

BONDING FROM THE BEGINNING

An Evaluation of the Parent Infant Programme in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust

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24



Southern Health
& Social Care Trust



STATS &
STORIES

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Parent Infant Programme (PIP) was set up by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) in partnership with Home-Start to provide support for parents with an infant aged 0 – 4 months who lived outside the current SureStart areas. PIP currently serves four areas in the SHSCT area: Armagh and Dungannon, Banbridge, Craigavon and Newry and Mourne. The programme features weekly two-hour face-to-face sessions over 19 weeks. Sessions of the programme include Sensory Play, Infant Massage, Sleep Support Workshops and the Incredible Years® Parents and Babies Programme. The key objectives of the PIP programme are to enhance parents' understanding of developmental milestones, boost parenting skills, reduce isolation and stress, support mental health and foster community connections.

The SHSCT commissioned Stats & Stories to evaluate how effectively the programme achieved these outcomes to support parents and infants. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of two PIP programmes, which started in spring and autumn 2023, in supporting parents and infants. In addition, this evaluation aimed to identify areas for improvement in the programme's design and delivery.

Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to explore how effective the PIP programme was in supporting parents and infants, focusing on gathering insights from three main groups:

- **Parents:** Parent perspectives were gathered through pre/post standardised measures completed by 98 participants before and after the 8-week Incredible Years® Baby and Parent sessions, alongside an anonymous online end-of-programme evaluation completed by 85 parents.
- **Home-Start Staff and Volunteers:** Home-Start staff and volunteers provided feedback through an online evaluation completed by 21 participants and a focus group involving all four Home-Start Managers.

- **Stakeholders:** Stakeholder views, including those of Health Visitors as key referrers, were obtained through an online survey completed by 13 respondents and a focus group with three members of the SHSCT management team.

Data collection occurred in Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024, with quantitative analysis conducted using SPSS and qualitative data thematically coded. Focus groups conducted in February and June 2024 were recorded with consent and analysed thematically to uncover key insights from participants.

Key Results

Programme Delivery

PIP Referral Process: An effective referral process is critical to ensure timely and appropriate support for parents who would benefit most from the programme. There is consensus on replacing the current first-come-first-served system with a needs-based approach. Home-Start managers recommended using an expression of interest form to gauge demand and prioritise needs effectively. Suggested eligibility criteria include:

- Primarily, but not exclusively, for first-time parents/carers;
- Early concerns regarding parental isolation;
- Parents self-reporting anxiety or depression;
- Families requiring support/additional support identified by Health Visitors or other family support services in the community.

Most parents (88.2%) self-referred to the programme and reported high satisfaction with the process. While professionals were generally satisfied with the referral process (69.2%), some suggested reducing the referral form length and improving communication consistency.

Programme Implementation: A very high proportion of participants rated the overall service delivery of PIP as excellent or good:

- 100% of stakeholders rated the overall programme delivery as excellent or good;
- 97.7% of parents rated the overall programme delivery as excellent or good;

- 95.2% of Home-Start staff and volunteers rated the overall programme management as excellent or good.

Partnership working between Home-Start and SHSCT was described as mutually beneficial, enhancing service delivery and parental engagement. Suggestions for improvement included increasing flexibility of programme content and scaling up the programme to reach more families in the SHSCT area.

Programme Content

All four main elements of the PIP programme have been highly rated by both parents and Home-Start staff and volunteers:

- **Infant Massage: (International Association of Infant Massage training)** 98.8% of parents and 100% of Home-Start staff and volunteers rated the content on Infant Massage as very useful or useful.
- **Sensory Play:** 98.8% of parents and 95.5% of Home-Start staff and volunteers rated Sensory Play content as useful or very useful.
- **Sleep Support Workshops: (Millpond)** 90.0% of parents and 87.8% of Home-Start staff and volunteers rated the sleep content as useful or very useful.
- **Incredible Years® Baby and Parent Programme:** 87.3% of parents and 90.5% of Home-Start and volunteers rated the Incredible Years (IY) content as useful or very useful. It should be noted that this was the only part of the programme to be rated as not useful by parents who completed the survey (5.1%). Parents expressed frustration at the dated nature of some of the IY resources, particularly the videos.

Parents and staff suggested that additional content around weaning, physical movement and first aid would also be beneficial for participants.

PIP Impact on Parents

Feedback from parents indicates participants gained multiple benefits from PIP:

- **Socialising with Others:** 97.6% of parents benefited from socialising with other parents;
- **Bonding with Baby:** 90.6% of parents reported improved bonding with their baby;
- **Safe Learning Environment:** 83.5% of parents agreed PIP provided a safe environment for asking questions;
- **Learning to Cope:** 78.8% of parents benefited from learning coping strategies.

The use of the Incredible Years® Babies Programme Survey before and after the IY programme has also provided valuable insights into parental progress. Administered at the start and end of the IY component at both the Spring 23 and Autumn 23 groups, results across five key areas show:

1. **Playing:** Parents reported significant increases in daily play activities, with the largest percentage increases around 'I give my baby massages' (36.2%), 'I read books to my baby' (35.7%) and 'I use hand puppets with my baby' (32.6%).
2. **Crying:** Results indicate positive progress by parents in coping with their baby's crying, with an 80.4% decrease in parents finding it difficult to soothe their baby (from 10.2% to 2.0%) and an 80.4% decrease in parents yelling at their baby when crying (from 5.1% to 1.0%).
3. **Child Development:** All parents reported that they always or often felt bonded to their baby after the programme with 96.9% adopting a baby-directed approach in feeding.
4. **Parental Self Care:** By the end of the IY programme nearly all parents (92.8%) found it helpful to share both their ideas and worries with other parents compared to 67.3% before the programme.
5. **Coping as a Parent:** Overall the majority of parents reported positive outcomes:
 - 99.0% reported they were happy in their role as a parent;
 - 96.9% reported feeling confident as a parent;
 - 96.9% reported feeling close to their baby.

Overall, 100% felt confident in helping their baby feel safe and loved after the programme.

The qualitative data from the PIP programme highlights three key themes staff identified as significant benefits to parents:

1. **Peer Support:** Parents formed connections through sessions and a moderated WhatsApp group, fostering social interaction and sharing experiences which served to reduce isolation and loneliness.
2. **Increased Understanding of Baby Development:** Parents gained knowledge of developmental milestones and the importance of quality one-to-one time, enhancing their ability to respond to their babies' needs and strengthening parent-infant bonds.
3. **Confidence:** The supportive learning environment and new skills such as baby massage and sensory play boosted parents' confidence, reduced stress and improved their ability to bond with their infants.

Staff also identified several benefits to infants including social interaction, new sensory experiences and strengthened bonds with parents.

Learning for the Future

This evaluation of the PIP programme demonstrates its significant impact on improving outcomes for parents and infants. This included enhanced understanding of developmental milestones, strengthening of bond between parent and infant, reduced stress and isolation and greater awareness of support in the local community. While these strengths are noted, the evaluation also identifies opportunities to enhance the programme's effectiveness such as refining the referral process to prioritise families most in need, expanding programme content with evidence-based modules on topics like physical movement and weaning, allowing for more flexibility with programme content and exploring alternative approaches to Incredible Years content. These areas of improvement have been incorporated into the following recommendations for future development.

Recommendations:

- 1. Improve the PIP Referral Process:** Focus on developing an effective referral process that reaches parents who would benefit most and is manageable for staff. Consider adopting a 'pre-registration' referral system where parents express their interest, allowing staff to gauge demand, prioritise families based on need and manage the referral process more effectively. Clear and specific guidance on how to access the programme, using needs-based criteria, should be developed in partnership between the SHSCT and Home-Start and be clearly communicated and accessible to parents.
- 2. Additional Programme Content:** Develop a suite of modules using evidence-based content on subjects such as physical movement, weaning and first aid. These modules should be interchangeable, allowing flexibility within the programme while ensuring the delivery of high-quality content on a consistent basis. In addition, consider how to make better use of existing resources to support parents through signposting to evidence-based webinars and online content by the Public Health Agency and other relevant sources.
- 3. Options alongside Incredible Years:** Explore alternative evidence-based programmes such as Solihull Understanding Your Child as options alongside the current Incredible Years content to respond to feedback from both staff and parents. While the Incredible Years programme has proven effective in supporting parent and infant interactions, some outdated content and challenges in scaling up cost-effectively have been expressed as limitations.
- 4. Expanding the Reach of PIP:** Building on the successful partnership between the SHSCT and Home-Start, further exploration should be given to sustaining this partnership in the medium to long term. This would provide stability and reach more families in the area. Additionally, focus should be given to:
 - adopting a more flexible approach to accommodate parents from outside current Home-Start catchment areas within the SHSCT area to ensure programmes are filled to capacity and more families in need can benefit;

- exploring how groups with specific needs, such as those with limited English language skills, young parents and parents from care-experienced backgrounds could benefit from the PIP programme;
- the potential of using a blended learning approach for families needing an interpreter or those who cannot attend a group due to physical disabilities or other caregiving responsibilities.

5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Enhance the existing evaluation system to effectively track and monitor all aspects of the PIP programme. Consideration should be given to:

- continued use of the end of programme surveys for parents, staff and stakeholders set up under this evaluation to provide a clearer picture of the impact of PIP;
- introducing a specific standardised parenting measure such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) or Karitane Parenting Confidence Scale as an alternative to IY Babies Programme Survey to track progression throughout the programme;
- accessing additional support to analyse the data collected from these sources in order to systematically assess how well the programme is achieving its goals and objectives and to create an evidence base of what works well to support families in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area.

Part 1: Background

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been growing understanding of the critical importance of early childhood development and its link to supporting positive life outcomes. Developments in neuroscience and psychology have provided robust evidence about the long-lasting impact infant mental health has on emotional regulation, social skills and mental health. Parents and caregivers are central in shaping infants' early experiences. The quality of the parent-infant relationship can substantially affect a child's development, either positively or negatively. The early years provide the unique opportunity for parents to establish a strong, nurturing relationship with their child, fostering secure attachment and trust. In addition, investing in early childhood development is cost-effective and has wider societal benefits. Early interventions can reduce the need for more intensive and costly services later in life, such as mental health treatment and social services.

Recognising the importance of supporting families in the earliest stages, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT), worked in partnership with the UK-wide charity Home-Start and Public Health Agency (PHA), to develop a Parent Infant Programme (PIP). PIP is a 19 week programme designed to support parents with new babies aged 0 – 4 months living outside the current SureStart areas. Sessions include infant massage, sensory play, sleep workshops and Incredible Years Baby and Parent Programme. The programme was initially developed to support parents of newborns during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they often felt very isolated and lacked the usual support from family and friends. The outcomes of the PIP programme are to empower parents by enhancing their understanding of developmental milestones, boosting parenting confidence, reducing isolation and stress, supporting mental health and fostering connections in the local community. The SHSCT commissioned Stats & Stories to evaluate how effectively the programme achieved these outcomes to support parents and infants.

Northern Ireland Policy Context

In the past ten years, there has been much greater recognition of the importance of infant mental health in Northern Ireland's policy making. The Infant Mental Health Framework for Northern Ireland¹ defines infant mental health as focusing on social and emotional development during the first three years of life, including a child's ability to form relationships, recognise and express emotions, and explore and learn about their environment safely and happily. The following section briefly outlines key policies related to supporting babies and their families in Northern Ireland.

