

**Evaluation of**  
**Focus on Family**  
**Nurturing &**  
**Development Centre**

**Fergal Barr, January 2012**

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## **Introduction**

This report marks the completion of an evaluation of Focus on Family Nurturing and Development Centre. It is my pleasure to present this report to you and I would like to begin by offering my thanks to all those individuals who contributed to this evaluation by making themselves available to answer my questions and where this wasn't possible made time to respond in written form.

I would also like to thank Brendan Patterson for making the necessary arrangements so that I could conduct one-to-one and group interviews with staff, volunteers and users during my visits.

I am delighted that I have been afforded the opportunity to evaluate this project and hope that the findings prove helpful to all involved with Focus on Family which not only appraises the work that it has done (and the achievements that go hand-in-hand with this) but also helps to inform future direction.

I have enjoyed evaluating the project immensely and appreciate the openness and honesty with which all respondents have approached the task in hand. An evaluation lends itself to the possibility of not only 'taking stock' and acknowledging the strengths of any organisation but also help to identify change and with Focus on Family this is no different.

That openness and honesty I refer to has allowed me to not only fulfil the Terms of Reference which of course was to evaluate Lottery-funded work but has enabled me to consider Focus on Family in a wider context.

I have begun this report with some background information to contextualise the organisation, its origins and work so as to provide the reader with a brief overview. I have then outlined the Main Conclusions from my work which contains a number of recommendations before describing the Evaluation Brief including my approach to the evaluation.

This is followed by a 'Summary of the Evaluation' where an *Assessment of Milestones* and also a *Summary of individual and group interviews and written responses* provides a detailed breakdown of key points raised.

Under Appendices a full overview of milestones and written responses and interviews is contained along with a list of respondents and my own biography so as to offer the reader an insight into my background.

At the outset and in my discussions with Project Manager, Brendan Patterson, I promised that whilst documenting the positives about Focus on Family I would not shy away from addressing any issues or concerns expressed.

Brendan was also clear that this should be the case and that any evaluation should not merely reaffirm only the good but should provide a platform for

Focus on Family to look in on itself honestly and where change is necessary it should take place.

I have endeavoured to acknowledge the positive and where there have been concerns or issues these should be given a voice.

With this in mind I am confident that the Terms of Reference have not only been fulfilled but have been in reality exceeded such has been the value of feedback from respondents.

An enormous amount of work and achievement has been accomplished by Focus on Family, particularly in the last few years and this evaluation has provided the opportunity to not only recognise this but it has also unveiled much to aspire to and work towards over the coming years.

I wish Focus on Family and all those associated with it the very best in its future endeavours.

Fergal Barr, January 2012

## **Background Information**

### **Focus on Family**

Focus on Family Nurturing & Development Centre began life in 1995 and at a time when Ballysally had suffered from a wide variety of issues including physical dereliction and a lack of community facilities and communal areas. This was exacerbated by paramilitary activity, crime, anti-social behaviour and social problems such as high unemployment, ill health and alcohol & drug abuse.

In response to this a community audit was commissioned in an attempt to identify the root causes of issues and to ascertain what could be done to support local people.

Key findings identified a lack of a community 'hub' – somewhere where people could go to find support for them and their families, access training & activities and to ultimately begin to improve their quality of life.

Alongside the collective energy of local residents a small amount of funding was secured from Government and with the agreement of the NI Housing Executive to utilise a vacant property within the estate, Focus on Family Nurturing & Development Centre was born.

The organisation has grown immensely over the last sixteen years and has expanded from a single dwelling (where local women met to look after each other's children whilst others participated in training) to a five-dwelling building with two large childcare settings with outdoor play areas, a large training room, IT suite, small training room, community launderette, working kitchens and office space.

Services have expanded and Focus on Family can boast of providing specialised childcare and crèche provision, developmental and training courses including Nurturing & Parenting, Adult Counselling Service, Healthier Relationships, Preventing Abuse (Domestic Violence) for both victims and perpetrators, skills-based courses such as Essential Skills, IT, Sign Language, Cookery, a range of Complementary Therapies including Reiki, Crystal Healing, Reflexology, Yoga, Pilates & Aromatherapy and cultural and cross-community programmes and events.

Focus on Family also provides a community space for the local area and links with external agencies to provide additional services, including training and workshops. The organisation operates mainly through the provision of grant-aid. Annual turnover is in the region of £345,000. Current funding is made up of a mix of large and small grants in addition to approximately 7% generated income through charging of fees for childcare and some other services.

## **Ballysally Area**

Ballysally is a housing estate close to the centre of Coleraine. It has a population of 2800 people within 900 houses. There is a predominantly young population with about a third of residents under the age of 16. The area is predominantly Protestant/Unionist with 78% from this background and 16% from a Catholic/Nationalist background.

