



Connection

Celebrating 10 years of the
Strengthening Families Programme
in Ballymun
(2008-2018)



Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme (2018). *Connection: Celebrating 10 years of Strengthening Families Programme in Ballymun (2008-2018)*. Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force, Dublin: Ireland.

Designed by Róisín Byrne, BLDATF

Acknowledgements

This book celebrates 10 years of Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme. The continued development of the programme from year to year is testament of the relationships and commitment to enhance family and community life in Ballymun. SFP would not have been possible without the participation, motivation and enthusiasm of the 224 families who have graduated from the programme and the many statutory, community & voluntary agencies who have supported the programme in its delivery.

Particular thanks:

- To the venues and their facilities teams that have hosted the programme: Tusla Geraldstown House Family Resource Centre, The Reco (Ballymun Regional Youth Resource) and the Lighthouse (Aisling Project).
- To the wonderful catering providers – BRYR (Roger & his team) and Zest Catering for preparing hearty dinners for families & teams at beginning of each evening.
- To the transport providers - local taxis & the Aisling project bus for getting families to & from the programme.
- To the programme managers & site co-ordinators who have overseen the roll out and development of the programme (*Catherine McGowan, Tom O'Donnell, Pat Kavanagh, Clíodhna Mahony, Deirdre McDonagh, Mary Fitzpatrick and Peter Doherty*).
- To the range of Ballymun (and further afield) agencies & volunteers who have over the years fulfilled a variety of SFP roles such as:
 - * Referral Agents
 - * Facilitators (Group Leaders)
 - * Childcare Staff
 - * Support Agencies
 - * Site Co-ordinators
 - * Programme Support Workers/Floater
 - * Ballymun SFP Management Committee & Referral Committee
- To the members & board of directors of Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force who since 2008 have ensured the sustainability of the programme through the provision of funding & management of SFP.
- To the members of the National Strengthening Families Council of Ireland who work with Ballymun SFP to promote & ensure best practice in the delivery of SFP across Ireland.

Ten years of Strengthening Families in Ballymun is such a huge achievement for the agencies who came together to bring the programme here, the teams involved in rolling out the programme and all the agencies who supported it, but mostly for the 224 families who have graduated from the programme. I feel very honoured to have been a part of it over those years and to see the impact it has on families, agencies and the community.

When a group of us, from various agencies took part in the first training in Ballymun in October 2007, it seemed like such an ambitious idea to bring so many of the agencies in the area together to roll out a 14-week programme that we would be asking families to sign up to. I will admit I had my doubts, how would so many agencies with different working practices work together, would families sign up to it and even if they did would teens come along?

The agencies involved in bringing Strengthening Families to Ballymun put so much effort and time into ensuring it took off and was successful. The first programme started in Spring 2008 and I joined the team as a facilitator in September 2008. I can still feel the nervousness I felt that evening, I felt nervous for myself but also for the families. I was a parent myself with children heading into the teenage years and I knew the stress that it can cause as a parent and the trials it can bring. I believed and still do, that it takes enormous courage for parents and young people to reach out for help and support with family life and its challenges. It shows a real testament to their commitment to their family.

It became apparent quickly that the reassurance the programme offered to parents, teens and later children (when we began to roll out the junior programme), facilitated families to actively take part in and complete the programme. We as a team, get the chance to share the programmes skills in an inclusive and supportive way with families. The skills the programme imparts are practical and straight forward; communication, problem solving, dealing with emotions, peer pressure to name but a few. They are the skills we all need to succeed not only in our families but in the wider community also.

Working on an interagency team gives all of us a better understanding of the work other agencies do and this in turn makes supporting families easier, as we have a better idea of the supports each agency offer on a practical level. I believe for the agencies involved it has changed how we work together.

In 2012 I took on the role of Parent Advocate Worker which meant I was able to offer further support to families during and after the programme. Since 2013, I have been Site Co-ordinator, this allows me to work closely with the families which has been an extremely rewarding experience. Working with such caring and dedicated teams has had a profound impact on me and I value the experiences we have had.

It has been a real privilege to listen to families' as they take part in the programme and hear from them how it has impacted their lives. I am always amazed by the amount of positive feedback we receive after each programme. This is most apparent on graduation night when there is a real sense of achievement and celebration from the families and the team. Through evaluations, reports and family testimonials over the past ten years we know through working together on the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme that we have made a positive impact on families in our community. My hope is that we will continue to do so over the coming years.

