

Evaluating and disseminating best practice in relation to the Greenlights project: A collaboration between Greenwich Mencap and the University of Greenwich

Learning Evaluation Research Network

Background

Greenwich Mencap has a long history of supporting people with learning disabilities and their families. They have been running the Greenlights services for five years within the Borough of Greenwich, which aims to respond to the needs of individual families. Specifically, this service provides support for families whose children have been diagnosed with a learning disability and have additional challenging behaviours, including autistic spectrum disorder and ADHD.

Greenwich Mencap's Greenlights Project takes a far more holistic, family-focussed approach than other services currently available. The use of a family-centred approach has been found to be highly effective in previous research, with studies finding an improvement in sibling understanding of challenging behaviour and thus increases in sibling self-esteem (Evans, Jones & Mansell, 2001). The greenlights intervention comprises of a maximum of ten sessions led by a trained worker within the family home and includes signposting to other services such as the Greenwich Mencap support group for families of children with ADHD.

Greenwich Mencap noticed a marked increase in the number of referrals to Greenlights in recent times, thought to be a result of a range of factors including; the uniqueness of the service available, an increase in the number of children being diagnosed with behavioural difficulties and a changing threshold in other relevant services in the Borough.

The Greenlights project has been independently evaluated by researchers at the University of Greenwich since April 2011. A collaborative partnership has ensured that expertise from Greenwich Mencap practitioners and academics from the University of Greenwich's Research Centre for Children, Schools and Families (RCCSF) has been consistently shared, ensuring continual improvement to the service by promoting an evidence-based approach.

Research Objectives

The specific aims of the research evaluation were to:

- 1) Investigate parental perceptions of the Greenlights service.
- 2) Explore any changes in parental confidence and competence in managing challenging behaviour.
- 3) Assess the healthcare benefits of the Greenlights approach in terms of reducing parent anxiety and family isolation and increasing levels of confidence for families dealing with challenging behaviour.
- 4) Investigate the socio-economic effects / cost-effectiveness of the Greenlights project.

Methodology

Design

This project comprised of two studies, collecting data across a 3.5 year period. Within this time-frame, both primary and secondary data methods were used, resulting in two longitudinal, mixed methods design. Secondary data was used to assess cost-effectiveness in relation to other services, in addition to accounting information for economic profiling.

Primary data involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. In study 1, quantitative questionnaires were administered to all parents referred to the Greenlights services at two time points; Pre (baseline) - before commencing Greenlights sessions and Post (follow-up) - after completing Greenlights sessions. In addition a subsample of five parents were asked to participate in one-to-one, qualitative, semi-structured interviews with researchers to acquire a more in-depth analysis of their perceptions of Greenlights.

In study 2, all parents referred to Greenlights were invited to take part in a structured interview, containing a series of open-ended questions, followed by the completion of quantitative questionnaires. These were once again administered Pre and Post Greenlights.

In addition to these methods, a case log-book was recorded by the Greenlights project worker over both studies, (October 2011 to March 2015). This included, but was not limited to, collating the number and the source of referrals received for the service and whether or not the case was appropriate for the Mencap Greenlights project.

Sample

All parents referred to the Greenlights service were invited to take part in the current project. In total, 47 parents participated in some form throughout both studies, with 13 parents providing data both Pre and Post Greenlights. 146 referrals were reviewed in the case log-book.

Measures

Within study 1, two forms of measures were adopted:

- The Managing Behaviour Questionnaire (A self-report measure designed by RCCSF specifically for the use in this project). This analysed parent perceptions of their children's behaviour and their confidence in the ability to manage these behaviours.
- Semi-structured interviews. These were employed in order to understand and qualitatively explore the extent to which Greenwich Mencap's Greenlights project had an effect on parents' management of behaviour.

Within study 2, three forms of measures were used:

- The Managing Behaviour Questionnaire
- The Child's Challenging Behaviour Questionnaire (Bourke-Taylor, Law, Howie & Pallant, 2010).
- Structured interviews. There were conducted to assess whether the outcome indicators for measuring success had been achieved.