Children and Young People's Strategy 2020 - 2030

The Children and Young People's Strategy in Northern Ireland² is the overarching policy to support the wellbeing of children and young people aged 0 – 25 years old. The strategy aims to ensure children and young people have the best possible start in life and opportunities to thrive. The strategy places significant emphasis on early intervention and prevention and recognises that the best way to improve the overall well-being of our children and young people is to ensure that babies are as healthy and well cared for as possible from pre-birth and through those early years. A number of actions in the strategy focus on improving early childhood outcomes through targeted interventions including:

- **Enhancing Maternal and Infant Health:** Implementing programmes to promote positive prenatal and postnatal maternal health and support parents to have a better understanding of how responsive and sensitive parenting can impact on their child's brain development.
- **Promote the Importance of Play:** Support measures to promote awareness of the importance of play in the early years and encourage the integration of play-based learning approaches in early childhood education programmes.
- **Parental Support:** Offering evidence-based parenting programmes and resources to support parents in providing a nurturing and stimulating environment for their infants.

¹ Public Health Agency (2016) [Infant Mental Health Framework for Northern Ireland](#)

² Northern Ireland Executive (2020) [Children and Young People's Strategy 2020 - 2030](#)

- **Early Intervention Services:** Expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and their families, particularly those at risk of developmental delays or disabilities.

Infant Mental Health Framework for Northern Ireland

The first regional Infant Mental Health Framework for Northern Ireland³ was launched in 2016. This framework offers a structured approach to address the mental health and well-being of infants, recognising the critical importance of the early years in shaping long-term mental health outcomes. The strategy promotes early intervention, supports parents and caregivers and builds the capacity of the early years workforce. The three key policy areas are:

1. **Evidence and Policy:** Commitment to gathering evidence of local practices and using this evidence base to inform policies and strategies related to infant mental health and the early years.
2. **Workforce Development:** Capacity building for frontline practitioners across relevant disciplines, ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to support positive parenting, assess infant mental health and identify issues early.
3. **Service Development:** Enhancing the capacity of practitioners to identify and address infant mental health needs, with a clear referral pathway and increased service capacity. This involves a multi-disciplinary, coordinated approach to maximise resource use and support a whole-child approach.

Each priority area includes key recommendations and is accompanied by a timescale with specific actions. Each Health and Social Care Trust has developed their own Action Plan informed by the Infant Mental Health Framework.

³ Public Health Agency (2016) [Infant Mental Health Framework for Northern Ireland](#)

Good Beginnings: An Infant Mental Health Strategy for the Southern Area: 2020 to 2025

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust developed ‘Good Beginnings: An Infant Mental Health Strategy for the Southern Area: 2020 to 2025’⁴. The vision is to ensure that all children have the best start in life by prioritising and supporting the development of positive, social and emotional wellbeing. The key priority areas in the ‘Good Beginnings’ strategy reflect those set out in the Infant Mental Health Framework and it emphasises early intervention and prevention, supporting families and caregivers, workforce development and coordinated service delivery. As illustrated in Figure 1, the approach focuses on placing the child and their needs at the centre of their world.

Figure 1: Southern Trust’s Approach to Infant Mental Health



The implementation of the strategy is led by the Southern Area Infant Mental Health Strategic Group comprising stakeholders from statutory, voluntary and community sectors along with service user representation.

⁴ Southern Health and Social Care Trust (2019) [Good Beginnings: An Infant Mental Health Strategy for the Southern Area: 2020 to 2025](#)

What is the Parent Infant Programme?

The Parent Infant Programme (PIP) was set up by the SHSCT in partnership with Home-Start to provide support for parents with an infant aged 0 – 4 months who lived outside the current SureStart areas. PIP currently serves four areas in the SHSCT area:

1. Armagh and Dungannon
2. Banbridge
3. Craigavon
4. Newry and Mourne

Parents can access the PIP programme through a direct referral from a healthcare professional, such as a Health Visitor, self-referral or through a partner organisation in the local area. The current criteria for the programme are that the infant must be between the ages of 0 – 4 months old, the parent must live outside the SureStart catchment area and the parent must be a resident within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area.

PIP involves weekly two-hour face-to-face sessions over the duration of 19 weeks. The key aims of the PIP programme for parents and their new babies are:

- **Increase Understanding of Developmental Milestones:** Helping parents understand their baby's developmental milestones and boosting their confidence in addressing their baby's needs at various growth stages.
- **Enhancing Parenting Skills:** Increasing parents' confidence in their parenting skills and enhancing their relationships with their babies.
- **Reduce Isolation and Stress:** Reducing parents' sense of isolation and stress.
- **Improve Mental Health:** Supporting the mental health of both parents and their infants.
- **Build Community Connections:** Encouraging parents to build supportive connections with other parents and raise awareness of other support structures within their local community.

Each group followed a programme consisting of the following elements:

- 1) **Sensory Play:** This 4 week part of the programme focussed on a range of activities designed to stimulate a baby's senses and support their development in a fun and interesting environment to foster early development and bonding between babies and parents.
- 2) **Infant Massage:** This 5 week course taught parents massage techniques through repeated strokes each week to improved parent-baby bonding, relaxation, better sleep and sensory stimulation.
- 3) **Sleep Support Workshops:** Parents accessed two workshops aimed to equip parents with practical skills and evidence-based knowledge to improve their infant's sleep. This included support to establish consistent bedtime routines, address common sleep issues for infants and provide advice on maintaining parents' own sleep health.
- 4) **Incredible Years® Parents and Babies Programme:** This 8 week evidence based parenting programme aimed to promote positive parent-child interactions which support their baby's emotional, physical and language development.

The SHSCT have commissioned Home-Start to deliver PIP in each of the four areas. Home Start Managers regularly met together with the Trust's Child Development Interventions Coordinator to discuss matters relating to delivery and to support a consistent approach across all areas for this programme.

Evaluation Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the two PIP programmes, which started in spring and autumn 2023, in supporting parents and infants. Additionally, this evaluation aimed to identify areas for improvement in the programme's design and delivery. Specifically, the evaluation sought to explore:

1. **What worked well?** What worked well to support parents and infants including the impact PIP had and to identify areas of good practice.

2. **Learning from Challenges:** What could have been better in the planning and delivery of the PIP programme?
3. **Looking to the Future:** What insights can be gained to inform the development of future work of supporting infants and parents in the SHSCT area?

The evaluation began by reviewing existing service data to provide an overview of the PIP programme. Drawing on this evidence, a set of questions were devised to explore what worked, what could have been better and what would be useful for the future by capturing multiple perspectives as outline below:

- **Parents:** A total of 103 parents registered for PIP. Two measures were used to gain feedback from parents. Firstly, 98 parents completed the Parenting Strategies pre and post standardised measure as part of the Incredible Years® Baby and Parent sessions. This survey asked about their strengths in areas such as play, comforting their child, baby development and self care before and after they completed the 8 week IY course within the PIP programme. Secondly, parents were asked to complete an online, anonymous end of programme evaluation to evaluate their overall experience of participating in PIP. A total of 85 completed responses were collected.
- **Home-Start Staff and Volunteers:** A total of 21 staff and volunteers completed an online end of programme evaluation covering themes such as views of service delivery, staff training and partnership working with the SHSCT. A focus group was also held with all four of the Home-Start Managers to explore in greater detail their experiences of delivering the PIP programme.
- **Stakeholders:** An online survey was circulated to stakeholders, such as Health Visitors, to gain their views of the service delivery, the referral process and any benefits they observed for parents and infants. A total of 13 stakeholders responded. In addition, a focus group with three members of the SHSCT management team was held.

The data collection was conducted in two points: (i) Autumn 2023; and (ii) Spring 2024 at the end of each 19 week programme. Quantitative data from both the Incredible Years Parenting Strategies survey and the end of programme surveys was systematically analysed using SPSS with qualitative comments thematically coded.

The focus group with Home-Start managers was held in February 2024 and the focus group with members of the Trust management team was held in June 2024. Both focus groups were recorded, with participants' consent, for the purposes of conducting thematic analysis to identify common themes. The following sections draws together service data with the themes emerging from the qualitative data. Extracts from the qualitative data have been used throughout the findings.

Part 2: Results

Results will be presented in three sections incorporating multiple perspectives from parents, Home-Start staff and volunteers and stakeholders from the SHCST to provide a comprehensive overview of the programme's effectiveness. These sections are:

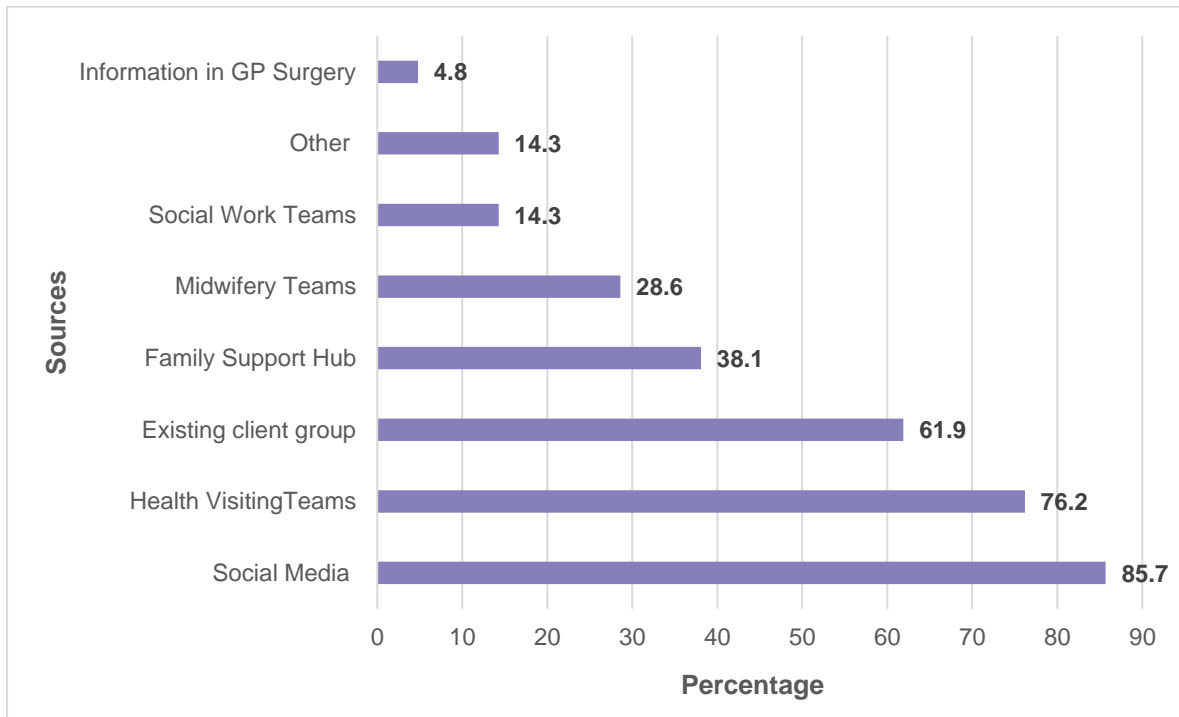
- 1) **Programme Delivery:** This section will explore participants' views on how PIP is implemented including how it is promoted in the community, the referral process to access the PIP Programme, staff training and partnership working.
- 2) **Programme Content:** Participants' views on the content of the four specific areas of the programme, including results from Incredible Years (IY) Parenting Survey.
- 3) **Impact of PIP:** These results will explore the benefits the PIP programme has had for both parents and babies from multiple perspectives.

