

The Inspiring Families Programme: A Formative Evaluation of Pilot Implementation in Slough, Berkshire



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Executive Summary

The Inspiring Families (IF) Programme is an innovative assessment of families where domestic abuse is an identified component and the families have chosen to stay together. It is designed as an accessible tool that provides professionals with the evidence they need to make an assessment of the family and to identify the nature of further intervention. It enables professionals to assess and understand family dynamics, support and educate parents in order to enhance support for children who witness and experience domestic violence and coercive control, and in turn, help to reduce the negative, long-term impacts on families and children.

This report presents a formative evaluation of the Inspiring Families Programme's pilot implementation in Slough in May – July 2016. The evaluation examines 'process' in terms of *how* the IF Programme works to achieve outcomes and 'outcome' by documenting indications of *what* the IF Programme can achieve for a) professionals and operational practice and, b) IF participants – as individuals and couples – and the consequential, preliminary signs of how the IF Programme can impact their families. The report presents findings in a number of outcome areas:

1. Indicative Impact on Couples and their Children

In total, 10 couples¹ participated in the 10-week programme and all couples completed the programme. The police data reveals that – at the point of writing – there were no further domestic abuse-related incidents reported for any of the IF families.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (SES) was used to measure the self-esteem levels of each member of the ten couples at the beginning and the end of the course. The results show that self-esteem levels increased for 8 out of the 9 women and 5 out of the 6 men who completed both assessments. Further analysis shows a statistically significant increase in self-esteem levels and that the IF Programme had a large effect on these changes. These results are corroborated by qualitative findings generated from participant feedback at the end of the programme and practitioner observations of the difference in couple/family interactions pre and post-Programme participation.

Male participants reveal increased understanding of what constitutes domestic violence and coercive control and a number of women expressed feelings of increased confidence, strength and empowerment.

I now know what a healthy relationship & unhealthy relationship is – the course has helped me reflect & observe other relationships

¹ See Table 2.1 for an overview of IF participant demographic characteristics.

Now I am strong. Before the course I was scared but now I can say how I feel
Female IF Programme Participants

It [IF Programme] helped me realise what I did was wrong and gave me the tools to correct it

Male IF Programme Participant

I spoke to the father and he touched his head with his finger and said, 'it's actually given me a far bigger insight than I actually had before I did the programme' because little things that he was taking for granted he didn't know that it was domestic abuse, for example not allowing the wife to have the keys, he was the one who opened the house...

IF Family Social Worker

While the IF Programme is not an intervention programme there are indications of changes in behaviour from some of the male and female participants. Therefore, further research might prove to be useful to investigate where the programme lies on the assessment / intervention continuum.

2. Supporting and Developing Strategic Frameworks

Inspiring Families is part of the fabric of our strategic framework already

The IF Programme is perceived as embodying a change in the methodological approach to addressing domestic abuse in a number of key areas:

- Focusing on the needs of children

It brings a change of methodology in terms of meeting children's needs and hearing children's voices, reacting to what research says about the impact on children

- Engaging with perpetrators as men and fathers

Inspiring Families brings a reality-based perspective, which is grounded in serving all parties, really. It takes account of the father who is important in the child's life. It is invaluable to focus on men and to offer them the opportunity to make changes in their lives. You can't reduce risk in a family if no work is done with the dad

Senior Executive, Slough Children's Services Trust

- The IF Programme assesses family dynamics over a period of time to test issues such as **disguised compliance**. This is a methodological move away from the current approach of assessing risk at a single point with a single person – the victim of abuse.

3. Operational Impact: A Holistic Evidence Base

The IF Programme **structure and content** has been favourably received by family social workers and the **IF Programme Family Assessments**, in particular are viewed as an important tool for the social workers involved with the families and case review conference panels:

*I think it's a very good programme in the sense that it goes through everything that we want the parents to have insight on the issues of domestic violence; to understand about the way that they interact with each other around the children, the emotional impact on the child. **It shows them how to talk and learn ways to diffuse arguments and stop them from escalating to a fight or an incident.***

*The assessment helped us [case review conference] **make a decision that we could step the case down from child protection to child in need.** The programme has had an impact because the issues were around domestic violence, all those were addressed, they had insight of the impact of domestic violence not only on themselves as parents but on their children as well.*

IF Family Social Workers

The IF Programme has the capacity to enhance practitioner awareness of, and multi agency response to **risk within a family dynamic**.

Inspiring Families examines all relationships within a family but predominantly between the male and the female, and what impact it's having on the children and actually what is safe and what's unsafe. What the strengths are and what are the potential risks

Senior Manager, Slough Borough Council

The evaluation identifies a number of general challenges to IF Programme implementation and delivery and provides constructive recommendations for future development in areas such as:

- Programme Capacity versus Programme Demand in Regions
- Language Constraints and Cultural Considerations
- Negotiating a Domestic Abuse Family Dynamic

Ultimately, Rock Pool has recognised that **risk is dynamic** and can change from week to week. The proposition underpinning the IF Programme is that by better understanding the dynamics at play within a family, professionals and participants can be helped to **identify behaviour patterns** (e.g. coercive control and disguised compliance) and start to develop strategies to manage risk. The evidence shows that by using approaches that will develop trust and empathy and encourage honesty and self-reflection, the IF Programme has the capacity to enable a better understanding of what is truly happening within a family.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Inspiring Families Programme: Context and Description

The evidence from Domestic Homicide Reviews reveals the identification and assessment of levels of risk and dynamics to be a challenge for agencies and organisations. The biennial and triennial reviews² of Serious Case Reviews have identified that the rate of child death and serious harm as a result of domestic abuse (DA) in families has not reduced over the last 10 years. Nationally, it is accepted that domestic abuse is over represented in Children's Social Care and has a significant and disproportionate impact on demand management. The Understanding Troubled Families Report, published by the Government in 2014, highlighted DA as a prominent issue in Phase One of the Troubled Families Programme, stating *29% of troubled families were experiencing domestic violence or abuse on entry to the programme...62% of families experiencing domestic violence had a truanting child and 39% of families experiencing domestic violence also had a young offender*³. Domestic abuse has now been included as a priority issue for the expanded Phase Two programme and the Inspiring Families (IF) Programme is intended to support practitioners to develop the whole family plan and deliver the outcomes required.

