

FAMILY SKILLS PROJECT



Evaluation
June 2012

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Introduction

National Children's Football Alliance (NCFA) is a coalition of agencies and organisations that safeguard and advance the rights of children in football. As a humanistic voice and advocate for children, The NCFA also acts as a focal point and network for those individuals and organisations seeking sustainable partnerships, information, education and/or training on child-centred approaches and children's rights in football. Strong families are the building blocks of a strong society and are a sustainable solution to tackling violence and aggression within communities. The NCFA and **Family Lives**, a highly respected national charity providing help and support in all aspects of family lives, joined forces with **Arsenal Football Community** who facilitated the **Family Skills Project** (FSP) programme of workshops and football for fun sessions.

FSP provided families from disadvantaged areas opportunities to take part in activities together, which they have never done before. Activities encouraged communication between age groups and building skills to create a stronger family unit benefiting the wider community through social inclusion. Families attended group sessions and discussed their feelings about the role football plays at home, at school and in the community. Together families explored a number of methods on how to play football for fun with their children and encourage development through play. The learning process brought families closer together and formed friendships in the community.

Outcome aims

- Better communication skills
- A better understanding of intergenerational relationships.
- Support for children's age appropriate football games.
- Confidence to play football for fun with children.

Background / brief history.

A number of points highlighted the need for a FSP. Islington is the eighth most deprived borough in England and the fourth most deprived in London 62% of Islington residents live in areas of the borough ranked amongst the most deprived 10% in the country and there remain significant barriers to education and training, high levels of crime and income deprivation affecting children. Football can be a vehicle for social inclusion which drives on strong family units educating children at home about anti-social behaviour. The NCFA wider membership contains many organisations playing an important part tackling violence in the community through football.

- Correspondence from parents to NCFA and founder members concerning bullying in football – are considered high priorities in schools, football's governing bodies and number one issue for families and children.

Since the NCFA's conception correspondence from parents, coaches, teachers and

other organizations regarding issues around bullying in the children's game continues to be a cause for concern.

- The importance of strengthening the family unit as a sustainable solution to tackle the rising violence in the community e.g gangs and knife crime

Football can be a vehicle for social inclusion which drives on strong family units educating children at home about anti-social behaviour. There is ongoing work with many organisations playing an important part tackling violence in the community through football. The [NCEFA's](#) extended network recognise there is no room for complacency and the family have a vital role to play in education of young people and those that work with them.

- The rise in aggressive behavior of parents at children's football games.

A number of press articles and debates on coaching forums continue to once again give rise to parents' poor behavior on the touch lines of children's football matches. Lessons learnt from communities that have suffered from aggressive behavior of parents in the past can provide solutions in areas that may have been overlooked such as football in the family?

The work undertaken from the 2010 pilot project has shown how participants felt more confident in their home lives when communicating with their children, schools, clubs and in the community in general. The project has as a core aim to tackle anti-social behaviour, through utilising football and sportsmanship to improve communication skills. People learn that strong families create strong communities; children are educated about anti-social behaviour and parents about their responsibility to their families and to the community as a whole. The NCEFA disseminated this learning across its wide membership and highlighted how football and the involvement of children can lead to greater social inclusion. This led to further interest from other organisations and clubs interested in the project. NCEFA will aim to raise funds to extend the reach of the project across the country, bringing greater benefit for all, particularly within disadvantaged communities where family cohesion may not be strongest.

Recruitment / who was involved.

Eleven families took part with a further twenty plus families turned down due to the project being fully booked in the space of a week. Islington Family Services, Camden Family Services and Family Lives all received enquires for places on the Family Skills Project. Leaflets were distributed to a number of local schools which continued to generate phone enquiries weeks after the Project.

Families were informed when they booked onto the FSP that it is non statutory and they could leave at any time.

Community leaders also enquired about enrolling their groups onto FSP. The demand was such that there simply was not enough places to accommodate everyone.

Arsenal Community Coordinator, Ross McKinley reported, ‘**In terms of recruitment, the demand exceeded our expectations hugely. We could have filled the course three times over after just a few days but this is promising for future programmes. It was also nice to have many calls from ‘family orientated’ charitable organisations requesting information as the FSP fitted really well with their local needs’**

Who was in involved.