Section 1: Programme Delivery

To explore the effectiveness of programme delivery, parents and Home-Start staff were asked to evaluate a number of aspects of the PIP programme delivery. This related to functions which support effective service delivery such as the promotion of PIP, the referral process, management, staff training, partnership working and venues as outlined below.

Promoting PIP: Home-Start staff and volunteers were asked how they promoted PIP in their local areas. A wide range of methods were used to raise awareness of the PIP programme. This included using social media (85.7%), Health Visiting Teams (76.2%) and recruiting participants from existing client groups (61.9%) as shown in Figure 2. Further analysis suggests promotion and recruitment of parents differed by each area providing multiple avenues for referral.

Figure 2: Promotion of PIP Programme by Home-Start Staff



(N =21)

Parents reported that the most common sources of hearing about the PIP programme was through Family/Friends (32.9%) and their Health Visitor (28.2%). A further 18.8% were made aware of the programme through social media with 15.3% hearing about the programme from Home-Start staff and volunteers. The use of social media by both Home-Start and the Trust to advertise PIP to parents was highlighted as problematic in focus groups with Home-Start managers and Trust management. It was acknowledged that this approach did not effectively reach parents who would benefit most, resulting in oversubscription and frustration.

PIP Referral Process: The referral process is an essential component of the PIP service delivery as it ensures that parents receive timely and appropriate support. Most participants agreed there was an opportunity to replace the current first-come-first-served referral system with a needs-based system. Home-Start managers suggested the referral process could be improved using an expression of interest form to gauge demand, prioritise needs and allocate resources effectively. Suggestions for potential criteria to assess parents for eligibility included:

- Primarily, but not exclusively, for first-time parents/carers;
- Early concerns regarding parental isolation;
- Parents self-reporting anxiety or depression;
- Families requiring support/additional support identified by Health Visitors or other family support services in the community.

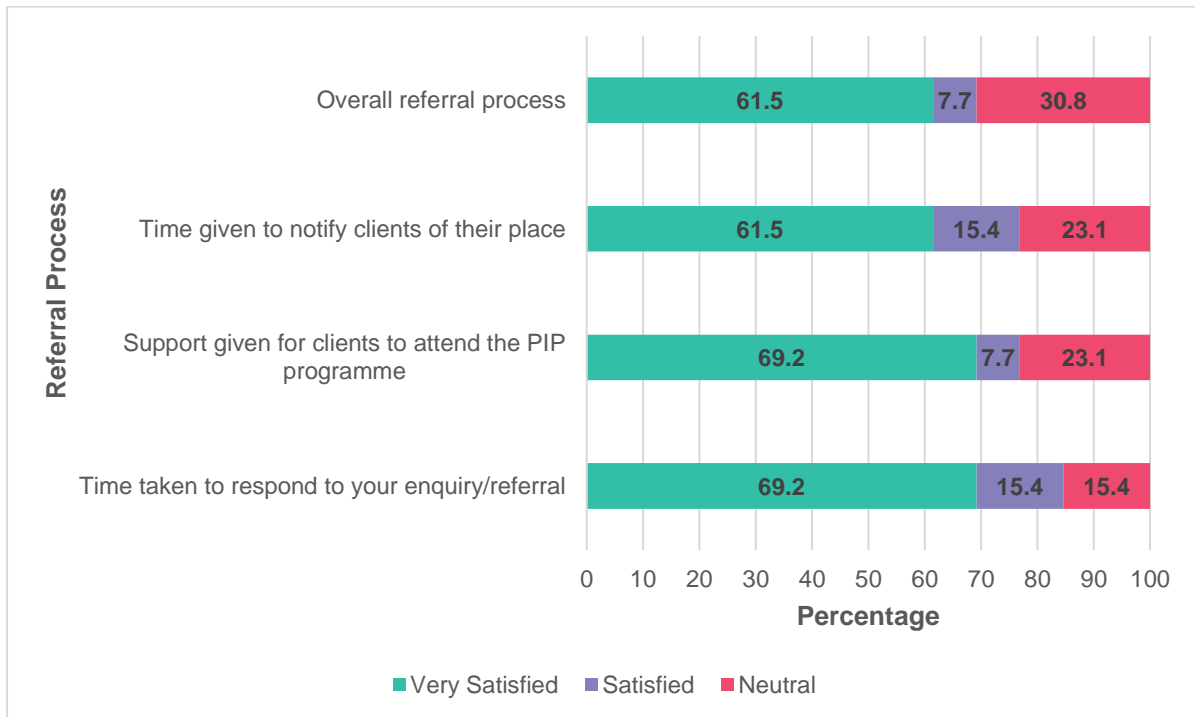
Most focus group participants felt geography should not be used as a criterion, emphasising that PIP should be available Trust-wide to support parents outside Sure Start catchment areas.

Evidence suggests that there is some confusion about how parents access the PIP programme. The majority of parents (88.2%, n = 75) reported that they had self-referred on to the programme while stakeholders, such as Health Visitors, reported that they had referred high numbers of parents. Parents who reported that they self-referred to the PIP programme were asked to rate how they found the process. All parents rated the overall self-referral process as satisfactory or very satisfactory with:

- 100% of parents satisfied or very satisfied with time taken to notify them of their place;
- 100% of parents satisfied or very satisfied with the answers given to questions they received;
- 98.5% of parents satisfied or very satisfied with the time taken to respond to their enquiry/referral.

While the majority of professionals who made referrals to the PIP programme were satisfied with the overall process, they were less emphatic than parents. Figure 3 shows that 69.2% of stakeholders were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall referral process to the PIP programme. Higher levels of satisfaction were reported by stakeholders relating to time taken to respond to enquiry/referral (84.6%), time given to notify clients of their place (76.9%) and support given for clients to attend the PIP programme (76.9%).

Figure 3: Stakeholders' Levels of Satisfaction on Referral Process



(N = 13)

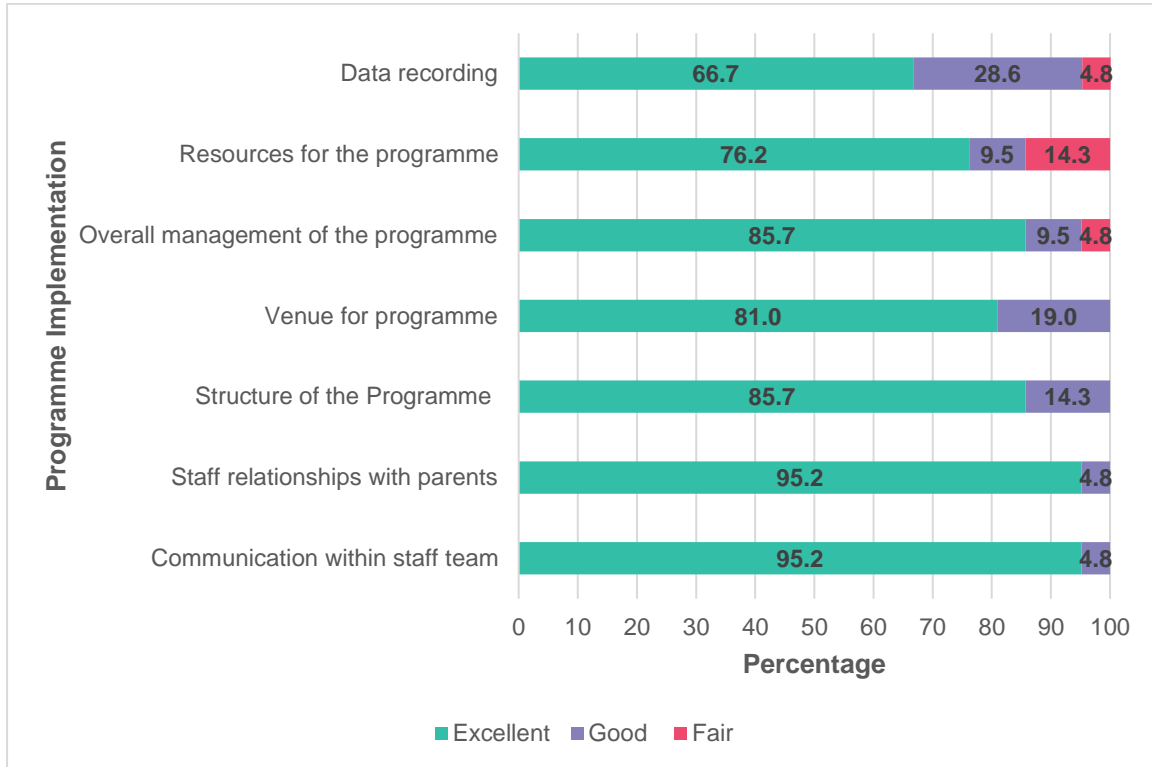
When asked if there was any aspect of the referral process that could be improved, over three quarters of stakeholders (76.9%) reported no improvements could be made. A total of 23.1% felt that the referral process could be improved through reducing the length of the referral form and developing a consistent approach to communicating about successful referrals.

Programme Implementation

Home-Start staff and volunteers, parents and stakeholders were asked to rate additional aspects of the programme implementation such as programme structure, relationships between staff and parents and venues as outlined below.

Home-Start Staff and Volunteers: The majority of staff and volunteers rated most aspects of the PIP programme delivery as excellent or good. As shown in Figure 4, all staff rated communication with the staff team, staff relationship with parents, the structure of the programme and the venues as excellent or good. Staff also highly rated the overall management of the programme (95.2%), data recording (95.2%) and resources for the programme (85.7%) as excellent or good.