Whole family approaches to domestic abuse remain rare and the IF Programme is an attempt to address the gap in support service provision. Ultimately, one of the aims of the IF Programme is to support the most appropriate allocation of resources, which will in turn help to reduce the demand for high cost services. The IF Programme is designed to be an accessible tool that will provide professionals with the evidence they need to make an assessment of the family and to identify the nature of further intervention. Rock Pool have recognised that risk is dynamic and changes from week to week. The proposition underpinning Inspiring Families is that unless professionals can understand the dynamics in a family they cannot properly understand and therefore effectively manage risk. Conducting risk assessments on families where there is domestic abuse gives professionals a good indication of where the risk is at a given point.

Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that additional information is often revealed once trust and rapport is established with both abusers and victims, which in turn enhances understanding of risk factors and indicators. The IF Programme is designed to systemically enable this process. Family members and abusers often have a stake in maintaining the status quo and avoiding scrutiny and 'disguised compliance' is often a feature within families experiencing domestic abuse. Serious Case Reviews acknowledge that this is a barrier in correctly identifying risks to children. The IF Programme recognises that most perpetrators are skilled in establishing power and control within relationships and can use this to good effect with professionals. The programme uses

² Pathways to Harm (May 2016) Department for Education, HM Government

³ Understanding Troubled Families (DCLG): 2104: 10-13.

approaches to develop trust and empathy and encourage honesty and self-reflection. These approaches help to unpick controlling strategies enabling practitioners to have a holistic understanding of what is happening within a family and to make evidence-based decisions regarding the most appropriate interventions moving forward.

1.2 The Socio-Demographic Landscape of Slough

Slough is a town in the east of Berkshire. In 2011, the population of Slough was 140,713, although estimates taken in 2014 show that Slough now has a total population of 144,800, approximately. Roughly 65% (94,700) of the town's residents are aged 16 – 65, and the borough is made up of a significantly younger than average population compared to the other southeast local authorities. Almost 30% of the borough's population is aged 0-19 years old and almost 10% (12,800) is aged 0 – 4 years old. In addition, Slough has a higher proportion of young adults aged 25 to 44, which suggests the possibility of a large number of young families. In Slough, 39% of all households contain dependent children and this is the third highest proportion across England and Wales. Six per cent (2,911) of all households have dependent children but no adults in employment⁴.

Slough was one of the most ethnically diverse local authority areas outside of London in the United Kingdom in 2015. The demographic of the borough is constantly changing with trends showing a steady rise in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population. The borough continues to attract high levels of refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have opted out of the formal 'dispersal' system (and therefore not registered for vouchers), which can make them vulnerable and in need of key services. In 2012/2013, the school census recorded over 150 languages spoken in schools. In 2011, 16% of households in Slough did not have a family member with English as their main language (11th highest across England and Wales). Since 2010 there has been a slight shift towards greater deprivation in Slough relative to the rest of England, particularly in relation to crime, barriers to housing and services and income deprivation affecting older people⁵.

Children and Families in Slough

Under the Government's Troubled Families Programme (Phase 2), Slough has a target to work with 1260 by 2020. In 2015/16 Slough worked with 236 families against a target of 213 families. The target for 2016/17 is 431 and as of July 2016 they had worked with 323 families. As of 31 October 2015, 1,172 children were identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,450 at 31 March 2015. At the same point in time, 150 children and young people were the subject of a Child

⁴ The Slough Story (2016:4):
www.slough.gov.uk/downloads/The-Slough-Story.pdf

⁵ The Slough Story (2016: 5-8)

Protection Plan; three children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement and 183 children were being looked after by the local authority (a reduction from 196 from March 2015).

In the last 12 months (March 2015 – March 2016):

- 20 children were adopted;
- 25 children became subject of special guardianship orders;
- 61 children ceased to be 'looked after', of whom six (4%) subsequently returned to be looked after;
- 37 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living,
- 46 children and young people stopped being 'looked after' and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

Issues of neglect were a feature in 43% of the local authority's child protection plans; emotional abuse was a factor in 34% of cases, physical abuse in 10% of cases and sexual abuse in 3% of cases. The data compiled in Slough suggests that domestic abuse features prominently in the background of a significant number of the borough's social care casework.⁶

1.3 The Inspiring Families Programme: Implementation in Slough

Rock Pool, in partnership with Slough Children's Services Trust, Slough Borough Council and Thames Valley Police delivered the pilot Inspiring Families Programme between 4 May and 13 July 2016. In Slough, all of the families participating in the IF Programme were also part of the Troubled Families Programme, and were known to Slough Children's Services Trust either accessing support from the Early Help Service or statutory children social care services. Prior to the implementation of Inspiring Families, Slough did not operate a domestic violence intervention programme focused on men, specifically.

Agencies across Slough were asked to refer families on to the programme. These agencies included children services, Slough Borough Council, Thames Valley Police, MARAC and the voluntary and community sector. Once referrals were received families were initially assessed by a Team Leader from Early Help Services for their suitability to attend the programme. If they were assessed as suitable for the IF Programme, the group facilitators met with the prospective participants individually and completed a pre-programme assessment interview.

The Facilitators in Slough were female and came from different service areas. The two facilitators of the women's group work as Family Support Workers

⁶ The Slough Story (2016:4):
www.slough.gov.uk/downloads/The-Slough-Story.pdf

(FSW) employed by Slough Children's Services Trust within the Early Help Service. A Targeted Support Manager and an Inspector in Thames Valley Police led the men's group. All four facilitators met up after each session to provide comprehensive feedback on group dynamic and individual participation. This also included feedback from each of the families lead professionals, where necessary. The facilitators received case management support and direction from a Team Leader from the Early Help Service in Slough Children's Services Trust. An administrator who provided additional support to organise the logistics of the delivering the groups supported the delivery of the programme.