*Mary Fitzpatrick, Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force
Site Coordinator/Parents Advocate Worker*



Ballymun was the first training we did in the Dublin area and the success in Ballymun has really laid the foundation for success of SFP all across Ireland. Success in Ballymun directly sparked the creation of the SFP National Council and nothing like it has been done anywhere else in the world including the US, it's voluntary, supportive and co-operative. We are tremendously proud of what's happened in Ireland and especially the role of Ballymun and the Ballymun families have played in that success. Congratulations.

*Dr. Karol Kumpfer and Henry Whiteside, SFP Programme Developers
Transcript from video for Ballymun SFP celebration 9th May 2018.*



Ever since our visit to Cork SFP in back in Jan 2008, I have been involved in Ballymun SFP at various levels. I believe this programme has been hugely successful on two fronts. Firstly, scores of families have told us that the programme has impacted on their families in a very positive way. It has been a privilege to witness those “aha!” moments for parents participating on the programme.

Secondly, the programme has afforded local statutory and non statutory agencies a real opportunity for partnership and we have learnt so much from each other on our collective SFP journey. I am proud to play my part in the continuing success story of Ballymun SFP into the future.

*Tom O'Donnell, TUSLA
Former Site Co-ordinator, Facilitator, Referral Agent
& Chair of the Management Committee*



by: Callum
byrne

I have so many fond memories of the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme, its hard to mention just a few. Of course, the food was always one to remember, and I still hold out that my favourite dessert was the banoffee pie – thanks Roger! The families and team eating a meal together and filling the hall with chatter and activity gave life to the start of the evening. But it also gave a really strong sense of community, and this for me, is one of the most memorable unique aspects of SFP.

The people who brought meaning to SFP each week, each term and each year over the last decade. The people - parents, children and teens, and workers - building and supporting relationships, working side by side, transcending boundaries and most importantly, making a positive difference to each other, for each other. Because ultimately, it's the quality of the relationships in our lives that really matter and SFP brings life in a practical sense, to building and supporting family and community relationships.

*Clíodhna Mahony, CYPSC Dublin City North
Ballymun SFP Programme Manager (2008-2016) &
1st Chair of the National SFP Council of Ireland*

Aisling Project has referred children, young people and their families to the Strengthening Families Programme since the beginning of SFP in Ballymun. The programme has always been based on supporting families towards a stronger family life in the most sensitive, caring and practical manner. It puts emphasis on the family as the cornerstone of community life and development.

The process of working with each family over a number of weeks and being part of their journey is always a privilege. Strengthening Families is a programme that brings families together and community groups and organisations closer. This practical coming alongside parents/guardians and their children is the heartbeat of the on-going importance and success story of the programme across all the communities where it is offered.

*Micheál Clear, Aisling Project
Referral Agent, Facilitator, Member of Management Committee*

“I think I have matured and listen and be there for my younger sister. I have improved in school everythings not perfect but I think things definitely have improved.”

Teen SFP 2012



“Every Saturday night we watch a dvd and get some treats and have a family night”

Child SFP 2011

My involvement with SFP began when I was on my placement in the Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force. I had heard of it previous to that as I knew families who participated on the programme and I had attended a graduation to support a family member in completing the programme. I already had a positive opinion of it as I seen how it helped families in real life. I then experienced it first hand as I became involved through my college placement. I got to interact with families every week and witness the positive changes in their lives. I witnessed people grow and develop over the course of 15 weeks, which can seem like a long time but when you are in it and engaging with these families every week the time goes faster than you expect. I knew by the end of my first programme I wanted to continue to be involved. I completed the SFP facilitator training with support from the Ballymun Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

The next programme began shortly after the training and I went back as a volunteer. This time I was a facilitator with a teen group on the programme. I had such a positive experience and built relationships with the young people, watch them build relationships with one another and also strengthen the relationship between themselves and their guardians. I am volunteering on my third programme now and it is something I hope to keep up for a long time. I feel like the programme provides families with a safe, positive and open environment allowing them the opportunity to work on issues they may be facing. It provides families with new skills, develops existing skills and reminds people to use skills they already have. I believe it's a commitment worth taking by families.

*Sophie Birch
Volunteer*

I first met Linda and Paul Browne when we took part in the 5 step programme with them, during this programme they mentioned the Strengthening Families Programme and when they described it to us we knew we wanted our family to be involved in it.

In early September we met with Róisín whose warm welcoming manner instantly made us feel comfortable, I think my not so shy boys made her comfortable too as we were accepted onto the programme.

