

My Family First

The image features a circular collage of family photographs. The photos include a man and woman smiling, a woman holding a baby, and several children of different ages. The background of the collage is a gradient from light blue at the bottom to orange at the top. The text 'My Family First' is overlaid in a large, blue, 3D-style font.

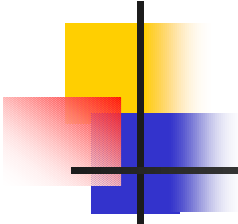


MY FAMILY FIRST

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Our observations are that parents following separation from their children find it difficult to get beyond their anger and grief to move toward

- Maintaining/re-building a positive relationship through planned contact opportunities
- Understanding how the “system works” and being confident yet responsive in working with statutory workers to plan for the future for their families – either re-unification for permanent placement plan



Short term group program

- Assist parents to deal with grief and loss following separation from their children
- Plan for more effective contact time
- Provide education and support to enable parents to advocate more positively and participate more effectively in case planning and decision making within the CP system



Background

- MY FAMILY FIRST recognises that the point of removal can also represent a point of opportunity. Could be used to engage proactively with families as they may be highly motivated to do whatever is necessary to reunify “my family”.



Project funding

- Dept. of Communities (Qld) – Qld Families: Future Directions – Lighthouse Projects.2002.
- Seed funding for innovative new ways of working that integrate learning and development principles to improve service delivery outcomes



Post removal parental grief

- Impacts negatively on parental ability to work on maintaining their connectedness with their children
- Hinders/destroys motivation and ability to have their family reunited or accept need for alternate placement option that has clear and defined contact opportunities to allow them to maintain a parental role in their children's lives.



Parental grief (con't)

- Workers in OHC recognise daily dealing with child, carer and worker grief however focus of service delivery often concentrated on C & P of children
- Emergence in literature of recognition of impact of post separation grief
- Literature search identified few specific programs/ services targeting parental grief
- Often ad hoc and unfunded



Project details

- Literature review around programs & evaluation thereof being delivered elsewhere to engage parents
- Information from review used to develop a 9 week trial program
- Program reviewed (action learning model) & second trial group run
- Review of evaluations & Manual developed



Project Highlights

- Development of the manual
- The progress of the participants within the two trial groups



Perceived Aims & Outcomes

Outcome One

- A reduction in participants' negative feelings that are associated with the loss of children through statutory removal



Outcome Two

- Parents plan for and have effective contact time with their placed child, so that their child experiences the contact positively and the relationship between child and parent is enhanced



Outcome Three

- Parents demonstrate an enhanced understanding of the CP system and are more responsive to working with statutory workers for plan for their family's future.
- This includes a commitment to addressing the issues that
 - Led to placement & working towards reunification; or
 - A realistic LT plan which involves ongoing OHC and planned parental/family involvement



Manual content & outline

- Program description
- Group Process aims
- 9 program sessions & activities
- Handouts
- Evaluation sheets



Program sessions

- **Getting Acquainted** incl changed roles in parenting, emotional responses to separation & loss
- **Our Experiences** incl parents' feelings about children entering care sys & tasks assoc with adapting to loss



Program sessions

- **Strengths & Weaknesses – Busting the myths** - New Family Charter of Rights, myths around separated families
- **Understanding Child Development**
– ages & stages, behavioural responses of children to separation, helping children manage separation



Program sessions

- **Communication & Navigating the CP system** – communication, role plays of meetings
- **How does it all work?** – guest speakers e.g. Legal Aid Qld & Dept. of Communities



Program sessions

- **Working together and being together** – developing positive working relationships with foster carers & understanding their role
- **What is it like for young people in foster care** – guest speaker from CREATE
- **Moving forward** – reflections and linkages with agencies to develop plans



Sample and study method

- Participants – parents child/ren removed past 12 months, placed on CPO for first time and child/ren in alternative care placement
- Voluntary
- CP workers linked interested parents with the project co-ordinator
- Difficulties – expanded group to incl parents where children on orders in excess of 1 yr

Evaluation



- First group – post-program self report questionnaire (4 single parents)
- Second group – pre & post self report questionnaire (6 parents – 2 single and two couples) – only 5 responded to the questionnaire