The area is deemed to be an area of deprivation on the Noble Indices and as such has been identified as a Neighbourhood Renewal area which means it benefits from various government initiatives aimed at improving local quality of life to bring it in line with wider NI averages.

On the Multiple Deprivation Measure, Ballysally has an overall rank of 64 out of 890 Super Output Areas thus placing Ballysally in the top 10% most deprived wards. The proportion of persons who stated their general health as good is 5.6% lower than Northern Ireland level whilst the unemployment rate among adults aged 16-74 years is more than double the Northern Ireland level. Qualification levels are poor with over half of the population aged 16-74 having no qualifications.

Statistics show that Ballysally still suffers from issues such as high unemployment, lack of educational attainment, limiting long-term health problems, relative poverty, household income and access to transport.

## **Main Conclusions**

### Focus on Family:

- is an integral part of the Ballysally community and has helped reduce isolation and increase the sense of belonging felt by residents
- have provided a 'home from home' with its open and accessible environment and supportive and welcoming staff
- has helped to promote and increase social interaction among residents and ultimately helped nurture long-lasting friendships and has contributed to an improved perception of Ballysally among local publics as well as a greater understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of 'others' among users and residents
- has made a major contribution to the confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and aspirations of residents and users
- have brought about behavioural change among its users through creative, innovative, supportive and interventionist type programmes which have been led by Focus on Family or arranged (by Focus on Family) in response to particular needs raised by users
- has made a major contribution to the skills base and career aspirations of residents and users by providing a range of accredited and non-accredited courses and programmes in addition to accessible childcare which has allowed parents to pursue career aspirations where otherwise opportunities would have been restricted or non-existent
- has achieved almost all milestones set out in its funding application - 89% of milestones have been achieved albeit with some variance in timing and eventual numbers of participants. The remaining percentage of milestones not achieved refers to three key milestones (and whereas two are strictly speaking no longer applicable as a result of external factors) only one in real terms hasn't been achieved it is perfectly feasible for this to be addressed in the remaining timescale of BIG Lottery funding.
- has been able to reach out to among the most needy in the Ballysally area and in doing so have created not only an interest in but a growing demand for services and programmes particularly in areas such as Alternative Therapies & IT Training
- has managed funding from BIG Lottery relatively well and where overspends and underspends has occurred there have been legitimate reasons and BIG Lottery have been kept informed

- has acknowledged the role of BIG Lottery funding through a series of marketing and PR mechanisms including leaflets, headed paper, compliment slips, press releases, annual reports, organisational leaflets and other programme leaflets
- has benefitted from a range of training secured through funding from BIG Lottery and provided by NICVA which has helped to inform and improve services and provision
- has nurtured and supported the development of a small but thriving volunteer base which has not only provided opportunities for individual skills development but has helped to reduce isolation among residents whilst supporting staff in implementing services and provision to users
- has been a significant source of support for adults and families through the provision of space and time and/or interventionist-type programmes when faced with a range of personal issues and difficulties
- has to consider its future role in relation however to a number of contexts including the current political, economic and cultural climate and the need for a more intensive business-like approach to ensure long-term sustainability especially against a backdrop of depleting resources and the need for greater partnership working
- has to work on securing a greater level of business expertise at least among its management in order to increase the prospects for long-term sustainability and to move away from becoming funder-led
- has to reflect upon its current workload, partnerships and direction and make efforts to update either its existing vision to take account of changing environments or develop a new vision which is cognisant of current climates and also focuses on the strengths of the organisation and does not continue to try and be an 'all things to all people' type of organisation
- has to consider its current workload and determine where, if any, there is duplication with other organisations and consider the implications of this and appropriate actions with a view to pooling resources so as to maximise provision to the wider community
- has to work harder to build relationships across the entire Ballysally community through partnership and informal networking with existing organisations
- has to work harder to market and promote its services to ensure it is inclusive and that it reaches out to the entire Ballysally community



- has to develop and clarify its 'signposting' service or services to ensure that users do not become reliant or dependent on the organisation and that they can make the transition to independence more effectively
- has to consider existing and future use of space in order to meet both current and anticipated demand from service users
- has to further consider how it can develop its level of professionalism whilst retaining its personal 'touch' with users so that the organisation can grow in order to secure its future but not lose sight of the very reason for its existence
- has to work harder to ensure more effective staff relationships at all levels of the organisation through greater transparency and clarification of roles
- has to create a more open culture and as a result appropriate mechanisms where issues and/or concerns can be voiced by staff, paid and unpaid, in a safe environment
- has to develop and implement a much more effective system or systems of data collection in order to record best practice and document impact of provision more accurately
- has to build on previous Good Relations work and commit to ensuring continued work in this area to cement previous achievements and continue to move residents and users into new ways of thinking as part of a commitment to helping build a shared society