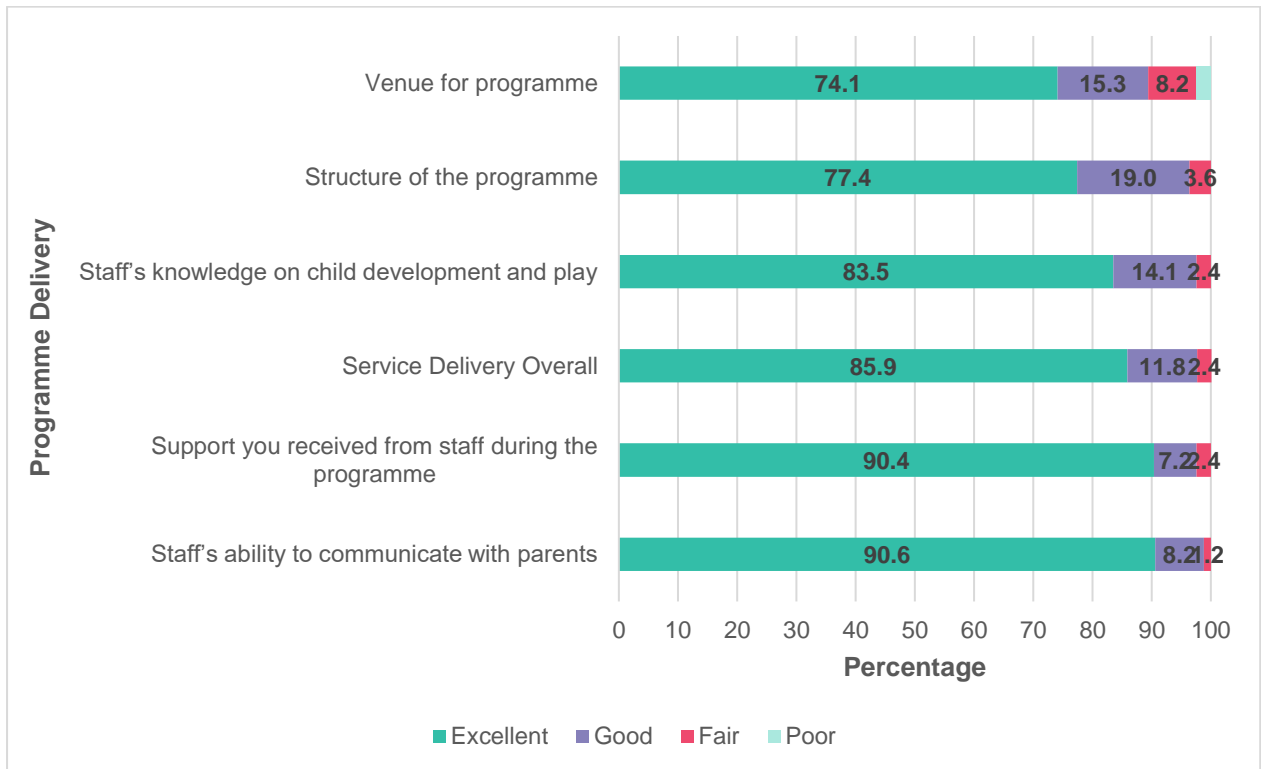
Figure 4: Aspects of PIP Programme Implementation Rated by Home-Start Staff and Volunteers



(N = 21)

Parents: A very high proportion of parents rated staff's ability to communicate with parents (98.8%), the support parents received from staff (97.6%) and staff's knowledge of child development and play (97.6%) as excellent or good. Most parents also rated the structure of the PIP programme (96.4%) as excellent or good as shown in Figure 5. A small number of parents highlighted that the venue they attended could have been larger and more comfortable.

Figure 5: Parents' Rating of PIP Programme Delivery



(N = 85)

While not directly involved in programme delivery, stakeholders were asked how they would rate the support provided to parents, programme content and location of PIP sessions. All stakeholders rated these aspects of programme delivery as excellent or good. Reflecting the positive results from staff, parents and stakeholders, overall delivery of the PIP programme was rated as excellent or good by 100% of stakeholders and 97.7% of parents with 95.2% of staff and volunteers reporting that the overall programme management was excellent or good.

Staff Training

In order to effectively deliver the PIP programme, Home-Start staff and volunteers were able to avail of training opportunities funded by the SHSCT. Opportunities included training related to infant massage, sleep support and the Incredible Years® (IY) Baby and Parent programme. A total of 15 Home-Start staff and volunteers took part in some form of training during the period of evaluation. As shown in Figure 6, the International Association of Infant Massage Training received unanimously positive

feedback from staff and volunteers. The IY Baby Programme Training received mostly positive reviews with 93.8% rating it as excellent or good. The Millpond Sleep Service Training received mixed reviews, with sixty percent of participants rating it as excellent or good but a notable proportion finding it only fair (30.0%) or very poor (10.0%). The comments reflect that some staff felt one day of training did not fully equip staff to deal with parent queries, particularly for those parents who accessed sleep experts.

Figure 6: Home-Start Staff and Volunteers' Perceptions of Training for PIP



Overall, most Home-Start staff and volunteers who participated in training reported that the training they received was very useful or useful (80.0%). From the total number of staff and volunteer responses, just over forty percent (42.9%) of staff and volunteers reported that no improvement in the training could be made, one third felt there could be improvements with 23.8% unsure about any improvements to the training provided. Two areas of improvement drawn from the staff qualitative comments from the survey included training for the sensory element of the programme and exploring programmes which offer a more child-led approach.

Partnership Working

As outlined in Part 1, PIP is delivered in partnership with Home-Start and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The consensus from participants in both focus groups was that the partnership was positive and mutually beneficial. From the Trust's perspective, the partnership with the Home-Start team has been highly advantageous. SHSCT management valued the PIP programme delivered by Home-Start as crucial in supporting its early intervention and prevention efforts. They recognised that it is hugely beneficial to have the ability to refer parents from sources such as Sure Start or the Health Visiting Team to the PIP programme. In addition, Trust management reported that the Home-Start team has proven to be reliable and effective in retaining high levels of parental engagement throughout the 19-week programme and added additional value to their contracts.

“I am very clear and our assistant director and director are very clear, that these services are critical because the vast majority of children out there don't come to the attention of the statutory social work teams because of services like this.”

Head of Service for Family Support and Safeguarding, SHSCT

“From the perspective of the rep from the Trust working with Home-Starts, it has been an absolute joy to work with them. I would really like to highlight the efforts the Home-Start staff have put into engaging, sustaining and securing such positive outcomes for families on the programme.”

Child Development Interventions Coordinator, SHSCT

Similarly, Home-Start Managers identified a range of benefits from working in partnership with the Trust. This included increasing their ability to work with more families, raising the profile of Home-Start across the Trust area and accessing training which developed the skills of their workforce.

“This has been a wonderful partnership based around the true needs of families with newborn babies. I look forward to seeing the partnership grow and develop and thank [CDIC] for her guidance and support.”

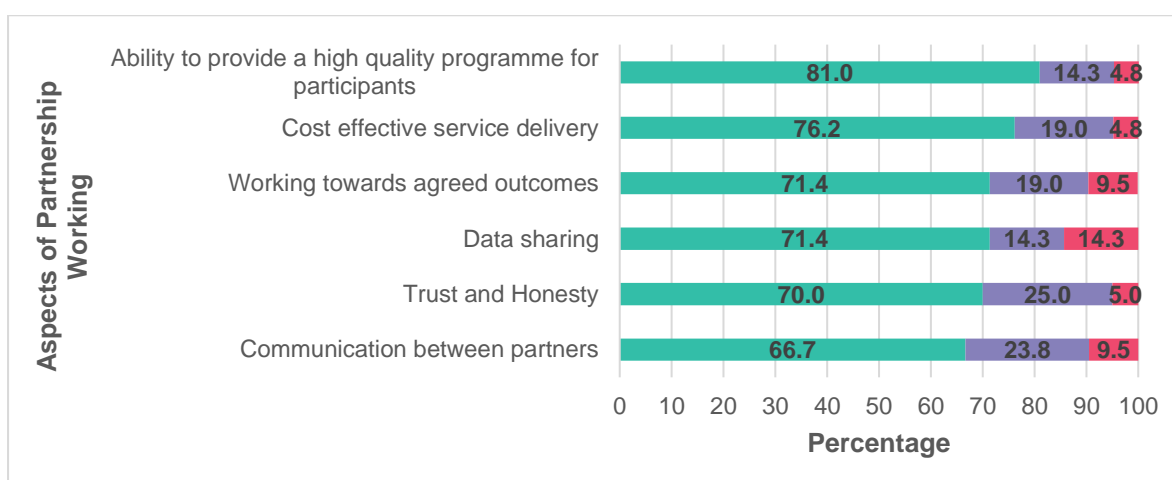
Home-Start Manager

“The strong partnership with the SHSCT makes us feel trusted and valued.”

Home-Start Manager

Both groups recognised a central aspect of the success of the partnership was the role of the co-ordinator who acted as a ‘bridge’ between both organisations and fostered positive relationships. The positive nature of the collaboration was corroborated by Home-Start staff and volunteers who were asked to rate key aspects of partnership working. Results shown in Figure 7 indicate high levels of satisfaction with 95 percent of staff rating ability to provide a high-quality programme for participants, cost-effective service delivery and trust and honesty between partners as excellent or good. No respondents rated any aspect as poor or very poor, indicating overall positive feedback.

Figure 7: Home-Start Staff and Volunteers’ Perceptions of Partnership Working



(N = 15)

Participants also identified the potential scope for further development of the partnership between the SHSCT and Home-Start:

- Discussion around introducing more flexibility in the content of the PIP programme to allow for topics such as physical movement, weaning and first aid to be better incorporated;
- Consideration of delivering PIP to specific groups such as parents with little or no English language skills, young parents and parents from a care experienced background.

Section 2: Programme Content

Specific attention has been given in this evaluation to assessing how useful participants found the content of the PIP programme. As outlined in Part 1, each group followed a 19 week programme consisting of the following elements:

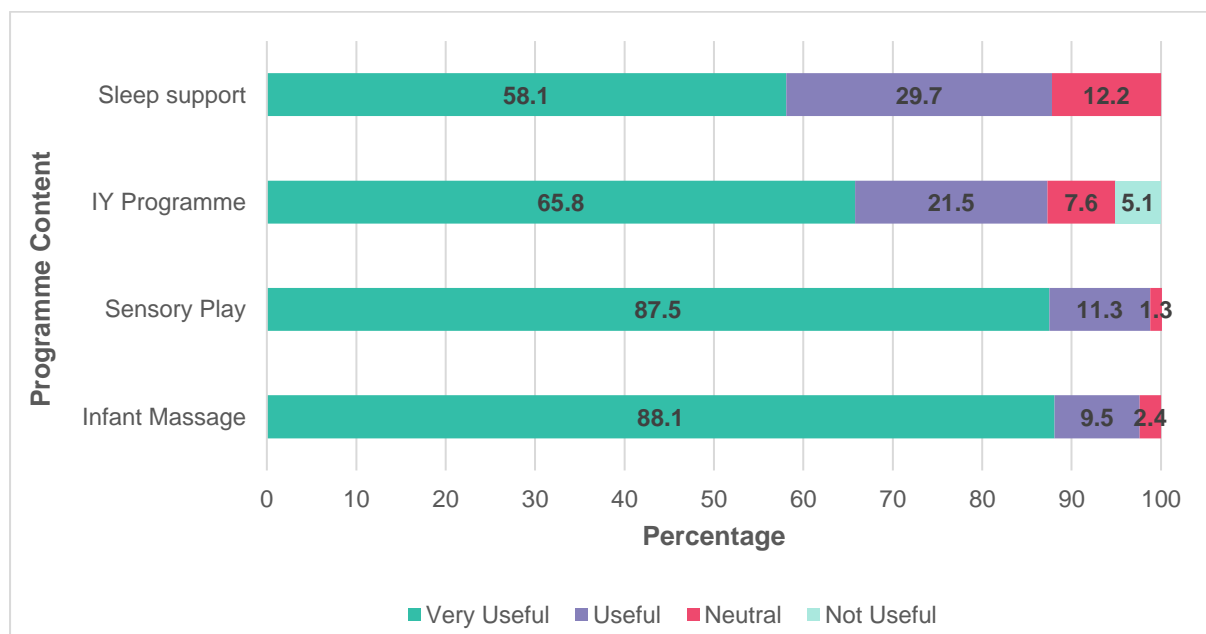
1. Sensory Play
2. Infant Massage
3. Sleep Support Workshops
4. Incredible Years® Baby and Parent Programme

Both parents and Home-Start staff were asked to rate how useful they found each component of the PIP programme as outlined in the following sections.

