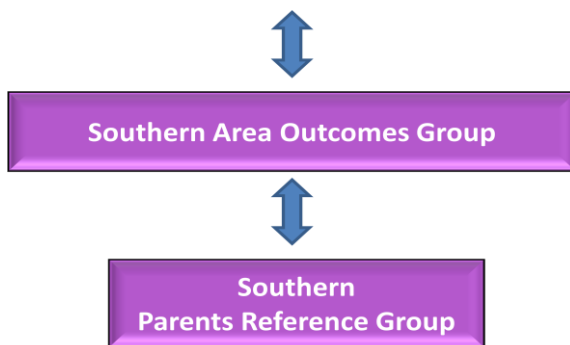


# Summary of Themes raised by the Southern Parents Reference Group

## Background

The Southern Parents Reference Group (SPRG) links directly to the Southern Outcomes Group as part of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) framework.



Parenting NI was commissioned to involve parents in the CYPSP planning process which seeks to improve outcomes for all children living in Northern Ireland.

The role of the SPRG is to participate in the CYPSP process and to act in a consultative role in responding to any documentation, plans or initiatives as directed by the Outcomes Group.

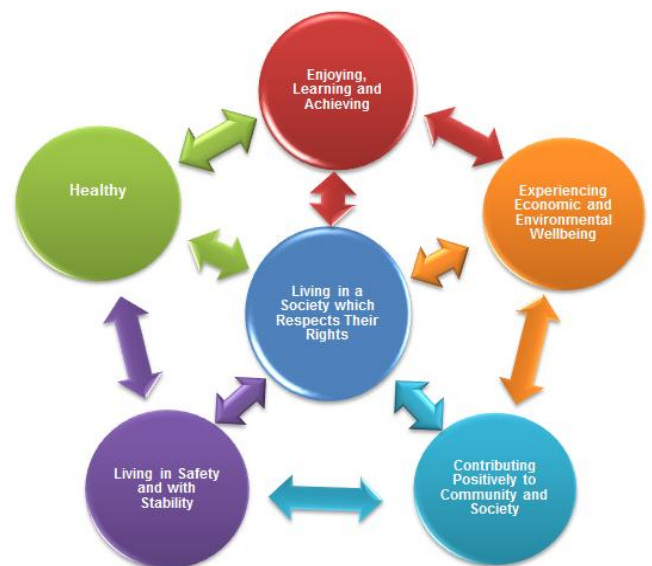
The SPRG was established in April 2012 and has met 5 times since then. The SPRG consists of 21 parents from across the Southern area whose children vary in ages and abilities.

The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting in April 2012 introduced parents to the CYPSP and its processes as well as providing an opportunity for parents to discuss the key priorities identified by the Outcomes Group to inform the development of the Southern Outcomes Group Action Plan (2011-2014).

A cross reference document was then produced as a result of the amalgamation of inputs from parents and the Southern Outcomes Group Action Plan which was discussed during the second meeting of the SPRG in June 2012.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> meetings in September 2012 and March 2013 respectively, focused on key questions posed by the Southern Outcomes Groups which parents were asked to consider and provide feedback on. The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting in June 2013 included guest speakers from Locality Planning and Volunteer Now.

This summary provides an overview of the key themes raised by the SPRG about each of the 6 high level outcomes across all their meetings to date as well as an overview of the additional pieces of work they have carried out.



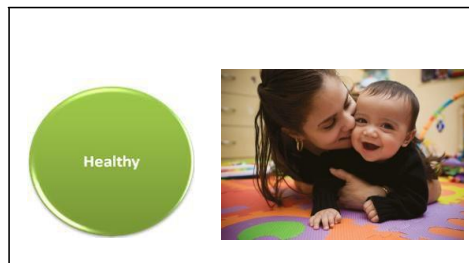
Parents welcomed the opportunity to become involved in this process and contribute to future planning. The Southern Area Outcomes Group identified 3 initial priorities from the 6 high level outcomes which they agreed to concentrate on first.

- 1) Health and Well-being
- 2) Living in Safety with Stability
- 3) Enjoying, Learning and Achieving

Parent's initial responses to these priorities included recognition of their importance but experienced a disconnect with the word "intervention" throughout. They also felt that in order to measure the success of the priorities, KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) needed to be included. Parents also felt that it was important to recognise the difference in rural and city life and how some of these outcomes can affect families differently depending on where they live.

Parents were pleased to see their contributions incorporated into the Draft Action Plan and acknowledged the time-sensitive, measurable milestones with identified leads which will drive the Southern Outcomes Group plans forward.

Over the course of the 5 meetings, parents looked at the high level outcomes and fed into discussions around the proposed plans and actions.



