and other mums have come straight from the school run and often don’t get a chance to get anything to eat on the way”

“[I liked] the style of delivery...we can share opinions and give ideas. The course was very open and friendly.”

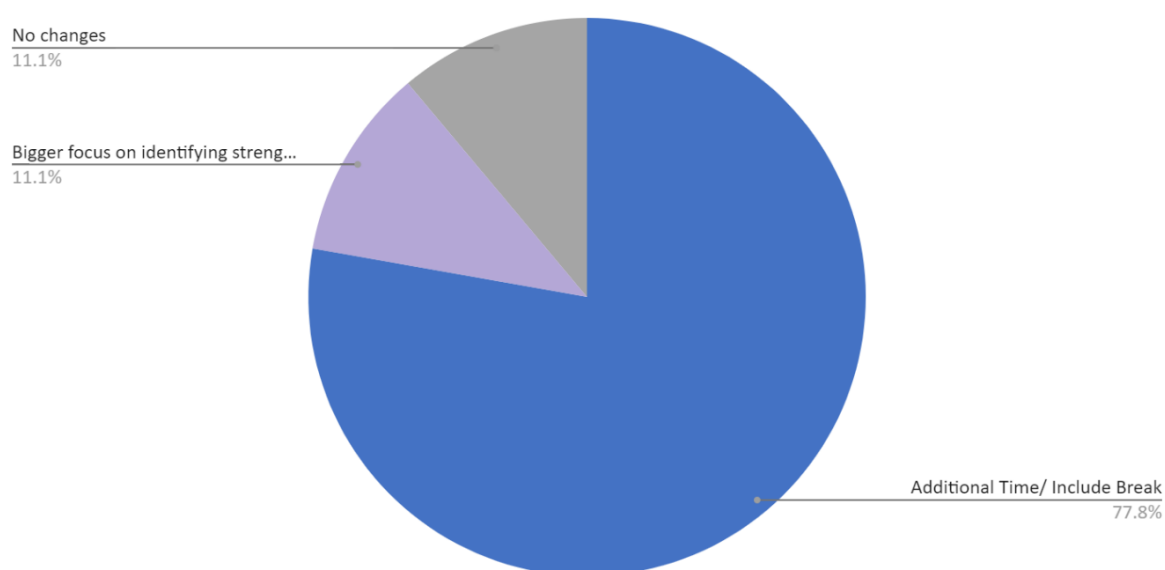
Each parent set personal goals at the start of the training. Goals varied for each individual but included self-discovery, self-confidence, public speaking, forming new relationships and giving back to the community.

Following the co-design process, 7 out of 9 Parent Facilitators reported that they had reached their goals by the end of the training. The remaining two Parent Facilitators reported moving towards

their goals but not yet reaching them. All 9 of the Parent Facilitators reported feeling confident that there was value in the course that they had developed and that it would benefit other organisations.

In terms of improvements to the co-design process, the most common theme related to requesting more time to discuss and prepare or course delivery within the training sessions.

Figure 2. Suggested Changes to Co-Design and Training Structure/ Content



PART 2 Delivery of the Upskilling Course

Part 2a Course Delivery

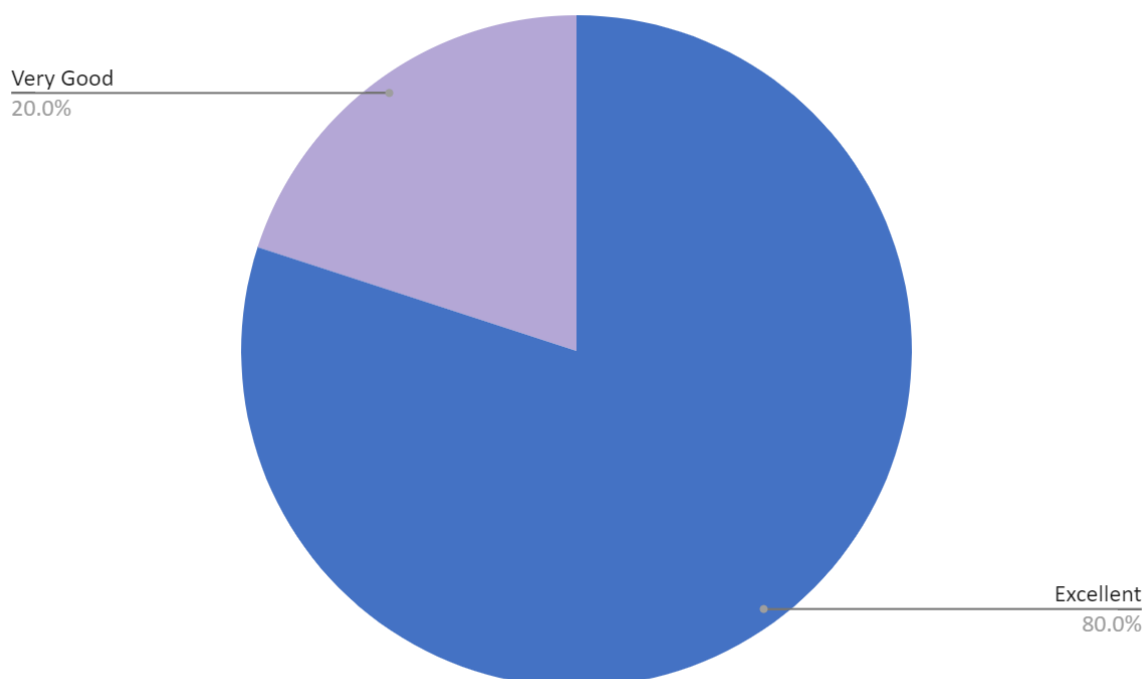
In 2022, Parent Facilitators led two complete courses at local community organisations; 1st Place Nursery and St Francis Primary school. A total of eight parents attended the courses; five at 1st Place and three at St Francis Primary School. In addition, the course was initiated in three other organisations during 2023 however all three courses were cancelled due to lack of attendance.