Parents' Perceptions of PIP Programme Content

Parents were asked in the evaluation survey to rate how useful they found each of the four components of the PIP programme. Parents highly rated the Sensory Play content with 98.8% finding it very useful or useful. Similarly, parents also rated the Infant Massage content highly with 98.8% as very useful or useful. As shown in Figure 8, the sleep support was well received with 87.8% rating this content as very useful or useful.

Figure 8: Parents' Perspectives on PIP Programme Content



(n = 74)

While the majority of parents (87.3%) rated the IY content as useful or very useful, this was also the only part of the programme to be rated as not useful by parents who completed the survey (5.1%). Parents expressed frustration at the dated nature of some of the IY resources, particularly the videos:

“The incredible years, I think this section of the programme is very outdated and hard to follow, it goes on for too long and I think the mummies could benefit from a different topic.”

Parent

“To review incredible year’s programme felt outdated and long. It also wasn’t very engaging for the babies.”

Parent

Parents expressed mixed views when asked if there should be additional content added to the programme. Around forty percent (39.8%) felt that no additional content was needed while 30.1% were unsure. A further 30.1% reported that additional content to the PIP programme would be beneficial. The majority of qualitative comments from parents in the survey related to weaning. Parents requested more support in terms of finding out more information about baby led weaning and how to prepare and serve food in an age-appropriate way:

“I think if we were able to talk more about weaning, the different methods of feeding, maybe a session where you try different foods with the babies.”

Parent

“I got to attend the group with my 2nd baby so although weaning wasn’t new to me it might help new mums if it was included.”

Parent

“More info on weaning - particularly with a professional if possible like a health visitor.”

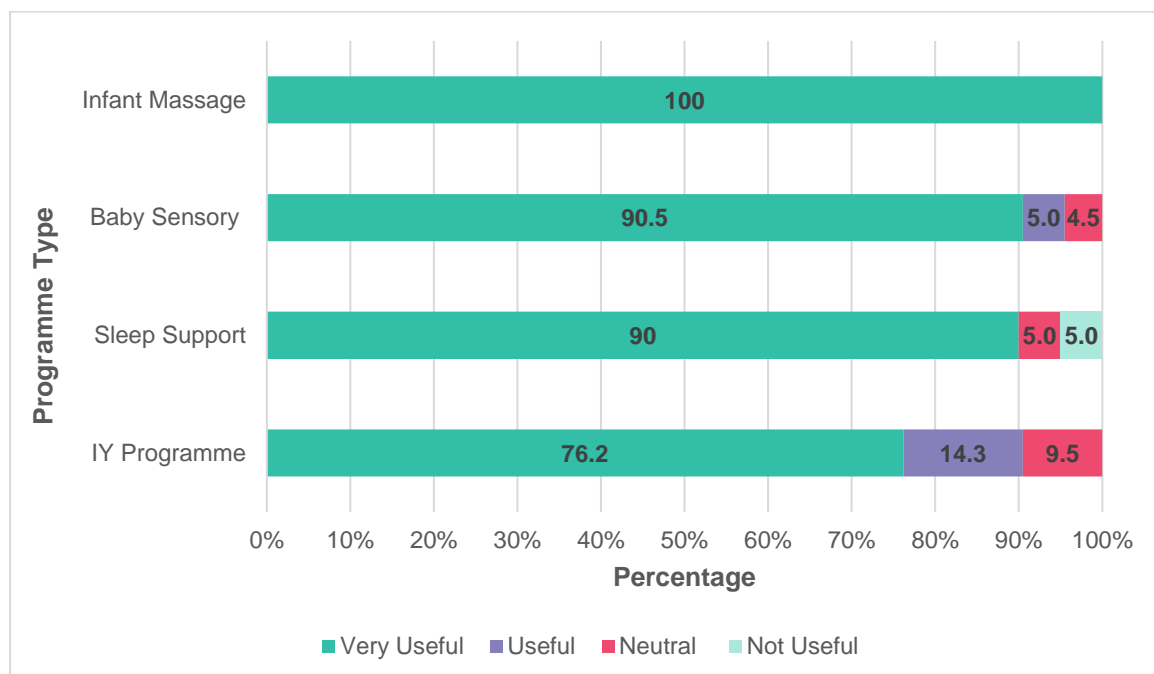
Parent

Other suggestions for content for the PIP programme included relationship advice, first aid and breastfeeding support.

Home-Start Staff and Volunteers’ Perspectives on PIP Programme Content

In terms of staff and volunteers’ perceptions of how useful each of the four elements of the programme were for parents, results show that every component of the PIP programme was rated as useful or very useful for parents by staff. All staff and volunteers rated the infant massage sessions as very useful for parents. Staff and volunteers also highly rated the other elements of the programme in terms of their usefulness for parents as shown in Figure 9. Further analysis of these results found that all staff in three out of the four areas rated infant massage, sensory play and sleep support as very useful for parents. Staff in three out of the four areas also rated the IY Babies Programme as very useful (84.2%) or useful (15.8%) for parents.

Figure 9: Home-Start Staff and Volunteers’ Perspectives on Programme Content for Parents



(N = 21)

As displayed in Figure 9, nearly ten percent (9.5%) of staff were neutral in their response to how useful the IY Programme was to parents. Themes drawn from the qualitative data suggests that this relates to the outdated nature of some of the IY approaches and materials:

“I do feel the Incredible Years baby programme needs updated as the concept is lovely. Just needs modernised, particularly the vignettes.”

Home-Start Manager

“Parents continue to comment on IY Baby vignettes being outdated.”

Home-Start Manager

This sentiment has also been corroborated by some parents as outlined previously. Home-Start Managers in the focus group felt that the addition of physical movement to the content of the programme would be beneficial.

Section 3: Impact of the PIP Programme

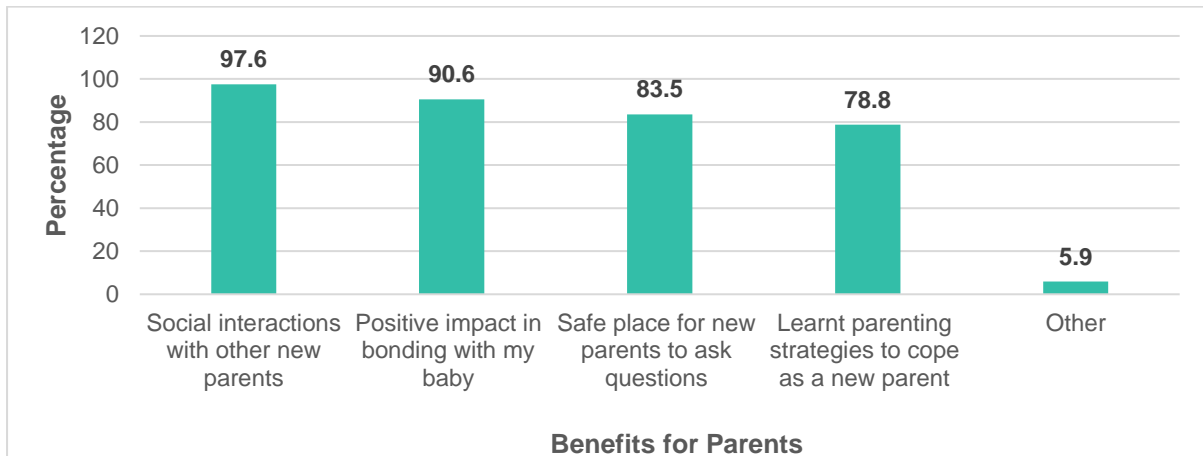
The PIP programme has a number of key objectives. The programme is designed to support parents of new babies understand developmental milestones, boosting their confidence and enhancing their bond with their babies. It also aims to reduce isolation and stress, improves mental health for both parents and babies and fosters support networks in the local community. This section of the evaluation report explores how well the programme achieved these outcomes from the perspective of parents, Home-Start staff and stakeholders. The first part focusses on parents' experiences with the PIP programme and its impact on both them and their babies. The results presented include survey data and findings from the pre/post Parenting Strategies Survey, which parents completed as part of the 8 weeks Incredible Years® Baby and Parent Programme section of the PIP programme. This is followed by evidence from staff and stakeholders about the impact of the PIP programme on both parents and babies.

Parents' Perceptions on the Impact of the PIP Programme

To gather parents' views about the impact of the PIP programme, parents were asked in the survey about what benefits they received from participating in the group. Nearly all parents (97.6%) reported they benefited from socialising with other parents with

90.6% reporting that the programme had a positive impact on how they bonded with their baby. A significant majority of parents also benefited from accessing a safe space to ask questions (83.5%) and from learning coping strategies as a new parent (78.8%).

Figure 10: Parents’ Perceptions of the Benefits of PIP



(N = 85)

Reflecting the results in Figure 10, thematic analysis of parents’ qualitative comments provided insight into how the PIP programme had such a positive impact on new parents. Participants emphasised the value of meeting regularly with other new parents. Many parents felt that sharing their concerns or struggles with others in the group was beneficial and made them feel less alone. This reduced the sense of isolation amongst new parents and provided a way for them to socialise with their child and develop new friendships with other parents.

“It has provided a social network with other mothers which has helped with my confidence, doubts and concerns as a first time mother. It has helped me understand the importance of understanding both my baby’s physical needs but also emotional.”

Parent

“It allowed me out to socialise and help me see that it’s not just me going through tough days that others are in the same position which makes it easier.”

Parent

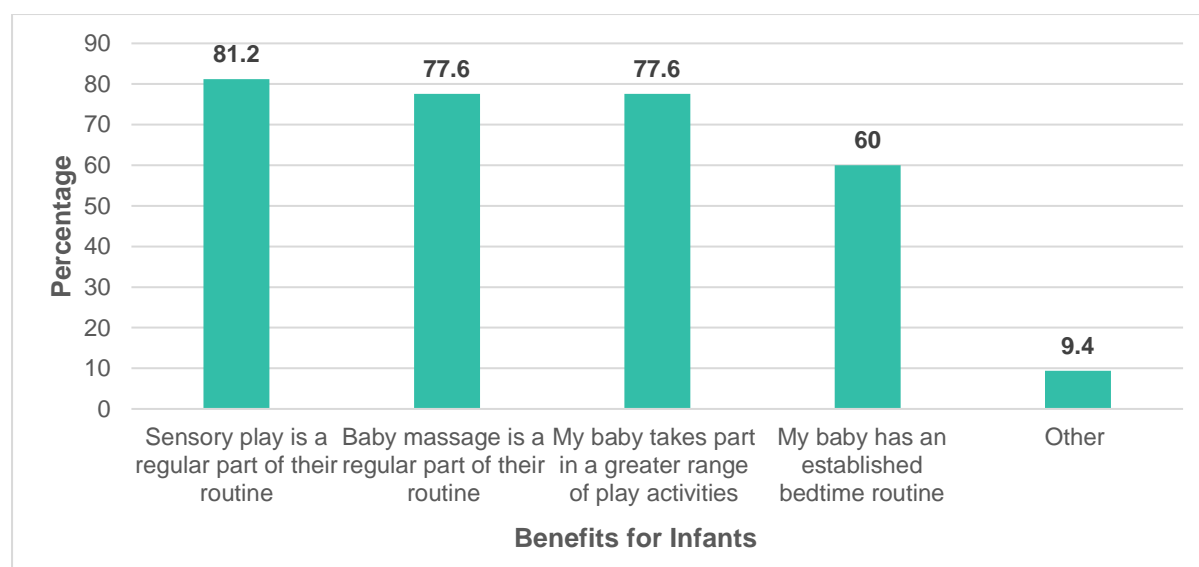
“Really enjoyed it as a new mummy, one of the best things about maternity leave. So good to socialise with other mums going through the same things and watching our babies learn and develop.”