Parents felt it was important to examine current services and existing gaps with regards to this outcome but agreed with the intended actions. Parents also raised the following points:

- **Family Support** – more certainty around pre-school places; consistency across the area including access to local services and support; one parent commented “family support is not just about supporting families with young children. There needs to be services for children of all ages”; Highlighted the positive impact of Surestart (particularly 2 year old programme)but emphasised the importance of making their services available to all families (more available places) and not based on a post-code lottery (parents also raised concerns about one side of a street receiving Surestart services whilst the other didn’t and claimed this was unfair and suggested a re-mapping of Surestart areas)
- Need to identify and promote more positive ways for young people to deal with **stress**
- **Health initiatives** should be built into school life including on issues such as alcohol, smoking and sex
- **Hubs** – parents had not heard of them before but were delighted that they had been introduced. They highlighted the importance of raising awareness of Hubs throughout the area but questioned if they were fully resourced and had enough capacity to meet potential demand.
- More support for **working parents, new parents** and **rural families** accessing health services is needed including extension of operating hours outside of Monday-Fri day 9am-5pm
- **Green areas** should be maintained and better play provisions provided
- More **Healthy Living Centres** needed across the area
- **Funding** for existing parent support groups should be extended as well as access to future funding made easier. One parent suggested that an over-arching body should co-ordinate it.
- **Outreach parent support programme** with a wide range of services is important for the Southern area offering a mix of 1-1 and group support both at home and in community settings. This would help reduce isolation (especially for new parents, BME families and rural families) and practical suggestions were made as to how to go about this. Parents considered costs involved in travel, location of services and how/who to target. Parents felt there was a need for more support for parents with teenagers



Parents agreed with the actions under this outcome and discussed other areas of concern including:

- Need for more work in school around **building children's confidence and self-esteem**
- Local community organisations should look at how they can provide work experience for young people
- More support is needed for **working parents** who have children in school and for **parents whose children have behavioural problems**
- **Parents' Forums (or Councils or support groups)** should be set up in schools to get parents involved in school life
- More **promotion of STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects in schools
- **Non-traditional methods of teaching** should be looked at as traditional methods don't suit all children
- **Early intervention** and support is vital particularly with the transition age group of children moving from small local primary schools to large town secondary schools
- **EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance)** was a good system which encouraged young people to stay on at school
- Proposed **selection** for grammar schools **at 14 instead of 11**
- **Young people dropping out of school for many reasons therefore they need to be supported more**



Parents agreed with the actions under these outcome and had nothing further to add.



Parents were all in agreement about the importance of these outcomes. They agreed with the actions to increase and promote volunteering among young people but stated that the value of this needs to be made evident to young people and the community. They identified issues to look at further including:

- Important to highlight the **positive contributions** young people make to their community including in local media
- More work with and support for **young parents** is needed including evening and weekend support services. Young parents need support to use existing skills and gain confidence in returning to work which could be done through volunteering/community work
- More work is needed with parents around **positive parenting and boundaries**
- Suggestion to raise the age of going into a bar to 25
- **Community-based support services** work well and could include youth mentoring schemes; grass roots funding is needed to support this; examine local Church run groups such as Guides, Scouts, Boys and Girls Brigades and work with them to achieve this outcome
- Schools should play a role in **promoting volunteering** but consideration should also be given to a “virtual fair” (similar to a Time Bank initiative) as it would be more appealing to young people

In March 2013, the SPRG were asked to consider and feedback on the establishment and priorities of a sub-group to focus on new services proposals and specification arising from outcomes investment. The sub-group was set up with a remit and target areas including:

- 1) Specialised Family Support for targeted young and first time parents;
- 2) Family Support Services delivered within the community;
- 3) Mental Health of the whole family;
- 4) Services/supports to facilitate inclusion, participation, raising aspirations and achievement and
- 5) Prevention of Offending

Parents agreed with the proposed target areas and felt that the above mentioned issues should be given priority. Parents were happy to see that their input into original discussions had helped shape this sub-group and its targets and offered additional feedback to be considered.

That feedback included:

- Suggestion of a lay person to help prepare new parents for parenthood
- All support needs to be flexible to include evening and weekends for working parents
- Mental health of whole family should be considered as the most important as mental health cuts across all other target areas
- Specialised training for teachers on dealing with pupils who self-harm could be beneficial
- Infant Mental Health needs to be focused on
- Mentoring systems are useful tools to support families
- Early intervention with young people deemed “at risk of offending” was vital
- Parents role in setting boundaries in vital and more parents need support to do this
- Raise awareness, particularly amongst BME parents about the need to and importance of registering with dentists

In June 2013, the SPRG met with Julie Bolton, Locality Development Officer and Jane Gribbin, Volunteer Now. Parents received information on the work of Volunteer Now, the role of Locality Planning and an update on what was happening with Locality Planning across the Southern area. They also received information on “Keeping your child safer online and encouraging positive use” training delivered by Wayne Denner.

#### **Next steps:**

The Southern Parents Reference Group last met collectively in June 2013 in response to tasks set by the Outcomes Group. Whilst waiting for the next piece of directed work from the Outcomes Group, the Parenting Forum have kept the PRG informed of the progress of the Southern Outcomes Group as well as providing information about relevant government consultations, upcoming training for parents as well as policy updates through our monthly e-brief.

As each OG area are reviewing their action plans and developing action plans for 2015 onwards, the PRG are available to participate in any directed tasks relating to the future action plans between now and June 2014. The PRG will also be invited to participate in the OG stakeholder events which are scheduled to take place before June 2014.

Views of the Southern Parents Reference Group are submitted to the Southern Outcomes Group as part of a wider process to improve lives of all children living in Northern Ireland ([www.cypsp.org](http://www.cypsp.org)).

The Outcomes Group has specific responsibility for improving lives of children in the Southern area and welcomes the participation of parents in this process.

Interested in joining or finding out more about the Southern Parents Reference Group?

Please contact Clare-Anne Magee at Parenting NI; [clare-anne@parentingni.org](mailto:clare-anne@parentingni.org) or 028 90310891