The women's group ran on a Wednesday afternoon from 12.30pm to 2.30pm at a local children centre. The children's centre also provided childcare for children aged between 0 – 5 years for the families where this was required. The men's group ran on a Wednesday evening from 4.30pm to 6.30pm from a community centre. Between Weeks Four and Five of the programme a formal family review meeting took place that included the IF Programme Facilitators, Team Leader from Early Help Services, Troubled Families Co-ordinator from Slough Borough Council and a representative from Rock Pool. The purpose of this meeting was to review the progress of the families, including the impact if any on the children and to discuss any safeguarding concerns.

A final review meeting was held following the final (Week 10) session and attended by the same representation that attended the Week Four review meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to prepare the final assessment reports on the observations and progress of each family who attended and completed the programme. These final reports were then sent to the Family Lead Professional for their use and dissemination.

1.4 Inspiring Families Programme Evaluation

This report presents a formative evaluation of the Inspiring Families Programme's pilot implementation in Slough in Spring 2016. The evaluation examines 'process' in terms of *how* the IF Programme works to:

- Inform and develop strategic frameworks in operation within domestic abuse and children's social care arenas;
- Provide a holistic evidence base to better understand the nature and impact of domestic abuse within different family environments;
- Increase understanding of domestic abuse and coercive control within a family setting and provide increased awareness of the impact of domestic abuse on children,
- Contribute to risk assessment approaches from a whole family perspective.

The evaluation also focuses on 'outcomes' by documenting indications of *what* the IF Programme can achieve for a) professionals and operational practice in relation to enhanced multi-agency partnership, child protection and risk

assessment and b) IF participants – as individuals and couples – and the consequential, preliminary signs of how the IF Programme can impact their families – as observed by professionals working with the families and the IF couples, themselves.

The IF Programme Evaluation incorporated a mixed method approach to data collection, analysis and presentation of findings. Both the IF Programme (and partners) and the research team generated data utilised in the evaluation report. In terms of the qualitative methodology, the research team carried out five one to one, telephone interviews with key stakeholders within Slough Borough Council, Slough Children’s Services Trust and social workers who were directly involved with at least three of the families referred onto the IF Programme. In addition, all four IF Programme facilitators completed a short questionnaire and their responses were coded, qualitatively. The research team made a concerted effort to secure telephone interviews with some of the IF participants, themselves. However, it was not possible to secure interviews despite initial contact and agreed arrangements for telephone interviews. However, participant observations and perspectives were derived from qualitative feedback provided following completion of the programme.

The evaluation report includes quantitative data on some of the demographic characteristics of each family and case history with data provided by both Thames Valley Police and Slough Children’s Services Trust⁷. In addition, the pilot IF Programme incorporated Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (SES) into its assessment framework, and this was completed at Week 1 (baseline) and Week 10 (post-intervention). Although all 10 couples (20 participants) completed the course, only 15 participants fully completed the assessment questionnaires at both Week 1 (baseline) and Week 10 (post intervention). Therefore the Full SES Sample was 15. The evaluation team carried out statistical analysis on SES results, including a paired-samples t-test to examine the impact of the IF Programme on participants’ self-esteem levels.

It will be useful to re-visit the pilot site and the families who participated in the first IF Programme if possible in order to generate some additional, more longitudinal insights into IF Programme impact on individual/couple behaviour (including rates of re-victimisation⁸), family dynamics and outcomes and on operational practice in terms of multi-agency working with families, risk assessment and an understanding of domestic violence and coercive control, more generally.

⁷ See Table 2.1 for a breakdown of the demographic characteristics and baseline data on all ten families who participated in the Inspiring Families Programme.

⁸ The evaluation team acknowledges the challenge of assessing domestic abuse victimisation and re-victimisation and the fact that not all incidents are reported to the police, for example.

2.0 Demographic Characteristics of IF Programme Families

Table 2.1⁹ provides a breakdown of the key demographic characteristics of each of the ten families that participated in the pilot IF Programme in Slough. This data contributed to a baseline assessment of families at the point they became involved with the IF Programme. The demographic data shows IF participants were heterosexual couples from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The baseline children and social care data shows that 3/10 women have had their cases raised at a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) at some point prior to IF participation; one family has a Looked After Child; 4/10 families have children subject to a Child Protection Order and two families have Children in Need. The police data reveals 8/10 families had been subject to police-call out in the six months prior to the start of the IF Programme (one reported incident included concerns around child protection). The reported incidents included in Table 2.1 include all offences (crime and non-crime) that could trigger the Hate Crime indicator relating to Domestic Violence.

It is important to note that **ALL participants completed the 10-week course**. This is a significant accomplishment for both the pilot IF Programme and the participants themselves who negotiated challenging circumstances often exacerbated by work commitments, childcare considerations, transport issues and language constraints to attend every session. It is not unreasonable to suggest that a 100% completion rate, in part, reflects both the content and delivery of the IF Programme and a genuine commitment to behaviour change on the part of the couples attending the Programme.

Also, it is interesting to note that since the start of the IF Programme – and one month following its completion – **there had been no subsequent incidents (domestic abuse-related or otherwise)** reported to the police. It will be important to monitor this situation in the coming months.