## **Evaluation Brief**

Below is an outline of my approach to carrying out the evaluation of Focus on Family. The approach consisted of three key phases:

1. One days desk research to gather information in order to secure 'overview' so as to set context
2. Carry out evaluation over 7 working days: (i) 4 days contact time – staff and volunteers (ii) recipients (iii) community and (iv) others, i.e. groups and other professionals including funders
3. Two days report writing and any follow-up work as necessary - required working time beyond this built into agreed fee

The evaluation would be completed using the following methods:

- (i) Individual Interview
- (ii) Group Interview
- (iii) E-mail
- (iv) Questionnaire and/or Survey Monkey (where possible)

I proposed to assess outcomes against milestones using statistics, information and feedback gathered from Focus on Family records alongside anecdotal evidence gathered from interviews and also using a 'scale framework' which was designed to 'measure' impact.

The Terms of Reference for the Evaluation was to assess the following:

- (i) Increase in tolerance of people from different religions and ethnic minorities
- (ii) Improve mental and physical health empowering them to make better lifestyle choices (100 people)
- (iii) Increase in confidence in advancing their educational opportunities – 'upskilling' and accreditation (100 people)
- (iv) Improvement in emotional literacy (250 people)

In putting together my proposal for evaluating the project I proposed the following milestones in order to compile the necessary evidence to determine if the project was successful:

- Assess number and variety of applicants to posts to determine if organisation has wide community appeal
- Identify training completed and interview Trainers so as to document the perceived impact that their training has had
- Meet with select number of recipients of training across variety of training elements to determine impact, relevance and gaps?

- Select 'X' number of programme elements (healthy relationships, alternative therapy, reiki, aromatherapy, reflexology, yoga, nurturing) to assess impact - meet with staff, volunteers, management and recipients
- Contact 'X' number of seminar participants to assess impact of seminars – e-mail correspondence or meet if necessary
- Meet with Essential Skills Tutor and review impact of work – identify pluses and minuses but ultimately learning secured
- Meet with participants on essential skills training
- Meet with and interview translators and discuss impact & relevance of the service they provide and also meet with members of ethnic minorities to discuss relevance and impact

I proposed that the format of any evaluation might look like this:

- Summary
- Overview of the project – history, context and services offered
- Definition of services offered and why they were chosen
- Case studies focussing on various aspects of the services
- Testimonials from individuals
- Conclusions and Recommendations
- Analysis of work – breakdown of figures, etc

In completing my evaluation I altered my approach somewhat. I followed the three phases as proposed using the methods outlined and given the quality of feedback it wasn't necessary to use my proposed 'scale framework' nor was it necessary to use 'Survey Monkey' as I was able to speak with a large number of respondents.

When meeting with respondents I posed the following questions in order to secure feedback:

- Describe your involvement in Focus on Family, i.e., length of time, job title, role, tasks, etc.
- What has been the highlight for you personally (what you have got at a personal level) and professionally (achievement in your work)?
- In your own words describe the impact that Focus on Family has made on you, other people (things you've observed where Focus on Family has made a direct lasting impact on individuals) and the wider community?
- What wouldn't have been possible without Focus on Family?
- What are or what have been the challenges Focus on Family has faced?
- What could Focus on Family do better?
- What would you change about Focus on Family?
- How has Focus on Family changed people's lives?
- How has Focus on Family changed relationships between people within Ballysally, between people in Ballysally and Coleraine and on wider basis with other communities across NI and beyond?

Once I had gathered all 'necessary' information from Focus on Family records and having met with a wide variety of people involved with Focus on Family I altered my approach to assess the impact of the project to draw conclusions in two ways.

First of all I felt it more appropriate to determine, for the purposes of informing BIG Lottery, if Focus on Family had managed to achieve all milestones as set out in their original funding application and if not, why not and where the gaps might be in order to inform not only Focus on Family but BIG Lottery as well.

In essence, this would provide a straightforward 'black and white' approach in which to determine if Focus on Family was successful and underpin the importance of the Evaluation in relation to the continued work of Focus on Family.

Secondly, I would use the anecdotal evidence gathered from interviews and written responses to draw conclusions regarding the work of the organisation, namely the impact it has made in relation to its proposed milestones.

