Executive Summary

Social Impact Assessment
of
SAFC Foundation of Light’s Wider Family Learning Courses

July 2012
Main Findings:

Impact on the communities:

- Parents in this research appeared to be very proud of where they lived. Our research revealed that although the schools were located in areas considered to be deprived, parents were in control of their own lives and that of their families.
- Parents and carers were strong active citizens and decision makers in their own lives. They readily voiced key issues that impacted and affected their lives. These included road safety, young drivers speeding and dog fouling issues. However, these parents were able to solve their own problems and were able to describe ways in which they took an active role in developing and maintaining their communities.
- Parents generally agreed that before participation in the SAFC Foundation of Light courses that they only spoke to other parents on a ‘need to basis’; however, they now suggest that they do feel more connected to others in their local community.
- Parents who participated in the Wider Family Learning courses had developed a culture of volunteering. It was found that the motivation to volunteer was often viewed as a means to an end in terms of helping parents to secure employment, rather than ‘giving something back to the community’.
- It was clear that the Foundation of Light had played a major role in providing parents and young people with a ‘space’ to find new ways to relate to others and to take up opportunities in their communities.
- Communities within schools helped to bring people together. People from the same communities were meeting each other for the first time, and challenging preconceived ideas and opinions about each other.

Impact on children:

- Children interviewed discussed their delight in being able to share their ‘school life’ with their parents.
- Children interviewed discussed working ‘harder’ at school as they knew they had the Family Learning course to look forward to.
- Children relished spending this extra time with their parents.
- Children reported that the involvement in the Wider Family Learning courses had the unintended outcome for their families and that they now spent more time together as families, enjoying leisure activities.
Children reported their pleasure of being awarded match day tickets at the end of the Wider Family Learning courses. It was clear that they enjoyed attending SAFC matches with their parents.

Impact on parents:

- Several of the parents interviewed discussed the ways in which the family learning courses had provided them with the impetus to 'lose weight' or 'stop smoking' or to 'take up sport' in an effort to improve their overall levels of fitness. These impact stories demonstrate the social value in the Wider Family Learning courses and enhance the idea of families taking control of their own lives, often as a result of involvement with SAFC Foundation of Light.
- Parents discussed their involvement in terms of participation, socialisation (new friendships) and learning. Parents we interviewed discussed the way in which participation on the course or serial attendance on the courses had had the power to transform certain aspects of their lives.
- Parents were acutely aware of the socio-economic down turn. It is clear that in these financially restricted times, roles are being redefined and there are limitations on current employment opportunities.
- The notion of serial attendance was a feature of this research. It appears that for the parents involved with SAFC Foundation of Light, an effective first experience of family learning increases the value of participation on other courses.
- Involvement in the courses clearly led to an increase in confidence and self esteem for many of the participants.
- Increased confidence and self esteem led to improvements in both physical and mental health which in turn led to improved relationships with their children, other families in the community and the schools.

Impact of SAFC Foundation of Light:

- While the SAFC brand is a factor in the motivation for participation in the courses, it was the children who provided the main motivation for involvement.
- Involving parents as co-researchers helped collect credible data and reinforced the SAFC Foundation of Light’s message that parents are valued.
- SAFC Foundation of Light has the potential to influence lifestyles. Health (mental and physical) and Wellbeing were a main concern of the participants. Evidence came from parents who had lost weight and become fitter as a direct result of their involvement in a Wider Family Learning course and a mother who had stopped smoking.
- SAFC Foundation of Light courses had high levels of attendances, well over the national average.
- More fathers take part in SAFC Foundation of Light courses than other comparable courses.
- Family Learning course tutors are recognised as providing excellent responsive provision.
- The SAFC Foundation of Light is in a prime position to understand how to meet their own four aims while addressing the changes to the funding rules.