⁹ IFP Slough delivery team, Slough Children's Services Trust and Thames Valley Police (TVP) provided the data in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Breakdown of Demographic Characteristics of Slough Inspiring Family Programme Participants

	Relation to Child(ren)	Age	Ethnicity	MARAC Attendance	Looked After (Child)ren	Child(ren) in Need	Child Protection Order (CPO)	Open Referral	Domestic Abuse Reports 6m Pre-IFP¹⁰
IF 1	Mother	23	Mixed Race	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	2
	Father	25	Black African						3
	Daughter	11m							
IF 2	Mother	26	Asian Pakistani	Yes	No	No	No	No	0
	Father	41	Asian Pakistani						0
	Son	2							
IF 3	Mother	31	Asian Indian	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	2
	Father	34	Asian Indian						2
	Daughter	3							1
	Daughter	6							
IF 4	Mother	32	Asian Pakistani	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	2
	Father	36	Asian Pakistani						3
	Son	3							1
	Daughter	1							
IF 5	Mother	24	White British	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	1
	Partner	26	White British						1
	Son	5							
	Son	3							
	Son	1							

¹⁰ This data is provided by Thames Valley Police (TVP). It includes all offences (crime and non-crime) that could trigger the Hate Crime indicator relating to Domestic Violence.

Table 2.1: Breakdown of Demographic Characteristics of Slough Inspiring Family Programme Participants (continued)

	Relation to Child(ren)	Age	Ethnicity	MARAC Attendance	Looked After Child	Child in Need	Child Protection Order	Open Referral	DA Reports 6m Pre-IFP
IF 6	Mother	42	Asian Pakistani	No					0
	Father	52	Asian Pakistani						0
	Son	15			No	Yes	No	Yes	
	Daughter	13			No	Yes	No	Yes	
	Daughter	12			No	Yes	No	Yes	
	Daughter	7			No	Yes	No	Yes	
	Son	6			U/K	U/K	U/K	U/K	
IF 7	Mother	32	White Polish	No					1
	Father	32	White Polish						1
	Son	6m			No	No	Yes	Yes	
IF 8	Mother	33	White Polish	No					1
	Father	36	Asian Indian						1
	Son	11m			No	No	No	Yes	
IF 9	Mother	38	Asian Pakistani	Yes					2
	Father	35	Asian Pakistani						2
	Daughter	13			No	No	Yes	Yes	
	Daughter	12			No	No	Yes	Yes	
	Daughter	10			No	No	Yes	Yes	
	Son	6			No	No	Yes	Yes	
	Son	3				No	Yes	Yes	
IF 10	Mother	29	White Polish	Yes					2
	Father	40	White Polish						2
	Daughter	5			No	No	No	No	
	Daughter	5			No	No	No	No	

3.0 IF Programme Impact: Commissioners and Practitioners

3.1. Supporting and Developing Strategic Frameworks

The IF Programme framework is widely observed as comprehensive and robust, incorporating a sound understanding of multi-agency partnership working and communication, and complimenting established operational programmes such as Troubled Families. Furthermore, the programme is valued as both a support for pre-existing strategic priorities whilst also providing the means by which to develop future objectives.

A number of interview participants perceive the IF Programme to have introduced a **change in the methodological approach to addressing domestic abuse** by a) prioritising the needs of children, and b) confronting and working with the reality of domestic abuse within a family dynamic and c) assessing family dynamics over a period of time to test issues such as **disguised compliance**. This is a methodological move away from the current approach of assessing risk at a single point with a single person – the victim of abuse.

It brings a change of methodology in terms of meeting children's needs and hearing children's voices, reacting to what research says about the impact on children of domestic violence.

We are no longer saying [to children] there must be preconditions in place before I will visit your home, or...for you to get a service, your parents must do certain things. The Programme ensures those children got a kind of guaranteed level of service and a guaranteed offer [of support] and that offer wasn't clear before.

Senior Executive, Slough Children's Service's Trust

The IF Programme feeds into strategies to **better engage with perpetrators as both men and fathers**.

What Inspiring Families has brought is a reality-based perspective, which is grounded in serving all parties, really. It takes account of the father who is important in the child's life. It seeks to differentiate between their role as men and fathers: differentiating between role in parenting which includes role in partnership and marital relationships, and the other undesirable, sometimes unacceptable, sometimes harmful and sometimes illegal behaviour of fathers is an important dimension which feeds into the Trust's strategy to engage better with fathers.

Senior Executive, Slough Children's Service's Trust

By working with both men and women, Inspiring Families approaches parenting behaviour in a realistic and positive way, and there is an explicit acknowledgement of the complexity of domestic abuse households. In addition, the capacity to work with men as fathers has an operational impact in that it contributes to the assessment of risk within individual family environments (see Section 3.3).

By definition, engaging with fathers is not punishing mothers for making what sometimes is a logical choice. So the DV is going on, and the reality is that the same person who is perpetrating the DV is four days out of seven your economic support, your emotional support...when couples express a desire to remain together, Inspiring Families offers them the opportunity to show their commitment and learn together.

It is invaluable to focus on men and to offer them the opportunity to make changes in their lives. You can't reduce risk in a family if no work is done with the dad. Ultimately, the risk to children is still there if no work is done with perpetrators. The men need to 'do work'.

Senior Executive, Slough Children's Service's Trust

3.2. Programme Structure, Content and Delivery

The IF Programme **structure and content** has been favourably received by family social workers, in particular the mid-point feedback sessions between the two groups and the provision of formal, mid-course and final assessments to social workers.

I think for us [social workers], it's much more than a domestic abuse programme. It's an awareness of parenting, substance misuse, and risk...it brings it all together.

I think it's a very good programme in the sense that it goes through everything that we want the parents to have insight on the issues of domestic violence; to understand about the way that they interact with each other around the children, the emotional impact on the child. It shows them how to talk and learn ways to diffuse arguments and stop them from escalating to a fight or an incident.

IF Family Social Workers

The role of **clinical supervision and observation** within IF Programme sessions was also widely praised by both facilitators and management within both Slough Borough Council and the Children's Trust. This structural element

facilitated conversations around best practice in terms of engaging participants and maximising the impact of each session.