The RCCSF designed a template log-book document to investigate the number and type of referrals received by Greenwich Mencap.

Procedure

Families were approached by their Greenlights worker and asked to participate by completing a questionnaire and/or an interview. Interviews and questionnaires were completed in respondent's homes by a trained psychology researcher from the University of Greenwich.

In Study 1, the MBQ was administered at T¹ and T². A subsample of five respondents also participated in semi-structured interviews. In study 2 structured interviews were conducted with participants at T¹ and T². This included the oral administration of the MBQ and the Child's Behaviour Questionnaire.

The case log-book was recorded throughout both studies over the 3.5 year period.

Results

Questionnaire responses in study 1 and structured interview and questionnaire responses in study 2 were entered into an SPSS file for analysis. In addition, T¹ interview data was added to the file in order to ensure all respondents' data was collated and treated consistently. Multivariate analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the case log-book data.

Case Analysis

Figure 1 demonstrates a breakdown of the source of referrals to Greenlights, derived from the recorded case log-book. A multitude of avenues were identified for referral to Greenlights, with the largest percentage acquired from self-referrals (18%) and social services (16%).

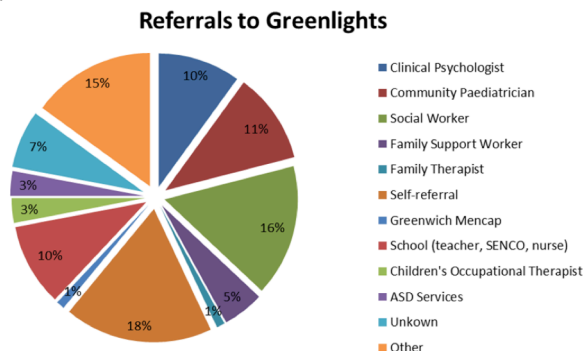


Figure 1. Pie chart demonstrating the source of referrals to Greenlights over the last 3.5 years (n=146).

Performance Evaluation

This project utilised two measures of performance evaluation. Firstly the Big Lottery outcome measures, secondly the World Bank's EAEI (Word Bank, 2015).

In reference to the Big Lottery Outcomes Measures, the project found, over a 3.5 year period, that all indicators of success had been achieved to some extent, with an overwhelmingly positive response from participants. As figure 2 demonstrates, an increase in parental confidence in managing behaviour, improved strategies in dealing with this behaviour and less perceived need for support were all established over this period.

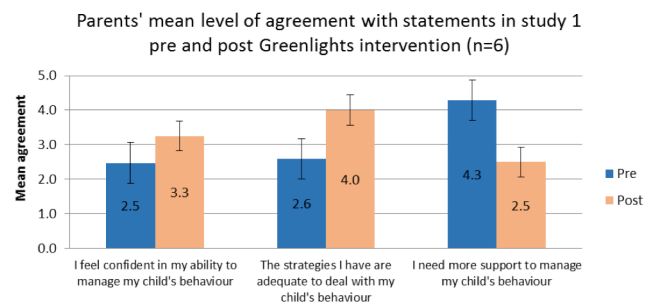


Figure 2. Stacked bar graph showing parent perceptions of Greenlights at post stage in study 2.

In study 1, 100% of participants concluded that they would refer parents, in a similar position to themselves 6 months ago, to the Greenlights service. 100% of participants also stated that they would like to stay involved with the service in the future.

Further analysis of the adopted measures, via qualitative interviews, suggested that improved parental confidence was achieved by fostering strategies for a far more equipped approach to behaviour management. For example, one parent stated

"It's just building up and up and up, and then you can't see, it's the end and it's just hopeless, so you...feel...Greenlights has kind of helped you feel less, sort of, guilty."

In both studies, parents were asked to complete questionnaires both Pre and Post Greenlights. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which certain pre- defined behaviours were difficult to accomplish with their child and how much impact each of these behaviours had on the day-to-day lives of members of the family.

