
Evaluation of Parenting By Connection for Community Benefit SA

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It is well recognised that good early childhood experiences are essential to each child's future learning and ensuring young people realise their full potential. Learning begins in the home, long before children start school. Early supportive relationships, both within the family and community, help our kids develop well. (SA Strategic Plan 2011)

Final Evaluation Report

Parenting by Connection

This final evaluation report has been prepared by Loretta Geuenich from the Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management. This evaluation is in response to a request by Community Benefit SA which provides funding to incorporated, non-government, non-profit, charitable and social welfare organisations for projects which will improve the well-being, quality of life, community participation and life management skills of disadvantaged individuals and communities.

The evaluation report draws on quantitative and qualitative data collected by Parenting by Connection trainers at the completion of the courses they delivered, interviews with the Parenting by Connection Project Director, Ann Hefferan, and phone interviews with participants, as well as video footage a sample of participants. It comments on the continued impact of Parenting by Connection in the lives of early childhood professionals, parents/carers and their children. Special thanks to Ann Hefferan, John Smith (Southern Junction Community Services), Paula Dickson (Community Benefit SA), Associate Professor Jo Baulderstone (Flinders University), Dr Leonie Hardcastle, and to the 21 parents and carers who generously gave of their precious time.

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Executive Summary

Parenting by Connection (offered by Community Transformations Inc.) is an early intervention, positive parenting project which provides parents and carers with effective tools to nurture strong connections with children and resolve universal parenting challenges. The Parenting by Connection approach is based on more than three decades of research and practice (see Hand in Hand Parenting USA) and aims to build lasting relationships as well as parent leadership at home and in the broader community. It offers talks, classes, workshops, support groups, intensive training, courses, booklets, one-on-one consultations, and leadership pathways. A theory of change of the Parenting by Connection approach is provided at Appendix C

Parenting by Connection received funding under the Department of Families and Communities, Community Benefit SA fund and has demonstrated the value of providing training and support for parents in the areas of:

- The vital role of emotional connection with their children in strengthening the parent-child relationship, in the child's brain development and in the child's ability to function well;
- Bringing children's off-track behaviour back 'on track' and supporting children through their times of strong emotions;
- Becoming aware of 'restimulation' – that is, where unresolved, and hurtful experiences in parents' own childhoods when restimulated, drives *their* behaviour off-track and interferes with their ability to reflect and think, resulting in a reaction rooted in their own early years, rather than a fresh response;
- Providing safe and supportive environments, which assist parents, over time, to offload stress and heal childhood tensions, thereby supporting more effective, intelligent and confident parenting;
- Building the confidence and self-esteem of parents (and other carers of children) with the knowledge and insight that they are, at all times doing the best they can, within the context of past and present circumstances
- Accessible, skill-based tools that parents can use in the home, supported by Listening Partnerships between parents;
- The establishment and use of ongoing support groups and mentoring; and
- Building and furthering community-based parent leadership.

While initial activities, up to 2011, were directed to parents in the outer southern suburbs of Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills, in 2011, this was expanded to the Inner Southern-suburbs, the North-Eastern and Western suburbs of Adelaide.

The Parenting by Connection service model incorporates:

- Providing accessible and inclusive one-off events, and courses, based in local communities

- Training in the use of skill-based tools
- Ongoing one-to-one, and group support
- Leadership training and mentoring
- Working in partnership with other community based service providers and initiatives, and
- Building on existing community capacity

Target groups supported by the Parenting by Connection Project have included disadvantaged single parents, parents from CALD backgrounds, mums, dads, parents with special needs, children with special needs, some Aboriginal parents, grandparents, children with various mental health and spectrum order disabilities.

Interviews with parents, conducted in 2011, review of course evaluation feedback, and video footage observed by the evaluator, provided evidence of positive changes in behaviour for parents/carers, and children. Relationship changes for parents were identified in several contexts - parent-child within the family as a whole, and with other adults and children in social and workplace contexts. Changes for children were identified within the context of home, childcare, school and public environments.

Interviews revealed that parents who participated in the program between 2005 and 2010 continue to use the Parenting by Connection tools they learnt. Some parents indicated they had connected to other supports offered by the program and/or have accessed ongoing support in the wider community. For those who have connected to additional support through Parenting by Connection such as ongoing skill-building and leadership training groups it appears likely that this involvement will continue over time as they then begin to offer what they have learnt to other parents in the community. The program was also effective in working with a wide range of community-based services and activities, thereby increasing accessibility by local families and also leveraging capacity and resources.

The Parenting by Connection program recognises that parenting is a complex task that continues to challenge parents for in excess of 20 years. The program has shown the importance of supporting parents through an approach that:

- Nurtures and frees parents' intelligence through, stress release, emotional healing, peer support and confidence building;
- Encourages parents to develop on an ongoing basis their own parenting wisdom through implementation and ongoing appropriation of the Parenting by Connection 'Listening to Children' tools;
- Offers the possibility of deep and lasting change to parent-child relationships and attachment, as well as increased connection with partners and in other relationships in general. This is supported by well-trained and qualified leaders and instructors who have undertaken both theoretical and practical training in the approach;

- Offers the possibility of ongoing support and development given that engagement with parenting occurs for around 20+ years; and
- Develops community-based, peer support, and leadership through building a movement of parents who help build community capacity through their own increasing parenting expertise and sense of belonging.

The program has supported a range of positive outcomes for parents, children, and families as a whole including partners and with extended family members. Additional outcomes were reported in the areas of social networks and in the workplace. Changes were observed and reported included:

- Increased connection and attachment;
- positive behaviour changes
- stronger and more open relationships;
- increased confidence and esteem;
- increased capacity for working with emotions and complexity;
- decreased stress, anxiety and isolation;
- enhanced problem solving and life management capacity;
- families more relaxed and able to enjoy each other;
- a sense of community with other local parents; and
- a sense of greater wellbeing.

In addition the program appears to have supported the building of community capacity through increased parenting expertise, stronger social networks and ties, and the development of local community-based parent leadership.

There are insufficient services for families. The unmet need incredibly outstrips the services ... Parenting by Connection is a highly effective program: It is, well structured and brings about results – the end result is the true test of any program (Ex-Executive director –DFC)

Parenting by Connection articulates well with a wide range of local and national policy frameworks and responds to global calls for early intervention and prevention approaches to child protection and community safety (Parkinson 2011; and Allen 2011). However the challenges for programs like Parenting by Connection is securing longer-term funding which will allow it to expand its base, thereby supporting more families and opening up more leadership pathway which will enable greater sustainability of both learning and supports for families in need.

I feel much better Parenting by Connection than 'parenting by punishment' (Participant)

Parenting by Connection has helped show me what is really important to me, and I want to spread the message far and wide to all parents. (volunteer Group leader)

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1. Introduction

Parenting By Connection is an early intervention, positive parenting project which enables *parents and caregivers to learn how to nurture the bonds of connection with children* (Aced-Molina 2006:1) and which has received funding under the Department of Families and Communities, Community Benefit SA (CBSA) fund. CBSA fund a diverse range of projects aimed at increasing the capacity of community organisations to deliver quality service and strengthen the capacity and skills of individuals and families experiencing disadvantage. There is an emphasis on funding programs which support participants to enhance their full range of capacities, strengthen resilience, develop leadership qualities and become more active members of their local community.

Parenting by Connection first received funding from CBSA in 2005, and has been successful in securing funding for further rounds. Each round has funded a separate component of the service delivery with each building on the previous. These have included:

- 2006 – Bringing Listening to Children to Additional Parents
- 2007 – Leadership and Advanced Leadership training
- 2008 – Expanding and Strengthening the Parenting by Connection Network
- 2009 – Implementing the Parenting by Connection *Building Emotional Understanding* Program
- 2010 – Achieving Financial Sustainability
- 2011 - Strengthening Community Partnerships To Reach Additional Families Over Wider Area

In accordance with CBSA funding requirements Parenting by Connection has submitted yearly evaluation reports. The 2011 funding round emphasised program consolidation and longer-term sustainability, and both CBSA and the Parenting by Connection team thought there was value in a report that would evaluate the sustainability of outcomes for program participants across all previous funding rounds. The Director of Community transformations was keen that an independent review of the program occur, yet was not able to identify/secure funding for this purpose. The author of this report became familiar with Parenting by Connection through work on the SA Communities for Children sites and agreed to provide support to Parenting by Connection through reviewing existing data, conducting a small number of interviews and providing independent analysis and comment. What this report is not able to comment on is the longer-term benefits for families who participated or the benefit of the Parenting by Connection approach in relation to other or similar parenting programs. Please see page 15 for a further discussion of the evaluation methodology and its limitations.

This report comments on positive changes for individuals, families and communities as a result of involvement with the Parenting by Connection projects, and identifies the key elements which have contributed to success.

The true end result is the test of any program. If the clients are actually saying that they are getting improvements in their life as a result, that's the biggest thing to make a program effective for the disadvantaged. From their frame of reference if it's working then it's working. (Previous SA Government Executive)

Overall aims of Parenting by Connection

The primary objectives of the organisation that delivers Parenting by Connection, Community Transformations Inc, are to:

- support parents and allies of children to care effectively for themselves and for young people of all ages;
- train leaders who will work for a better community and national policy regarding parents and children;
- undertake any other project in the community that builds and rebuilds connections between people with the outcome of building a healthier community;

Accordingly, the program aims to support parents to build and maintain a close connection with their children and is grounded in four principles: Respect, Connection, Listening and Leadership. The program teaches four Listening to Children tools - "Special Time," "Playlistening," "Setting Limits" and "Staylistening" with which parents can build and rebuild connection with their child/ren. The program also teaches two parent-to-parent Listening tools – Listening Partnerships and Support Groups that parents can use in order to off load the tensions that interfere with their ability to guide their children with love and to connect with them in a thoughtful way. (Lezin et al 2004)

Community Transformations has used Community Benefit SA funds to deliver the program primarily to people experiencing disadvantage in a multitude of different and intersecting ways. The program has been run in areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage and/or has been run in partnership with agencies who work with parents with complex needs (Forbes DECS Children's Centre, and Time For Kids).

Areas in which Parenting by Connection has worked since 2005 include:

- Parents living in the Southern and Outer Hills areas of Adelaide (e.g. Hackham, Morphett Vale, Christies Beach, O'Sullivan's Beach, Aberfoyle Park);
- Outer Adelaide Hills (Strathalbyn and Mt Barker); and
- Adelaide West (Seaton, Port Adelaide, Woodville and surrounds)

Parenting by Connection participants include people (parents/carers) from a broad range of 'target groups' including:

- Parents under court orders in regard to their children;
- Parents with health care cards;
- Parents with Mental Health 'challenges' (e.g. depression, anxiety, epilepsy);

- Parents of children with a disability (including physical, mental health, Aspergers, Autism, and other spectrum Disorders, Global Developmental Delay and ADHD);
- Parents of children with Challenging Behaviours;
- People of colour who are not Australian Aboriginal;
- Aboriginal;
- People of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CALD);
- Sole parents;
- Young female parents who are homeless; and
- Grandparents.

Broader context

Governments in Australia are committed to making sure children receive a good start in life and there are many federal and state programs aimed at supporting families and children (for example the Federal Communities for Children initiative, and Stronger Families, Safer Communities, SA). However due to short funding cycles, competitive tendering processes (which inhibit the development of lasting local level collaborative relationships), and narrowly specified or short-term program/ activities many families are not receiving the support they need. In addition figures for children living care in care in Australia are rising despite significant sums of money being poured into the child protection system (Lamont et al 2011). Yet there is strong evidence suggesting that government to look at the savings (both economic and social) they could make by investment in investing in early intervention and prevention approaches shown to be effective (Allen 2011)

Nationally for the period 2009-2010 there was a 5.3% increase in the number of children living in care (foster, kinship, residential) compared with the period 2008-2009 and this has almost doubled since 2001 (Lamont 2011) In South Australia in 2008 there were 1,841 children living in care. By 2010 that number had risen to 2,188. On average the costs for caring for these children are 52% higher than those for children not in care (McHugh 2002 cited in Lamont, 2011).