Participation in Wider Family Learning:

- helped to develop a culture of volunteering amongst parents.
- helped participants to feel more connected to others in their community.
- helped to lift the mood of participants.
- motivated participants to lose weight, get fit and give up smoking.
- helped adults see themselves as learners.
- increased the value of participation on other courses.
- encouraged families to spend more time together, and improved relationships.
- helped to change attitudes towards seeking employment.
- Led to an increase in confidence and self esteem for many of the participants.
Tangible and measurable Impact:

A wide-ranging list of tangible and measurable impact evidence of involvement in SAFC Foundation of Light’s Wider Family Learning and Family Learning provision has been developed. For the children and parents directly involved in the provision, the impact evidence includes:

- Acquisition of new skills
- Meeting other parents and reducing social isolation for some
- Spending more time together as a family
- Improved physical health and fitness
- Improved mental health and well-being
- Becoming more involved in the life of the school
- Becoming more involved in the community
- Volunteering and taking the lead in community activities
- Feeling able to represent the community and being a voice for the community
- Taking up further learning opportunities
- Gaining qualifications or steps towards this
- Having aspirations to gain employment.
Background

This executive report summary, describes the social impact assessment of the Wider Family Learning courses delivered by the SAFC Foundation of Light.

Northumbria University Research Team

The research was conducted by a team led by Dr Lynne McKenna from the School of Health, Education and Community Studies at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne. The evaluation planning began in late 2011, following full ethical approval from the school’s ethics committee. Data collection began in February 2012. This research was conducted in accordance with Northumbria University’s ethical protocols.

SAFC Foundation of Light

SAFC Foundation of Light, established in 2001, uses the power of football to involve, inspire and educate young people and their families through a variety of programmes.

By 2010/11 it helped improve the lives of more than 40,000 people across Sunderland, South Tyneside and County Durham through advancing literacy and numeracy, improving confidence and aspirations as well as raising awareness of citizenship issues and enhancing employment skills.

SAFC Foundation of Light has the following four aims:

- Increase access and participation in positive activity
- Inspire young people to achieve and raise aspiration now and in future generations
- Contribute to safe, healthy and regenerated communities,
- Be an integral and embedded part of the community

The Focus of the Research

In order to assess the benefit of its programmes to the local community, this research ultimately aimed to:

a) Assess the Wider Family Learning social impact on the community
b) Consider the impact of football and SAFC brand
c) Analyse the outcomes of its Family Learning courses (the impacts made and the experiences of its core stakeholders) in relation to its vision and objectives
d) Disseminate to stakeholders the changes created by SAFC Foundation
e) Devise a set of indicators and a social impact measurement framework for future use.

Key Documents

Three key documents informed the development of this social impact assessment:

- Wood and Leighton (2010) Demos project ‘Measuring Social Value’

It was considered that this research would help to provide evidence based outcomes on the impact of learning for the families and communities involved. This involved developing innovative ways to capture both “intended” and “unintended” outcomes.

The three Wider Family Learning courses included in the first two phases of the research were:

- Family Learning through Football Coaching
- Family Values
- Football Fitness
The City of Sunderland

The City of Sunderland is situated at the mouth of the river Wear in the North East of England. It is the 26th largest city in England, covering an area of 137 square kilometres. In February 2011 the overall population of Sunderland was 281,700. The City of Sunderland itself has a population of 182,758. The city ranks 15th out of 354 authorities on the government’s index of multiple deprivation. Eleven wards, out of a total of twenty five, are amongst the ten percent classified as the most deprived in England.

‘The First- Half’: Data Collection and Analysis of Phase One with Past Participants

Phase one of the research involved interviewing parents and children who had previously had involvement with the Wider Family Learning courses offered by SAFC Foundation of Light. This took place in late February/ early March 2012 and involved adults and children from four primary schools in the Sunderland area. The schools were Highfield Primary School, New Silksworth Junior School, South Hylton Primary School and St Anne’s Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School.