Regarding this I have provided an account of work completed below.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Work Completed</b>
Assess number and variety of applicants to posts to determine if organisation has wide community appeal	
Identify training completed and interview Trainers so as to document the perceived impact that their training has had	Interviews with course facilitators completed
Meet with select number of recipients of training across variety of training elements to determine impact, relevance and gaps	One-to-one interviews with course recipients completed - feedback on impact of courses compiled and documented
Select 'X' number of programme elements (healthy relationships, alternative therapy, reiki, aromatherapy, reflexology, yoga, nurturing) to assess impact - meet with staff, volunteers, managements and recipients	One-to-one and group interviews with staff, volunteers, management and recipients completed – feedback on specific course compiled and documented
Contact 'X' number of seminar participants to assess impact of seminars – e-mail correspondence or meet if necessary	Information compiled by e-mail from representatives of some external organisations
Meet with Essential Skills Tutor and review impact of work – identify pluses and minuses but ultimately learning secured	One-to-one interview with Essential Skills Tutor and questionnaires with other Tutors – feedback compiled and documented

Meet with participants on essential skills training	One-to-one interviews with course recipients completed - feedback on impact of courses compiled and documented
Meet with and interview translators and discuss impact & relevance of the service they provide and also meet with members of ethnic minorities to discuss relevance and impact	Not applicable

As is also now clear this final report has been structured differently from what I proposed largely in response to the wealth of information and feedback I received at source and thus I believe it to be more beneficial to provide Main Conclusions as a synopsis of *Summary* and *Conclusions and Recommendations* whilst Background Information now provides an *Overview of the Project*.

Additionally, rather than offer a *Definition of services offered and why they were chosen* or provide *Testimonials from Individuals* I chose to use the feedback from respondents as a means of providing an in-depth consideration of provision.

Regarding *Analysis of Work* I elected to measure Milestones (set for the project) in percentage terms which provides the reader a simple and effective way of gauging success.

Reflecting on these changes I am confident however that the information I have compiled using the methods outlined and drawn from a wide range of sources (as listed at the end of this report) has enabled me to produce an evaluation which reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation.

I am also confident that the evaluation has been conducted in a manner that has been fair and just and in accordance with the highest professional standards necessary to not only fulfil the Terms of Reference as laid down by the organisation but would nonetheless be expected of anyone tasked with carrying out such an evaluation.

# **Summary** **of Evaluation**

## Assessment of Milestones

One of the more straightforward ways of evaluating the work of Focus on Family is to consider whether or not identified outcomes and more importantly associated milestones were achieved as set out in their application to BIG Lottery.

This provides a simple and effective if not entirely comprehensive way of determining the success of Focus on Family. It provides a statement to its main funder that Focus on Family has achieved what it set out to do and determines whether or not it has fulfilled its obligations contracted to them as a recipient of funding.

This of course does not offer an insight into the impact of the work on individuals and the wider community, the differences it has made as a result and the influence it has exerted or the changes it has brought about but this I will go onto look at in more detail in the second part of my evaluation but let's begin by assessing the milestones set out at the beginning of the current funding period.

In total there were 5 key outcomes and 55 milestones contained within those 5 outcomes, and whilst remaining largely the same over the course of the funding period these did vary from year to year, so for example, Outcome 3 differed in Years II & III as compared with Year I and likewise for Outcomes 4 and 5.

If we consider milestones by virtue of a simple 'numbers game', 44 of the 55 milestones were 'Achieved', 4 'Mostly Achieved', 1 'Partially Achieved' and 6 'Not Achieved'. This however does not provide an accurate account of the overall 'picture' because some of the milestones overlap or repeat and thus, 'Monitoring and Evaluate the Programme' for example, was included as a milestone for each year of the project.

As a 'stand alone' milestone it is of course equally applicable across all three years of the project and in effect constitutes three different milestones. However, I believe it makes more sense to treat it as a single milestone in order to provide a more accurate assessment and as a result I have applied this approach to a number of other milestones.

As many of the milestones overlapped on a year-to-year or outcome-to-outcome basis there was a need to break these down and identify the key milestones of which I have identified 27 as being distinctive or 'stand alone'.

Of these, 17 were achieved outright, 5 achieved/mostly achieved, 2 achieved/partially achieved and 3 not achieved. Of the 3 not achieved, two of these were 'abandoned' (so to speak) due to the influence of external factors/circumstances and therefore only 1 milestone in reality wasn't achieved where Focus on Family had complete control over.

Where milestones were only ‘mostly’ or ‘partially’ achieved this does not mean that the milestone wasn’t actually achieved over the course of the project but rather might have been delayed in starting or finishing or that there was less numbers recruited for a particular programme.

By and large Focus on Family has been able to achieve almost all of its milestones, and in some cases has exceeded these (in no small measure) and thus can be entirely proud of its achievements.