The most recent research and evaluation findings indicate that the savings to governments of investing in effective, evidence-based early intervention programs are significant – both financially and in terms of the wellbeing of our communities and society (Allen 2011b; C4EO 2010; O'Mara et al 2011)

Evidence base

Parenting by Connection uses a strengths-based approach in that it acknowledges and builds upon existing parenting skills, deep care for their children, and desire to be the best parent they can parent they can. It may differ from some strengths based approaches in that parents/carers are also supported to look at where their parenting style may not working so well for both them and their children, develop an understanding of its origins and then use the Parenting by Connection tools to support them to re-orient their parenting style so that it continues to support the social, emotional, physical and intellectual development of their children.

A wide range of recent evidence supports the Parenting by Connection approach in relation to:

- The type of support offered
- Skilled staff
- Skills training
- Key characteristics of programs successful in overcoming barriers to participation
- The importance of early intervention; and
- Child protective factors

The type of support offered

A large body of research into early intervention and family programs (including long-term studies, meta-evaluation and research into parent/carers experiences) supports the effectiveness of approaches that:

- Are family centred, and build on existing family strengths and resilience (instead of weaknesses) (Centre for the Study of Social Policy, 2003). CWIG (2008);
- combine individual and group approaches, offering access to a wide range of resources and supports (including information, advice, parenting tools, emotional support, opportunities to develop personal and social skills, build family relationship skills etc. (Colosi & Dunifon, 2003; Lundahl, Nimer, & Parsons, 2006; CWIG, 2008; O'Mara *et al*, 2011; and Bromfield, Lamont, Parker, & Horsfell 2010);
- are culturally appropriate and inclusive in ways that are consistent with the communities in which they are run (Lundahl, Nimer, & Parsons, 2006; CWIG, 2008; O'Mara *et al*, 2011; and Bromfield *et al* 2010);
- make use of peer support and local leadership as well as creating ongoing opportunities for parents to share with each other their struggles and learning's (C4EO, 2011);
- have a focus on learning, as well as opportunities for practice, and reflection; and
- offer a continuum of support over time (C4EO, 2011).

Being able to offer individual support alongside of group support has been found to be more effective when working with families with complex needs. Commensurate with this is consistency of support over time (C4EO 2011; CWIG, 2008). Senior Research Associate, Deb King commented that the Parenting by Connection approach and groups provided an

'important forum for learning how to become 'better' parents: to connect with their children and have more loving relationships, to make time for their children, to empower their children to make good choices and take responsibility; and to discipline their children within a supportive and nurturing framework.' (King, 2007)

Skilled staff

Skilled program staff with a 'sound theoretical grounding as well as hands-on experience' in working with families experiencing disadvantage has been found to have a significant bearing on parent support and education program success (CWIG, 2008; O'Mara et al 2011; C4Eo 2010)

Skills training

Parenting skills training has been shown to have a strong positive impact on children's wellbeing both in terms of reduced notification, positive changes in child behaviour, and improved parent-child relationships. As children transition into adolescence those changes have translated into improved social and emotional outcomes including a reduction in offending behaviour (Asmussen et al 2007; Barrett 2010; CWIG 2008; (Aced-Molina 2006:16)

Overcoming barriers

Mara et al (2011) identified a range of strategies and approaches of effective parenting training and education programs which supported parents and carers to engage. These included:

- Locally accessible;
- Flexible delivery i.e. using a mixed approach – web based, books and leaflets, one-to-one and phone support;
- Non-stigmatising environment – practitioners being hospitable, environment and groups are emotionally supportive; and the
- Value of choice e.g. voluntary participation, provides a range of tools, and parent involvement in decision making

Parenting by Connection offers all of the above to participants and their families.

The importance of early intervention;

We must invest now in neglected children to improve their lives and avoid future costs to society. We cannot afford the alternative of inaction. (Allen 2011: xxiii)

Prevention and early Intervention programs are increasingly being seen as critical not only in reducing the suffering of parents/carers and children at risk and preventing future trajectories that would increase and not reduce disadvantage and social isolation, but also for increasingly cash-strapped governments who want to ensure better 'bang for buck'.

Key points highlighted in recent research include:

- The necessity of support before a problem develops or exacerbates
- The importance of low-level ongoing prevention particularly where families are experiencing is experience poverty (O'Mara et al 2010)
- The value of programs with both targeted and universal benefits – leads to less stigmatisation makes it easier to identify those needed additional support (O'Mara et al 2010). A USA based comparative study of three groups (including a control group) using Parenting by Connection's Listening to Children tools concluded that:

Taken together, the results of the three studies suggest that LTC (Listening to Children) can be as relevant and effective among middle-class mothers as among low-income mothers of color. (Wolfe 1999: 86)

- *The importance of engaging parents in a collaborative approach, building on their strengths and taking account of their views and experiences (O'Mara et al 2011)*

Child protective factors

Early intervention and parent education programs highlighting family strengths instead of weaknesses have been found to reinforce existing family protective factors and thereby prevent either the occurrence or reoccurrence of child abuse and neglect (CWIG, 2008). In addition programs with a focus on healing, particularly the child-parent relationship, may offer increased protection in situation where children are potentially at risk (Bromfield et al 2010).

Parkinson (2011:72) lists five protective factors that 'organisations working with families should seek to promote'. These are:

- Nurturing and attachment;
- Knowledge of parenting and child/youth development;
- Parental resilience;
- Social connections; and concrete supports for parents.

A local study completed commented that data gathered indicated that the Parenting by Connection approach (using the Listening to Children tools) *is of great benefit to children's emotional wellbeing, particularly in dealing with issues around separation, transitioning, or challenging behaviours .. (King 2007)*

Societal benefit Cost effectiveness Each child with untreated behavioural problems costs an average of £70,000 by the time they reach 28 years old – 10 times the cost of children without behavioural problems. Allen & Duncan-Smith 2008)

'The police service has much to gain from capable parenting. Raising babies, children and young people who prove to be socially and emotionally capable is important, since this will inevitably mean fewer offenders in later life. We must invest now in neglected children to improve their lives and avoid future costs to society. We cannot afford the alternative of inaction. (Allen 2011: xxiii)

As mentioned above, recent research suggests that early intervention programmes can provide significant value for money for the taxpayer, when compared to late intervention programmes that are more expensive to provide and have a lower success rate. (Allen 2011:6).

O Mara et al (2011) suggest that positive parenting programs (like Parenting by Connection) which are aimed at changing parent behaviour, and supporting better parent -child and whole family relationships and functioning can have cost benefits to society as a whole. However programs need to be able offer ongoing support especially for those families who find it hard to engage with services. Short-term, unstable funding was seen to negatively affect the capacity of promising parenting program in terms of effective delivery, developing leadership (voluntary and through formal training)and the ability to conduct meaningful monitoring and evaluation O' Mara et al 2011:75)

2. Evaluation Methodology

The Director, trainers and volunteers of Parenting by Connection have maintained ongoing records of participation, and program outputs, as well as undertaken routine evaluation and feedback. The author of this report did not become involved in an evaluating capacity with Community Transformations until late 2010 and therefore did not have input into the design of any evaluation tools, approaches or processes before that date. This evaluation report draws on a range of evidence including:

- Feedback forms for all participants who undertook the new Building Emotional Understanding Courses in 2008 (from 2nd school term) were available;
- Evaluation reports for each funding round including an interim evaluation report for round 28;
- 19 follow-up phone interviews conducted with parents 13 of which were conducted by Parenting by Connection staff and a volunteer, and 6 by Flinders University staff¹ Two parents responded to Flinders University staff by email;
- Feedback from a parent volunteer;
- Viewing (by Flinders staff) of three DVD's containing footage of (post program) parent-child play and engagement
- Other relevant documents, including Community Benefit funding guidelines letters of support and CBSA funding round applications
- Interviews with two Executive Managers - one at the Department of Families and Communities, and one currently with a local NGO (but previously was with the Department of Families and Communities);

Examples of feedback and evaluation forms used by PBC trainers, as well as copies of the survey instrument used for follow-up interview with parents can be found in Appendix 1

Limitations of the evaluation methodology

This report is primarily to fulfil final reporting requirements by Parenting by Connection for Community Benefit SA. The report is unfunded which has limited the scope and integrity necessary for a truly independent summative evaluation. It draws primarily on data gathered by Parenting by Connection (feedback forms, parent interviews, and video footage etc) supplemented with some interviews conducted independently, construction of a theory of change (see Appendix C), observation of video footage, and a review of recent literature conducted by the author. People interviewed were identified by the Director and while she aimed for broad representation of participants (i.e. different age, gender, social background, location, length of time since participating etc) is likely that those who were available for interviewing were those parents/carers with more positive experiences of the program. What this evaluation is not able to comment on is those people for whom the program did not work or had limited benefit, the long-term benefits for parents/carers,

¹ Note: Feedback from interviews undertaken by Flinders University staff was consistent with that from interviews done by the PBC Director and volunteers.

and how the Parenting by Connection approach compares in terms of long term sustainable results with other local parenting programs.

While the scope for true independence of this evaluation was limited the author notes that interview findings conducted by Flinders University staff were consistent with those conducted by Parenting by Connection staff.

3. Key Elements of the Parenting by Connection model

Key elements of the Parenting By Connection Model included:

- Introductory talks
- Course based delivery
- Skills-based tools
- Individual consultations
- One off-sessions and workshops for existing parents
- Ongoing group events
- Provision of Resources
- Community events
- Skilled workers/leader
- Emphasis on parent skills and behaviour
- Holistic approach that supports 'healing' from past distressing/hurtful experiences
- Safe and welcoming environment
- Community based Leadership Training and pathways.
- A creative community development approach
- Partnership with community-based agencies and groups (add attachment re Rounds)

Introductory talks

Parenting by Connection has delivered free introductory talks about the model, and its approach, to a wide range of community members in different contexts. These have included local community centres, child care centres, TAFE campuses, pre-schools, and libraries, churches, and the Annual General Meetings of many organisations. These talks allow for presentation of information in a convenient and or familiar local setting, space for questions and answers, as well as an opportunity for participant education in relation to the approach and underpinning theory.

As participants are not required to register at these events there are no accurate statistics. However, records indicate approximately 20 of these events have been held over the past five years, with a conservative estimate of in excess of 400 parents/professionals participating.

Course based delivery

Course based delivery has been shown to be important in Building Emotional Understanding (Aced-Molina n/d) and when combined with individual support is the most effective way to build parents' skills, enhance social connections, and increase the capacity of parents and families to access other supports (CWIG, 2008; Lundahl, Nimer, & Parsons, 2006).

Parenting By Connection offered 7-8 week course-based program titled Building Emotional Understanding. From 2006-2011 forty-one separate Building Emotional Understanding and Tantrum Training Courses were held in community based locations with a total of 348 parents/families/early childhood workers participating. The total number of immediate family members (i.e. spouse/partner and children) directly impacted by these courses was 1,073 for the five years. See the Actual Outcomes section below for a discussion of the broader reach of impacts in relation to extended family, friends, neighbours and workplaces.

Skills-based tools

The parent-child emotional connection is the central focus of these [i.e. PbC] tools and practices. This focus contributes to the complete development of a child's brain and his ability to be resilient in a complex and challenging world. (Aced-Molina 2006:17)

Parenting by Connection tools are accessible to parents/carers from all educational, cultural and personal backgrounds.

These tools give parents access to the important work of self-reflection, stress release and engagement with others. In turn, parents are able to better meet their children's core needs for connection by listening to, playing with, and caring for their children. (Aced-Molina 2006:17)

There are two types of Parenting by Connection tools

- Tools for use with children; and
- Listening partnerships for adults

Tools for use with children:

[The]tools to help our children grow into healthy happy balanced people. This is what I want most for my children (BW)

Special Time

Special Time sets aside a regular, limited period of time for the child to direct the parent in one-on-one play. The parent is receptive to the wishes of the child, and offers eye contact, affection, and warm comments and tone. The parent does not teach, direct, or multi-task during this time.

Playlistening

Parents should create distinct play periods during which the child has the upper hand in the play he has chosen. The parent should look for ways to play that let the child laugh for extended periods of time while exploring the more powerful role

Setting Limits (The Three L's)

The three 'L's are 'Listen – Limit – Listen' and translate into the following:

- Listen – Gather information: Does your child need assistance? Do your expectations fit your child? Are you running on empty? Is your child unreasonable?
- Limit – You have listened and determined that your child's behaviour is indeed off-track. Act to stop the off-track behaviour, if your child needs it, i.e. bring the kicking, hitting child onto your lap, away from her target, or put your hand on a treasure she is grabbing from another child so that it can't be taken away.
- Listen – Stay close and offer caring as your child releases emotional tension.