A total of 38 interviews were conducted out of a possible 114 interviews, giving an overall percentage response rate of 33.3%. The parents and children we interviewed spoke honestly and openly about their lives at home, school, workplaces, within their communities and about the impact of their involvement with the Wider Family Learning courses provided by SAFC Foundation of Light. The interviews were analysed to identify the emerging themes from phase one of this study. This phase considered eight categories:

1: Way of life

Parents we interviewed explained their range of roles and identities. The range of roles included being a mother, father, spouse, breadwinner, worker and shared parents/carers. Within these identities and roles, the parents were particularly organised. They fitted an immense amount of activities into each day. This way of life refutes the idea that people who live in disadvantaged communities are less likely to work, more likely to be poor, have lower life expectancy, live in poor housing, receive poor education and health care. Parents we spoke to appeared to be very proud of where they lived and of having the ‘Sunderland accent.’ Our research revealed that although the schools were located in areas of deprivation, parents were in control of their own lives and that of their families.

2: Shared beliefs, customs and values

Parents who participated in the Wider Family Learning courses had developed a culture of volunteering. Many of the parents interviewed volunteered as ‘helpers’ in their children’s schools or for local charities to fit around caring for their children. The dilemma of attempting to work while children are still young was a concern for many of the parents but they considered volunteering as working towards gaining employment in the future. They realised that volunteering could add value to a CV. The unintended outcome of such volunteering indicates that future employment is within reach for these parents.

3: Community

Before participation in courses, parents generally agreed that they only spoke to other parents on a ‘need to basis’; however, they now suggest that they do feel more connected to others in their local community. Parents also recognised that their roles and connections now spill over from school to the community and their wider world experiences. They are increasingly making and owning connections between what was once a separate set of learning spaces. This includes the school, the Wider Family Learning Courses, sharing of views and sharing of facilities inside and beyond school. It was clear that the SAFC Foundation of Light had played a major role in providing parents
and young people with a ‘space’ to find new ways to relate to others and to take up opportunities in their communities.

The SAFC Foundation of Light has adopted a regionally responsive approach which considers parents’ education and training needs. This responsiveness appears to be influencing parental aspirations towards employability and further training.

4: The extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives

Parents and carers were strong active citizens and decision makers in their own lives. They readily voiced key issues that impacted and affected their lives. These included road safety, young drivers speeding and dog fouling issues. However, these parents were able to solve their own problems and were able to describe ways in which they took an active role in developing and maintaining their communities. One parent we interviewed explained:

‘My child plays out but only on my drive or his friends. There are issues of double parking and there are also some big lads up the street who have just passed their test. I have spoken to these big lads about their fast driving. I have also spoken to the police and traffic warden in the past about the zebra crossing and cars travelling both ways outside school, being a bit of a hazard’.

5: Environment

Responses from parents initially described a strong sense of food awareness and parents we interviewed explained that better food could be purchased at supermarkets. However, essentials were still available in local shops on the doorstep and these were needed on occasions. Parents were aware that the supermarkets offered a greater range of foods, which were of better quality and value. ‘I can take a bus ride into town or my Mam takes me shopping in her car’.

Other hazards identified included levels of road traffic and new bus routes which stopped the children playing outside safely.

6: Health and wellbeing

Several of the parents interviewed discussed the ways in which the family learning courses had provided them with the impetus to ‘lose weight’ or to ‘stop smoking’ or to ‘take up sport’ in an effort to improve their overall levels of fitness. One father discussed how attendance on the Family Learning through Football and Coaching course had acted as a ‘wake-up call’. This father realised how unfit and overweight he was after finding it difficult to keep up with the physical demands of the session. This led him to seek advice from his GP who referred him to a local slimming course, whereupon he subsequently lost three and a half stones in twenty four weeks. The father freely reported that he ‘...stopped drinking beer and eating snacks at home on an evening’ in an effort to lose weight.

One mother interviewed explained how the family learning course she attended provided her with the impetus and support to ‘stop smoking’. This saved the mother over £200 a month, which she then used to save towards a family holiday. As a lone parent, and mother of two young children she voiced how she was ‘proud of herself’.