Variables

- Items assessed included
 1. Negative feelings surrounding separation
e.g. anger, worry, lowered mood, shame
 2. Feelings of control
 3. Understanding of systems – DOC, legal
 4. Relationship with statutory body
 5. Parental belief
 6. Relationship with children



Table One

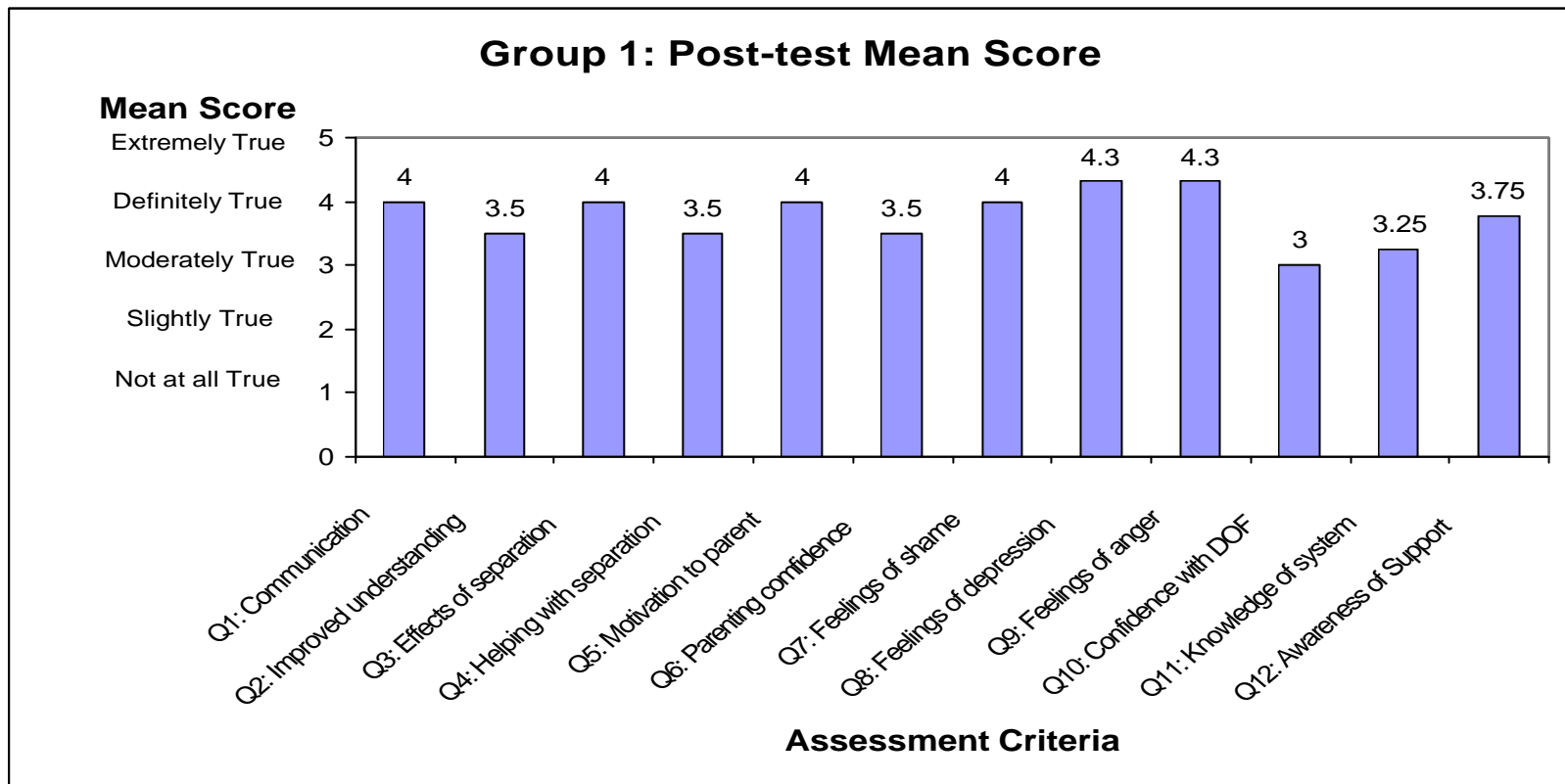


Table Two - Differences in mean pre & post - Group 2

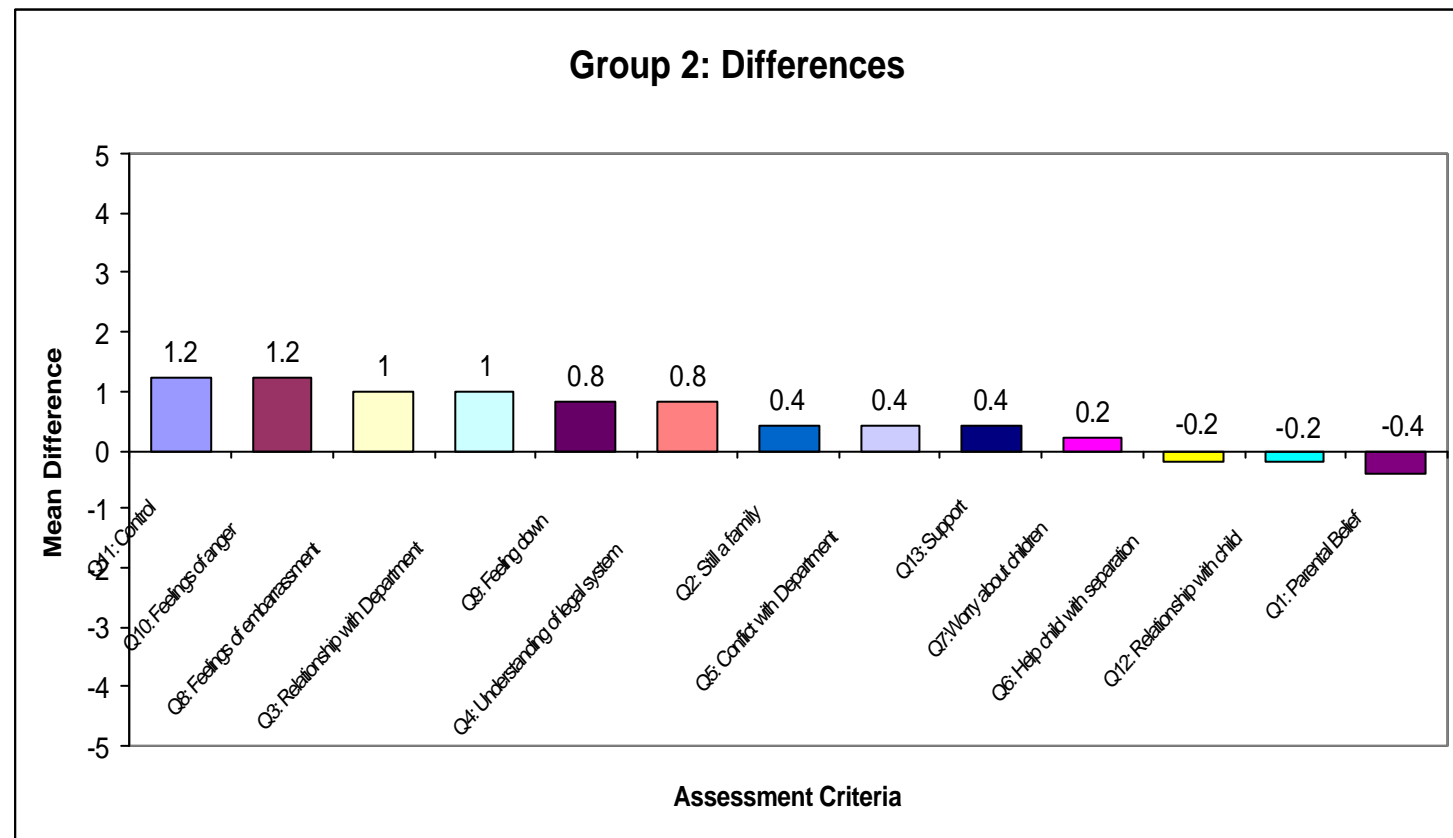
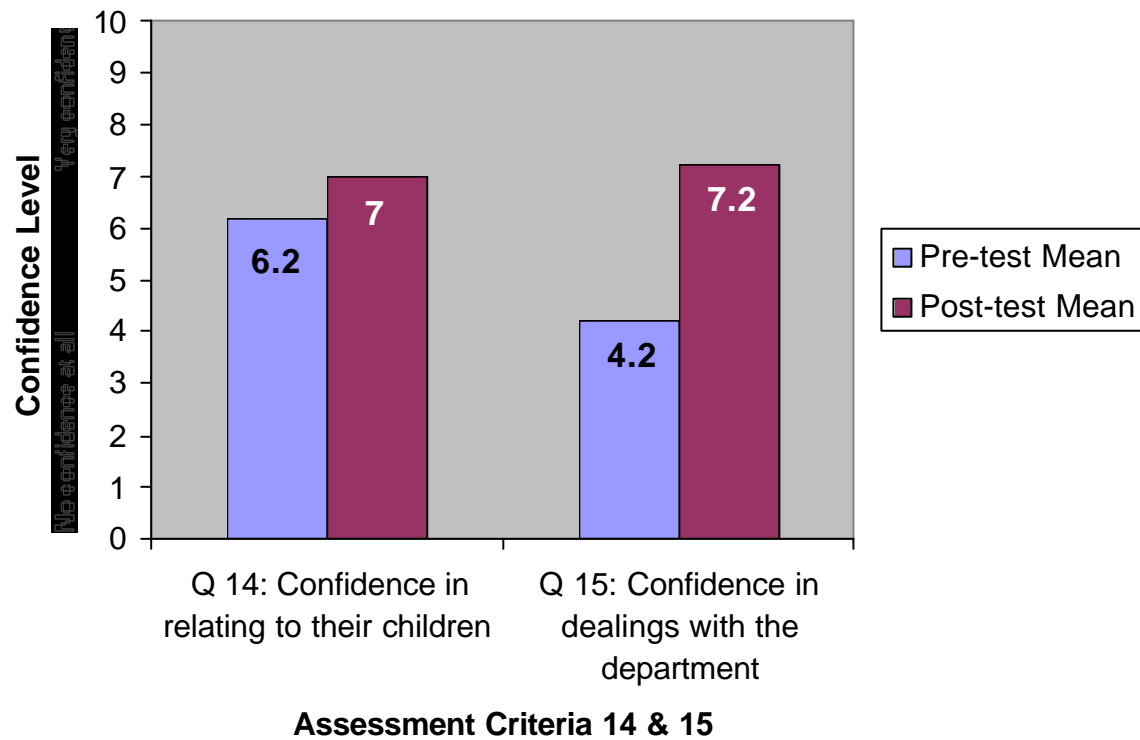
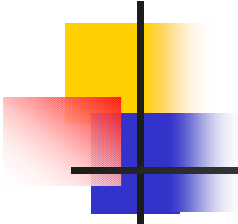