Stay-listening

When a child is upset, crying, or having a tantrum, allow the child to cry and listen to the child while he cries. Tell your child, "I'm sorry it's hard; I'll stay with you while you're upset."

I am still doing all four ...now that you mention it! I didn't realise until you identified each one. Also, with Special Time, we call it Special Time. (i6)

With Setting Limits, we are doing that lots because he is 2 yrs old and testing boundaries. Like he demands, "Mummy come now!" and throws a tanty. I get down to his level and say something like, "When mummy finishes what she's doing, she will come" and I listen till he's OK. Then I do finish whatever it was. We are doing a lot of that. Special Time keeps his behaviour pretty on track though. Has given me power and freedom to not get stressed. Rather, just be in charge of parenting. (i9)

It's good having these tools. Even though you don't use them all the time, when you do, they work so well. (i12)

Listening partnerships for adults

Two parents come together in a quiet place, away from children, work, or other demands and decide on a set time to exchange listening – anywhere from 5 minutes to a half an hour each. One person talks, the other listens. Then the partners switch roles.

Guidelines: adopt an attitude of respect for each other, assume your listening will make a difference, give your full attention, don't interrupt or offer advice. Respect your partner's ability to experiment and problem solve.

It's the only one that builds adult listening time in – others pay lip service but don't do it. (i8)

Society today has lost the ability to communicate effectively. It gives insight into different strategies that need to be taught to everyone. (i13)

A reflective learning model

Parenting By Connection gives parents a toolbox of tools for application and testing, trying out and then reflecting on in the group environment

Individual consultations

PBC offers participants individual consultations. The purpose of these consultations is:

- Additional support for parents in working with 'off track' children's behaviours, and their own personal issue restimulated through being in a parenting role; as well as
- identification of leaders and beginning the process of engaging future leaders

The combination of one to one and group support reflect best practice in relation to parenting groups, and supporting positive behaviours and future outcomes for children. (O'Mara et al 2011)

In its first three years of operation (2005-2008) Parenting By Connection provided approximately 60 hours per annum of one-on-one support for parents and other program participants. In the past 2 years (2009-2011) this number has jumped to over 120 hours each year. The Director commented that the significant increase is related to increased support to Families SA program participants with Court Cases, providing counselling and home visits, writing support letters, attending Court sessions and or liaison with solicitors.

Short sessions and workshops

Two-session Introduction to Skill-building Groups

At the time of production of this report Parenting by Connection had begun trialling a 2-session Introduction to Skill-building Group, immediately following the completion of the Building Emotional Understanding Course, rather than trying to link parents to an existing group. Parenting by Connection aims to connect parents/carers into ongoing support as soon as possible following course completion as possible. However many participants have busy lives with multiple demands and find it challenging to give themselves permission to use their time attending an ongoing support group.

In addition parents are more likely to participate in a Skill-building group if it is an extension of their own course, rather than an existing group. This appears to be related to the safety of connections built during PbC courses and the opportunity to have continued 'ownership' of their own group and its process.

One-off talks and workshops

The *Parenting by Connection* Program team is available to lead one-off talks and workshops on a range of issues that are key to parents and professionals. Topics focus on the needs of groups such as adolescents, mothers with postpartum depression, new mums, foster parents, adoptive families, special needs children, teen parents, divorced families, step-families and others.

Ongoing group events

Parent Skillbuilding groups

Parent Skillbuilding groups support the ongoing development of basic skills and understanding learnt in Building Emotional Understanding courses. Each session runs for approximately 2-3 hours and groups occur on a fortnightly basis.

4 of these per annum from 2005-2007, and 5 (for each year from 2008-2011)

I am also part of a skill building group that meets every second Monday and although I do not know these people of a social level, i like it that way, and also get a great deal personally from listening and being listened too. I know this process helps me deal with my own issues and gives me greater patience and confidence in dealing with my family. (i20)

Parenting by Connection Leaders Skillbuilding Groups

Ongoing Leaders Skill-building Groups are offered each year and run for approximately 2-3 hours per fortnight. Skillbuilding Parent Leaders sessions develop each participant's ability to lead parents to apply Parenting by Connection Listening Tools within the family, and Skillbuilding Professionals sessions develop each participant's ability to lead colleagues in work with parents and children

Participants are asked to use Listening Tools consistently for the duration of their participation and contribute to a supportive co-learning environment.

Ongoing Group events offered resulted in a total of 920 x 2-3 hours parent sessions from 2006-2011, plus 85 Leader Support Groups from 2008-2011.

Provision of Resources

A wide range of resources and supports are available for parents and leaders. These include:

- Booklets
- DVD's
- Access to the Director and trainers
- online support advice including discussion groups and opportunities for dialogue with Patty Wipfler via the USA based Hand In Hand Parenting website (see <http://www.handinhandparenting.org/>)

An excellent local website (see <http://www.transformations.org.au/>) offers online response as well as access to video's, webinars, downloadable articles and other resources.

Once parent commented on the value of having access to Patty Wipfler via the website:

My son kept running away and hiding under the bed when he was mad, and after writing on the discussion board Patty Wipfler posted a response and because I had done the course I understood what she meant – it was amazing how it worked. (i13)

Community based Leadership Training and pathways.

Integral to the Parenting by Connection approach is its leadership model. The Director comments

[I]n order to establish an ongoing resource for parents in the long engagement in the job of parenting, we train up leaders of Skillbuilding Groups (which are ongoing Support Groups) meeting fortnightly on regular basis. These groups, at the same time as providing excellent ongoing support for participants, are an excellent training ground for leaders and teachers - (PBC Director)

From 2006-2011 a total of 129 people received mentoring, lead or assisted (play events, Skillbuilding sessions), or taught Parenting by Connection courses. During this time two local teachers trained and became Certified Hand in Hand instructors.

In 2011 a one year certified training program has been available to parents/carers wanting to formalise their qualifications and work as trainers within local communities.

Skilled workers/leader

A range of evidence suggests that the skill of parenting program facilitators and the quality of the relationships developed with parents/participants is a critical factor in producing changed behaviour and positive outcomes for children (O'Mara et al 2011; DOCS, 2008:33)

Parents interviewed highlighted the skill, warmth and accessibility of the PBC Director/trainer as key to their enjoyment of the training and consistent application of tool and techniques learnt in the course-based training.

Comments included:

It was really amazing how comfortable I felt. The way [the Director] introduced us, not forcing, just a natural way of going to the next thing and what we were doing. (i19)

It was relaxed but professional.(i20)

The way [the Director] welcomed us was so warm – she's so committed and passionate - she's someone who really talks the talk and walks the walk. You could tell this by the way she handled interruptions from children during the course. I just think she did a fantastic job on a range of levels – she made sure that we were all connecting and understanding. (i19)

The PBC Director and other trainers/group leaders continually undertake professional training (both in Adelaide and internationally) and participate in peer mentoring.

Emphasis on parent skills and behaviour

Recent research into parenting program best practice showed that parents feel they need a range of supports *including information, advice and practical skills, emotional support, personal and social skills, family relationship building skills, opportunities to learn, education and training ...* (O'Mara et al 2011:24) Parenting By Connection supports parents to develop this wide range of skills that impact on their parenting and personal efficacy.

The PBC approach differs from other approaches in that it does not rely upon a didactic parent-education model. Rather skills are gained and behaviours are also changed through:

- Opportunities and tools to highlight emotions which in turn creates space for more focussed thinking processes to occur,
- an emphasis on parents becoming leaders within their families (and local) communities; and
- through promoting the development of a 'movement of parents' who support each other in building further skills, knowledge and connections.

This approach is underpinned by an a belief that strong positive parenting is developed through a multi-pronged approach which takes into account that whole person and allows for reflective learning, emotional healing, the formation of strong peer relationships, and opportunities ongoing support and skills development.

Wholistic approach that supports 'healing'

Lezin et al (2004:58) observe that the Parenting by Connection program teaches parent-to-parent listening tools that help parents off load the tensions that interfere with their ability to guide their children with love and to connect with them in a thoughtful way. The development of healthy parent-child emotional connections is essential for children's brain development and their ability to confidently negotiate an increasingly challenging and complex world. (Aced-Molina 2006:17)

Healthy parent-child emotional connections arise when parents can be emotionally present to themselves (and thus their children). PBC supports parents to do this through:

- providing a safe and supportive 'container' (i.e. group environment) where emotions can be processed and re-assessed; and
- supporting parents to see, notice and gain fresher perspectives, and insights into where parenting is 'restimulating' any of their own difficult or negative childhood experiences;

Parents commented that:

[I]t takes you back to you and back to the child.(i20)

I learnt things about myself and what made me a good parent and what didn't. (i17)

Since the course, I am not putting my pre-conceived views on things which limited my perspective prior to course ...so much more has come from this which is beautiful. (i10)

Safe and welcoming environment

Many parents interviewed commented what impressed strongly on them was the welcoming, and hospitable group environment where open and inclusive communication was modelled and supported.

Young (2000) comments that participants in communicative democracy should listen to all modes of expression that aim to cooperate and reach a solution to collective problems. (Young, 1999, p. 80) The Parenting by Connection approach encourages communication and two-way understanding across gender, class, race, age, ability etc.

Recent research into social exclusion identified that personal relationships, participation in community life and the ability to access local services are all essential for life in Australia today

(Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2007). Many community development and empowerment strategies address issues related to external exclusion (being left out) yet miss what Chambers (2007) calls “internal exclusion”. Internal inclusion is about being visible, being heard, and being recognised within a community: It is more than just a sense of self-identity; it is about self location within the community (Chambers, 2007; Jaeger, 2001).

Greeting is one of the many things we can do to make people feel acknowledged and listened to (Chambers, 2007). Parenting By Connection groups create a space where inclusive communication can take place. All parents are welcomed regardless of class, ethnicity, formal education, or English language proficiency. Each person in the group is “greeted” and acknowledged.

Culturally specific ways of communication and expression that might result in exclusion within some social and political spaces are not viewed as a barrier to participation or group dynamics. The open, warm and inviting environment of PBC groups helps facilitate both external and internal inclusion so that previously isolated parents come to have a greater sense of place and belonging in their local community. (Jaeger, 2001, p. 81).

A creative community development approach

For community development to occur, people in a community must believe working together can make a difference and organise to address their shared needs collectively – Flora et. al. (1992).

Community Development has been defined by Frank and Smith (1999) as *a process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems*. It has as its aim improved quality of life and when effective *results in mutual benefit and shared responsibility among community members* (1991: 6).

Parenting By Connection has employed an innovative community development approach through:

- supporting parents, and carers to strengthen and build upon their capacity as parents;
- supporting groups of parents to find common ground, share struggles and promote increased emotional connectedness to others;
- supporting parents to see themselves as leaders – not only in their own families but within their local community;
- bringing together a diverse range of people from the same community/local area;
- supporting the development of participant-run support and Skillbuilding groups; and
- working with other local community-based organisations to increase access and accessibility of Parenting Programs to families at risk or experiencing isolation and disadvantage.

Partnership with community based agencies and groups

Parenting By Connection has worked closely with a wide range of government and non-government community based groups, programs and agencies that provide family and children’s services, including:

- Child care centres (ABC Childcare Hackham, Aberfoyle Park ,Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre , Happy Valley Community Children’s Centre, Warradale Community Children’s Centre, Blackwood Community Children’s Centre, Aldinga Community Children’s Centre, Emu Morphett Vale, Seaford Rise, O’Halloran Hill TAFE Campus , Mt Barker TAFE Campus and Strathalbyn)
- Pre-schools (Seaford Rise, Karrara)
- Kindergartens (The Hub Kindy,)
- Primary schools (John-Morphett, O’Sullivans Beach, Craighburn, Christies Beach)
- DECS Children’s Centres (O’Sullivans Beach Children’s Centre Hackham West Children’s Centre, Forbes Children’s Centre)
- Community Centres (Family Connections Hackham East , Hackham West, The Volt Youth Enterprise Centre, Aldinga)
- Community Health Services (Woodcroft, Adelaide, and Southern Vales)
- Churches (Aldinga Uniting Church)
- Non-government agencies /programs (Anglicare, Centacare - Coolock House , Southern Junction Community Services, Onkaparinga Communities for Children, North-Western Region Communities for Children, Time for Kids)
- Government Agencies / programs (Families SA, DECS, FAMSA)
- Local Government (City of Tea Tree Gully, City of Onkaparinga)
- Flinders University (Institute of Public Policy and Management, National Institute of Labour Studies)

Partnerships have centred around the sharing of resources (venues, material, program staff), maximising outcomes for shared participants/clients, supporting workers, and management, and collaborative approaches to supporting participant with high and complex needs.