These impact stories demonstrate the social value in the wider family learning courses and enhances the idea of families taking control of their own lives, often as a result of involvement with SAFC Foundation of Light.

7: Personal and property rights

In terms of external sources and employment opportunities, parents were acutely aware of the socio-economic down turn. When presented with government figures about Sunderland, parents we interviewed used their ‘insider knowledge’ of Sunderland, to refute the idea that they lived in disadvantaged communities. Many of the parents we interviewed owned their own homes and were car owners. It is clear that in
these financially restricted times, roles are being redefined and there are limitations on current employment opportunities. For example, one parent discussed that her husband had previously been self employed in the motor repair industry, but had to resort to becoming an employee within an organisation, while re-mortgaging the family home.

8: Fears and aspirations – their perceptions about their safety, their fears about the future of their community, and their aspirations for their future and the future of their children

Parents and Carers skipped over questions about their own fears and aspirations, choosing to focus on very real fears for their children, these fears included:

- Pressures from other children
- Being persuaded to do something negative
- Worries about senior school
- Worries about child’s needs at school
- Concerns about future employment
- Getting into university
- Life chances
- Careers
- The perceived danger of drugs
- Happiness

Aspirations parents had about developing their communities included:

- The provision of ‘spaces’ for teenagers
- Relevance of age appropriate playing activities
- Improved road safety
- Raising awareness of dog ownership and responsibility for dog fouling

The Children’s Voices

Parents discussed that the SAFC brand is a factor in their motivation for participation in the courses, it was the children who provided the main motivation for involvement.

Parents who were interviewed explained that it was ‘their children’ who provided the main motivation for their involvement. The children also spoke about wanting to be with ‘their parents’ and how engagement with the family learning course afforded them that opportunity. This provides us with further evidence of the power of learning within families.

Summary of Phase One: Six Headline Themes

In an attempt to capture the impact of involvement in SAFC Foundation of Light’s Wider Family Learning programmes, we found that six headline themes were emerging:

- Before and after Wider Family Learning
- Parental agency
- Involvement and Inclusion continuum
- Insider Knowledge and experience
- Evidence and Involvement- impact
- Added social value

Involving Parents as Co-researchers

As we moved to the next phase of the research we asked parents to join us as co-researchers in the research. This enabled the research team to collect credible data and to build the participants’ views into the study. It was also designed to build on the work of the SAFC Foundation of Light who clearly value parents. The research team wanted to extend this approach to the research. Although the overall number of volunteer parent co-researchers was relatively small, it was evident that those who did volunteer were extremely enthusiastic and willing to engage with the process of training to interview other parents. The parents agreed that their involvement was a good idea. One parent being trained as a co-researcher said:

‘... I think the parents would be more comfortable talking to another parent. We use plain English. Definitions could be taken
another way. There’s nothing we don’t already know about them’.

It was explained involving parents in the research would enable the evaluation team to collect “reliable” data and the parents would be lending an element of “insider research” to the social impact assessment and evaluation study. It was acknowledged that conducting research of this nature could raise some issues and dilemmas for the parents as co-researchers and would be more likely to raise issues for them, rather than for the university staff. Issues such as confidentiality, insider knowledge and potential bias were all discussed with the parents recruited as co-researchers.

There was a definite willingness to interview other parents along with some flippancy in relation to what parents already knew about one another. ‘Ahh – let me interview _______. She’s hilarious! She makes me laugh’. However, all co researchers did understand the need to respect participants during the interview process and recognised this as important.

A sensitive and open-minded approach was taken to levels of parental literacy skills. Parents were offered the option of interviewing other parents in pairs, alone with help close by should it be needed, or alone with a scribe. In actual fact their writing was entirely legible.

Written responses recorded by parent researchers however tended to be minimal and did not totally capture the complexity and richness of the dialogue between themselves and those they interviewed. This was a lesson learned by the University research staff who were present during all parent interviews.