Parent

Parents also appreciated that the PIP programme offered them a safe space to learn new skills and ask questions. Participants frequently noted how well the practitioners facilitated the sessions by creating a supportive and non-judgemental environment.

Parents in the survey were asked to identify what benefits, if any, they thought the PIP programme had for their baby. Results demonstrate that most parents found the different components of the PIP programme of benefit to their child. As shown in Figure 11, parents reported that both sensory play (81.2%) and baby massage (77.6%) are a regular part of their infant’s routine. Findings also show that over three quarters of parents reported that their baby participated in a greater range of play activities (77.6%) with 60.0% reporting that their baby has an established bedtime routine.

Figure 11: Benefits of PIP Programme for Infants



(N= 85)

Comments from parents about the positive benefits for their baby included:

“The PIP programme has been of huge benefit to both myself and my son. It has been a really welcoming group and the group leaders are just fantastic. There is no judgement, just advice, encouragement and

support. I have left every class feeling more confident as a mother, knowing that I am doing a good job.”

Parent

“I have found this programme really helped me and my baby. As a first time mother I always felt I could ask advice or I could share my experiences with the group leaders and other mums without judgement and they shared with me. I have made some wonderful friends and my little boy loves attending class with the other children.”

Parent

“The skills that I learnt throughout the programme will be with me for life now, from the baby massage to learning how to handle situations whenever I’m feeling stressed. I can’t thank Home-Start enough, the ladies were amazing.”

Parent

Incredible Years Baby and Parent Programme Survey Results

The use of the Incredible Years® Babies Programme Survey before and after the IY component of the PIP programme has provided valuable insights into how parents progressed. The survey was administered to participants at the beginning of the IY component and again at the end of both Spring 23 and Autumn 23 groups across four Home-Start areas as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Numbers of Participants Completing Incredible Years through PIP

Home-Start Group	Programme 1 Spring 23	Programme 2 Autumn 23	Total Number of Participants
Armagh and Dungannon	12	15	27
Banbridge	11	16	27
Craigavon	10	9	19
Newry	12	13	25
Total	45	53	98

The Incredible Years® Babies Programme Survey has been specifically designed to evaluate the outcomes of the 8 week IY Baby Programme through assessing various aspects of parenting practices. These five key areas are:

1. Playing
2. Crying
3. Child Development
4. Parental Self Care
5. Coping as a Parent

Due to the standardised nature of the IY Programme, the results presented here related to participants across all the PIP programmes (n = 98) as little significant differences were found between the Spring and Autumn programmes. Results for the five key areas are presented below.

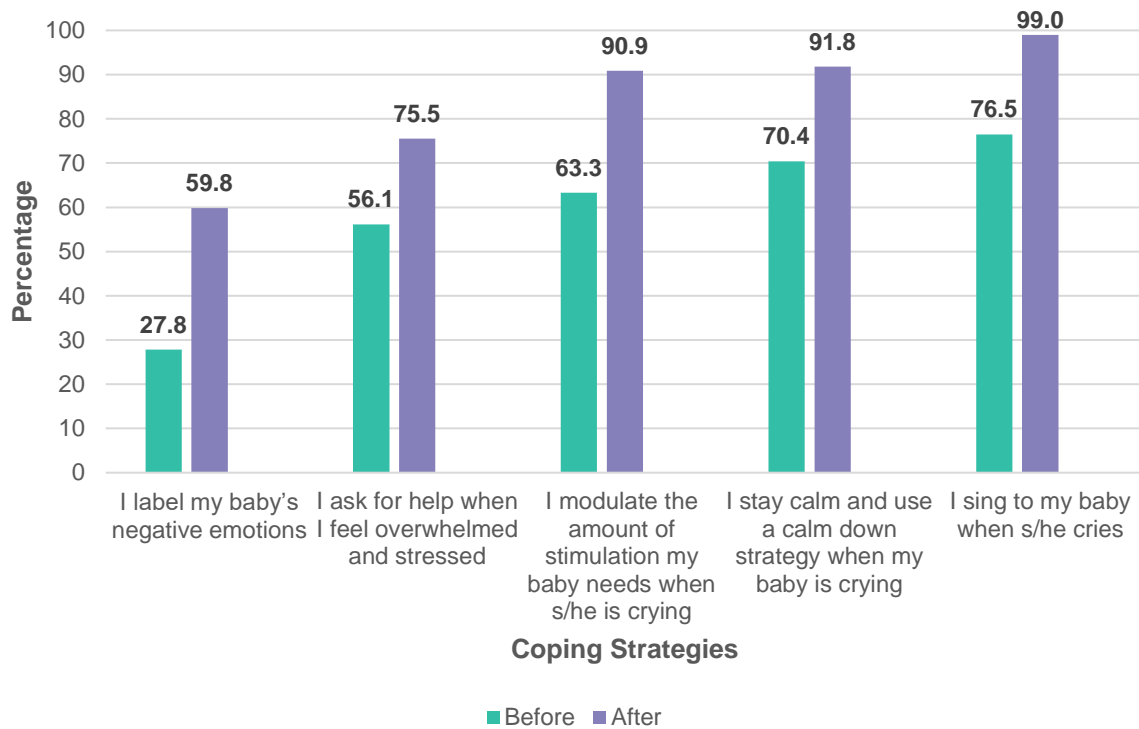
1. Playing: Results indicate that the PIP programme significantly increased daily activities related to play between parents and infants. After completing the programme, 100% of participants in both programmes reported that on a daily basis they smile and praise their baby with 99.0% singing to their baby and telling them they love them every day. The largest percentage increase with parent and child daily play activities was around ‘I give my baby massages’ (36.2%), ‘I read books to my baby’ (35.7%), and ‘I use hand puppets with my baby’ (32.6%). Furthermore, findings show that parents reported a significant increase in daily play activities after the IY programme as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Daily Play Activities Before and After IY Programme

Play Activities	Daily Before IY %	Daily After IY %
I use hand puppets with my baby	15.3	36.7
I give my baby massages	38.8	71.4
I read books to my baby	50.0	85.7
I use hand signals to communicate with my baby	45.9	73.5
I label my baby’s positive emotions	73.5	97.9

2. Crying: Overall, results indicate positive progress by parents in how to cope when their baby is crying. Figure 12 shows the top five areas that parents showed significant percentage increases, indicating improvement in how they feel and respond to their crying baby.

Figure 12: Coping with Crying Before and After IY



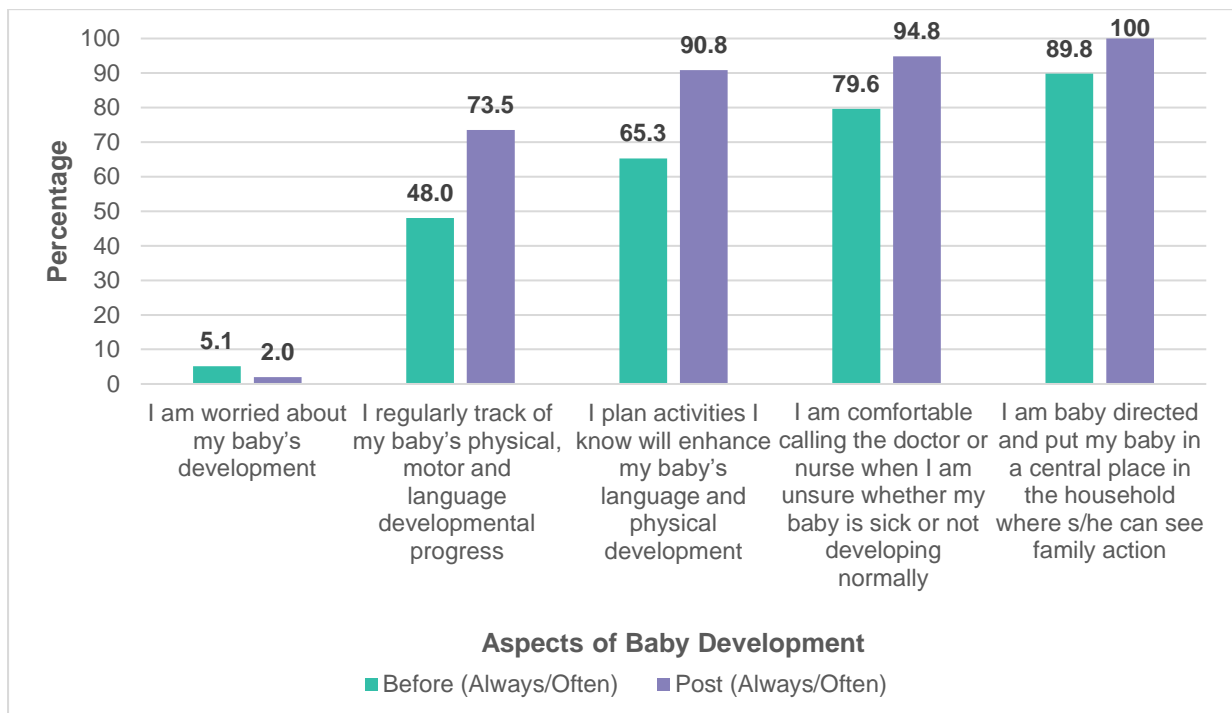
(N = 98)

It is also important to note that there was a 80.4% decrease in parents who found it difficult to soothe their baby when they are crying dropping from 10.2% to 2.0%. Similarly, results show an 80.4% decrease in parents yelling at their baby when they cry for too long from 5.1% to 1.0%. Encouragingly, all parents reported that they felt confident they can help their baby feel safe, loved and secure after the programme.