3.3. Operational Impact: A Holistic Evidence Base

The **IF Programme Family Assessments** are viewed as an important tool for the social workers involved with the families and case review conference panels. The Family Assessments enable practitioners to design a package of effective support that needs to be provided to families in order to keep families together or for an appropriate exit strategy to be developed for those wanting to leave the relationship. A youth worker can support the children and young people involved in the situation and a wrap-around service can be provided for the whole family.

The assessment helped us [case review conference] make a decision that we could step the case down from child protection to child in need. The programme has had an impact because the issues were around domestic violence, all those were addressed, they had insight of the impact of domestic violence not only on themselves as parents but on their children as well. We were given a midway review as well, which was very helpful.

I think for us, the family assessments are a very big chunk of the puzzle of our cases. If we didn't have that piece then we can't complete the whole thing.

I think they should keep doing the feedback, it's very important for us because you want to know the impact of the programme on the parents or on the family as a whole because it's not only about the parents it's about their children, how is it impacting on their functioning as a family unit so we value that regular feedback.

IF Family Social Workers

Social workers value the close working relationship with the IF Programme. They believe it is important that the programme supports the ethos and objectives of social services and social workers but that it **retains autonomy** and this is well received by participants and practitioners.

I think its delivered in a way that isn't judgemental, if someone can say, 'hang on we are not social workers, we're here to help you and support you from another angle.' I think parents work with that. They trust them more, I think once they develop that trust they open up, which sometimes they don't do with social workers.

IF Family Social Worker

The IF Programme has the capacity to enhance practitioner awareness of, and multi agency response to **risk within a family dynamic**. The IF Programme is seen to move beyond traditional notions of risk reduction that focus on removing the perpetrator from the household. Instead, it incorporates home visits and provides an opportunity to carry out a robust, holistic assessment of the dynamics between all family members.

*I've been in social care a long time and chaired numerous child protection conferences where there's very much the culture of job done, risk is reduced because we've told the dad, and it's usually the dad, that if he doesn't leave the home we are going to bring him to account. And then they usually leave, but whether it actually achieves very much longer term remains questionable certainly when you've got a **false compliance** going on because often what you find out is that although he's moved out he's spending all of his time there, and the issues really haven't gone away.*

Inspiring Families examines all relationships within a family but predominantly between the male and the female, and what impact it's having on the children and actually what is safe and what's unsafe. What the strengths are and what are the potential risks, being resilient moving forward...

Senior Manager, Slough Borough Council

The IF Programme recognises that perpetrators are often skilled in establishing power and control within relationships and can use this to good effect with professionals. By using approaches that will develop trust and empathy, and encourage honesty and self-reflection, IF retains the capacity to address strategies such as false compliance and coercive control and enable practitioners to gain a **better understanding of what is truly happening within a family**.

The IF Programme supports the development of **effective multi-agency partnership working** by facilitating collaborative and innovative ways to respond to dynamic situations. This is exemplified in the following case study:

The Impact of Effective Multi-Agency Working

Challenge

We discovered in the first week or two that the bail conditions for one of the men were actually making it very difficult for them [couple] to do any of the [IFP] homework and evidence what the dynamics were between him and his partner.

Multi-Agency Communication

Having the police inspector deliver the programme, they were able to then go back renegotiate the bail conditions – still keeping the woman safe, but enabling them to come together as a couple and start to put into practise some of those things that they were picking up and learning on the programme.

Future Development

It is something to think about in the future. Even if you haven't got a police inspector [facilitating the Programme]...to have those relationships with the police so we can have those discussions and be more creative and more flexible to do things that are right for the family.

4.0 The Impact on Participants and Families

4.1 The Impact of the IF Programme on Participants' Self-Esteem

The self-esteem levels of each member of the ten couples that participated in the Inspiring Families Programme were measured at the beginning and the end of the course. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show that self-esteem levels increased for 8 out of the 9 women and 5 out of the 6 men who completed both assessments.