See Appendix E for a breakdown of different partners for each of the CBSA funding Rounds.

Case study “Playdays down South: A partnership with Communities for Children Onkaparinga”

The six *Playdays* facilitated by Community Transformations and held at Hackham West Children’s (childcare) Centre aimed at supporting parents to form stronger and more positive connections with their children.

This innovative *Playday* series comprised of three separate sessions:

A *Preparation for Playday* session (for children under 18 months, and their parents);

Playday (for parents and children); and

A post-*Playday* Debrief Session (for parents only).

The *Playdays* also aimed to provide a non-threatening entry into two subsequent eight session courses: Listening to Children, and Parenting by Connection.

For the parents who participated in the *Playdays*, a range of significant outcomes were reported including:

- learning how to reframe 'off-track' child behaviour ;
- learning how to appreciate the message inherent in 'difficult' child behaviours ;
- how to set positive limits and remain connected with the child;
- learning how to work with and alleviate their own stress;
- learning how to play with their children especially children previously labelled 'troublesome';
- more positive interaction with their children including better listening and improved attachment; and
- feeling more supported as a result of Listening Parent to Parent activities.

Parents reported that it was helpful and novel for them to let their child chose how they spent time together, and that it was good to have '*permission to not pay attention to other [household] tasks*'. Debrief sessions were helpful for *offloading* and *asking more questions*. One father commented that the Debrief session was really helpful *because it was not a 'gossip' session*.

It's so good to know that we are all in the same boat together!'

Another significant outcome was that parents made links between changes in their own behaviour and increased confidence in their children.

Using the Listening tools with my children has given them more confidence to share what they feel because I have given them time by listening to them. It also formed closer bonds in our parent-child relationship. My children are more confident and they feel safe. (Parent)

It was freeing to be in an environment where I wasn't expected to 'control' my child and instead I could just enjoy connecting with him in the way he chose (Parent)

Approximately 45 % of parents who participated in the Playdays series went on to participate in the Listening to Children, and Parenting by Connection. Parents commented that enrolling in a 6 or 8 week course might previously have been inconceivable to them.

Working with Child Care Centre Staffs

Apart from parenting courses, ongoing support groups, individual support to parents (counselling and hands-on instruction), Parenting by Connection has provided a services to early childhood centre staffs – delivering training in Listening Partnerships and in Listening to Children strategies. This service was delivered either on a fee-for—service basis or with funding in 2006-2007 from the then Minister for Education and Children's Services.

The Project has worked closely with staff from a range of Child Care Centres (See above) to target parents of children who have particular issues, such as:

- 'additional needs' – 'off-track' behaviours that may have become entrenched over a long term – that require intervention in the early years if they are not to become a negative driving force in later years.
- children's everyday tensions such as 'separation'. For example, this might be the result of a child being new to childcare, or parents having had conflict. Such everyday issues can become the source of irrational behaviour patterns if not addressed adequately.

This work was carried out in a way that strengthened the relationships between centre staff and parents and which in turn enabled greater consistency of approach.

4. Evidence of outcomes Achieved: How effective has the Parenting by Connection Program been?

The funding agreement with CBSA identified a range of program outcomes across the five funding rounds. Each new PBC 'project' was scaffolded on the previous one allowing for the further development, expansion and embedding of the program within local communities experiencing disadvantage. This report discusses actual outcomes for the Parenting by Connection program within the context of changes for parents, children, families, and creating healthier communities. A reference to the corresponding CBSA outcomes is provided in brackets. A list of these outcomes can be found at Appendix B.

Expected Outcomes

Parenting by Connection identified a range of expected outcomes that would support parents to address needs and thereby contribute to the building of healthier communities. These outcomes included:

- The development of meaningful support networks in order to parent and to take leadership in their families and communities;
- Recognition of the important work that parents are performing
- Parents experiencing successes in parenting and
 - Have closer relationships with their children.
 - Have strategies and understandings to deal with 'off-track' behaviours
 - Have new insights into children's emotions.
 - Have closer/stronger/healthier relationships with family members and extended family, friends and community
 - Have better support in their parenting
 - Be more relaxed and confident and less stressed
 - Be more able to respond, rather than to react according to old patterns of behaviour
 - Know that they are doing the best they can, given all of their circumstances
 - Have increased confidence and self esteem
 - Have increased self awareness and an increased awareness of others
- Recognition that fathers are equal parenting partners
- Strategies and skills for building close connections and resolving conflict with family members, friends and community
- The development of leadership skills and roles (within the family, Parenting By Connection, and the broader community)
- Building connection across 'difference' such as race, class, gender, etc.

Actual Outcomes:

Outcomes for Parents

A range of outcomes were both reported (via interviews and written feedback forms) and observed (in 3 separate DVD's) for parents/ carers. These included:

- Increased confidence as a parent
- Increased resilience

- Better engagement and attachment with children
- Increased parenting knowledge and skills
- Personal development
- Improved life management skills
- Increased connections with other parents

Increased confidence as a parent (Outcome 5.6)

The majority of parents providing feedback (40 out of 41 feedback form respondents and the majority interviewed in person) commented that participation in the Parenting by Connection training courses and application of the tools presented have enabled them to develop great confidence and trust in their parenting which in turn has had an impact of their ability to be patient, see problems more clearly, trust that difficult situations were workable, and feel more in charge all of which contribute to reduced stress and anxiety .

It gave me permission to parent in the way that comes instinctively. For example, the idea of ignoring a tantrum never sat right with me. I feel that through the course I've been validated in the way I wanted to parent. (i7)

[K]nowing I have these tools has made me more confident in parenting...I am reassured and can be more confident because, if things go off track, I have these tools I can use to put things back on track. So, I am more in control of things. (i11)

Just being more patient and being more confident I think – I don't take things so personally any more. (i14)

[T]his course helped me with easy to follow steps that gives me greater confidence that we as a family can do this right and not damage the group dynamic and our children's emotional wellbeing forever by bad parenting.(i20)

Increased resilience (Outcomes 5.3 , 5.6 and 5.9)

Parental resilience is the ability to handle everyday stressors and recover from occasional crises. (Parkinson 2011:72)

Having access to effective tools that help set limits and increase options for working with difficult situations has supported parents to develop greater resilience. This resilience has been present in the face of children's off-track behaviour, in managing personal emotions and responses, and also in understanding the broader context of specific behaviours and stresses at play in family life.

Respondents commented:

I learnt that even if they're being what appears to be dysfunctional – you can help them and yourself to become more resilient. You can start to be able to work things through as a family – you can move beyond just saying it's the parents who are at fault. (i19)

You don't realise how kids can react to situations and if you change what you do then you can completely change situations for the better (i15)

It has given me power and freedom to not get stressed. Rather, just be in charge of parenting. (i9)

Better engagement with and attachment to children (Outcomes 5.3 and 5.6)

All parents interviewed commented that since participating in Parenting by Connection training and through employing tools (or a selection of) at home relationships between parents/carers and children had experienced positive change these included:

- increased awareness of the importance of attachment between parents/carers and children
- increased attachment
- more playing with children
- increased connections with dads
- increased feelings of closeness
- happier families

It appears that the Parenting by Connection tools have provided a framework for better engagement between parents/carers and children through supporting increased time together (including designated playing times), clearer communication and setting of boundaries, and greater kindness in relating to children's behaviours. In addition the evidence below suggests that there are positive changes for parent and children even where not all of the tools are adopted.

I've been using Setting Limits with kindness, and Playlistening not as much. I definitely use it for discipline but, also, I am much more connected to my children and am calmer – so there is less need than before for setting limits.(i12)

One parent commented that she still struggles with getting down on the floor and playing with her children because that was never a part of her childhood, however this parent also commented that she understood the great benefit and importance of doing that with and for her children and persists alongside of her own discomfort.

Two parents reported that using the tools at home had supported greater connection between fathers and their children.

My husband works long hours – and he's used Playlistening quite a lot with them. It used to be that cleaning their teeth and everything else they did had to be done by 'mummy' – and they wouldn't let him do it. They seem to have re-connected with him and it really helps them – and helps them not want mummy to do everything. It makes us all much happier. (i17)

Increased parenting knowledge and skills (Outcome 5.3)

Feedback from parents and carers indicated that they had increased their knowledge of parenting in relation to attachment (see above), the importance of play including child-directed play, staying present to children's emotions, facilitating emotional wellbeing, taking time to listen to children, helping children sleep, and understanding that small changes in parents behaviour can make a significant difference for their children.

Specific parenting skills identified by parents interviewed included developing a more moderate approach to parenting, setting limits with kindness, listening to children, working with tantrums,

using clear speech especially in relation to consequences of certain behaviours, and finding alternatives to physical punishment.

A common theme was increased awareness of how parent/ behaviour impacts on children and thus the importance of working with one's own emotions, anxiety, and frustrations. Once again the Parenting by Connection tools appeared to provide a supportive reference point for parents thereby reducing their own stress and offering more space for reflection and positive action.

I am far more aware of the pointless use of yelling and punishment to excess that my parents used when we were growing up. Though life without limits is not okay, there is no point in losing our cool and ranting and raving as all it does is get everyone including both us as parents and the kids even more worked up and off track.(BW)

Little kids don't need a whole story about everything. Otherwise they think if it's just mummy saying it then we can talk mummy out of it. By just changing a few words of the words you use it makes a huge difference to them and how they react to it and can react to it. (i15)

I feel like I don't have to give into everything he wants and I don't have to punish either – it's lovely! (i9)

I feel calm because I know I can just say, "no, darling". I feel OK to say, 'no' to some things, but he does get what he wants at other times – so, it's a nice balance and I don't feel mean because I say, 'no'. He doesn't run the house, and nor do we. Even if we are shopping and he has an upset, I feel calm enough to move to the side of the aisle and listen. I don't feel embarrassed or like I have to apologise. We have less [sic] meltdowns now and occasionally a long session – we've got that balance. He can have Listening Time in a safe environment. I feel calm because I have changed my perspective on crying and when children have a meltdown. For a while, after doing the course, I was listening ½ to ¾ hour everyday – now there is not the need. (i10)

Within the context of changed parenting practices, a number of parents were also honest about the ongoing challenges. Such comments highlight the value of the ongoing group support also offered by Parenting by Connection.

I have a much greater understanding of what leads to melt-downs/off track behaviour so I can be more understanding. I can set limits now with kindness ... though not always (i13)

I need a refresher. Thought the course was really good. I was good for a while...I still don't shout or smack any more – but, I still let crying go when I should listen more. I don't listen as much as I should...I do sometimes and I don't yell. (i1)

Personal development (Outcome 5.4)

Many of these comments (from parents) indicate changes in personal understanding and awareness. Through involvement with Parenting by Connection parents and carers have access to processes and supports for working through their own childhood issues

Outcomes to date, in the area of parent/carer personal development have included:

- increased awareness of their own issues and when and where ‘restimulation’ occurs;
- increased trust in one’s own wisdom and ability;
- increased ability to be assertive, and communicate needs;
- not feeling like a failure as a parent;
- increased self-awareness in relation to where they block connection with their children;
- working with emotions;
- increased confidence to access supports.

I learnt things about myself and what made me a good parent and what didn’t. (i20)

Since the course, I am not putting my pre-conceived views on things which limited my perspective prior to course. I take any rigid expectations (how long listening to a child should take) out of it...so much more has come from this which is beautiful. (i10)

While there have been many positive changes personal development is a journey and parents indicated that struggles remain. For one parent actively seeking help was an indicator of her increased development.