3. Baby Development: This section of the survey covers feeding, sleeping and the environmental factors that support a baby's physical and language development. All parents reported that they always or often felt bonded to their baby after the programme. All parents reported that they were always or often baby-directed and ensured their baby remained centrally located in the household, involved in family

activities and conversations after the programme. Additionally, more parents showed increased awareness of regularly tracking their baby’s physical, motor and language developmental progress, as well as planning activities to enhance their baby’s development. Furthermore, after the programme, participants demonstrated greater confidence in seeking professional help if concerned about their infant’s developmental progress, with a reduction in parents reporting always or often feeling worried about their baby’s development as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Parents’ Understanding of Baby Development Before and After IY



(N = 98)

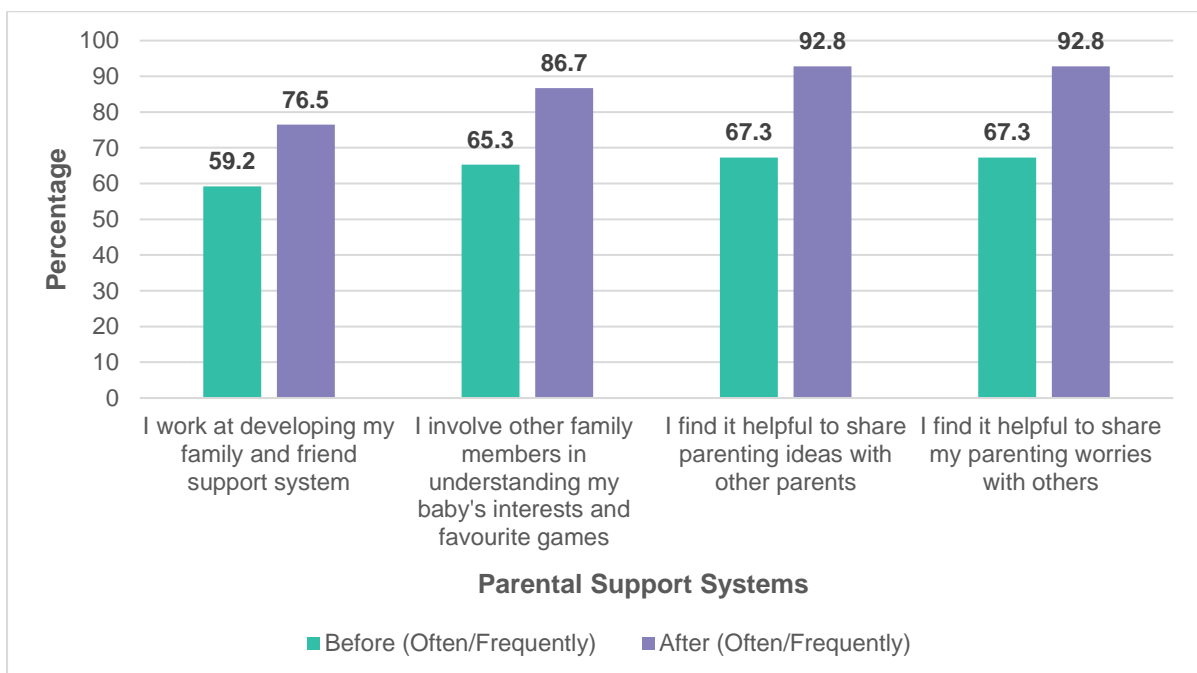
In terms of feeding, most parents reported that they always or often took a baby directed approach (86.6%) before the programme which rose to 96.9% of parents after the programme.

Regarding sleep, almost a quarter of participants reported they always or often worried about their baby’s sleep schedule and patterns (24.4%). This decreased to 14.3% after the programme.

4. Parental Self Care: A significant aspect of the IY Programme is the importance of self care so parents are better able to manage stress, seek support and model positive behaviour for their children. The survey approaches this in two ways; (i) support systems; and (ii) coping as a parent as outlined below.

Support Systems: Firstly, the survey explores to what extent parents have a support system from family and friends and how they use strategies to reduce their stress. By the end of the programme nearly all parents (92.8%) found it helpful to share both their ideas and worries with other parents compared to 67.3% before the programme. Results also show that over three quarters (76.5%) of participants recognised the value of developing a support system of friends and family while 86.7% reported that they involved other family members in understanding their baby’s interests and favourite games.

Figure 14: Support Systems for Parents Before and After IY



(N = 98)

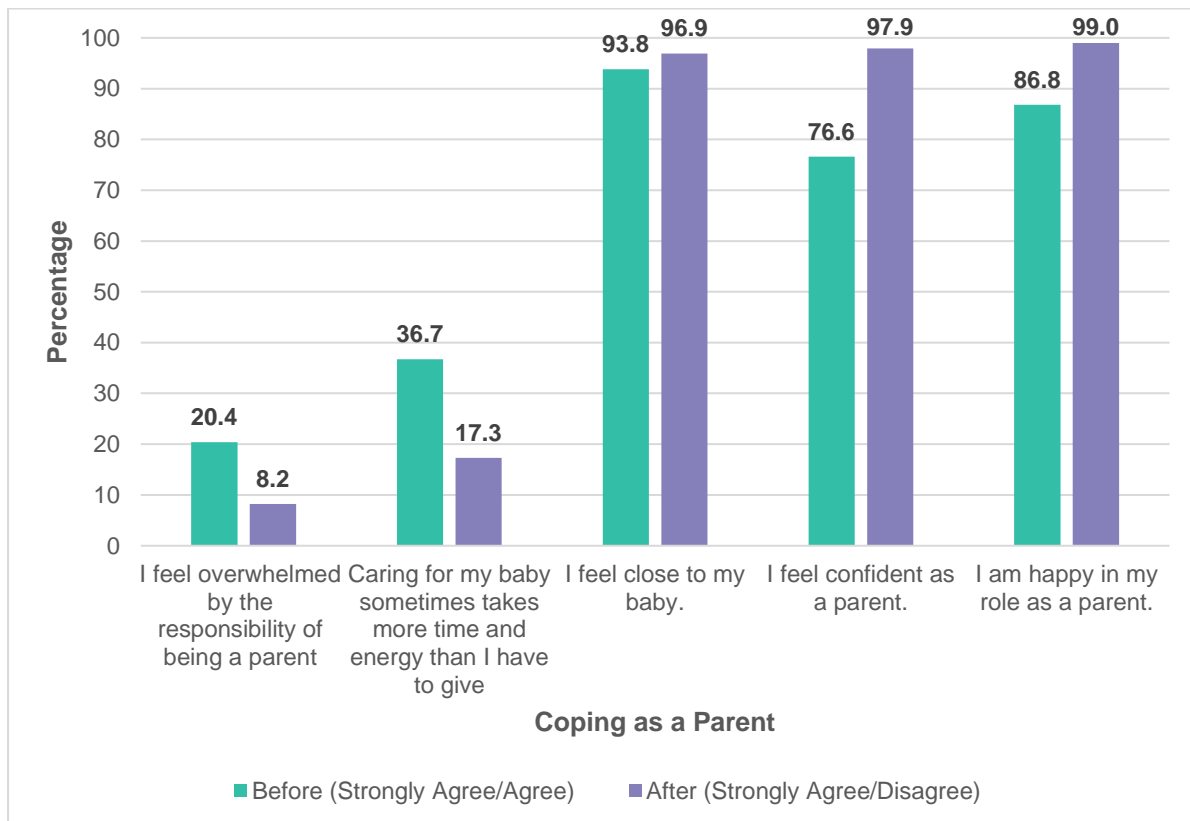
Findings suggest that parents were more likely to use calm down strategies to reduce their frustration after the programme (82.6%) than take actions such as pay attention to their needs for rest and self-care (57.2%) or organise a childminder so they could have a break (9.3%).

Coping as a Parent: The final section of the survey explored how participants cope as a parent. Overall, the majority of parents reported positive outcomes:

- 99.0% reported they were happy in their role as a parent;
- 96.9% reported feeling confident as a parent;
- 96.9% reported feeling close to their baby.

Before the programme, more than a third (36.7%) of parents expressed agreement or strong agreement with the statement “Caring for my baby sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give.” However, results indicate a significant improvement after the programme, with a 52.9% decrease of parents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement reduced to 17.3% of parents. Similarly, before the programme, 20.4% of parents felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of parenthood, a figure that dropped to 8.2% after completing the programme.

Figure 15: Coping as a Parent Before and After IY



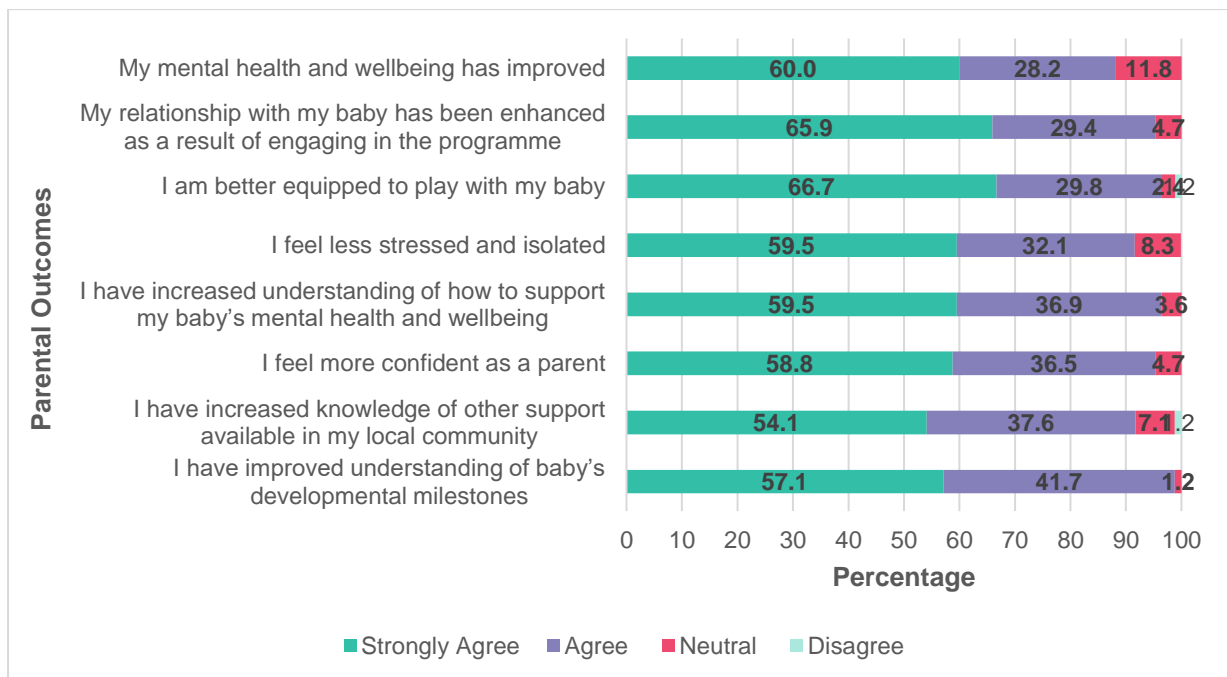
(N = 98)

Parents were also provided the opportunity to reflect on the impact that the whole PIP programme had on them as a new parent. The majority of participants strongly agreed or agreed with the positive statements about their experiences and the impacts of the PIP programme. As shown in Figure 16, parents reported significant benefits in areas such as mental health, relationship with their baby, confidence in parenting and understanding of their baby’s needs and development.

The PIP evaluation survey results indicate that the PIP programme had a highly positive impact on participants. Specifically, 98.8% of parents strongly agreed or

agreed that their understanding of their baby’s developmental milestones improved with 96.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt better equipped to play with their baby after the programme. Furthermore, 96.4% of parents reported that their understanding of how to support their baby's mental health and wellbeing had increased with 95.3% noting that their relationship with their baby had been enhanced. Participants also reported that they felt more confident as a parent (95.3%) and had increased knowledge of other support services available in the local community (91.7%). As shown in Figure 16, the majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed they felt less stressed and isolated (91.6%) and their mental health and wellbeing has improved (88.2%).