ID	Relationship	Family Status	Gender	Ethnic Group	Adult Age	Child Age
FS01	Mother	Married	Female	White British	36-50	7+8
FS02	Father	Co-habiting	Male	Black British	36-50	13+14
FS03	Father	Co-habiting	Male	Black British	26-35	8
FS04	Mother	Lone mother family	Female		36-50	9
FS05	Mother	Lone mother family	Female	White British	36-50	6+9
FS06	Father	Married	Male	Black British	36-50	8+14
FS07	Mother	Lone mother family	Female		36-50	7+7
FS08	Mother	Married	Female	White British		10+5
FS09	Mother	Married	Female	Black African	36-50	7
FS10	Mother	Lone mother family	Female	White British	26-35	11+7

Activities

Hosted by Arsenal Community, NCFa facilitated children’s football games on the Monday 2nd and Tuesday 3rd April with the parents attending Family Lives workshops at the same time. Games; Magic Tunnel, Five Shot Game, First Team to Score and Free Play supported communication skills and sportsmanship discussions which took place later in the workshops. Children and parents then switched sessions on the Wednesday 4th April with Parents attending NCFa workshop and children attending Family Lives session. Parents viewed two grass roots football films and discussed issues around communication at home, school and in the community and how the children’s game may help to better their understanding of how best to deal with certain issues like poor behaviour. Celebration day brought children and parents together to take part in fun football games on Thursday 4th April with a guided tour of the Emirates Stadium to complete the FSP. Games included Conger-D-Futsal, Relay, Blindfold and Freeze, plus many more games made up by the children. (See Appendix 1 for detail activities).

Outcomes achieved.

- **Better communication skills**

Through the power of football improving communication skills families explored how to listen more sensitively and take time to discuss issues without distractions which brought them closer together. By contextualizing football through childhood and feeling confident trusting children to play their game in safe loosely supervised environments created a feel good factor and generated more and new ways of playing football together as a family. By the end of the week families exchanged contact details and wanted to stay in touch and support one another through their children's football. Age appropriate games and workshop exercises explored the balance of communication between parents and their children. Parents recognised negative traits that expressed concern for a lack of support for their child's football interests in the wider community. Ultimately, parents listening skills addressed the bullying culture in the home, on the pitch and in the community in general.

- **A better understanding of intergenerational relationships.**

The children interviewed their parents the night before which provided the basis (answers) of discussion on the topic of intergenerational relationships (See Appendix 1). Many parents recollected relationships with their parents and grand parents and the games they would play together. Discussing parents' childhoods in a group helped remind them about the importance of inter-generational relationships and how common sense was the order of the day with their own parents. Conversely, many parents felt that they did not know whether playing football in parks with their children and children's friends was now permitted because of health and safety issues.

- **Support for children's age appropriate football games.**

Through football game related play parents appreciated the vast differences between the adult game and the children's game. A number of sanctions created by the children enabled their parents to join in playing a match on celebration day (See Appendix 1). Parents understood that children play football when they feel safe to explore and be creative on their terms learning the game by making lots of mistakes. The environment was key for parent understanding and supporting children's football. This was achieved when parents watched the grass roots films and then applied their knowledge to playing the games with their children and other families on the final day. Tony David, Arsenal Community Coach said, **'The adults learned to control their competitive spirit and have more fun without great expectations, whilst the kids learned to share and enjoy things more instead of wanting the ball to themselves. They both learned how to praise and encourage each other and communicate as a group or team.'**

- **Confidence to play football for fun with children.**

Putting the fun back into football as a family activity provided parents with confidence to play the children's game. Regardless of parents' football abilities their children's energy to display their skills was clear for all to see in the family football for fun games.



Parents and children look forward to their Emirates Stadium tour facilitated by Arsenal Community.

Many of the parents started FSP with sceptical views about playing football with any degree of confidence with their children. This aspect was totally turned around by the end of the project (See Appendix 2). Bringing together vulnerable families and showing them that football is a force to bring them closer also gave them confidence to organize and take part in their own games. Once again the environment was crucial to the positive outcome.

Conclusion

FSP provides vulnerable families with the opportunity to come together and use the principles of fair play, sportsmanship and children's football to improve their parenting and life skills. Through the teaching of non-aggressive communication, identifying positive strategies to deal with poor behaviour and avoiding negativity families reconsider their listen skills through a programme of play. When discussing how best to encourage their children to behave better at home, at school and in the community families reported back that their relationships with their children had changed for the better.

Parents now recognise the early signs of poor behaviour and reinforce their newly found strategies to deal with emotive situations in a positive way. Ultimately, families discover how best to deal with their emotions in challenging environments by sharing their experiences in group discussions which led to further friendships amongst participants formed outside of the Family Skills Project. One parent (a qualified football coach) offered to provide support to the group with their children's school football.

Families recognised intervention methods addressing poor behaviour at home and in public. When families discussed the early stages of poor behaviour in a friendly environment they recognised how they could affect anti-social behaviour in the wider community by teaching their children through their experience.

Families felt confident to play football with their children on the final day of the week long project. They openly embraced the benefits and looked forward to playing in parks, at home and in designated play areas. Parents recognise that their children's football interests can be an important point of contact for positive communication, social inclusion and citizenship. Through intergenerational play young and old played a form of football that suited their needs and not the conventional game that some parents find intimidating.