I have personal emotional issues that I am working through that in all honesty, though it is hard to admit that I am not a perfect parent, I struggle with playing with my children. I am able to be with them while they are playing but have barriers that I am working through to enable me to follow the process more effectively. I can see the greater benefits we will achieve, both in my own relationship with my children, but also as a whole in the dynamics of the family unit. (BW)

I got down while back and I went for help [to Parenting by Connection] (i4)

It helps enormously to know that children are fine and just need to work through emotions when things when they don’t feel fine or aren’t able to act well - and it’s the same with us adults – we just need to offload, too. I did burst into tears with my husband recently and I felt better. (i11)

Improved life management skills (Outcome 5.4)

It appears that the focus on personal awareness and change supported by Parenting by Connection is also supporting for some parents access to a wider range of life management skills including time management, reflection, the ability to defuse highly charged situation, learning to offload, improved communication with partners, finding alternatives to shouting and smacking, ‘giving yourself a break’, seeking support, and being more open to everyday life situations. They are skills which not only support parents, children and families, but better relationships in general.

I am learning to make better time judgements to set aside more focused time for the kids individually. Again, my own issues with trying to be perfect in so many areas (learned behaviour that doesn’t necessarily help anyone entirely in the end), has a tendency to get in the way of my patience to focus on them and not on work or housework... when I feel myself getting this way, I give myself a time out outside to regroup and then try to come back in more calmly and use the tools to process the situation (meal time, bath time, bed time can be our major issues) and by using the tools effectively these processes can become far easier, even fun. (BW)

I just step back from things and think about them. No one teaches you these skills. I'd like everyone to have them so that can achieve what they want to in their relationships. Probably what I do differently beyond my own family is tell everyone about it! (i17)

Increased connections with other parents (Outcomes 5.2 and 5.5)

Key to the Parenting by Connection approach is the sense of community that develops when people come together to learn, question, reflect, and share experiences together. The development of community is seen as pivotal in supporting a 'movement' of parents who support and inspire each other over time. Parent/carer feedback indicates that increased connections with other parents was developed in two distinct ways:

1. through being a part of a Parenting by Connection training group and/or ongoing support group; and
2. in broader life contexts where Parenting by Connection tools support more effective communication between adults - through children's needs being met, attended to and or limits being set.

I liked the connecting with other parents. (i5)

I find myself a lot more aware of listening to children when adults are ignoring children. I now feel fine to recognise children when adults are talking and children are asking for attention. It works out much better when you respect that children need some attention – include them and you find you can actually have that conversation with the adult/s. (I?)

Outcomes for Children

Actual outcomes observed for children included:

- Increased resilience
- Improved connections with parents
- Increased confidence
- Positive behaviour changes
- Gain skills

Increased resilience (Outcomes 5.3 and 5.4)

Parents and carers discussed incidences of increased resilience for children in terms of 'emotional resilience', increased stability, and being able to work with and manage anxiety and stress. As might be expected positive changes for children also had a positive effect on the broader household, and in some situations may also contribute to more positive experiences of schooling.

I believe the girls are more emotionally resilient and my husband and I as parents are much calmer. (i5)

I can also see the benefits we have been able to experience with our second child having access to these tools since she was born. She seems to be even that much more aware of her feelings and the barriers it can have for her when she is feeling off track and disconnected. (IV20)

My children have at various times had problems with anxiety – where they hate the teacher and won't go back to school because of that. Though the Staylistening tool I've helped them to work through their anxiety ... at the end they feel much calmer and much happier – and are able to go back to school. It's often the children's anxiety that's causing the problems – rather than the actual teacher (i17)

Through an improvement in my Listening skills, I was able to more fully listen to my children using the Staylistening tool and to spend less time off-track, trying to solve their problems. ... As a result, their resilience in a wide-range of situations has improved. We have just moved countries. This is an enormous transition for adults, let alone young people. Using all of the Listening Tools, the children have shown, and gained much, resilience- it's been remarkable, in fact. I am so proud of them and of my husband and I with what we've achieved with this big move. (IV21)

Improved connections with parents (Outcomes 5.2 and 5.3)

When parents and children have strong, warm feelings for one another, children develop trust that their parents will provide what they need to thrive, including love, acceptance, positive guidance, and protection (Parkinson 2011:72)

Parents participating in Parenting by Connection training and groups reported that their children's connections with them has changed in positive ways. As parents began playing more with their children, setting clearer boundaries, and accepting 'chaos' in small situations so that there might be order in greater ones, children responded with increased playfulness and communication, and fewer struggles.

I do pillow play fights to get laughing going. The result is a big change in the last few weeks. He's sharing a lot more. And, he's sleeping really well throughout the night. He even says, "goodnight, I'm going to bed!" I say to him, "I'm proud of you!". (i2)

We make an effort to make sure that the kids have control over some situations. If a child has no control over anything then they are going to fight you for everything. My son (4) has control over his hair and with that he doesn't fight me on other stuff. Because he has control over something he doesn't fight me anymore. (i15)

Increased confidence (Outcome 5.6)

Many parents commented that they had noticed that their children were happier and more confident. This confidence extended beyond the home into social and school contexts. 'Confidence' was expressed through increased ability to play, better communication with parents, siblings and others, and as a result of better managing their own behaviours. One parent suggested that the ability to respond to her child when 'things aren't right' has increased the sense of trust her daughter has in her and has [made] my daughter a happy, confident person. (i4)

It works in so many different ways for different children. I have a daughter with Aspergers and have handed over the one on one playtime to my hubby. I told him he has to let her decide what they will do and lead. It lets her enjoy the play now because it gives her a bit more control because she knows how they will play and she knows what the outcomes will be because she has

control over the outcomes. It makes play more enjoyable for children with problems and then feel more comfortable and confident in play and the laughter she gets from it is out of this world. (i15)

Positive behaviour changes (Outcomes 5.3, and 5.6)

All parents and carers interviewed commented on positive changes in children's behaviour that had previously been problematic for them and/or the child. A wide range of changes were observed in terms of respect for parents and others; healthier routines, with better sleeping and eating; children fighting less and caring for each other more; 'off track' behaviours getting 'on track' with parents no longer being embarrassed by their children's behaviour in public places.

There is less fighting. They are more co-operative and more caring generally, including with us as well and more co-operative with other kids. For example, they share toys. Less fighting was my goal when I did the course and I achieved that. (i7)

Gain skills (Outcome 5.3)

Skills gained by children included improved communication and speech; an ability to express feelings before behaviour goes 'off track', one parent commented that she was teaching her older children the tools so they could use it with younger ones. Increased skills were seen as a factor in improved child development, better relationships and increased confidence.

There is mutual listening. We listen to the children and they are able to listen much more. (i10)

Outcomes for families (Outcomes 5.3, 5.4 and 5.9)

All the communication and all of our relationships within the family are just so much better. (i17)

There is indication that Parenting by Connection courses, tools and ongoing support groups have supported changes that extend beyond the individual and into whole families. These changes reflect Community Benefit SA aims of improving the well-being, quality of life, and management skills of local families².

In addition to training and support groups, Parenting by Connection provides opportunities for other family members to get involved through attending workshops and play-events. Approximately 772 existing participants and their families attended these from 2006-2011. A conservative estimate that a total of 1073 immediate family members would have been in the immediate sphere of influence of other family members participating in Parenting by Connection training and support groups from 2006-2010.

Specific outcomes identified for families included:

- Families coping better;
- Increased sense of wellbeing;
- Increased cooperation and respect;
- Improved communication and relationships; and
- Increased 'teamwork approaches' to parenting.

² See: <http://www.dfc.sa.gov.au/pub/Default.aspx?tabid=406>

These outcomes correspond to Community Benefit SA Outcomes numbers 5.3, 5.4, and 5.9.

Families coping better (Outcome 5.3 and 5.9)

Parents commented that their families were generally coping better with the challenges of parenting and everyday life.

Using the tools constantly as part of daily life, not just as a go to card means a happier more harmonious environment with the kids willing to help and be cooperative, everything moving more smoothly, parents less stressed and everyone in general getting along better and having more fun.(BW)

Increased sense of wellbeing (outcomes 5.3 and 5.9)

Some parents commented that they noticed changes at a family level very soon after participating in Parenting by Connection. Increased wellbeing was mentioned and linked to families experiencing reduced stress, more calm, and increased relaxation. As parenting skills and confidence continued to develop, families became more adept at not only creating times for positive connection with each other but also for more effective problem solving. This has enabled challenging situations to be worked with in ways that prevents heightened emotions getting out of control (for both parents and children).

We are far more even keel as a family and are able to keep relationship dynamics happy with less off track behaviour from the kids and less “losing our cool” as parents.

It provided immediate benefits for the whole family, we all became much more relaxed and happy. (i17)

It makes things easier – instead of things blowing up and turning into a big issue – you can use Parenting by Connection to fix things. (i3)

I feel calm and he is calm, that’s the difference. It’s a calm house mostly ... Without those sessions, life would have been tragic! It’s made a huge difference. Everybody feels like they’re being listened to in the family. Problems don’t linger – they get solved. (i10)

Increased cooperation and respect (outcomes 5.3 and 5.4)

As families have begun to relate more intimately and genuinely with each other, parents are noticing that children are more cooperative, willing to help and respectful. This also contributes to increased harmony within the family.

Respect! The children know where to stop. Sometimes, I’ll say “Yes” – but sometimes I stress. Even when I do stress, there is more respect. There is less of me stressing now but, when I do, there is more respect from the children! There is more respect – both ways. (i12)

Improved communication and relationships (outcomes 5.3 and 5.4)

Parents reported improved communication and relationships within the family. Examples provided included listening to each other, increased awareness of emotions accompanied by an ability to articulate emotions, less blaming, and more incidences of talking through difficulties.

It's given us a language and a means to breach the hard bits and the Tools when it gets hard. (i9)

The children benefit a lot. Especially in terms of closeness – they'll talk things through and they became more aware of their emotions. They work them through better and more effectively (i11)

All the communication and all of our relationships within the family are just so much better. (i17)

Increased 'teamwork approaches' to parenting (Outcome 5.3)

A number of parents commented that even though their partners had not participated in parenting by Connection training, they had shared tools and learning with them and partners had also begun to apply tools. In one family the dad is using some tools with one child, and mum with the other child. In another family the partner was not initially supportive but as they witnessed changes between the other parent and the children, their curiosity was aroused and they began to also use the tools. Setting clearer boundaries leading to better routines for children has supported parents in finding more time to spend together and talk about their parenting approaches. In two families the 'team' approach to parenting involved older siblings learning skills for working with younger siblings.

The fact that my husband shares these tools and can now do things with the children has helped me a lot. (i17)

I am teaching my 11yo how to use the tools with my 2 year old and the difference in behaviour is very noticeable (i13)

Building healthier communities outcomes (Outcomes 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9)

In addition to supporting individuals and families experiencing disadvantage, Community Benefit SA funding aims to increase community participation and contribute to the further development and strengthening of communities where there is significant disadvantage. Gauging community based outcomes for a relatively short-term intervention Parenting by Connection with no longitudinal study is a complex task given that:

- Communities themselves are hard to define and delineate;
 - Changes in perceptions and attitudes are slow to occur and difficult to measure; and that
 - Only a broad based and comprehensive project with allocation of significant funds for impact evaluation could hope to deliver and measure changes within a five year period.
- (Baulderstone and Geuenich 2010)

What can be commented on within the context of this report is that there have been a range of outcomes observed that extend beyond the realm of the family or a particular child care centre to include the ways people communicate, create inclusive conversations and environments, establish and strengthen support-networks, more actively participate, feel a sense of hope for and belonging, and work to provide opportunities for others within the community.

Outcomes related to the building of healthier communities (Outcomes 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9) include:

- Better adult communication and socialising
- Skills gained transferable to other contexts

- Meaningful support networks
- Social inclusion
- Increased parent leadership in local contexts

Better adult communication and socialising

Interviewees commented that they were employing increased communication skills gained through participation in Parenting by Connection in social, and support situations. Skills highlighted included:

- Listening more;
- Not interrupting;
- Being mindful of how they are communicating with other people's children;
- Clearer communication; and
- Articulating own needs

I try not to put my 2 cents worth in. I try to listen and if I feel like interrupting, I pull back. Then I watch the person come to their own solution. It's amazing when you do. But, when you put your bit in, you see them pull back. When you don't, they keep going and it ends up better.. (i7)

Try to use it with friends when some have hard times. I listen to their grievances so they can release tension. With other parent's kids, I bend down and get at their level – it enhances the connection and helps them to think – especially when delivering something they don't want to hear. (i9)

I use it at the Breakfast Club and use with girls at the Girls Club – the 10-12 year olds. Knowing how to listen is great! (i4)

I am better able to say what my needs are. Prior to the course, I didn't allow others to see the other side of me. Now I get more support because I see it doesn't mean that I am a failure. ..., I now realise, fear got in the way of me saying things. (i10)

Skills gained transferable to other contexts

Some parents, and carers discussed their application of the Parenting by Connection tools to work, community and volunteer contexts and commented on their value especially in working with complex or emotionally charged situations.