Figure 16: Parental Outcomes of the PIP Programme



(N = 85)

There is very little disagreement, and only a small proportion of participants felt neutral about the benefits, suggesting that the PIP programme is highly effective for parents.

Home-Start Staff and Stakeholders’ Perceptions on the Impact of the PIP Programme

Home-Start staff and SHSCT stakeholders in both the surveys and focus groups were asked about what benefits parents and babies can receive from attending the PIP programme. Respondents were able to highlight a number of benefits the programme

had for parents. Three key themes emerged from the qualitative data as outlined below:

1. Peer Support: The majority of practitioners identified peer support as a significant benefit of the PIP programme and key to its success. Parents connected with each other during PIP sessions and through a moderated WhatsApp group where they could ask questions and gain support from others. Regular social interaction with other parents at the same stage of parenting within the local area was viewed by staff as a crucial support for parents. This interaction allowed parents to share experiences, develop new friendships and grow in confidence:

“It allows them to get out of the house which can be difficult to do with a newborn and it supports them to socialise with women in the same postpartum stage as them which can be a comfort.”

Volunteer

“Many mothers I have referred are feeling lonely or new to the area and have found it a great place to connect with new people. I have also referred mothers to the volunteer service which for many has been an invaluable support.”

Health Visitor

During the focus group, Home-Start managers cited multiple examples of parents who met through the PIP programme and developed friendships beyond the group:

“For us what some of our parents tell us is “I wouldn’t have the friends, the friendship group, I have outside Home-Start if I never came to Home-Start.”

Home-Start Manager

“One girl was new to the town and had her first children here and one came from a family background where she does not have good family support and the other girl lost her mum. So the three of them have become their own village which is through that peer support that you’re really trying to encourage. They’re babysitting for each other and they’re helping each other out and they socialise together.”

Home-Start Manager

“Even from our PIP group last year, they're still meeting in parks and some of those kids will go on to school together.”

Home-Start Manager

This sense of community established during the programme and the enduring friendships formed afterwards were highlighted by staff as key to reducing the isolation and loneliness that parents of newborns may feel which in turn supported parents' overall well-being.

2. Increased Understanding of Baby Development: Staff reported that parents benefited from increasing their own knowledge and understanding of baby development. Greater awareness of key developmental milestones, brain development and speech and language development supported parents to respond to their baby's needs more effectively which positively reinforced their important role as a parent:

“We talk about bathing them in language. It is so important and that is so much a part of that bonding process. That communication and reciprocity between mum and baby. I always labour this because we know this is so important as they move into their toddler stage and it sets them up as you are building right from the foundation. I remember one of the mums welling up with tears and she said, “I am really sorry but it is just the way you have described that I am building their future.”

Home- Start Manager

Through increased awareness of their important role in their child's development, parents gained a better understanding of the importance of quality one-on-one time, interaction and play with their infants. This was highlighted by staff as beneficial in strengthening bonding and attachment.

3. Confidence: Staff identified that one of the key benefits of the PIP programme was the growth in confidence among parents. This increase in confidence was attributed to several factors from the perspective of Home-Start staff and volunteers:

- **Supportive Learning Environment:** PIP provided a shared learning space where parents felt safe to ask questions and seek reassurance. This supportive environment helped parents feel more secure in their parenting abilities.
- **Empowerment through Knowledge:** Gaining a better understanding of their crucial role in their child's development was empowering for parents. This knowledge positively impacted how they perceived themselves and their parenting capabilities.
- **Skill Development:** Parents had the opportunity to learn new skills, such as baby massage and sensory play and engage in activities that encouraged play and quality interactions with their infants. These hands-on experiences boosted parents' confidence in their ability to care for and bond with their babies.
- **Peer Support:** Connecting with other parents going through similar experiences provided a sense of camaraderie and support. Knowing they were not alone in their journey reduced parental stress and further boosted their confidence.

Overall, staff reported that the PIP programme helped parents feel more confident, capable and supported in their parenting roles, leading to better outcomes for both parents and their children. Closely related to benefits to parents are staff's perceptions of the benefits the PIP programme brings for babies who attend. Staff were also able to identify a range of benefits to infants. The prominent benefit identified was the opportunity for infants to socially interact with other babies, parents and staff. Staff viewed this as positive in infants' overall development:

“Babies thrive in social situations with other babies.”

Home-Start Staff Member

“PIP allows babies to interact and form relationships with other babies. They support the baby’s development of physical, literacy, communication and language and cognitive skills.”

Health Visitor

In addition to social interaction, the PIP programme provided new experiences for babies through sensory play, infant massage, singing and playing:

“Relief from colic and constipation through massage techniques. Stimulation through songs, rhymes and activities.”

Home- Start Staff Member

Staff also identified bonding between parents and infants as a benefit of the PIP programme. As well as providing space for quality one-to-one time, parents also learnt ways to strengthen their relationship with their infant at home.

“It allows the baby to have essential one on one time with mum without distractions from home life.”

Home-Start Volunteer

“PIP encourages social development and promotes the bond between mum and baby.”

Home-Start Volunteer

As identified above, practitioners also highlighted that a confident and relaxed parent, with improved mental health, benefits their child as they have more capacity to be responsive to their physical and emotional needs and can use positive parenting strategies:

“They benefit by having happier, attuned, parents who have learned on our programme how to become a ‘good enough’ parent.”

Home-Start Manager

“Babies benefit from improved maternal mental health outcomes.”

Health Visitor

Part 3: Learning for the Future

Results from this evaluation demonstrated that the PIP programme is highly effective in meeting the key outcomes for supporting parents with new babies. Overall, the PIP programme successfully supported parents in understanding their baby's developmental milestones, increasing their confidence as parents, reducing isolation and stress, improving mental health and building community support networks. The programme was considered excellent or good by the majority of parents, Home-Start staff and volunteers and other stakeholders for the service it provided. Drawing from the data, a number of key strengths of the service were identified which contributed to its success. These factors include:

Effective Programme Implementation: Both Home-Start staff and parents rated various aspects of the programme delivery, such as communication, support and the structure of the PIP programme as excellent or good. The positive feedback indicates strong relationships between staff and parents and effective programme management.

Evidence Based Content: The content of the PIP programme was well-received and rated highly by both parents and staff. The use of programme content with a strong evidence base such as Sensory Play, Infant Massage, Sleep Support Workshops and the Incredible Years® Parents and Babies Programme has been beneficial within the PIP programme in a number of ways:

- Staff received training for each component which ensured consistency of the input provided for parents at different times and in different locations. The use of structured, evidence-based content helped maintain uniformity in programme delivery, reducing variability and ensuring that all participants received the same level of support.
- Parents needs were effectively met. This has been reflected in the feedback from parents with new babies who report the content increased their understanding of developmental milestones, supported them to develop new skills and boosted their confidence.
- Consistently positive feedback on the content from parents, Home-Start staff and stakeholders across all four locations and both sessions (Spring 23 and Autumn 23) show the potential to scale up the PIP programme to reach more families.

- The ability for the PIP programme to deliver high quality content underscores the programme's value in terms of early intervention and prevention and filling a crucial gap for families outside the Sure Start catchment areas unable to access alternative provision for early years.

Supportive Learning Environment: A significant strength of the PIP programme was the ability of Home-Start staff and volunteers to facilitate an environment in which parents were able to increase their understanding of baby development, learn new skills and ask questions. The positive relationships developed between staff and parents were identified as a key way parents developed in confidence, felt a sense of belonging and remained engaged for the duration of the programme.

Cross Sector Collaboration: The partnership between Home-Start and the SHSCT was highly valued by participants. Evidence suggest that this collaboration was mutually beneficial in providing a high-quality programme with better skilled staff in a cost effective way to more families. Key to this success was the effective coordination and positive relationships between the organisations.

While high levels of satisfaction have been found, this evaluation also identified areas of the PIP programme that could be improved or further developed. Overall, the PIP programme could be reoriented to be more needs-led. This includes developing a referral system that prioritises families who would benefit most from the PIP programme and providing more flexibility within the programme to cover different content. Other areas to consider include the further development of the programme. These areas of improvement have been incorporated into the following recommendations for future development.

Recommendations:

1. **Improve the PIP Referral Process:** Focus on developing an effective referral process that reaches parents who would benefit most and is manageable for staff. Consider adopting a 'pre-registration' referral system where parents express their interest, allowing staff to gauge demand, prioritise families based on need and manage the referral process more effectively. Clear and specific guidance on how to access the programme, using needs-based criteria, should

be developed in partnership between the SHSCT and Home-Start and be clearly communicated and accessible to parents.

2. **Additional Programme Content:** Develop a suite of modules using evidence-based content on subjects such as physical movement, weaning and first aid. These modules should be interchangeable, allowing flexibility within the programme while ensuring the delivery of high-quality content on a consistent basis. In addition, consider how to make better use of existing resources to support parents through signposting to evidence-based webinars and online content by the Public Health Agency and other relevant sources.
3. **Options alongside Incredible Years:** Explore alternative evidence-based programmes such as Solihull Understanding Your Child as options alongside the current Incredible Years content to respond to feedback from both staff and parents. While the Incredible Years programme has proven effective in supporting parent and infant interactions, some outdated content and challenges in scaling up cost-effectively have been expressed as limitations.
4. **Expanding the Reach of PIP:** Building on the successful partnership between the SHSCT and Home-Start, further exploration should be given to sustaining this partnership in the medium to long term. This would provide stability and reach more families in the area. Additionally, focus should be given to:
 - adopting a more flexible approach to accommodate parents from outside current Home-Start catchment areas within the SHSCT area to ensure programmes are filled to capacity and more families in need can benefit;
 - exploring how groups with specific needs, such as those with limited English language skills, young parents and parents from care-experienced backgrounds could benefit from the PIP programme;
 - the potential of using a blended learning approach for families needing an interpreter or those who cannot attend a group due to physical disabilities or other caregiving responsibilities.

5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Enhance the existing evaluation system to effectively track and monitor all aspects of the PIP programme. Consideration should be given to:

- continued use of the end of programme surveys for parents, staff and stakeholders set up under this evaluation to provide a clearer picture of the impact of PIP;
- introducing a specific standardised parenting measure such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) or Karitane Parenting Confidence Scale as an alternative to IY Babies Programme Survey to track progression throughout the programme;
- accessing additional support to analyse the data collected from these sources in order to systematically assess how well the programme is achieving its goals and objectives and to create an evidence base of what works well to support families in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area.

This evaluation of the PIP programme demonstrates its significant impact on improving outcomes for parents and infants. This included enhanced understanding of developmental milestones, strengthening the bond between parent and infant, reduced stress and isolation and greater awareness of support in the local community. Participants consistently rated the programme highly for its structured implementation, evidence-based content and supportive learning environment facilitated by Home-Start staff in collaboration with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. While these strengths are noted, the evaluation also identifies opportunities to enhance the programme's effectiveness such as refining the referral process to prioritise families most in need, expanding programme content with evidence-based modules on topics like physical movement and weaning and exploring other options alongside the Incredible Years programme. These measures aim to further elevate outcomes for families and fulfil the vision set out in the Southern Trust's 'Good Beginnings' Strategy that all children have the best start in life by prioritising and supporting the development of positive, social and emotional wellbeing.