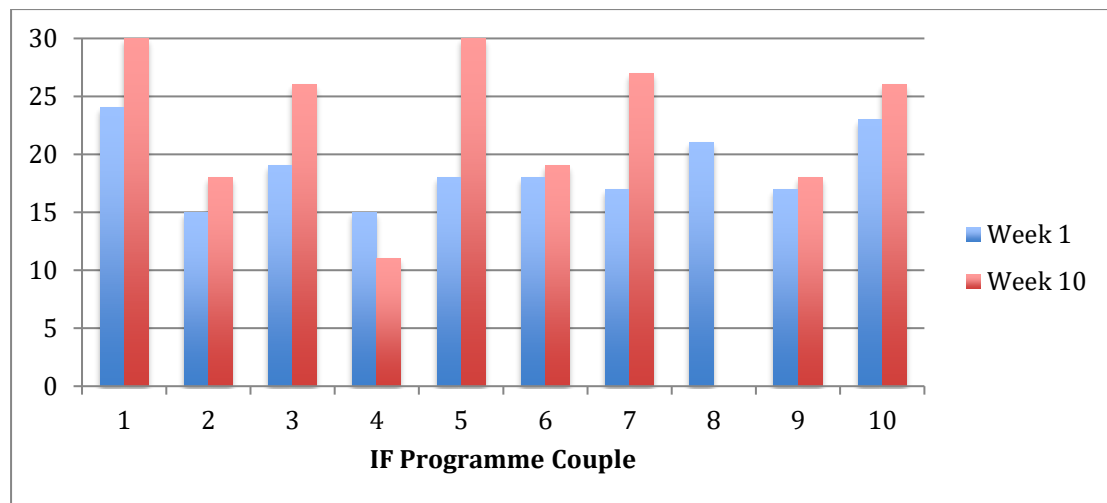


Figure 4.1 Changes in Female Participants' Self-Esteem Levels

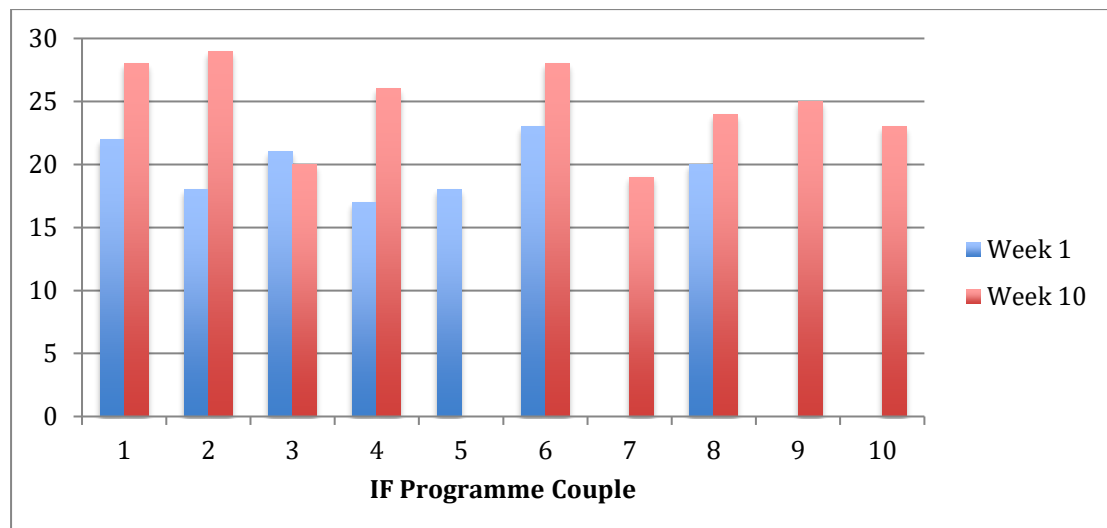


Figure 4.2 Changes in Male Participants' Self-Esteem Levels

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the IF Programme on participants' scores on Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (SES). The results show a statistically significant increase in mean scores from Time 1 ($M=19.13$, $SD=2.90$) to Time 2 ($M=24.00$, $SD=5.56$, $p=.001$ (two-tailed)). The eta squared statistic (reflecting the strength of the IF Programme's effect on

participants' self-esteem), is .55, which indicates the IF Programme had a large effect on changes to self-esteem levels with a substantial difference in scores before and after participation in the Programme. These results are corroborated by qualitative findings generated by family feedback at the end of the programme. One of the male participants revealed that he had *more good thoughts*, and a number of women expressed feelings of increased confidence, strength and empowerment (see Section 4.2).

4.2 Impact on Families: Practitioner and Participant Perspectives

The data presented in this section is generated from interviews with family social workers and feedback from some of the couples that participated in the Slough IF Programme. It is important to note that, while the IF Programme is not an intervention programme there are indications of changes in behaviour from some of the male and female participants. Therefore, further research might prove to be useful to investigate where the programme lies on the assessment/intervention continuum.

The qualitative data indicate the IF Programme had noteworthy impact on male participants. Programme facilitators highlight particularly successful aspects of the course:

*All the sessions have been informative, but the **equality wheel** and relationship sessions have enabled perpetrators to reflect on their behaviours and issues related to domestic abuse. **Peer challenge** has been beneficial to the group as the men have learnt from their peers as well as have been directly challenged regarding the need to change their attitudes.*

Facilitator of the Men's IF Group

A number of men reveal they have a greater awareness of what constitutes domestic abuse, acknowledging a greater understanding of terms such as 'control' and 'power', with one male participant stating, that the:

It [the IF Programme] helped me realise what I did was wrong and gave me the tools to correct it

This development is supported by social workers:

I spoke to the father and he did say it had an impact because little things that he was taking for granted he didn't know that it was domestic abuse. Like for example not allowing the wife to have the keys, he was the one who opened the house, holding the keys and all that. So he said little things like that he wasn't really aware that it was a sign of being abusive or dominating. He did say it was a bit eye opener for him and they wanted to remain together as a couple.

When I spoke to the couple, the father said 'it's actually been very thought provoking'. He touched his head with his finger when he was saying 'it's actually given me a far bigger insight than I actually had before I did the programme'. And I thought wow; well, there must be something in the programme that's taken your attention.

IF Family Social Workers

Programme facilitators share observations on **changes to behaviour** and relay conversations they've had with fathers during the Programme:

I feel that some men in the group have changed in the way that they communicate and actually value their partners, girlfriend or wives.

IF Facilitator of Men's Group

This is corroborated by the men themselves as they express an **increased ability to relate** to their partners, which has, in turn, brought them closer together:

I am more open, more affectionate...

We have started 'date night': we do more together and communicate better.

It [IF Programme] was something to share together; it gave us something to relate about together [sic].

Male Participants on the IF Programme

A number of women felt the IF Programme had give them an increased understanding of domestic abuse and positive relationships, more generally:

I now know what a healthy relationship & unhealthy relationship is – the course has helped me reflect & observe other relationships

I now observe other relationships – my relationship not normal – I can see how my relationship should be...

Female Participants on the IF Programme

A number of the women felt reassured by the friendly nature of the group and felt it was a **'safe space'** to share personal experiences. The majority of women revealed an **increase in confidence** following participation in the programme:

I have increased confidence to go to English classes now; I wouldn't have done that before [Inspiring Families].

I now understand I have a voice, I can be more open

I have made friends

Now I am strong. Before the course I was scared but now I can say how I feel

I am empowered to build a perspective, to look more deeper [sic]. An angry person is not normal; I deserve to be respected in equal ways.

I have the right to be respected

At first I was angry with Social Services now I know they are there to protect children – I need to prove that I can be protective for my children.

Female Participants on the IF Programme

A number of men and women highlighted the improvements made by their respective partners and referenced the **impact on their children** and the family environment:

I don't want my children to be in an abusive relationship

It has opened my eyes to the effect on my children

I'm more aware of the impact on the kids; I spend more time with my family.