All of the tools that were included in the program are things that I continue to use. Implementing them into the workplace has been great. ... Communication and relationships have all improved through these tools. ... So many children aren't allowed to say how they feel. Everyone's into blaming instead of listening. Giving them tools helps so much with this – it also helps me as a practitioner (i19)

I am much more in tune with their [pre and post natal women] emotional needs. I say to colleagues, "I am going to be with such and such a woman and I may be a little while", meaning that I am not as task oriented as I was prior to course. Nursing is very task oriented profession. Now I am more people's emotions oriented. The other night a woman was crying. I used the same approach with her as with a child. "We are here with you, and we will make sure you are safe..." and so on. I didn't say to her, "You can see the social worker in the morning". It was such

a privilege. She really appreciated it. She got insights and went home relieved instead of full of stress. It is the same principles, I think, as listening to a child. I think that we need to think like that because when we are emotional, it is because there is something unresolved, unhealed from, and it's from childhood (i10)

In the Kindy where I work, I asked the boss if I could use the Tools with children with challenging behaviours – particularly Staylistening and Setting Limits. I have had some pretty full-on sessions with kicking, etc. The boss comes over to assist and make everything safe. Children come out the other side placid, lovely children. It's amazing to me, still. We also do 1:1 Special Time for the few children with difficult behaviours to help keep their behaviour on-track. (i11)

[I use them] with my nephews and friends kids – Instead of having the parents stressing, I come in and connect and defuse potentially difficult situations. The tools that I kept with me have meant I can do this instead of “get out of my face” or “give them whatever they want”, like I might have done prior to the course or like the parents might do. Most of the time, the Listening Tools are with me. Adults need to calm down and not add to the tension when children are tense. (i12)

Two women whose families are in neighbouring countries each commented on how they have been passing on their new knowledge to friends and families via the phone and how friends are now putting these tools into practice within their own cultural context.(AH)

Meaningful support networks and social inclusion

The people we live with, neighbours, co-workers and friends, those we connect with online, see at the shops and play sport with, are all part of our community. Through stronger connections with each other, we can build community resilience, ensuring that South Australia adapts and prospers, even when times are tough (SA Strategic Plan 2011:26)

Through participation in initial Parenting by Connection courses, and for some parents/carers ongoing attendance at skill-building groups, strong friendship, and connections have been made with others from their local area. More skilful communication and feeling better able to support others when times are tough, all contribute to the building of more caring and connected community.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is about creating communities and societies where all people feel valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs - both physical and emotional - are met³.

Parenting by Connection has worked with a very range of people experiencing significant disadvantage and social exclusion. In many instances Parenting by Connection has forged strong collaborative partnerships with other organisations (government and non-government) in maximising support for participant who are vulnerable or at risk. Partnerships have involved the sharing of both resources and co-coordinating groups and specific events.

Outcomes have included:

³ See SA Social Inclusion Initiative website <http://www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au/index.php>

- Development of friendships which continued outside of the framework of groups
- Parents from CALD backgrounds previously very isolated participating fully in the groups, making friends and establishing support networks
- Increased cross cultural sharing, and understanding
- Reduced isolation
- Increased confidence in participating in other groups and accessing supports
- Increased participation in community events

A number of courses and groups have had high numbers of people from CALD and refugee backgrounds (e.g. those in partnership with Forbes Childcare Centre). Group diversity has supported increased inclusion and awareness of the value and benefits of more inclusive communities.

Increased parent leadership in local contexts

One of the aims of Parenting by Connection is to build a community, a movement of parents who will offer skills, learning and support to each other. Many of the participants over the past 5 years have been people dealing with multiple challenges and intersecting disadvantage in their lives. When life is complex we often do not have a lot to give to others. However data for the 2006-2011 period indicates that between one-quarter and one-third of all participants we active in Parenting by Connection beyond the role of a participant. Examples included leading, co- facilitating, or assisting at courses, groups and events, volunteering time and skills especially to help out with one-off community based pay and information events, and training to be group leaders, or instructors.

Parenting by Connection is such a different way to parent from the way that I was raised that, during times of stress, I found myself reverting back to the punishment model of parenting which was used on me. By leading a Skillbuilding Group, I was committed to attend - so, I was getting regular listening time for myself, which is so important in being able to effectively use the tools. I could off load about my stress regularly, and then go back home feeling refreshed and reinvigorated again to Playlisten and Staylisten with my children. This consistency was such a positive improvement for my children and for me. Because I was acting like a leader, I was also thinking more and more like a leader - a person who could be in charge. So, I felt that I could be in charge to make things go well in the family with the children and generally - and, I did.(ML IV21

At the time of writing Parenting by Connection had 9 Leaders of Skillbuilding Groups and who attend a bi monthly Leaders Skillbuilding Group and two fully qualified Hand In Hand -Certified Parenting by Connection Instructors.

5. Sustainability

Parenting by Connection has demonstrated sustainability through:

- increasing skills for parents, families and child care workers;
- linking people into ongoing support groups; and
- providing leadership and training pathways which have resulted in skilled volunteers, group leaders and two fully certified Hand in Hand parenting trainers.

In addition they have forged and nurtured partnerships and collaboration with a large number of community groups and organisations. Adoption of Parenting by Connection practices within these settings contributes to sustainability of outcomes.

Parenting by Connection has demonstrated strong outcomes for participants which have included people from a range of backgrounds but with a particular focus on parents and carers experiencing disadvantage, and early childhood professionals working with families with high and complex needs (see King 2007). Parenting by Connection, could be replicated in different contexts/communities, requires low levels of funding, and fits with current policy directives at both a State and National level.

Replication of Parenting by Connection

Bradach (2003) discusses the challenges of replicating social programs, emphasising that the aim is replication of a successful program's *results*. He identifies critical elements in successful replication as:

1. A well-articulated theory-of-change
2. Appropriately skilled people
3. Match of model to context
4. Sufficient funding
5. Fit of theory-of-change and service recipients

Parenting by Connection is a known model which has been successfully implemented and evaluated both locally (King, 2007) and in North America (see Lezin et al 2004; Wolf 1999) and found to be beneficial for a wide range of parents across class, gender, and socio-economic differences. It has a clearly articulated theory of change and CBSA funding has allowed the model to be piloted and further developed within the local context. Local findings (this report and also King, 2007) appear to be consistent with those presented elsewhere (Wolf 1999; and Lezin et al 1994). While Parenting by Connection draws on volunteer leaders and peer support, it does require ongoing funding to be replicated and for sustainability of processes, this could be achieved by funding the existing organisation (training delivery and administration) or through incorporation of the model by an existing support provider. If this were to occur as a new function it would require additional funding.

Fit with broader policy context (National and State)

Parenting by Connection fits well with local and National policy directives in the areas of child protection; social inclusion; supporting families and communities; and early years and parent education. Key goals and targets of relevant policy frameworks that appear to be supported by the Parenting by Connection approach include:

- The SA Strategic Plan (2011)
 - Families are the centre of learning life skills; together we grow.
 - Target: Early childhood - Increase the proportion of children developing well
 - We spend quality time with our families.
 - We support families.
 - People in our community support and care for each other, especially in times of need.

- Target: Social participation - Increase the proportion of South Australians participating in social, community and economic activities
 - We value and support our volunteers and carers.
 - Target: Volunteering - Maintain a high level of formal and informal volunteering in South Australia
- The National Child Protection Framework (*Protecting Children is Everyone's Business*) an in particular outcomes 1-2:
 - *Supporting outcome 1:* Children live in safe and supportive families and communities
 - *Supporting outcome 2:* Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early
 - *Supporting outcome 3:* Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed
- SA Social Inclusion initiative
- FaHCSIA Communities for Children initiative and in particular Communities for Children Plus (currently being delivered in the Playford LGA with Anglicare as the Facilitating Partner)
- DECS Strategic Directions
 - support families with young children, as they develop their parenting role
 - create the opportunity for young people to develop resilience support children's early development as the foundation for life-long learning and achievement
 - support young people in their transitions through early childhood, the middle years, secondary education, develop a culture that supports innovation, creativity and allows for diversity in approaches to care and education

Fit with Child protection

Evaluation and research tells us that we need to invest in Child Protection at the early intervention stage. Outcomes identified in this report suggest that Parenting by Connection may be an effective investment in Child Protection. Although not targeted at families where notifications have been made it has been successful with families where factors often present in families categorised in Tier Two and Three. While the program appears to offer a range of protective factors through building resilience and more effective parenting. Piloting the Parenting by Connection model with identified families would enable assessment of its suitability as a targeted child protection intervention.

Financial sustainability

Secure long-term funding, flexibility in funding decisions and longer program time frames are essential. There is a long history of ad hoc 'pilot' programs that cease operating once short-term funding has run out. The entrenchment and level of disadvantage in many families and communities means that progress will be slow and 'quick fixes' impossible. (DOCS 2008)

[G]rants that are relatively small in value ... represents one of the best funding value propositions available to government. In many cases [providing] a core capacity for programs ... and services to operate and this provides both leverage and foundation for community groups to secure additional resources in the form of charitable grants, volunteer input and "in kind" contributions that multiply the value of the grant enormously. (Madden, 2011)

In recent years most funding growth for families and communities has been directed towards the crisis-response end of service delivery (crisis care, child protection, and alternative care) leaving few

funding options for early intervention programs and activities (Madden 2011). Parenting by Connection is a low cost program that appears to offer significant return on investment. It targets and has demonstrated successful engagement of parents, children and families considered hard to reach. It appears that for a small ongoing outlay Parenting by Connection could expand its base significantly and continue to skill parents and carers to not only become positive role models and leaders in their own families but share their skills more broadly within local communities.

Don't ever underestimate a small amount of money used effectively with a skills focus! ... In terms of models this would be an incredibly low cost model to implement. I \$100,000 per annum would pay for one professional worker plus admin, plus travel costs, on costs plus programming costs where you can employ instructors to run programs for you. One hundred thousand dollars, in the scheme of things is a very small amount. (Ex-Government executive)

Given the absence of local project funding, and low levels of individual philanthropy in South Australia Parenting by Connection could pursue one or a combination of three main options. These include:

1. Seeks charity status and fundraise. The downside of this option is that there are a plethora of local charities all competing for donor dollars and fundraising is hard to do without broader infrastructure and paid staff. In addition recent experience re denial of charity status to well established local not for profit service organisations suggests that seeking Charity status could involve going to court without guarantee of success due;
2. Pursue a fee for service model which would involve the development of a business model and implementation plan, and then targeting the 'upmarket end' of the early childhood world as well as government service. The obvious disadvantage of this option for Parenting by Connection is that it would take significant energy and time away from working with families experiencing significant disadvantage and unable to either access or participate in fee for service parenting programs, however this could fit with a social enterprise⁴ status for the organisation rather than a charity status. In addition fee for service programs offered solely to parents would not cover the costs of running the program, and without charity status the organisation cannot offer tax deductions on moneys donated through fundraising;
3. Identify organisations (most likely larger local NGO's) that have a primary interest in early intervention developing parent capacity and then partner with them to seek funding under the auspices of that agency. The FaHCSIA Communities for Children Plus model is one example of an initiative where an organisation like Community Transformations could tender to become a 'Community Partner' and run Parenting by Connection programs under the broader auspices of the 'Facilitating Partner'. Other models may involve provision of infrastructure support by an auspicing agency or incorporation of the organisation within a larger agency through acquisition.

The advantage of Community Transformations partnering with a larger agency would be access to a broader range of programs within which to offer Parenting by Connection programs as well as broader infrastructure including admin and evaluation support.