If we consider milestones in percentage terms, 63% were achieved outright, 26% mostly or partially achieved (but ultimately still achieved) and significantly only 11% not achieved and as already explained external factors impacted upon this. Overall, 89% of milestones were achieved albeit with variances, i.e. delays or less than anticipated participants.

In an effort to provide a brief overview of the status of project milestones I have worked through these so as to minimise duplication. A full overview is available under Appendices.

In summarising the first part of my evaluation, I am happy to report that Focus on Family has achieved a very high return (for its funder), as regards implementing milestones as outlined at the beginning of the current funding period and thus represents a very positive return on the investment by BIG Lottery.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
1. Advertise post, recruit staff	<b>Achieved</b>
2. Develop & deliver bespoke training for professionals (Jan 08-Dec 10)	<b>Achieved</b>
3. Devise & deliver official programme – 3 types of seminar on Healthy Relationships	<b>Achieved</b>
4. Implement individual Programmes – healthy relationships, essential skills, alternative therapies	<b>Achieved</b>
5. Induction training for staff and arrange specific training	<b>Achieved</b>
6. One seminar per two months to target professional bodies - 10+ professionals (Year III)	<b>Mostly Achieved</b>
7. Accreditation for 12 participants	<b>Achieved</b>
8. EGSA-Essential skills and training needs analysis	<b>Achieved</b>
9. Essential skills Literacy course – 20 weeks with 8+ participants	<b>Achieved in 08, 09, 10</b>
10. Essential skills Numeracy course – 20 weeks with 8+ participants	<b>Achieved in 08, 09, 10</b>
11. Monitor & Evaluate Programme	<b>Not Achieved</b>
12. Tutor identified and in place	<b>Achieved in 08, Mostly Achieved in 09 &amp; 10</b>



13. 16 week programmes - twice yearly on healthy relationships	<b>Achieved in 08, 09 &amp; 10</b>
14. Alternative Therapy programme – 40 participants per year	<b>Mostly Achieved</b>
15. Literature & Advertising Campaign set up	<b>Mostly Achieved in 08, and achieved in 09, 10</b>
16. One seminar bi-monthly for 50+ professionals	<b>Partially Achieved</b>
17. Identify local historian for workshops	<b>Achieved</b>
18. Identify translators	<b>Not Achieved – external factors influenced this</b>
19. Network with Kilcranny House & Ethnic Minorities Forum	<b>Achieved</b>
20. Source suitable events	<b>Achieved</b>
21. Source suitable training for religious and cultural diversity	<b>Achieved</b>
22. Translate literature	<b>Not Achieved – external factors influenced this</b>
23. Alternative Therapies weekly (40 participants)	<b>Partially Achieved in 08, Achieved in 09 &amp; 10</b>
24. Staff training in nurturing – 60+ to benefit	<b>Achieved in 08, 09, 10</b>
25. Training Needs Analysis	<b>Achieved</b>
26. Reiki, Aromatherapy, Reflexology & Yoga – 2 hours per week	<b>Achieved</b>
27. Alternative Therapy (40+ participants)	<b>Mostly Achieved in 08, Achieved in 09 and 10</b>

## **Summary of individual and group interviews**

Interviews were held with a wide variety of people – three members of staff, two members of Management Committee, two volunteers, three users, four tutors, representatives of three ‘external agencies’, seven childcare workers and two Focus on Family groups, i.e., Creative Writing Group made up of six members and tutor and a representative group (all parents) made up of two volunteers, one user and a member of staff.

**Highlights** were many and varied and included friendships that have developed from social interaction with others, not only within Ballysally but also outside which in turn has had the effect of leading to a greater understanding of and appreciation for diversity among users; the accessibility and drop-in element of Focus on Family and the sense and feeling of belonging that users feel as a result, i.e. ‘home from home’; the growth in confidence and self-esteem that users feel and have gained alongside behavioural changes among both adults and children; the integral part of the community that Focus on Family is with its childcare facilities/provision and its wide variety of programmes and courses including the development of specific needs-led programmes which has supported skills and career development, accreditation and volunteering opportunities; and the rapport between staff and volunteers and users which ensures a positive, warm, friendly and supportive environment at all levels.

**Impact** of Focus on Family has been measured in not only user numbers but the change in the perception of Ballysally among the ‘outside world’ not to mention its accessibility to the ‘outside world’ as compared with times gone-by; improvement in individual lifestyle and quality of life among users through involvement with Focus on Family, i.e. changing perceptions and attitudes, increased confidence, greater self-esteem and self-awareness; the development of tailor-made programmes to respond to particular needs as well as the positive rapport between Focus on Family and parents which has made courses and programmes accessible; the role of Focus on Family in supporting families in times of need be that families headed by two parents or single parents through the provision of childcare and intervention services; and the ability of users to have a direct influence on the types and range of services provided

**Without the involvement/intervention of Focus on Family** career and skills development would not have been possible for many whilst for others isolation has been reduced and support for adults struggling with personal issues and family difficulties has been forthcoming.