It has opened both of our eyes

We have both realised what a healthy relationship should be like

Couples' Observations on the Impact of the IF Programme

Moreover, Social Workers, directly involved with IF Programme families have noticed discernible differences in both couple and family interactions. This is highlighted in the following case study that outlines the experience of one IF Programme family.

Inspiring Families Impact: A Social Worker's Perspective

Background

I have been working with a family whose children have been subject to the child protection plan because of domestic violence between parents. I thought my family would benefit from this [IF Programme] because they wanted to remain together. Mum had been in the refuge with the children, and had returned to the father who was the perpetrator. We were very concerned as this was happening for the second time hence the case went to the conference. The IF Programme was the only way to support them because we do not have a domestic violence intervention programme for men at the moment in Slough, so it was going to be unfortunate for the man to not address the issues around domestic violence and to understand how it impacts on the children. In this particular case it did impact on their children because they had to leave their family home, go to a refuge somewhere else outside of their town. They were behind with schooling; they left their friends behind. They left other family members behind; it did have a negative impact on the children.

Impact

After the course, during my visits to the family home my observation was that they were very strong as a family unit. They were working together. I observed them on three occasions, lunchtime unannounced visit, having their lunch together as a family, mum, dad and the children. Especially during the school holidays, or dinner time after school I would find out they are sitting around the table, doing homework with the parents. Also for mum I think it had a very positive influence because her confidence grown a lot, even in managing the children's behaviour. With father as well he did say it had an impact, he said it was a big eye opener for him because little things that he was taking for granted he didn't know that it was domestic abuse.

Outcome

In this particular case, at the last review conference we decided that we needed to step it down from child protection to child in need because of the positive impact the IF Programme has had on the family, on the parents as a couple as well as on the children as well. And also the fact that they were so committed: they attended all the sessions even though they have five children and the father works. For me, it meant that they were really committed and motivated to make changes in their lives.

5.0 Challenges to Programme Implementation and Delivery

This evaluation identifies a number of general and site-specific issues to consider as the IF Programme develops and provides constructive recommendations for future implementation.

5.1 Programme Capacity vs. Programme Demand

It is important to retain 'workforce resilience', particularly in terms of the number of facilitators that are trained and remain available to lead on programme delivery. A number of practitioners indicated Programme delivery is both time and resource-intensive. There is a general consensus that the level of paperwork generated by the wide range of assessment tools needs to be rationalised to reduce the burden on IF Facilitators.

Everyone's been doing this as well as their day job and even if there has been some adjustments made, for example caseload cover, it is still having a significant impact.

Senior Manager, Slough Borough Council

It is important to consider facilitator recruitment in terms of professional background, ethnicity and language skills, and the relative merits of recruiting facilitators from within Children and Social Care. There will be an invaluable depth of understanding with respect to the challenges facing families. However, there may be a level of scepticism from families who believe the programme is run by social services and therefore that the IF Programme's agenda is aligned with social work objectives. Also, it is important to consider the gender balance when delivering the IF Programme for men and women to facilitate the opportunity to both engage and challenge participants' perceptions and behaviour within their family environment.

It is suggested that a Programme Coordinator is recruited to undertake administrative responsibilities, manage stakeholder engagement with the Programme, and to act as a single point of contact for families in order to communicate the role and structure of the IF Programme to couples that have been referred onto the course so that expectations are managed from the outset – for both families and partner agencies.

5.2 Language Constraints and Cultural Considerations

The findings reveal that language constraints are a considerable challenge for both couples and course facilitators during sessions, and in some cases low levels of English reading and writing skills hampered the completion of course homework, which in some cases was not possible without access to interpreter support.

We know that almost 70% of the population in the Slough area is made up of members of BME communities, and one of the challenges is that around 15% of our households have no one living in them who has English as their first language.

Senior Executive, Slough Children's Services Trust

To get the full benefit of the programme it needs to be properly separated into the core main languages that we have, Polish, Punjabi and Urdu. You had six languages in the room and some of the ladies' capabilities of English were quite limited.

IF Family Social Worker

It is important to note that, despite the diversity of ethnicity and consequential language constraints experienced within the pilot IF group, **ALL couples completed the Programme**. Nevertheless, it is necessary to address this challenge in future iterations of the IF Programme and consider options such as regular course delivery throughout the year (in different languages), multi-lingual IF Programmes or recruiting a diverse group of facilitators who speak a variety of languages.

5.3 Negotiating a 'Domestic Abuse Family Dynamic'

It is a challenge in itself for support services to negotiate family dynamics characterised by language constraints, childcare priorities and work commitments. The challenge increases when attempting to secure meaningful and long-term engagement with a 10-week course within a family dynamic where domestic abuse is a prominent factor. In some cases, one of the partners may be reluctant to engage with the programme in the first instance. In some instances, couples may pay a degree of 'lip service' to the Programme as a way to secure less social service involvement with their family. As one social worker observed, *'it is hard to know if a family is committed to change, or just telling the social worker what they think they want to hear from parents'*.

The issues outlined above pose challenges for participants – as couples – to commit to the IF Programme. This reality is a pertinent concern for the IF Programme, as it requires both partners to attend the duration of the course, together. There is an understandable fear that some families might miss out on valuable support. It is vital to communicate the role of IF Programme to participants at an early stage so that expectations can be managed and there is clear understanding of how the IF Programme fits within the wider family support plan. It is also important to track the progress of each IF family post-programme attendance and final assessment to ascertain the extent to which improvement and 'commitment to change' has been maintained after course completion.

In one family we had one parent who did not want to attend and they had to be dropped off [the IF Programme]. But, why drop off the mum? If she gets the learning, she might impact the home. You then have the victim, not getting any support; they need to be accommodated because these victims need to be empowered to stand up to something in their house or at least diffuse a situation, themselves.

5.4 What Lessons Can Other Regions Learn?

The evaluation findings highlight a number of activities that future IF regions can undertake in advance of implementation and delivery of the programme.