⁴ Where an organisation includes for-profit activities which generate income for its social-good activities

6. Concluding discussion

There are insufficient services for families. The unmet need incredibly outstrips the services ... Parenting by Connection is a highly effective program it is, well structured and brings about results – the end result is the true test of any program (Ex-Executive director –DFC)

Parenting by Connection using the (USA based Hand In Hand model) has demonstrated strong outcomes for parents, carers, children, families and communities within the local SA context. Some outcomes were above and beyond those expected for the program. While we cannot comment on long-term benefits, or for whom the approach does not work well, evaluation and feedback over the past 6 years including that from other service providers (Government and NGO) suggest that the program has potential to respond to some of the unmet needs of local families. Through providing tools for working with everyday parenting challenges parents, carers and children have increased the strength of their connections to each other, gained confidence, improved communication, and are more resilient in the face of difficulties. In addition, the ongoing support offered by the program has contributed to decreased isolation, broader social networks and local community leadership.

Parenting by Connection articulates well with a wide range of local and National policy frameworks and responds to global calls for early intervention and prevention approaches to child protection and community safety (Parkinson 2011; and Allen 2011). However the challenges for programs like Parenting by Connection is securing longer-term funding which will allow it to expand its base, thereby supporting more families and opening up more leadership pathway which will enable greater sustainability of both learning and supports for families in need.

This is a new movement of parents! (Participant)

I feel much better Parenting by Connection than 'parenting by punishment' (Participant)

Parenting by Connection has helped show me what is really important to me, and I want to spread the message far and wide to all parents. (volunteer Group leader)

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Appendices

A. Evaluation and Feedback/survey form examples

Building Emotional Understanding Evaluation

Name _____

(your name will not be published or associated with your responses.)

Please tell us what you think about your Building Emotional Understanding class

experience. Your comments will help us assess our effectiveness in supporting parents.

Use the other side of the paper if you need more space to explain. Thank you.

How valuable was the ***Building Emotional Understanding*** class to you?

____ Little/none ____ Some ____ Moderate ____ Great ____ Very Great

What part of the ***Building Emotional Understanding*** experience was the most helpful to you?

What part of the ***Building Emotional Understanding*** experience was the least helpful to you?

Has this class helped you to feel more confident as a parent? If yes, explain in what ways this is true.

How many people have you told about skills and tools you have learned from this class?

(Giving an estimate is fine.)

What key concepts were you able to share with others?

For the following questions, please check the answer that best describes your experience.

My experience in the **Building Emotional Understanding** class helped me to...

1. Get better support for myself.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

2. Become more connected with other parents.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

3. To see how to set limits with warmth, firmness, and without harshness.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

Building Emotional Understanding Evaluation

5. Better understand the emotional needs of children.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

6. Better understand and reflect on my own childhood experience and how that experience affects my parenting.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

7. Be more able to set up Special Time with my child.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

8. Be a better listener for adults.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

9. Be a better listener for my child.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

10. Resolve at least one moment of tension using **Playlistening** with my child.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

11. Play more often with my child.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

12. Feel more confident in my parenting approach.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

13. Feel more hopeful about my ability to help my child.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

14. Be better able to get help from another adult when strong feelings arise.

____ Yes, it helped a lot ____ Yes, it helped ____ It made no difference

15. Be better able to ask specifically for the kind of support I want.

Sustainability Parent Survey

If hand writing, please use reverse side if you need additional space.

Name_____ Date_____ 11 April 2011 Year Undertook Course...

1 What did you like about the Parenting by Connection Course?

2 Following the course did you continue to put Parenting by Connection into practice?

- If no', what prevented this?
- Were there any tools you used for a short while?

3 If 'yes', what Listening Tools do you continue to use?

Prompts:

- Staylistening (where you be close and listen to a child who is crying or having a tantrum)
- Special Time (one on one time with a child in which the child takes the lead and you follow)
- Setting Limits with kindness and firmness – eg “No, sweetie, you can’t have that biscuit”, or “It’s time for bed, honey....” (followed by Staylistening to their feelings)
- Playlistening (getting children’s laughter going and keeping it going to either Set a Limit or to build closeness)

4 Details of how parent uses the Tools with their own children – interviewer to note which one/s use the most, etc. ? Any on the back burner, present a challenge, etc.

5 Do you use the adult Listening Tools or the Listening to Children Tools with others? Who? In which ways? In which situation/s

6 Has using these tools supported any changes for you and your children? What are those changes or differences? Could add in some prompts here e.g. Better communication, relationships

7 Have you continued to get Listening Time for yourself? Other support for yourself?

8 Any other things you now do differently?

9 Do you have any suggestions to improve the Parenting by Connection program? We would like to hear them.

10 Have the booklets been helpful to you?

11 Any other comments?

12 Would you like us to keep you updated with events and so on through our emails?

13 Are you getting the Hand in Hand Newsletter by email? Would you like to receive this?

14. We are thinking of running Refresher Courses. Is this something you might be interested in?

B. CBSA Outcomes⁵

5. OUTCOMES

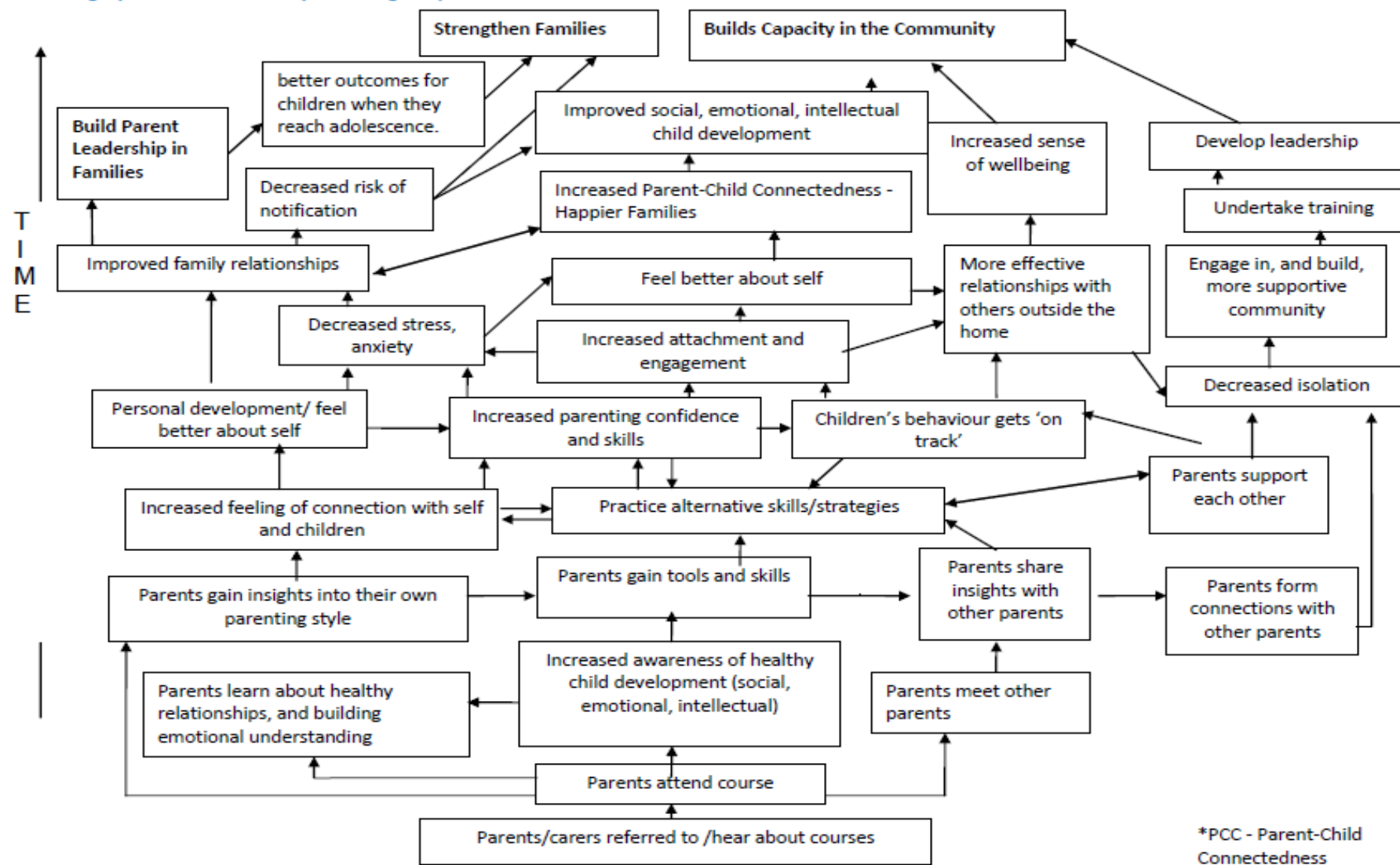
Community Benefit SA aims to support organisations delivering services and programs which achieve a large range of social and practical outcomes assisting disadvantaged individuals, families and communities, including:

- 5.1. Meeting **general** and **basic needs** – shelter, food, transport, housing, essential household items, liveable income (*Note that food and emergency relief items are not directly funded by Community Benefit SA*)
- 5.2. Meeting **physical, emotional, social, mental / intellectual needs**
- 5.3. Improving **family functioning** by building and strengthening family relationships, family coping skills, parenting skills, supportive environments for children, resilience to stress and family support networks
- 5.4. Developing **life management skills** communication and social skills, motor skills, parenting, assertiveness, goal setting, decision making, conflict resolution, problem solving, coping, structuring time, teamwork and cooperation, cooking, budgeting, hygiene, anger, emotional and stress management, family functioning
- 5.5. Acquiring a sense of empowerment and increasing **community participation** accessing community resources, information, knowledge, facilities, housing, transport, education, training, employment, health and social services, recreation and entertainment, enhancing community participation, contribution and leadership
- 5.6. Facilitating **self-development** – self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, positive attitude, motivation, persistence, determination, initiative / enterprise, meaning, purpose and direction
- 5.7. Addressing issues of **special needs** groups, including:
 - a. **Aboriginal** communities – improving well being, self reliance and community leadership and addressing cultural issues
 - b. Disadvantaged **families with children**
 - c. People with **disabilities** – maximising the degree of independence
 - d. **Multicultural** communities, including new arrivals and refugees – addressing language, resettlement, trauma and torture and cultural issues
 - e. Disadvantaged geographic regions, including **rural and remote communities**
 - f. **Other specific disadvantaged groups** including carers and people experiencing mental health issues and alcohol /other drug misuse
- 5.8. Facilitating **community development initiatives** – building and strengthening local communities, services, resources and state-wide networks; improving social networks, cohesion, mutual support and self-help initiatives
- 5.9. **Reducing social disadvantage**, including: social isolation, self-destructive, aggressive and offending / criminal behaviour, social anxiety, stress levels, alcohol and other drug abuse, domestic violence, accidents, high risk behaviour..

⁵ Taken from CBSA Funding Guidelines Booklet: Round 30 accessed from blogs.dfc.sa.gov.au/m/dfcweb_corp/829/download.aspx

C. Theory of Change

Parenting by Connection Theory of Change September 2011



D. Participants in Parenting by Connection Activities 2003 – 2010

	Round 20 2006	Round 22 2007	Round 24 2008	Round 26 2009	Round 28 2010	Total
New participants through Courses	64	64	80	72	68	348
Total Immediate New Family Members affected ¹	150	214	249	272	188	1073
Existing Participants + immediate Families– SBG's Workshops Play Events, etc ²	101 + parents + children	123	134	186	228	772
Talks, Introductions	80 Haven't kept stats bec don't get people to register (AGM's etc)	80	80	80	80	400 Conservative estimate
Courses	8	8	8	9	8	41 Courses
Special playtime events	2	2	2	1	1	8
Support/skill building groups Parents + Parent Leaders	4	4	5 + Leaders group	5 + 1 (leaders)	5 + 1 (leaders)	920 sessions x 2-3 hrs per session + 85 Leaders Support Groups
One-on-one support	60 hrs	60 hrs	60 hrs	120 hrs	120 hrs	420 hours
1-off sessions and workshops – Existing Parents	10	10	20	16	17	73 participants
Leading/Assistant Teaching/Mentored/Assisting with Play Events/leading SBG's	40	35	20	14 2 Teachers Certified Hand in Hand	20	129

¹ This figure includes not just the parents who participated in the Courses but, also, their spouses and children. It does not include extended family members and friends, although we do have a stats of sorts on these since 2008 in the question "How many people have you told". But would be good to know sometime in the future through a follow up survey, "What is the difference that the approach has made to your extended family (which ones) and friends and how do you know this?"