Week 1 we arrived at Geraldstown house met by Rita and June, we went into the dining room, where week after week Marianna from Zest catering served us up a lovely dinner. The vibe was relaxed but we could see like us people were nervous not knowing what to expect. We were divided into our 2 parent groups and met our parent facilitators Linda and Mary, Callum went with his child facilitators Vanessa, Tom and Alan and Rhys went with Liz, Mark and Paul. At first it was strange being split from the kids and we were thinking how is this going to work but this method of learning became clearer over the weeks.

It was amazing how after a week or two both Ger and I felt so comfortable in the company of these previous strangers and at this stage I would like to thank all of our parent group for your honesty and company every week. We learned so much from listening to you all and understand how it's not always easy to speak freely among people you don't know, but at every session we all laughed a lot which made it so much easier.

Break time was not always easy I'll be honest the kids liked to challenge us and Mary & Martin to a few laps around the buildings but the muffins were good although they did noticeably get smaller around week 7.



Family Session was always interesting but again there was always a fun element and week after week we could see the programme grow, develop and work.

Midway through the course, during one of the sessions while discussing what we had learnt from the previous week, I said to Linda and Mary “*it’s not rocket science*”. Now this was in no way meant to be a smart comment to which they said exactly “*it’s not*”. We as parents actually already know what to do. We aren’t learning a new skill or a new talent we as parents just sometimes need help to remember. “*Life gets in the way*” was a term used many a time and we just need to reintroduce these methods into our family life to try make it better for us all.

So no its not rocket science but the people who are involved in co-coordinating this programme Mary and Róisín and facilitating it Linda, Mary, Liz, Paul, Mark, Vanessa, Tom, Alan, Cathy, Angela and Paul Browne each and every one of you are amazing your commitment, patience and help each week is extraordinary and impresses me a lot more than rocket science.

Every week I took something home from this programme.

Every week I looked forward to coming back.

Thank you all and from our stronger family.

*Gillian
Parent JSFP 2017*

“My main issue was getting my child up for school and walking down the road he would shout and I’d shout back. Now we have fun and talk walking down the road”

Parent JSFP 2014

Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme is a fantastic resource for the Ballymun community. It's the only programme in the area where teens/children and parents come together in order to improve on existing and learn new skills over a 15 week period, leading to stronger bonds with each other.

Prior to my participation on the SFP, I was quite sceptical on how this programme would work in the Ballymun context. I first became involved as a referral agent; my role was to refer and continue to support families throughout the process.

A couple of programmes in, I came on board as a facilitator, I have really enjoyed being a part of positive change in so many families' lives over the years, getting to witness the young people practice their new skills and watching positive changes happen during teen sessions, also seeing it all come together in their family groups have been a real privilege and I am proud to play a small part in their life journey. Also big plus to my involvement I learned a lot of new skills, which has worked wonders for me in my own parenting role.



Thank you for helping to strengthen our families. Nobody can go back and start a new beginning but anyone can start today and make a new ending.

Parents of SFP 2017

I am also a member of the management/referral committee where we get to oversee the running of the programme and advocate on behalf of the families on board. We also discuss ways to reduce/remove possible barriers to participation among other things.

I believe the strong interagency involvement is pivotal to the success of the programme, with practitioners from a wide variety of community and statutory agencies getting to network and build up strong working relationships. This is also a big plus for families as they not only get to practice and develop family skills, they also have contact and have made connections to other services in the area, hence better participation and easier access to other services for them, this can only make for a stronger Ballymun community.

Being involved in the Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme has helped me grow in myself professionally and personally and I am grateful for having the opportunity to play a small part in their journey. I would highly recommend to any families, community members or professionals out there get involved.

*Cathy Duncan, BRYR
Facilitator, Referral Agent & Member of Management Committee*



Child participant JSFP 2016



One word stands out in my evaluation of the programme, 'Connection'. The programme is a connection between four different strands; between services working in the community, between services and families, between different families and most importantly between parents and their children.

Parents who attend the programme are often wishing to reconnect to their children. This connection has often been weakened or sometimes broken during the daily lives of families. This connection is the 'emotional connection' between parents and their children. The daily routines exist as they have always done but there's often an emotional separation that happens naturally between parent and child. This separation can continue throughout any relationship and the parent attends the programme to reconnect to their child. The connection returns because it is based on mutual understanding and respect. Parents often see behaviours that they cannot accept but sometimes do not fully understand why they occur. Through the programme they learn to reconnect with their child and have a greater understanding of the behaviours and ways to deal with them. We hope to teach the children and young people the importance of this connection as they learn the same lessons as their parents and even ways of dealing with their parent's behaviours.