‘Half- Time’: Phase Two of the Research: Interviews with current participants

Data collection for the second phase of the project took place in late March/early April 2012. The schools used in this phase of the research were the same schools used in phase one. Research was conducted with learners on programmes which were running during this time. A total of 19 interviews were conducted out of a possible 164 interviews, giving an overall percentage response rate of just over 31%. Access to children during this phase was problematic; therefore no children were interviewed in phase two. The team found that it may have proved useful to include some class teacher perspectives.

Six Headline Themes

Six Headline Themes had emerged during phase one of the research which were then supported with further data from phase two.

Theme 1 “Before and After the Wider Family Learning intervention”

“Volunteering”- It was found that the motivation to volunteer was often viewed as a means to an end in terms of helping parents to secure employment, rather than ‘giving something back to the community’.

“Connectiveness”- People from the same communities were meeting each other for the first time, and challenging preconceived ideas and opinions about each other. A Grandmother told researchers that:

“Since doing this, I have found that people round here are sociable people, happy, down to earth and caring. Didn’t think that they were when I used to hear them talking at the school gate. I’ve seen changes here… I’ve found out that these people care about their children. It’s a nice place to live and I’m now not afraid to say, Hi”.

“Influencing lifestyles”- This theme provided tangible and measurable evidence of impact. For example, parents who had lost weight and become fitter as a direct result of their involvement in a Wider Family Learning course and a mother who had stopped smoking.
“Learning” - The courses provided adults the space to develop their identity and feelings of agency as a ‘learner’ in a broad sense.

“Intergenerational persistence - The courses appeared to act as a catalyst for families to spend further time together. One child explained that the course ‘brought me and my dad closer together’.

These are not just a series of isolated examples of impact. The story of one family at the Top Scorer event and the number of families attending the Sir Bob Murray Family Graduation Day provide validation that such impact is a feature in the Foundation of Light courses. This is also recognised by the family learning coaches and tutors and participants on the courses.

Theme 2 “Parental Agency”

There was an acknowledgement that, for many parents, their participation on courses had been motivated through attempts to help their children learn. Parents interviewed were clearly able to act upon issues which impacted upon and affected their lives. The data suggests that there are several different aspects of agency, or the capacity to act, and that some of this can be attributed to the families’ involvement with the Family Learning courses. Examples of ‘parental agency’ included issues around:

a. Parking
b. Speeding
c. Dealing with teachers
d. Managing household budgets
e. Re-mortgaging
f. Moving from self-employed to employee
g. Saving for a family holiday

Theme 3 “Involvement and Inclusion Continuum”

Some parents found it difficult to identify their own position, in their own community and how they could possibly be connected to the “bigger picture”. Some described feeling very much included, while others discussed feelings of being on the edge, or on the periphery. This was both a “real” sense of physically living on the edge of the community, and also in terms of not feeling as being part of the community. Some parents who were longstanding members of the community described the way in which “new” families moving in to the old mining communities had changed the “shape” of the community. There is long-standing historical evidence that suggests that those who work in the community are key players in helping the community make the connections to their own lives and the lives of others. For some, this new awareness of how they are viewed is often the catalyst for change and certainly increases their feelings of inclusion and as our evidence suggests it impacts upon emotional wellbeing. The SAFC Foundation of Light courses and the humanistic approach of staff appear to have been instrumental in bringing about this change. Comments made by parents about the staff included:

‘Couldn’t do enough for you, really nice’
‘A very enthusiastic tutor, great with kids’
‘Coaches explained things well, both coaches really good’
‘Brilliant can’t fault anything, same tutor – great’
‘The staff were really easy going. They helped a lot’
‘Good equipment, good staff’

The skills of the SAFC Foundation of Light’s family learning coaches and tutors cannot be underplayed here. In her research Brassett-Grundy (2002, p.46) found parents expected that:

“Family learning course teachers should be trained how to teach adults. This would result in them being supportive, encouraging, non-intimidating, respectful and non-patronising”.