Part 2b Attendee Feedback – General Experience

Of the eight attendees, five provided written feedback on the course. All 5 agreed that the course met their expectations. The Parent Facilitators were recognised as a major strength of the course, with 4/5 attendees grading the facilitation as 'Excellent' (Figure 2). In addition, one attendee participated in a follow up phone call and stressed the importance and success of the Parent Facilitators. Attendees also reported enjoying the opportunity to connect with other parents.

The good thing about the course was that it was run by mums as well. They could relate to you. ... it was nice to hear different experiences and talk about different things. I really enjoyed that.

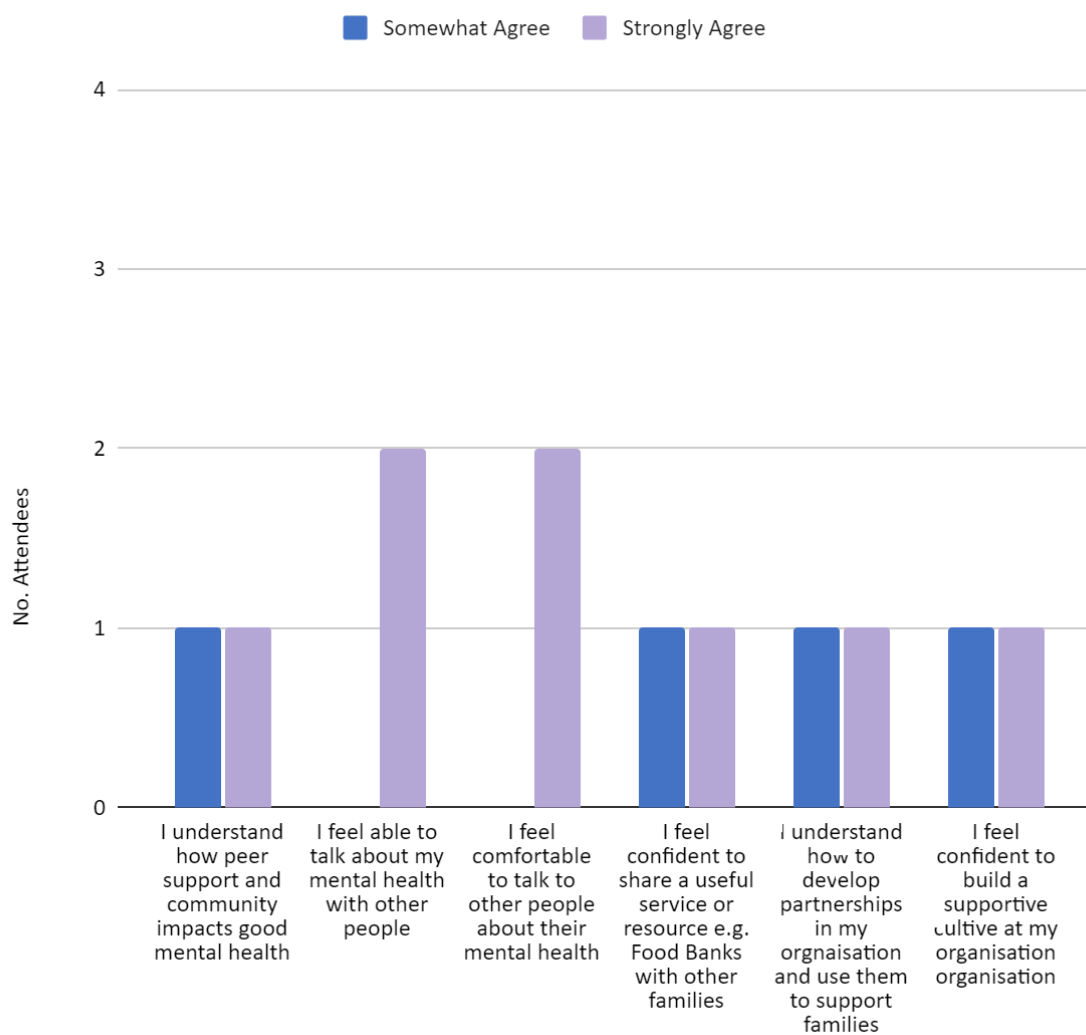
Figure 2. Attendee Rating of Course Facilitation