Table Three

Group 2: Differences in Mean (Pre and Post Test Scores)





Facilitators observations of parent sample

- Shock and anger
- Sadness and depression – “giving up”
- Shame and guilt
- Anxiety
- Affective distress
- Unskilled and uninformed about dealing with statutory body
- Did not understand
- Felt intimidated by CP system, carers and legal system



CP workers feedback – children in sys under 12 months

- Improvements observed in
 1. Parents motivation and skills to parent
 2. Ability to navigate the system and collaborate with dept workers within casework framework
 3. Hastened movement towards reunification
 4. Increased through put in the sys – children stayed in care for shorter times



CP workers feedback – children in sys over 12 months

- Re-motivation to parent and reconnect with children



CONCLUSION

- Evaluation established My Family First program had some usefulness in
 1. Working on negative parental feelings assoc with separation from their children
 2. Up-skilling parents to help them better work with the statutory CP system



Opportunities for family growth

- If parents are assisted to reduce negative feelings assoc with removal & parents understanding of the CP system is increased
- Inhibiting barriers that threaten to fracture/destroy parent/child relationship, can thereby be reduced or removed, allowing the parent-child relationship to thrive and grow



Sustainability of change

- 1 family – 3 of 4 children back in parent's care. Currently working toward the 4th also reunifying.
- 1 family elected to care for one child initially rather than all 3, then later resumed care also of the other 2
- 1 family has regular o/n w/e & holiday contact and moved his working relationship with DOC and carer from virtual breakdown to positive and mutually co-operative for the children's benefit. Significant reduction of tension for all the wkrs in the system incl the SFC agency and counselling service.
- 1 family had child reunited within 12 months

This material was produced by Mercy Family Services Toowoomba,
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Funded by

