

ALTERNATIVES' WE ARE FAMILY PROJECT

EXTERNAL EVALUATION MARCH - MAY 2011

Summary Report

We Are Family (WAF) provides holistic support to parents of young children. This evaluation, undertaken by Aston-Mansfield Community Involvement Unit, gathered information from all stakeholder groups: parents, children, staff, volunteers and outside agencies and professionals. Participation was high: 90% of parents, staff and volunteers took part.

A full report offers a detailed account of the evaluation and its findings from all these perspectives, with verbatim quotes from participants. This summary report highlights the following key findings:

- There is evidence of significant, widespread positive impact on the confidence and capacity of parents accessing the WAF project, and on their self confidence, self esteem, self awareness, emotional wellbeing, resilience and hope.
- WAF responds to need by being flexible and dynamic and continuously evolving. The project offers holistic provision and is well networked which enhances their ability to meet the needs of families thoroughly and effectively.
- WAF is experienced by parents as inclusive, non-judgemental and reliable, offering a safety that enables vulnerable parents to learn to trust, become more open and receive the support they need. The project fosters a sense of belonging, of being part of a family, building connections between people and reducing isolation.
- Relationships between staff, volunteers and parents are central to the success of the project. Staff and volunteers are experienced by parents as genuinely caring, with high levels of commitment to their work and to the families they supported.
- The way WAF works with families is extremely important. The non-judgemental approach, enabling a feeling of trust and safety, responding directly to need – are key to facilitating the sense of belonging and connectedness that is central to the therapeutic impact of the project. The project has evolved around and depends upon the qualities, beliefs and commitment of the founding staff. It might be useful to capture the WAF ethos in writing and develop strategies to ensure this is passed on systematically and effectively through induction and training to all future staff and volunteers.

- The project is accessible to those who discover it, engaging 'hard to reach' families, some on the edge of survival. However some parents had arrived at crisis point and it would have been far better for these families to have engaged earlier.
- WAF identifies and builds on the potential of the parents who get involved. There were a number of examples of parents moving on through the project through volunteering, training or paid work.
- It will be important for the project to stay small enough to feel family-like but big enough to respond to need. There is a potential future clash between increasing outreach/accessibility and maintaining quality/effectiveness.
- Sustainability and consistency are essential to a project working with vulnerable, otherwise un-supported people. Project managers should consider different ways to protect the future of the project
- It may be important both to the accessibility and the dynamics of the project that it does not target only very vulnerable families but enables a broader mix of people.