Theme 4 “Insider knowledge and experience”

The role of each school, in bringing people together, was referred to by many of the parents who were interviewed. One parent
said ‘Everyone is friendly and outgoing’. Another explained that the school was ‘Family focused, this school is very much the heart of the community’.

Some parents however, discussed the sense of a ‘community lost’. One parent explained, ‘I was born and bred in the place. In the past we used to know everyone. Now there are a lot of strangers’.

Another reflected on the loss of some services, ‘There were [community facilities] in the past but they’re gone now’.

Parents weren’t always aware of their own connections to their community. It wasn’t until some parents heard their own responses, being read back to them that they realised how connected to different aspects of the community they actually were.

‘I’ve never thought about myself in that way before, I suppose I do a lot and yeah my family are my main priority’

Theme 5 “Evidence and Involvement: the impact of SAFC Foundation of Light”

If parents believe it is part of the parental role to be involved in the child’s learning and they believe that they are capable of producing an effect they are motivated to become involved. Most of the parents who were interviewed responded to the invitation to participate in the Foundation of Light’s Wider Family Learning courses because it came from their child, their child’s teacher, their school or their Head Teacher.

The notion of ‘transformative learning’ (Mezirow, 1997) is a powerful phenomenon apparent in the WFL courses SAFC Foundation of Light programmes. Parents discussed their involvement in terms of participation, socialisation (new friendships) and learning. Parents we interviewed discussed the way in which participation on the course or serial attendance on the courses had had the power to transform certain aspects of their lives.

Theme 6 “Added Social Value”

When attempting to establish impact and measure added social value for participants on the SAFC Foundation of Light’s Courses, this research revealed tangible and measurable examples. The families involved in SAFC Foundation of Light courses discussed the social value of their involvement in terms of personal time management, financial awareness and family budgeting, use of community resources, work-life balance, and perhaps more importantly, contentment. Five such examples of added social value are presented here:

Changing notions of community

A sense of community inclusion, personal capacity development and processes of improving own social capacity has been identified during the research. This study has illustrated the extent to which government policy fails to distinguish between those communities labelled as economically disadvantaged, but which are actually “…culturally rich” in terms of community support and capacity.

Attendance on Wider Family Learning courses above the average

Government figures show that in England, in 2009/10 71,300 learners participated in a Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy course. The figures also reveal that 79,600 learners participated in a WFL course through government funded courses (Data Service 2011). It is therefore an outstanding achievement that SAFC Foundation of Light reached 40,000 people last year across Sunderland, South Tyneside and County Durham (SAFC, 2012). The data reveals that attendance on the SAFC Foundation of Light WFL courses is well above the national average.
The involvement of men in SAFC Foundation of Light’s provision

Recruitment to and take up of both the Wider Family Learning and the core family learning courses provided by SAFC Foundation of Light is higher than the national average. The ‘disturbing absence of men involved in family learning’ (Ofsted, 2000, p.10) is NOT a feature of SAFC Foundation of Light provision. Participation of fathers in the courses is also noticeably higher than in comparable courses. Football is the obvious reason to explain the higher than usual participation of men of the SAFC Foundation of Light courses. One grandfather we spoke to at the graduation ceremony said ‘I only did the course because I’m a lifelong Sunderland supporter’. While organisations are warned against providing stereotypical activities such as football, McKenna (2007) argues that traditional male type activities are often essential as a first step towards involvement for men as they can relate to it and participate in something which is familiar to them.

Health and Wellbeing
It was clear that parents and children who attended the family learning courses had gained knowledge about health, nutrition and the benefits of exercise. They described how they had, ‘picked things up’ along the way and were much more knowledgeable about things like food portions and healthy eating. One father described some of the steps he now takes to improve his fitness:

‘...like getting off the bus a stop earlier, and walking to town...yes, it’s been a positive experience, I feel like an insider now, not an outsider, I’ve had fun, I’m lots fitter and I still follow the fitness plan even now, after the course’.