It's not an easy task; it can be a constant battle being a parent. Each developmental stage of a child life creates new challenges and parents need to be prepared. The programme provides parents and children with skills that continue to improve relationships even after the programme is completed. Some parents even return to the programme to re-learn the skills.

I applaud any parent who wishes to do the programme because it means they are prepared for the challenge and more importantly ready to reconnect.

*Paul Madden, TUSLA
Referral Agent & Facilitator*

“Get along better with my guardian now, before the programme we argued a lot. We understand each other more now we hold family meetings and discuss school, friends and feelings”



Teen SFP 2013

Relationships and how we communicate with each other is one of the most important aspects of life and this is true of school life too. To know what we need and have the knowledge and skill to ask for it helps us to live more peacefully and even makes us happier.

We in Trinity Comprehensive try to pass on a lot of knowledge so that students can pass exams, sometimes we can pass on some knowledge about how students can ask for help in their subjects and how to communicate respectfully with one another and the teachers. However the most important skill of parents communicating with their children and children communicating with their parents we leave to the Strengthening Families programme as the programme and the people who work on it are experts at getting the best out of people and the situations that people sometimes find themselves in.

Over the past 10 years we have seen parents and their children relate better with each other and quite often they pass these skills onto their friends and families. By participating in the Strengthening Families programme everybody wins, students understand themselves better, they can relate better with their parents, they have better friendships and they get on better in school because they know what they need and how to ask for it.

*Fiona Gallagher, Trinity Comprehensive
Referral Agent & Member of Management Committee*



I would like to take you on my journey.

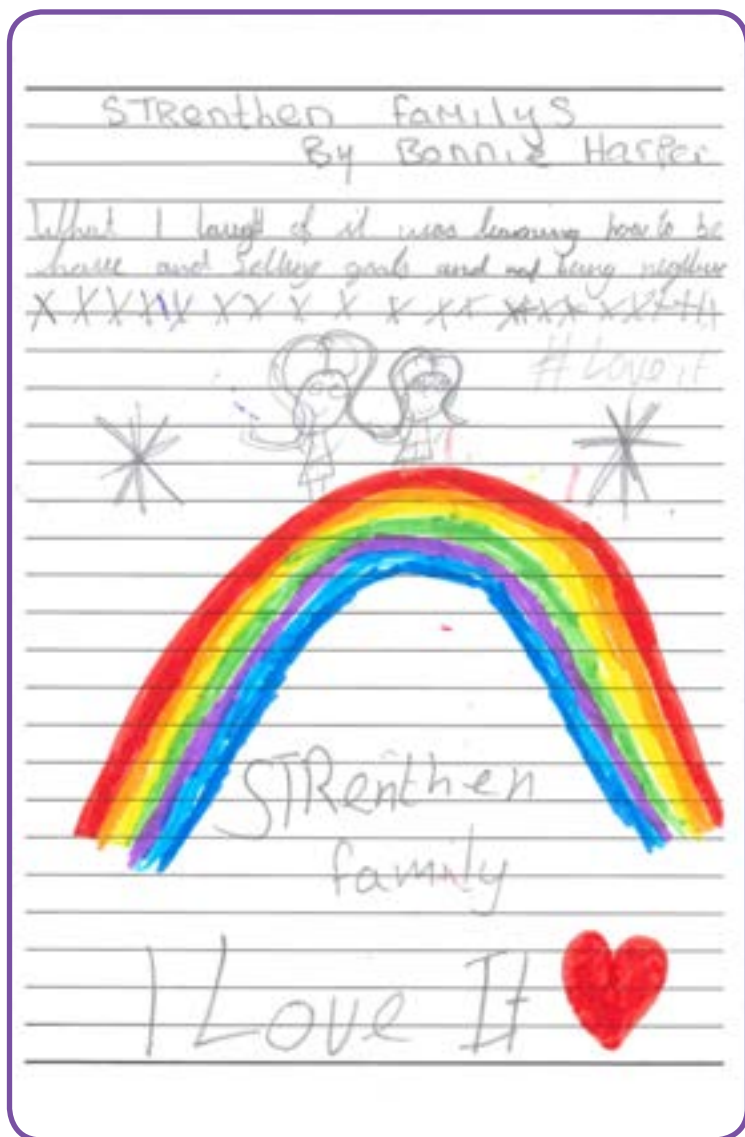
7yrs ago, my family was in turmoil, communication had broken down there was lot of conflict within our household. I could see the effect it was having on other family members, I was at my wits end and I did not know where or who to turn to.