The impact of the project is having a positive and lasting effect in the family, in school where children are performing better and able to show greater respect, passed to them from their parents. Supporting their child's football, parents recognise the benefits in terms of self esteem, health and well being. They also see the value of responsible parenting and how this is passed onto their children in public spaces like football matches. There is clearly a feel good factor and a potential to roll the project out to a much wider community in its current form will provide further positive outcomes.

A major factor to the success of the project was that it was not mandatory. Parents felt comfortable with the friendly environment and there excellent attendance suggests they were not intimidated by the options to interact.

In essence the Family Skills Project provides a firm foundation for families to discuss parenting issues and manage together how best to protect childhood and treasure memories for life.



THE FAMILY

Appendix i

Day 1 - Monday 2nd April

10:15: Arrive and refreshments

10.30-11.25 Football for fun playing the children's game (55 mins)

Fair play / sportsmanship looking at fun safe play

Homework task: Interview Your Parents (5mins)

11.30 – 12.00: Parents and children can stay behind to chat to each other and staff.

Football for fun playing the children's game (55 mins)

Introducing Fair play / Sportsmanship looking at fun safe play

Two games; **Magic Tunnel** and **Five Shot Game** helped introduce the children to each other and acted as a good ice breaker.



Icebreaker

Both games encourage children to take ownership and ultimately make friends. The children were asked how they can best make the game fair and how they can all play the game without any one missing out.

Solutions; Fair teams, Size, Speed, Fun, Rules, Safety, Tackling, No Goal Keepers, Lots of touches of the ball, Lots of goals scored, Good Communication

The children did not want to play with goal keepers because it was decided that every one wanted to score. Rather than goal keepers children decided to take it in turns to play in the goal scoring zone. Both games were played with different size balls and players nominated different captains in order to experience team leadership skills. The total number of goals scored in 55 minutes **92 Goals**

Interview Your Parents; the children were given a brief questionnaire to interview their parents at home about their childhood and play. The exercise encouraged children to listen to their parent's favourite games when they were young.

1. What games did you play as a kid and where did you play them?
2. What is your favourite memory of your parents / guardians?
3. Did you have a favourite football player or sports person?
4. Who was your best friend and why were they your best friend?

The exercise encouraged children to find out about their parents / guardians childhood. The questionnaires were discussed the next day in the children's workshop 03.04.12 and again in the parents' workshop 04.08.10.

Day 2 - Tuesday 3rd April

10:15: Arrive and refreshments

10.30-11.30: Workshops

11.30 – 12.00: Parents and children can stay behind to chat to each other and Arsenal staff.

Football for Life

The children were asked how else could they could decide a kick off in a match other than toss a coin. Lots of great answers but the one everyone felt was the most fun was the best of three playing Rock, Paper, and Scissors. The game led to discussing sportsmanship and the importance of making friends in football. Everyone agreed that to play football you needed to be part of a team. The children organised 3 teams and nominated captains to represent there team.

Children review Parents / Carers interview

The children discussed their parents' answers in their teams. A group discussion followed with the children recognising their parents / carers played the same games they play. **Football, King Ball, Gaelic Football, Rounders, Skipping, Hockey, Cricket, Pool, Table Tennis, Swimming, Hopscotch, Hula Hoops, Tag, Cats Cradle, French Skipping, Badminton, Netball, Hide and Seek, Bike Riding, Long Distance Running.** Children also felt that their parents / carers memories from childhood mirrored their own.

Children did not recognise all their parents / carers favourite sports person: **Viv Richards, The Rock, Hulk Hogan, Steve Collins, Tony Adams, Liam Brady, Pele, Denis Lewis, George Best.** This led to the children discussing why they had not heard of their parents sporting heroes and it was pointed out by the children's sporting heroes (David Beckham, Wayne Rooney, Lionel Messi, Van Persi) may well have been inspired by their parents sporting heroes.

When reviewing their parents answers for 'Who was your best friend?' all the children wanted to tell every one about their parents best friends. This exercise clearly worked on a level where parents communicated with their children in a positive manner and all the children were engaged to the point where they were excited to tell everyone.

The Numbers Game is a fun demonstration of different forms of communication. The numbers 1,2,3 are spoken in turn and eventually replaced by actions; clap, jump and hop. The game led to how the players can respect everyone's abilities and help each other to improve.



Numbers Game

Group discussions about relationships through football with adults. The children completed questionnaires in their groups. The exercise would be shared with parents therefore the children's names were not warranted on the forms.

- When you are playing football and your parents shout something positive at you how does this make you feel?

