

Positive Family Connections 2022 annual report

There has been excellent progress in the Positive Family Connections project in 2022. Positive Family Connections is a new programme which has been co-produced with family carers and aims to enhance family relationships and wellbeing in families of a child who has a learning disability, who is autistic, or both. The programme consists of six online sessions and is delivered by trained family carer facilitators to groups of 6-8 families. You can listen to a discussion about the development of Positive Family Connections by some of the family carers who were involved [here](#).

To establish whether Positive Family Connections is effective, we would need to conduct a large trial. However, we first need to conduct a smaller feasibility study to investigate whether a larger trial would be possible and how this could be carried out. In January 2022, we were given ethical approval to conduct a feasibility study of Positive Family Connections and this study has been ongoing throughout 2022.

Between January and March we recruited participants to take part in the study - successfully meeting our target of recruiting 60 families. A member of the research team would first meet with each interested participant to discuss the study and assess their eligibility. Eligible family carers then completed a survey which included questions about their family relationships and wellbeing. They were then randomly selected to either be invited to take part in Positive Family Connections in 2022 or 12 months later.

During March and April, nine family carers were trained to facilitate Positive Family Connections groups as part of the study, and four groups were delivered to participants between May and July. Whilst delivering the programme, we monitored family carers' attendance and found that 73% of participants attended four or more sessions of the group, which we had decided beforehand was necessary for considering somebody to have "completed" the programme. We also found that, across the four groups, facilitators reported covering 92% of components of the programme, suggesting they can successfully deliver Positive Family Connections according to the manual. To gain more detailed feedback from facilitators, we also conducted focus groups with them in June and July. These will help us to learn about their perceptions of the impact of Positive Family Connections on participants, their experience of delivering the programme, and how facilitators can best be trained and supported in the future. Since then, we have begun the process of analysing this focus group data.

We followed up all participants in the study between August and September to ask them to recomplete the survey from the start of the study. This enables us to investigate whether there are any differences in family relationships and wellbeing between families who took part in Positive Family Connections compared with those invited to take part in 2023. Nearly all participants (97%) provided some follow-up data, which helps us to be more confident in the study's findings and supports the feasibility of a future trial.

Facilitators and members of the research team met together in October to discuss what had been learned from delivering Positive Family Connections this year and to make some very small adjustments to the programme based upon these experiences. Nearly all facilitators expressed that they would like to continue delivering Positive Family Connections to the remaining participants in 2023.

Overall, throughout 2022 the project has proceeded according to its planned timeline and excellent progress has been made. We look forward to the final stages of data collection in early 2023 and then towards data analysis and disseminating the project's findings.