Pat Kavanagh from BJC suggested a programme called Strengthening Families. (Thank you, Pat we will be, forever grateful). My partner Frank and I along with the youngest son (12) participated on SFP. We learned some new skills and tweaked a lot of them to suit our needs. It didn't happen overnight it took time lots of practice, patience. We had to learn how to communicate nicely, listen to each other, be consistent with consequences we put in place, it was tough.

In time it began to make a big difference to our family. We gained so much from the programme. We went on to become parent volunteers and then did the facilitators training.

6yrs on we continue to facilitate on both 6-11 years and 12-16 years programmes. It is an honour to be part of a team that support families who are experiencing challenges within our community.

*Linda McDermott, Ballymun Family Support Service
Previous Participant, Facilitator and Referral Agent*



“the programme turned our negatives into positives and our arguments into discussions”

Parent JSFP 2016

“Doing this programme opened up our family to talking more, setting rules and following them through. I feel what I have learned will be ongoing and what has not changed now will in the future. Also my other two children will learn from the programme as they will grow to be young adults. Both my adult and me have changed a lot and learned a lot”

Parent SFP 2011



*we got along.
we were happy.
this is helping us all
that's what we're here.*

Child participant JSFP 2016

Myself and my daughter Caitlin attended the Strengthening Families course last year. We decided to do the course as we were both at a loose end of not understanding one another and as well my daughter was going through a difficult time in her life. When we started we were both a bit apprehensive as we did not know what to expect. The first time we walked in my daughter didn't want to stay, with a bit of encouragement of myself and the leaders and her seeing that some of her pals were there she decided to give it a go.

Over the weeks we both really enjoyed it, we learned and took a lot from the course. Not once was anyone ever judged we were all treated equally no matter what your circumstances was. The leaders were absolutely brilliant and so supportive no matter what problem you had they would sit and listen and also give advice/help. Mary went above and beyond to help me and my daughter and for that we will always be grateful to her. Myself and Caitlin now sit and listen to one another instead of shouting over each other we do 1 on 1 time once a week and we make sure we speak about everything. Caitlin has made friends for life with some of the other kids and I too with some of the adults.

I would highly recommend Strengthening Families course to anyone who needs a bit of support/help.

Joanne Carrie
Parent SFP 2017

“we talk more to each other, I am a much calmer person and I have learned to make rules and see things through with consequences”

Parent SFP 2016

My name is Lyndah, I was told about Strengthening Families through my son's school. My son Noel and I agreed to do the programme as communication between us was a shouting match, and he seemed so angry, and hurt.

I had an older daughter and 3 young babies. So my hands were full, I was willing to try anything. Noel was a great child, good hearted and would do anything for anyone when asked nicely.

So each Tuesday a taxi came, and the great thing was they had a creche so I could take the babies, two played in bigger groups and the baby in the younger creche. We would all sit down to dinner which was beautiful, and the kids loved this especially the dessert, banoffee pie, oh my it was mouth watering, and as a mother it was lovely for me to see them so happy. Staff would greet you and every one of them were so nice and down to earth.

Then we would split, I would go with the other parents to my group and Noel would go to his. Then we would meet, have tea and cake and we would have a group with teens & parents. We would introduce ourselves, play a game or two and the kids would be working on the same topic. One topic was to guess when parents were younger what they wanted to be as we all had a dream, and the kids were more artistic with theirs. They would cut out pictures it was great fun and I knew my son always wanted to be in the Army.



The course ran for fourteen weeks and myself & Noel could sit and speak to each other, express how we felt. Having home work really helped, no matter how many children I had, Noel was one and he had feelings & emotions. The one question I will never forget being asked in my group, “if I could go back to any age what would it be?” and everyone in my group picked 1-10, nobody picked 13-14-15-16 because being a teen is hard your body is changing, your mind, friends & some “peer pressure”.

It was so good I've returned with another child, myself & my son asked could we do the programme again. It brings your family closer, what you put in you get out. We also met some lovely parents who are going through things. Sometimes when you're a lone parent and going through stuff with your kids, instead of wanting to kill them, try and understand them. They are human with feelings and it can be so hard for them.

Graduation is brilliant you get a photo of you and your child and parents speak about what helped them. I would tell any parent man or woman give it a go. Have fun while bringing your family closer. Thanks to everybody.