**Challenges faced by Focus on Family** has included funding, long-term sustainability, a clear long-term vision and a lack of ‘business acumen’ within the current organisational set-up; reaching out to all of the immediate and surrounding Ballysally community, more effective marketing or promoting of the Focus on Family message and/or services and building stronger partnership and/or networking more effectively with other organisations within Ballysally and beyond; responding to greater demands among users including both personal and career-related matters, finding space for users including childcare, developing greater levels of professionalism whilst retaining the ‘personal touch’ and acknowledging the limits of some of the Focus on Family provision.

### **Focus on Family could do better**

- *staff relationships* - a focus on more effective communication, increased background knowledge of staff as well as knowledge and clarity of roles, responsibilities and tasks, greater emphasis on team-building between all staff and creating mechanisms that allow individuals to highlight or raise issues or concerns with other staff or working arrangements
- *Buildings & Internal Systems* - consideration of how existing space can be best used particularly as regards disabled access and space for childcare and ensure more effective collection of data to document impact of project
- *Sustainability and External Organisations* - a stronger emphasis on developing business acumen to match long-term sustainability aspirations and a pro-active approach to networking and partnership building with organisations right across the immediate and greater Ballysally area
- *Programmes and Approach* - should aim to increase Good Relations work whilst developing an approach that assumes a greater ‘signposting’ role so as to reduce dependency among users as well as giving consideration to regaining the ‘personal touch’ but without jeopardising continued growth and professionalism of the organisation and finally, consider Focus on Family’s role in the wider context of the changing economic, political and cultural climate and its impact upon the entire Ballysally community

**Focus on Family should change** the culture of ‘trying to be all things to all people’ and focus on its strengths whilst endeavouring not to be funder-led and in doing so work more closely with others so as to avoid a ‘them and us’ scenario in an effort to maximise not only available resources but minimise duplication and in doing so create a stronger collective voice when it comes to lobbying and campaigning. In this context, ‘them and us’ refers to how Focus on Family is or is likely to be perceived among other organisations in the Ballysally area where partnership, formal or otherwise, does not exist and therefore perceptions are influenced by a lack of contact, connection or collectivity.

**Focus on Family has changed people's lives** because it is viewed as integral to the community and provides warmth, welcome, space, respite and opportunity, it has the capacity to influence and create change, it has contributed to the growth and aspirations of individuals and families and thus has positively impacted upon people's lives and re-set the various relationships that exist within Ballysally and beyond Ballysally.

**Focus on Family has changed relationships** because it has helped individuals to re-think their aspirations, examine their values and beliefs, explore new concepts and ideas, provided opportunities to meet 'others' and travel to and engage in different events as well as striving to build relationships with other organisations in areas distinctly different to Ballysally.

**Focus on Family and the work they do** has been largely positive where members of staff, for the most, enjoy not only their work but working environment and where as a result residents and users benefit from a precious and vital service and as a result, the continued development of Focus on Family has a strong foundation but must also be addressed within the wider context of servicing the whole of Ballysally in partnership with others to ensure not only its sustainability but its inclusivity.

# Appendices

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
1. Through the delivery of individual programmes 250 people will improve emotional literacy by 2013	1. Advertise post, recruit staff	<b>Achieved</b>
	2. Develop & deliver bespoke training for professionals (Jan 08-Dec 10)	<b>Achieved</b> Nine seminars in total (2 in 2008, 4 in 2009 and 5 in 2010) with average attendance of 9 participants. Greater demands on facilitators time in Year I meant slower start but Year's II & III more comprehensive  Wide range of groups represented: community, church, social work staff, Coleraine Borough Council, Gateway Team, Children In Need Team, NHSCT, Inter-Agency Forum and PSNI
	3. Devise & deliver official programme – 3 types of seminar on Healthy Relationships	<b>Achieved</b> 2008: 8 participants, 2009; 21 participants 2010: 17 participants
	4. Implement individual Programmes – healthy relationships, essential skills, alternative therapies	<b>Achieved</b> Year 1: Healthy Relationships (8), Essential Skills (22), Alternative Therapies (56)
	5. Induction training for staff and arrange specific training	<b>Achieved</b> Specific nurturing training delivered on Child Protection and Domestic Violence
	6. One seminar per two months to target professional bodies – 10+ professionals	<b>Mostly Achieved</b> 2008 – 6 seminars (24 participants) 2009 – 4 seminars 2010 – 5 seminars