'Pleased'. 'Happy'. 'Embarrassed'. 'It makes me feel happy'. 'I feel happy because he's trying to make my team win'. 'Happy, good, proud and excited'. 'It makes me feel happy and not to quit and carry on'

- When you are playing football and your parents shout something negative at you how does it make you feel?

'Lonely'. 'Mad'. 'Angry'. 'Makes me have a temper, cross and sad', 'Makes me feel sad'. 'Disappointed'. 'Upset'. 'Sad because he's making me feel like he doesn't like me'

- When they SHOUT something positive what do they say?

'Please do it again'. 'Good work, nice try and nice shot'. 'Thanks'. 'Well done'. 'Go on you can do it'. 'What a ball or great goal'. 'Really good football / good work'

- When they SHOUT something negative what do they say?

'Come on'. 'Rude'. 'That's bad / bad work'. 'They say who are you passing to or what is that?'. 'Why don't you do it right?'. 'Don't be selfish'. 'What did you do that for? You can't play'. 'Stop saying that'

1=not important 5=very important	1	2	3	4	5
The number of children that said					
How important is your football result?	4		2	2	1
How do you see your relationship with your parents or carers at home?		1		7	1
How do you see your relationship with your parents at a football match?		3		6	
How often do you feel your family comes together as a team?				2	7

Exercise in pairs: All winners' game is a knock out competition featuring Heads, Shoulders, Knees and FOOTBALL. At the end of the session captains picked a player from their team that they felt contributed to all the discussions and helped by taking part in the activities. The captains explained their reasons why they awarded player of the team and the teams applauded sportingly.



Team talks

Day 3 - Wednesday 4th April

Parents' workshop

COME THE WHISTLE (audio-visual). Parents discussed the positive and negative communication issues arising from the film.

Some parents comments from the Feedback form:

'I'm a football coach and I see this kind of thing. It's an eye opener for parents and governing bodies'

'I thought the film was very good and gave some good info'

'Couldn't see kids to many adults practically standing on the pitch'

'Really effective – it's all about the adults. Awful to see how much pressure is on the kids'

'It was quite shocking to see.....'

LET THEM PLAY. The Children's game is not the adult's game – looking at how adults can enjoy children's football without expectations. Parents discussed their expectations when they watch their children play.

GET STUCK IN (audio visual). A film recorded on the touch lines of children's football matches

Some parents comments;

'Very shockingmaking me rethink about the game professionally'

'This was really shocking their manner, the swearing, expectations of parents and coaches was out of control. They totally forget what they was there for – a game of football'

'Angry, lost for words'. 'Quite upsetting parents turning nasty on each other and on children'.

'Really shocking – if I took my children to play in a team and they heard this kind of thing, I wouldn't go back'. 'Excellent film'. 'Shocking'

Parents discussed their experiences watching children's matches and how Positive Communication becomes learned behaviour amongst young people.

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS. Parents discussed the answers the children provided from their questionnaires. Some parents felt that they would not tolerate poor adult behaviour at children's football matches where other parents felt that they did not have the confidence to do something about witnessing poor behaviour in a public environment.

Positive Communication was discussed in the context of sport in the community and parents recognise that it acts as a public arena therefore they have wider responsibilities.

The discussions drew from the children's parents' interview whereby parents remembered their childhood and how play helped them to develop in an environment often without parental pressure.

Workshop Feed back form;

Please tick 3 = high, 2 = average, or 1 = low to each question in the box, thank you.

Workshop feedback?	3.	2.	1.
The number of parents			
Did you enjoy the workshop?	10		
Was the workshop informative?	10		
How do you rate your facilitator?	10		
How do you rate the facility?	10		

Day 4 / 5 Thursday 5th April

Celebration day

Conger de Futsal

Parents and children's football for fun featured football conger where two teams tried dribbling and controlling their footballs from one end of the pitch to another. The first team to get back to their marker and NOT break the conga chain was the winner.

The two conger lines were a mixture of parents and children and the game guarantees lots of laughter – a real ice breaker and perfect way to start the session

Cone pick up game

Parents and children were mixed into 4 teams located around and 10ms from a square with lots of cones in. Each player in the team had to take it in turns to dribble (with a ball) over to the square of cones – pick one up and go back to their team and place their cone on top of the starting cone.

When all the cones are gone the children on each team count up all the cones to see which team has the most and who has won the game.

Trust Game

Parents team up with their children and blindfold them. They then stand on the opposite side of the pitch and call them and give instructions – right/left straight on etc; so their child can cross over to them. The first to do this is the winner (ball optional) the roles were then reversed with the parents blindfolded and the children calling.

Freeze Game

A normal game of football but every few minutes the coach would either shout 'parents freeze' or 'children freeze'. This allowed more space and a chance for the parents to watch the children and for the children to watch the parents.

The game ended in a draw with a penalty shoot out with all participants taking part.



The Best Team in the World