The courses appear to be able to lift the mood of the overwhelming majority of the participants. One parent said that, ‘...the course puts me in a good mood on a Tuesday, it’s good fun.’ Many parents talked about how they were now happier as they felt the course had brought them closer to their children. They spoke about how they were pleased the course had supported them to make new friends and ‘develop networks’.

‘The Second-Half’: ‘Testing the tool in another SAFC Foundation of Light course’

Testing the Tool

The final contribution from the research team was to test out and evaluate the social impact measurement tool.

Research staff interviewed a whole cohort of participants at a family learning course in a fifth Sunderland School; East Herrington Primary School. The courses delivered by SAFC Foundation of Light, at this school included:

- Family Finance
- The Write Result (Literacy)
- Healthy Balance (Numeracy)

Although this cohort was smaller than others in the earlier stages of the research, with just six adult participants, it was viewed to be a viable setting in which the validity of the tool could be evaluated.

During the evaluation of the tool, researchers found it was able to:

- Provide background to the school setting
- Map perceptions of Family Learning
- Identify why these participants chose to attend
- Establish value parents placed on Family Learning
- Establish values and roles’ parents had in their community
- Identify aspects of active agency
- Provide details of the Family Learning course
- Raise awareness of ethical concerns pertaining to both children and parents
- Raise awareness of safeguarding issues and considering how we make these explicit for children
- Raise awareness of safeguarding issues
‘Post Match Analysis’: Looking forward to Next Season

Using the principles from SROI (Cabinet Office, 2011), we were able to evaluate the social value of the provision of family learning opportunities in terms of impact on the participants. For the parents involved in the Wider Family Learning Courses and the Family Learning courses, the most improved outcome appeared to be an improvement to their health, well being and mental health.

The notion of serial attendance was a feature of this research. It appears that for the parents involved with SAFC Foundation of Light an effective first experience of family learning increases the value of participation on other courses. Involvement in the courses clearly led to an increase in confidence and self esteem for many of the participants.

Increased confidence and self esteem led to improvements in both physical and mental health which in turn led to improved relationships with their children, other families in the community and the schools.

More widely than this, parents we interviewed provided examples of the way in which their improved mental health empowered them to work with services such as the local GP and referral systems to address their problems.

Parents interviewed discussed impact in terms of changing attitudes towards seeking or securing paid work or progressing to further courses or training as a direct result of their participation. One father interviewed described his action in setting up a fathers group in the community, whereas other interviewees discussed the ways in which they had developed skills and confidence and were now active in their children’s schools or in the wider community.

A wide-ranging list of tangible and measurable impact evidence of involvement in SAFC Foundation of Light’s Wider Family Learning and Family Learning provision has been developed. For the children and parents directly involved in the provision, the impact evidence includes:

- Acquisition of new skills
- Meeting other parents and reducing social isolation for some
- Spending more time together as a family
- Improved physical health and fitness
- Improved mental health and well-being
- Becoming more involved in the life of the school
- Becoming more involved in the community
- Volunteering and taking the lead in community activities
- Feeling able to represent the community and being a voice for the community
- Taking up further learning opportunities
- Gaining qualifications or steps towards this
- Having aspirations to gaining employment

Lessons learnt - schools as places of learning

The suitability of accommodation offered for interviews in some of the schools, as well as witnessing a course in progress, raised concerns with the research team about the suitability of some of the spaces allocated for the actual family learning courses. We recommend that SAFC Foundation of Light review the venues they use and make sure schools provide suitable rooms, suitable furniture and provide refreshments for adult learners.