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
2. Through the delivery of essential skills courses 80 individuals will improve their literacy	1. Accreditation for 12 participants	<b>Achieved</b> 2008 – 16: 8 in English & 8 in Maths 2009 – 27: 8 in English, 8 in Maths & 11 in IT Beginners 2010 – 68: 8 in English, 8 in Maths, 31 in IT Beginners & 19 in IT Advanced
	2. EGSA-Essential skills and training needs analysis	<b>Achieved</b> EGSA Advisor attends centre and level of attendance has increased from bi-monthly to monthly or more – an indication of increase in demand or an interest in Education
	3. Essential skills Literacy course – 20 weeks with 8+ participants	<b>Achieved</b> 8 participants took part and programme plus IT element
	4. Essential skills Numeracy course – 20 weeks with 8+ participants	<b>Achieved</b> 8 participants took part
	5. Monitor & Evaluate Programme	<b>Not Achieved</b> Varying levels of monitoring and evaluation carried out – no consistent approach among staff
	6. Tutor identified and in place	<b>Achieved</b> Completed on time and in place with local volunteers lending support

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
3. (Year 1) Through the delivery of healthy relationships training, essential skills and alternative therapy sessions 100 individuals will be more confident in advancing their educational opportunities to obtain necessary skills and accredited certificates by 2013	1. 16 week programmes - twice yearly on healthy relationships	<b>Achieved</b> Two programmes completed lasting 32 and 26 weeks
	2. Alternative Therapy – 40+ participants per year	<b>Mostly Achieved</b> 35 participants – less numbers due in part to late start to some programmes
	3. Essential skills Literacy course – 20 weeks with 8+ participants	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 2 Milestone 3
	4. Essential skills Numeracy course – 20 weeks with 8+ participants	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 2 Milestone 4
	5. Literature & Advertising Campaign set up	<b>Mostly Achieved</b> Achieved but 9 months behind original timeframe
	6. Monitor & Evaluate Programme	<b>Not Achieved</b> Varying levels of monitoring and evaluation carried out – no consistent approach among staff
	7. One seminar bi-monthly for 50+ professionals	<b>Partially Achieved</b> Achieved but slightly less than anticipated numbers – 37
	8. Tutor identified & in place	<b>Mostly Achieved</b> Achieved but 3 months behind original timeframe



<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>3. (Year II &amp; Year III)</b> Through the delivery of project 80 individuals will have increased tolerance of people from different religions and ethnic minorities by 2013	1. Identify local historian for workshops	<b>Achieved</b>
	2. Identify translators	<b>Not Achieved</b> In 2008, Coleraine Borough Council, through the Multi-Cultural Forum, released a comprehensive pack for new citizens which featured information on all local services, in a range of languages. Need for translators have been reduced to a minimum.
	3. Network with Kilcranny House & Ethnic Minorities Forum	<b>Achieved</b> Focus on Family has engaged with a wide range of cultural activities organised by Kilcranny (see Milestone 4)
	4. Source suitable events	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 3 key events – Chinese New Year celebrations (50 participants); Women’s Group Dance Performance (24 participants) & Ramadan Muslim Event (15 participants) Year III: Chinese New Year celebrations (45 participants); Cultural Celebratory Event with Kilcranny House (52 participants) & Ramadan Muslim Event (23 participants)
	5. Source suitable training for religious and cultural diversity	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: Programme with Creevagh Women’s Group (10 participants) Year III: Programme with the full Partnership (18 participants)
	6. Translate literature	<b>Not Achieved</b> As per Milestone 2

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
4. <b>(Year I)</b> Through the delivery of project 80 individuals will have increased tolerance of people from different religions and ethnic minorities by 2013	1. Identify Translators	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 3 (Year II & III) Milestone 2
	2. Translate Literature	<b>Not Achieved</b> As per Outcome 3 (Year II & III) Milestone 2
	3. Identify Local Historian for Workshops	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 3 (Year II & III) Milestone 1
	4. Network with Kilcranny and Ethnic Minorities Forum	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 3 (Year II & III) Milestone 3
	5. Source suitable Events	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 3 (Year II & III) Milestone 4
	6. Source suitable training for religious and cultural diversity	<b>Achieved</b> As per Outcome 3 (Year II & III) Milestone 5