1. Scoping and Mapping Exercises

It is advisable to invest time and resource in mapping the demographic nature of intended IF regions, highlighting issues of ethnicity, language and movement into the region in terms of the socio-demographic makeup of families and households. As part of this focused scoping exercise it is vital to identify the prevalence and nature of domestic abuse in a proposed IF region. It is also important to map the regional hotspots using multi-agency data sources and analyse the data within the context of key socio-demographic factors such as age, ethnicity, language and cultural background.

2. Communicating IF Programme Remit to Stakeholder Partners

It is important to ensure clear and effective communication of the IF Programme's structure, objectives and outcomes to multi-agency partners and other key stakeholders at the point of Programme commissioning in a region. In particular, it is vital for the IF Programme's Implementation Team to liaise closely with Children and Social Care Services and voluntary and community sectors early on in order to **establish a robust referral pathway** into the Programme.

There needs to be work around explaining to people what the programme is and more importantly actually what it isn't, particularly to social care and social workers. There needs to be good identification processes, to be really clear about which families it is you are intending to target for the support.

It is important to ensure that multi-agency partnerships are aware of the IF Programme and that effective information-sharing protocols are in place so that the right referrals are coming through to the Programme. It is possible that an effective referral system may be best achieved through the development of a

management-led referral panel that considers cases on the basis of a combination of risk data and practitioner nomination.

Moreover, it is crucial to engage with stakeholder partners – who may be outside of the operational running of the Programme – to manage relationships and expectations at the point of Programme implementation. It is crucial that stakeholder partners are aware of their responsibilities and that support is robust and responsive so that if issues do arise during the course of the IF Programme, any action required is swift and effective e.g. a home visit or other form of intervention. It is always a challenge to incorporate dynamic-response mechanisms into a structured 10-week model of supportive assessment. However, early-stage awareness of the role of the IF Programme and its intended outcomes, together with a clear understanding of partner agency involvement and their supportive responsibilities can mitigate these types of issues and contribute to a holistic support framework for families who wish to remain together.

6.0 Summary and Conclusions

The IF Programme is designed to be an accessible tool that will provide professionals with the evidence they need to make an assessment of whole families, identify and manage risk and make decisions regarding the nature of further intervention. This formative evaluation has identified a number of findings in key outcome areas including:

- Supporting and developing strategic frameworks;
- Focusing on children's needs, welfare and protection;
- Enhanced engagement with men as fathers and perpetrators;
- Programme structure, content and delivery, in particular, access to clinical expertise and the production of IF assessments,
- Enhanced partnership working, effective resource allocation and whole family risk assessment.

There is emerging evidence of IF Programme impact on participants – as individuals, and couples and parents. There are indications – from professionals and participants – that impacts extend into family life, which can contribute to a reduction in risk and trauma to children.

Quantitative findings show that **self-esteem levels increased** for 8 out of the 9 women and 5 out of the 6 men who completed both assessments and that the IF Programme had a large effect on changes to self-esteem levels with a significant difference in scores before and after participation in the Programme. These results are corroborated by qualitative findings generated by family feedback at the end of the programme with both male and female participants expressing **increased feelings of positivity, confidence, strength and empowerment**. The qualitative findings also reveal that men developed a better understanding of what constitutes domestic abuse and both men and women indicate that they are more aware of impacts on their children.

It is important to note that, while the IF Programme is not an intervention programme there are indications of changes in behaviour from some of the male and female participants. Therefore, further research might prove to be useful to investigate where the programme lies on the assessment/intervention continuum.

The IF Programme is perceived as embodying a **change in the methodological approach** to addressing domestic abuse in a number of key areas:

- Focusing on the **needs of children**
- **Engaging with perpetrators as men and fathers**
- Assessing family dynamics over a period of time to test issues such as **disguised compliance**. This is methodological move away from the current approach of assessing risk at a single point with a single person – the victim of abuse.

The IF Programme structure and content has been well received by family social workers and IF Programme **Family Assessments** are viewed as a vital evidence base for the social workers and case review conference panels. This in turn demonstrates that the IF Programme has the capacity to enhance practitioner awareness of and multi agency **response to risk** within a family dynamic.

It will be important to re-visit the pilot site and the families who participated in the first IF Programme if possible in order to generate some additional, more longitudinal insights into IF Programme impact on individual/couple behaviour, family dynamics and outcomes and on operational practice in terms of multi-agency working with families, risk assessment and an understanding of domestic violence and coercive control, more generally. Furthermore, it will be important to monitor rates of re-victimisation/police call out notwithstanding the acknowledged challenges of assessing re-victimisation and the fact that not all incidents are reported to the police or partner agencies. In addition, it will be useful to undertake similar evaluations on IF Programme implementation, delivery and outcomes in different regions to assess the implementation and impact of the Programme across a range of different socio-demographic settings.

The evaluation also identifies a number of general challenges to IF Programme implementation and delivery and provides constructive recommendations for future development in areas such as:

- Programme Capacity versus Programme Demand in Regions
- Language Constraints and Cultural Considerations
- Negotiating a Domestic Abuse Family Dynamic

The evaluation findings highlight a number of activities that can be undertaken to mitigate these types of issue including 1) a **comprehensive scoping exercise** to map the socio-demographic characteristics of IF regions and the prevalence and nature of domestic abuse in a proposed IF region, and 2) ensure **clear and effective communication** of the IF Programme's structure, objectives and outcomes to multi-agency partners and other key stakeholders at the point of Programme commissioning in a region in order to manage expectation and establish a robust referral pathway into the Programme.

Ultimately, Rock Pool has recognised that **risk is dynamic** and can change from week to week. The proposition that underpins the IF Programme is that by better understanding the dynamics at play within a family, professionals and participants can be helped to **identify behaviour patterns** (e.g. coercive control and disguised compliance) and start to develop strategies to manage risk. The evidence shows that by using approaches that will develop trust and empathy and encourage honesty and self-reflection, the IF Programme has the capacity to enable a **better understanding of what is truly happening within a family**.