² Participants who continue on in Skillbuilding Groups for that year and their spouses and children. Doesn't include extended family or friends.

E. Parenting by Connection partnerships across funding Rounds 20-28

Round 2006

Happy Valley Community Childcare Centre - evening
O'Halloran Hill TAFE Campus Child Care Centre - evening
Mt Barker – Community Childcare Centre – evening
Aldinga Community Centre
Aberfoyle Park Childcare Centre
Strathalbyn Childcare Centre - evening
Seaford Rise – Childcare, Pre School and OSHC – in the Seaford Library

Round 22 – 2007

Mt Barker TAFE Happy Valley Community Childcare Centre - Dads - evening
O'Halloran Hill TAFE Childcare Centre - evening
Blackwood Childcare Centre - evening
Happy Valley Childcare Centre – mixed - evening
Mt Barker Community Childcare Centre – evening
Aldinga Community Centre
Kararra Pre-school.- evening

Round 24 - 2008

Aldinga – Community Childcare Centre evening
Aldinga – Community Centre
Hackham – Children's Centre Term 1
Hackham Children's Centre Term 3
Blackwood Community Children Centre evening
Happy Valley Community Children Centre 1st Term evening
Happy Valley Community Children Centre 3rd Term – Dads evening
Warradale Community Children's Centre evening
Happy Valley Kindy evening
Christies Beach Primary School with Southern Junction Playgroup – with Tanya Galbraith

Round 26 - 2009

Pathways, Hackham East
Pathways, Hackham East II
O'Sullivan Beach Children's Centre
O'Sullivan Beach Children's Centre II
Hackham West Children's Centre
Hackham West Children's Centre II
John Morphet Primary School
Hub Kindy Venue for the Happy Valley and Aberfoyle Park areas – with the local pre-schools and CC's evening

Round 28 2010

Family Connections, Hackham East
O'Sullivan Beach Children's Centre
O'Sullivan Beach Children's Centre – FAMS Course
Warradale Community Children's Centre evening
Coolock House
Forbes Children's Centre
Happy Valley Community Children's Centre Term I evening
Happy Valley Term Community Children's Centre IV evening

F. Success Stories

Success Story 1

Jayden, a two and half year old boy who recently moved from England with his parents had been attending childcare for approximately 8 weeks, 2-3 days per week. He was very distressed each day, sobbing until he nearly vomited each time he attended the centre. We had tried many different techniques to try and settle Jayden (distractions, encouraging interaction in play etc) without success, nothing we did seemed to help. At the end of the 8 weeks he was still very attached to myself and chose me as his primary care giver over other staff members. Although I could get him to stop crying he would never/rarely leave my side, his teddy or his bottle in each hand.

Jayden had never been in care before and did not have interaction with other young children his own age prior coming to Australia. He had always been looked after by his Grandma or parents.

The night I attended the “stay listening” class of this course I decided to use this technique with Jayden the next time he was in care. I spoke with my team leader and she agreed it was definitely worth a try.

The next time Jayden arrived at the centre I greeted him with a big smile and open arms. Mum handed him to me (screaming) said goodbye and gave him a kiss then left the room. I took Jayden to a quiet area of our room and sat with him on my lap, my arms wrapped around him, his teddy and bottle. As we sat down I assured him that I understood he was sad that Mum had to go to work but she would be back as soon as she could. I spoke to him gently, making eye contact when ever possible telling him it was ok to cry and that I would not leave him and that when he was ready to get up we could go and play. After about half an hour his sobbing eased, he had a few yawns and although he did not fall asleep I could feel his body relax. When we had sat for a little while longer I asked if he wanted to go and play and he agreed. He never strayed far from me that day either.

I continued with the “stay listening” method with him each time he got distressed (sleep/rest time, meal time etc). After three weeks of using this technique Jayden now arrives at the centre, puts his bag in his locker with his Mum and waves goodbye without crying, he no longer searches for myself or the other primary caregiver. He no longer carries his bottle everywhere and is happy to join in with all activities offered. It is such a joy for me to see this little boy smile and interact with other children and I know it was all thanks to the Stay Listening technique.

G. Letters of support



Coolock House, PO Box 362, Morphett Vale, SA 5162, ph. 83826699

Dear Sir/Madam

I am one of the Children's Workers at Coolock House: a supported accommodation service for young women who are parenting and/or pregnant and at risk of homelessness. We are part of the Domestic Violence and Homelessness Service (DVAHS) of Centacare.

I am writing in support of the Parenting by Connection work that Ann Hefferan is doing. I have been aware through colleagues in other services of the effectiveness of this work for a wide range of parents over the past few years.

In June of this year, Ann facilitated 3 very successful Parenting by Connection sessions for our young women based on the theme of Tantrums.

The style of Ann's leading was practical and engaging. She demonstrated excellent knowledge and skill in the area of children's needs and effective parenting. She was responsive to the young women and the material that she used was effective in meeting their needs.

The young women responded well to Ann during the sessions showing that they had quickly felt they could trust her. Most of our clients have complex needs and have experiences of being parented poorly themselves. It seemed that they found these sessions to be helpful in providing a safe space to share and be heard and to reflect on their own experiences both of being parented and of parenting.

The core information on Parenting by Connection that Ann shared, invited us all to have a huge positive shift in our thinking around children's behaviors and needs. The young women were challenged to apply their new learning to their parenting both during the session playtimes and during the week between each session. They were also given opportunities to experience and to recognise their own needs around being listened to.

Through informal feedback it was clear to me that the sessions were beneficial to every participant. I believe that if we had more time with Ann the benefits would have increased greatly. It can take a lot of practice to make significant changes in established parenting behaviour patterns, and Ann's mentoring style with the young Mum's was very powerful and effective.

We have new clients continually, and would very much appreciate further opportunities to offer Parenting by Connection sessions, resources and mentoring to them.

As a long time worker with children and parents, I too was challenged and inspired by time spent with Ann and believe that other workers would gain from opportunities to see and hear her skills and knowledge in the Parenting by Connection area.

Ann's Parenting by Connection work has a positive reputation in the community and was much appreciated at Coolock House.

Sincerely

Bridget Chambers (Children's Worker) 20/8/10

ALDINGA COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CENTRE INC.



63 Butterworth Rd
Aldinga Beach SA 5173
ABN: 85294287759
Fax: 8557 8267



**Aldinga Community
Children's Centre**
Phone: 8557 7045

**Aldinga Community
OSHCer's**
Phone: 8556 6503

Tuesday 26th August 2008.

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to offer my total support for the Community Benefit SA funding application sought by Ann Hefferan as part of the Community Transformations parenting courses.

Our centre recently hosted one of Ann's 6 week parenting courses which was very well attended by parents that use our day care facility. There was a great deal of positive feedback by all of the attendees with some planning to be involved with follow-up courses in the near future.

I wish Ann every success in securing added funding to offer more parenting courses in the Aldinga and surrounding areas.

Sincerely

Stephen Kingsmill

Director

Aldinga Community Children's Centre



Blackwood Community Child Care Centre Inc.

5 Brighton Parade, Blackwood South Australia 5051
Telephone: (08) 8278 7271 • Facsimile: (08) 8278 9510
Email: bccccc@senet.com.au

To whom it may concern

We have continued during 2008 to be supported by Ann Hefferan from Community Transformations, both with staff and families in the child care centre. This year we had group of parents who attended classes with Ann and we provided a crèche for those children needing it.

Regarding staff training, 2 staff (myself and assistant director – Glenda) attended fortnightly listening partnership and leadership training with other leaders from the child care sector. This has been very worthwhile as a tool for our leadership and also an opportunity to network with other centers in our area.

This round of parent sessions was well attended and I received many positive comments from parents and children. On the last session – a weekend playday with families and children - one of the children told me “it was the best day of my whole life”.

I also got feedback from two parents who retok the course that the new Building Emotional Understanding Course and Manual were very useful and helped them to know what they would be learning and practicing each week. They felt that their parenting and listening styles had changed for the better and they were more in touch with what their children were telling them, either through words or actions.

It has also been a great opportunity for the families to get together with people who are like minded and discuss and reflect on their time as parents. Many of the parents are now getting together outside the centre.

As the director of our service I can already see the changes to the program especially in the Kindy room where a staff member has done the training previously. The staff member, Glenda is also able to be a spokesperson for the program's validity and has played the role of assistant leader in the parenting courses. I have heard the staff talking about giving their children 'listening time' and 'bringing them in' so they can have time together when their behaviors are hard for them to sort out by themselves.

We have a couple of families who have recently contacted Ann about the sessions she is running for next term from another centre in Happy Valley. She has always been quick to respond to our families and support them in a very positive way.

Regards

Janine McLoughlin

Director

Blackwood Community Child Care Centre.

10/9/08

Forbes Children's Centre for Early Childhood Development and Parenting (Government of SA)

To whom it may concern

Over the last four years, I have had the opportunity to develop a professional relationship with Community Transformations Inc, through my role as a Community Development Coordinator at two Children's Centres.

The role requires me to have an understanding of the key approaches in early childhood and to participate in a range of training and professional development opportunities.

I have found the Parenting by Connection approach to be unparalleled and absolutely unique, particularly in its understanding of, and approach to, children's off-track behaviour (signals for connection) and children's emotions. It is also distinct and insightful in its strategies to support parents.

My role as Community Development Coordinator, in a Children's Centre for Early Childhood Development and Parenting, is to build on the strengths and capacity of parents in the community. Working in partnership with the Parenting by Connection programme previously at Hackham West Children's Centre helped me achieve that goal by engaging disadvantaged and isolated parents in the community who, since participating in the PBC course, share a common sense of belonging. Through meeting other 'like minded' adults, parents have found support and encouragement.

The provision of opportunities for parents to connect with each other is very beneficial. Assisting parents to connect with each other allows them to develop friendships and networks. Having a structured, evidence based program to guide parents and respectfully invite their participation allows for all participants to explore their world of parenting and seek additional information whereby they can seek a greater understanding of their own experience of parenting their child.

Currently at Forbes Children's Centre, the community is diverse and is also comprised of parents who are of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Parenting by Connection Programme is culturally inclusive and assists all parents regardless of language or cultural differences.

The Community Transformations approach to parent education is powerful and has the potential to have such a positive impact on the lives of children. I therefore endorse any application to secure further funding for more parents to access the Parenting by Connection program.

Merridee Dangerfield
Forbes Children's Centre for
Early Childhood Development and Parenting
80 Thomas Street, South Plympton
South Australia. 5168

Phone 8293 4343
Mobile 0438 271 615

Tanya Galbraith
8 Tennyson Street
Seaford Rise SA 5169
8th September 2008

LETTER OF SUPPORT

RE: Community Transformations Inc

As a professional in the early year's sector I attended a Play Day for babies' facilitated by Ann Hefferan of Community Transformations. During this session I was given an introduction into the Parenting by Connection approach, which I found very interesting.

I observed the difference that it made to the parents that the facilitators mentored the parents to pay focussed attention to their children. I could see that it was useful for parents to be mentored to let their child take the lead in play, and to use 'playlistening'. The other interesting part of the event was the way that parents had time in an adult setting for a support group, led by another facilitator, in which they had listening time. During this time, the parents could get some listening for themselves. It was evident to me that this would lead to them being able to listen better to their children as a result of having had attention from the group. They would also be able to listen better as a result of being able to offload some tension of their own. This seemed to me to a very intelligent strategy that would help parents better attach with their children.

As a parent of a two old and a five year old, and having spent over ten years in the child care industry, I was keen to find out more. I enrolled into the "Building Emotional Understanding" course to be run at the Hackham West Children's Centre.

My experience as a parent has been that, the information and skills learned during this course have been motivating and has changed the way I parent in a positive way. An example of this is that, I no longer become anxious at the start of crying or tantrums - instead, I embrace them with strength and confidence. I have gained an understanding into the way I was parented and have put into practice consistent approaches to my children's emotional wellbeing. The importance of special time and listening time for children and adults I have shared with my family and friends.

I would highly recommend anyone involved with children on a regular basis to attend Play Days and the "Building Emotional Understanding" course, and have such enrolled my husband into the course in the near future so that we can consistently provide the best approach for our children.

Thankyou Ann!

Regards

Tanya Galbraith