Paired, within sample t-test analysis revealed that the difficulty of activities such as 'going to bed', 'going shopping', 'cleaning teeth' and 'having a meal' significantly reduced between baseline and the completion of Greenlights. Similarly the impact of activities such as 'socialising', playing outside', 'going shopping', 'having a wash' 'cleaning teeth' and 'having a meal' also significantly reduced between Pre and Post implying that Greenlights had been effective in helping parent manage these difficult behaviours.

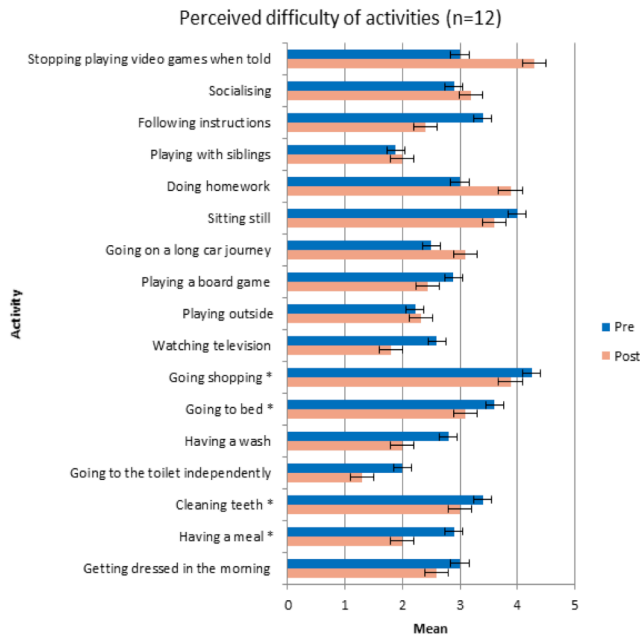


Figure 3. Bar graph showing the parents perceived difficulty of activities at T¹ and T².

Generally, Parents were overwhelmingly positive of the intervention. Parents felt that Greenlights made a positive impact on children's behaviour with 81.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Parents felt supported by Greenlights to manage their child's challenging behaviour. Greenlights was perceived to have a positive impact on family relationships as participants felt more able to participate in family activities and had more strategies in place to manage challenging behaviour post intervention.

Ultimately, Greenlights strategies were considered very effective, especially with regards to improving problem behaviour. One parent, for example, stated

"He's changed ...a lot...since we've been involved with Greenlights, his mood swings ... he doesn't swear."

In reference to the World Bank's EAEI (World Bank, 2015), it was found that the project had been filling an important gap in relevant Educational and Health services that otherwise would not have been supplied in the Borough of Greenwich. Because of this, Greenlights is establishing its wider socio-economic impact and distinguishable economic performance as a significant contribution to children mental health services. Financially, a running profit of £18,129 in 2015 has been identified, an increase on the £13,391 surplus in 2014. The service was also found to be a considerably low cost option in comparison to other services currently available, such as a private clinical psychologist or a family therapist. Finally, the fact that it addresses core issues to longer term social inclusion and mobility matters arguably makes it an outstanding initiative proven to be effective, with important potential to diffuse onto similar boroughs in London.

Conclusions

The findings from both longitudinal studies provide positive support for the use of the Greenwich Mencap Greenlights project with families whose children have a learning disability, often accompanied by challenging behaviour. The service was found to be successful in improving confidence, competence and inter-family relations in many families in crisis, when they may not otherwise have been eligible for support by other services (such as CAMHS). Parents also reported that Greenlights had enhanced their knowledge of the support services available to them, and a greater number of parents were now accessing these beneficial services as a result of this signposting.

Recommendations

Our analysis suggests that Greenlights is an innovative, holistic, flexible and comparatively lower cost service that is a valid solution from both a social and economic standpoint. It is therefore suggested that more families would benefit in relation to behaviour management, inter-family relationships and parental confidence if this initiative, based on a family-focused approach, could be diffused more widely.

Acknowledgements

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