*Lyndah Mullholland
Parent SFP 2012*

“I feel Strengthening Families was very helpful and useful in my home life. Me and my mam get along so much better now and we are very happy. We spend way more time together”

Teen SFP 2013

“I believe that participating in the programme was very beneficial for both the parent and teen. Even though things can still be very chaotic they have begun to find a way to navigate and communicate their way through this chaos. SFP generally, I believe, was of great support to them ”

Referral Agent SFP 2012



Child Participant JSFP 2016

I lent a hand a few times with various aspects of SFP as I believed it was a good model for helping both parents and children.

The first family I referred were sceptical about attending as they thought they might know someone, but they said after it didn't matter, it was a comfort to know they weren't the only ones with problems.

There was always a nice atmosphere, good grub, and most people took away some wee helpful idea they thought would work for them.

*Jude McHugh, Dublin City Council Social Support
Referral Agent & Facilitator*



“Fun,

Talk More,

Dinners”

Teen SFP 2012

“one of the girls from the last time ... still meet on the street, standing for hours talking, saying how its going, having a talk”

Parent SFP 2013

I would like to start off by saying congratulations to Strengthening Families for the 10 years that they have worked hard to keep the project going. On that note: it wouldn't have happened either for the last 10 years without the families attending with his/her child.

I did two journeys with Strengthening Families. First with my son Cormac in 2008, I didn't know what to expect when I started the 14 week programme. I found I wasn't alone, that there are other families out there all going through the same thing or similar. I got great support through the weeks, some weeks there were tears some weeks good craic, but always learning new skills, and making so much progress with our teens. The programme is really good, the main key I found is you must do the home practice and never give up on what you learn each week.

I did the course again in 2016 with my son Luke once I was back everything just came back to me from what I had learnt first time around.

I would just like to finish on saying I have a great relationship with my son Cormac now, and am so proud of how far he has come, and that was Strengthening Families bringing us together thanks so much for that. And regarding my son Luke his journey was to help him in school, he has improved not 100%. But I'd say 70% which I am proud of. I would recommend Strengthening Families such an amazing programme and hope it continues for many more years.

*Ann Farrell,
Parent SFP 2008 & 2016*

My mum always says “you are never alone when you have a book”. A book connects you to a story, to the characters, allows you to imagine and experience meaning in a very individual way. It brings you to a place where memories and thoughts are awoken.

This book of Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme has many stories to tell, every picture, quote and message brings us all together in our own family way.

My story to tell began in a lecture hall in 2005 at a conference where the developers of the programme came over from the US to do a presentation in Ireland. It later evolved to working with Ballymun Strengthening Families Programme around research and policy. This meant working with families and agencies together to show and demonstrate the effect of SFP on the lives of families, workers and the community. Over the years, research has demonstrated that the programme made a difference, and did what it was trying to do! However, I was in a very special position as a researcher to confirm the positive findings. I had the unique opportunity to also see smiles on families faces at graduation, hear teens/children positive feedback on the programme, listen to the facilitators energy ring through so loudly in reviews, agencies recalling follow up conversations with families and the impact of SFP on their own work.

Through Strengthening Families Programme we have created our own family in Ballymun and together those 3 letters “SFP” bring us to a place of common language and shared recollection.

A book where we all are the characters, with our own valued part to play.

*Marie Lawless, Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force,
Evaluation Manager and member of Management Committee*



List of agencies who have supported SFP in Ballymun

Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force
TUSLA Geraldstown House Family Resource Centre
Ballymun Regional Youth Resource
Aisling Project
Trinity Comprehensive
Ballymun Family Support Service
Ballymun Job Centre
Virgin Mary Boys National School
St Joseph's National School
Margaret Aylwards Community College
Ballymun Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service
TUSLA
Ballymun Child & Family Resource Centre
STAR Project
Wheatfield Prison Education Unit
Ballymun Educational Support Team
Probation Service
An Garda Síochana
DePaul Ballymun Case Management Team
HSE (Speech & Language, Adult Mental Health, Residential & Social Work)
National Education Welfare Board
CAFTA CE Scheme
Ballymun Principals Network
Áitlinn
Dublin City Council
St Francis Clinic, Temple St.
Ballymun Youthreach
Ballymun Home Support
St Vincent's CBS
Sports Across Ireland
Focus Ireland
Ballymun Welfare Rights CE Scheme
Ballymun Youth Action Project
youngballymun
Extern
OARS
TOPS
CAPS
Peter McVerry Trust
Lifestart
Blanchardstown Drugs & Alcohol Task Force
North Dublin Drugs & Alcohol Task Force





For more information



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