Part 2b- Attendee Feedback – Knowledge and Skills

In the 2nd cohort, attendees were asked about the knowledge and skills they gained during the course. Of the three course attendees, two completed the questionnaire. Both attendees responded positively regarding their knowledge and skills around peer support, mental health and community organisation (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Attendee Knowledge and Skills



PART 3. Overall Reflections from Parent Facilitators.

During a reflective discussion with a group of parent facilitators, a number of important themes emerged, which are discussed below.

Benefits to the Facilitators

The development and delivery of this programme was intended to nurture skills among both the Parent Facilitators and those attending the programme. Many parent facilitators discussed struggling with self-doubt early in the training and had improvements in their confidence and self-belief as a result of their involvement. A major component in building confidence was witnessing the impact of the course for the attendees and acknowledging the value of the work they were doing. As well as building confidence, facilitators found it incredibly rewarding to see the benefits of the course to those who were attending.

“They were struggling finding venues and it was something that PACT was able to share experience with. They were able to get a venue before the training finished so you could see that the training was actually making a difference so that was the exciting part!”

Additionally, time management and a re-introduction to skills needed for employment were mentioned by facilitators as benefits.

“I have learnt to manage my own time as well. In my day just add a little bit of the working life, to experience that after being a mother for such a long time.”

Importance of being peer/ parent leaders

For both the attendees and the facilitators themselves, the fact that the facilitators were parents and peers was an important aspect of the success of the course. Attendees found it much easier to open up and share their experiences when they knew the facilitators could relate to their experiences. For facilitators, the peer dynamic helped them to build a rapport with the attendees and put them at ease.

“They didn’t want to speak but as soon as we started talking and sharing our experiences of where we come from and what we do, we are just like you guys. There is nothing superior about me or you we are just the same people. And it was really nice and they started to share their experiences.”

“Because we went as parents, we started with the emphasis on like, we are not experts we are parents. So, it made it less daunting because if you make a mistake, you are not an expert you are a parent who is sharing what it means to be a part of an organisation.”

Challenges

The most common challenge that was discussed among the facilitators was misunderstanding and miscommunication around the purpose of the programme. The original purpose of the programme was to share lessons learnt within PACT on how best to establish or improve peer support among parents at the attending organisations, with the ultimate long-term goal of supporting parental wellbeing and mental health. However, some organisations misunderstood the purpose and expected a course focused specifically on parental wellbeing. There was therefore a mismatch in expectations which resulted in poor attendance and cancelling the programme.

“There were a couple of organisations where ...after starting it didn’t quite align with what they were expecting.”

As the facilitators tried to adapt the content of the course to include a larger wellbeing component and accommodate client requests, this led to some confusion within the team as to their goal.

“Because in my head we are trying to share this model of whatever works for us, but then we are like... but wellbeing and trying to sell as a wellbeing course to schools and everything. Which is confusing. But then we are still following what we were doing before about volunteering and this and that it is a mix that I felt, not only confusing for others but confusing for us as well.”

When reflecting on these challenges, the facilitators identified the importance of a clear aim for the programme, clear communication with clients and ensuring that potential clients were a good fit for the course. In addition, it was recognised that the success of the programme was dependent on existing engagement from parents within the client organisation. Lack of parental engagement, including very low attendance further hindered the success of the course at some organisations.

Another challenge mentioned by facilitators was the restriction of the geographic location of the organisations they were able to contact and work with. Many of the facilitators suggested that expanding the scope of organisations beyond Southwark would both increase the benefit by reaching more people who didn’t have access to PACT and open up a greater number of organisations with whom to work.

“There are families in Lambeth and in other places that are struggling and they need the help. Just recently there have been a lot of families in Southwark that have been pushed into temporary accommodation elsewhere. And they don’t have, financial means to travel here... We can move there and we can help them. Like I said they don’t know it exists until we let them know. So let us spread the word.”



Conclusions

In conclusion the Upskilling programme has shown great benefit to the facilitators in terms of learning new skills and building confidence and work readiness. The programme was also well received by the attendees among the two groups who completed it. Importantly, it has shown the value of parent leadership as the facilitators were highly praised by attendees.

Going forward, the facilitators identified the key to future success as establishing and communicating a clear goal, as well as ensuring the goal and the delivery of the course are aligned with the needs of client organisations.