Lessons learnt - Parents using the interview process as a platform to tell their stories

One phenomenon which was a common occurrence in this social impact assessment, relates to the ways in which the parents were happy to share their stories. This emphasizes the fact that stories about our lives are part of everyday life and that involvement in SAFC Foundation of Light enabled parents to re-tell their stories.
Lessons learnt - Testing the tool

The final social impact measurement tool is fit for purpose. We recommend that SAFC Foundation of Light work with Northumbria University to provide some professional development for their staff. We believe there is potential for staff to be trained to use the tool themselves and gather their own impact data. It is considered that some of the questions asked could potentially uncover not just safeguarding issues, but other potentially distressing narratives. Each potential interviewer needs to be able to deal with whatever is said, but also be able to signpost parents to other support services should the need arise.

Recommendations

There are three main areas of recommendations from the research:

1. Recommendations for future use of the social impact tool

We suggest that:

- Following suitable training and support that the social impact measurement tool could be used by SAFC Foundation of Light of staff
- The social impact measurement tool could then be used by SAFC Foundation of Light of staff in order to identify potential recipients of awards such as the Top Scorer awards
- Parents as co-researchers are used in any future social impact assessments
- Caution is used if SAFC Foundation of Light staff interview children
- School staff, particularly class teachers are interviewed as part of the data collection.

2. Recommendations for the SAFC Foundation of Light’s Wider Family Learning provision

One of the main findings from this research was the impact of the Wider Family Learning programmes on the participants’ physical, mental health and well being.

We are aware that SAFC Foundation of Light have plans to develop a new Wider Family Learning course. Healthy Minds will be a new programme developed to meet the increasing issue of mental health awareness. Courses will last ten weeks and cover topics including substance misuse, healthy minds and bodies, and self-esteem working with the whole family on: warning signs; barriers; prevention; and coping strategies. We recommend that evaluation of impact is built into delivery of this new course.

3. Recommendations for the future work of the Foundation of Light

SAFC Foundation of Light, as a third sector organisation, is in a prime position to take the lead in the provision of learning opportunities for families in Sunderland, South Tyneside and Durham.

Although the SAFC Foundation of Light has a high profile both regionally and nationally, we recommend that the SAFC Foundation of Light consider dissemination of their work even more widely and that they:

- Continue to release ‘Good news’ stories to the local press for both publication in regional press and regional TV news programmes
- Release the main findings of the impact evaluation work conducted by Northumbria University in both the regional press and regional TV news programmes
- Publicise the main findings of the evaluation work conducted by Northumbria University using both the
Northumbria University Press
Department/web site and the SAFC Foundation of Light website

- Include a brief summary of the findings of the research in a match day programme when the new season begins

- Consider approaching the ‘Match of the Day’ or ‘Football Focus’ TV programmes for inclusion in one of their ‘spin off good news stories’

- Consider hosting a nationwide conference for other charitable football club foundations who are perhaps just embarking on their journey. The lessons learned from this evaluation and the previous ten years experience and success of SAFC Foundation of Light would be very valuable lessons for other charitable football club foundations and may prove to be a new source of revenue?

And Finally...Extra Time

The impact of football and the SAFC brand was considered during the research process, which revealed evidence of the subliminal effect of the brand. The SAFC logo provides a strong physical presence in the region and in the schools. The attraction of being involved in an activity associated with the SAFC brand was most apparent amongst fathers and grand fathers we interviewed. However, there was some evidence of this as a motivating factor for mothers. For the children involved, the lure of being involved in both an activity associated with SAFC and football was clearly a motivating factor. However, the strong physical presence of the branding does not act as the prime motivator for involvement or engagement. It is clear that the most powerful motivating factor was the opportunity afforded to parents and children to share time together as families. This social impact assessment revealed that for the parents involved in this research, their children are extremely important and they relish the opportunity to spend time with them. SAFC Foundation of Light are well placed to continue their work with children and families.
References


The Research Team

Dr Lynne McKenna
Pamela Graham
Joan Goss
Justine Gallagher
June Davison
Ian Robson
Will McGovern
Gwen Marples

Parents as co-researchers from Highfield Primary School, New Silksworth Junior School, South Hylton Primary School and St Anne’s Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School.

For further information please contact Dr Lynne McKenna @ l.mckenna@northumbria.ac.uk