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
4. <b>(Year II &amp; III)</b> Through the delivery of this project 100 individuals will improve mental and physical health empowering them to make better lifestyle choices by 2013	1. Alternative Therapies weekly (40 participants)	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 45 participants - Holistic Therapies 24, Art 13, Creative Writing 8 Year III: 28 participants - Holistic Therapies 10, Creative Writing 18
	2. Essential Skills – literacy and numeracy (16+ participants)	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 27 participants - Numeracy 8, Literacy 8 & IT 11 Year III: 56 participants - Numeracy 8, Literacy 8 & IT 40
	3. Reiki, Aromatherapy, Reflexology & Yoga – 2 hours per week	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 80 participants - Reiki 30, Yoga 27, Pilates 23 Year III: 72 participants - Reiki 53, Yoga 8, Pilates 11
	4. Staff training in nurturing – 60+ to benefit	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 56 adults Year III: 68 adults & 42 children
	5. Training Needs Analysis	<b>Achieved</b> A series of information days and 'in-house' monitoring of users views resulted in the implementation of a series of courses including Learning to Earning, Employment Skills, Cookery & Basic Hygiene

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>5. (Year 1)</b> Through the delivery of this project 100 individuals will improve mental and physical health empowering them to make better lifestyle choices by 2013	1. Alternative Therapies Weekly - (40+ participants)	<b>Partially Achieved</b> 23 participants - Holistic Therapies 15 & Art 8,
	2. Essential Skills – literacy and numeracy (16+ participants)	<b>Achieved</b> 22 participants - Numeracy 15 & Literacy 7
	3. Reiki, Aromatherapy, Reflexology & Yoga – 2 hours per week	<b>Achieved</b> 33 participants - Reiki 21, Yoga 7 & Pilates 5
	4. Staff training in nurturing – 60+ to benefit	<b>Achieved</b> 67 participants – 47 Adults & 20 Children
	5. Training Needs Analysis	<b>Achieved</b> Training Support Package from NICVA which included ‘Planning for Evaluation, ‘Monitoring & Evaluating Your Outcomes’, ‘Managing Staff’ & ‘Stress Management

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>5. (Year's II &amp; III)</b> Through the delivery of healthy relationships training, essential skills & alternative therapy 100 individuals will be more confident in advancing educational opportunities to obtain necessary skills and accreditation	1. 16 week programme – twice yearly on hosting healthy relationships	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 2 x 26 week programmes – 21 survivors of Domestic Abuse Year III: as Year II but 17 participants Programme undergoing 'Respect' Accreditation
	2. Alternative Therapy – 40+ participants per year	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: 125 participants - Reiki (30 participants), Yoga (27 participants), Pilates (23 participants), Holistic Therapies (24 participants), Art Therapy (13), Creative Writing (8) Year III: Reiki (53 participants), Yoga (8 participants), Pilates (11 participants), Holistic Therapies (10 participants), Creative Writing (18) – creative writing replaced Art Therapy
	3. Essential Skills Literacy: 20 weeks – 8+ participants	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: English - 8 participants Year III: English - 8 participants & IT (40 participants)
	4. Essential Skills Numeracy: 20 weeks – 8+ participants	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: Maths - 8 participants Year III: Maths - 8 participants
	5. Literature & Advertising Campaign set up	<b>Achieved</b> Year II: Literature developed and Advertising Strategy in place Year III: Existing Literature reviewed, website updated & marketing strategy initiated
	6. Monitor & Evaluate Programme	<b>Not Achieved</b> Varying levels of monitoring and evaluation carried out – no consistent approach among staff
	7. One Seminar bi-monthly for 50+ professionals	<b>Partially Achieved</b> Nine seminars in total (2 in 2008, 4 in 2009 and 5 in 2010) with average attendance of 9 participants. Greater demands on facilitators time in Year I meant slower start but Year's II & III more comprehensive

		Wide range of groups represented: social work staff, community, church, Coleraine Borough Council, Gateway Team, Children In Need Team, NHSCT, Inter-Agency Forum and PSNI
	8. Tutor identified & in place	<b>Achieved</b> All Tutors identified and put in place

## **Overview of one-to-one and group interviews and written responses to questions**

### **Describe your involvement with Focus on Family, i.e., role, tasks, etc.**

Interviews were held with a wide variety of people – three members of staff, two members of Management Committee, two volunteers, three users, four tutors, representatives of three ‘external agencies’, seven childcare workers and two Focus on Family groups, i.e. Creative Writing Group made up of six members and tutor and a representative group (all parents) made up of two volunteers, one user, and one member of staff.

This involved 24 females and 11 males all of which had varying lengths of engagement with Focus on Family from literally a matter of weeks (someone had just moved to Ballysally), up to 3, 5, 7, 8 and 15 years. Those interviewed were drawn from a variety of areas including of course Ballysally but also as far away as Portstewart and Coleraine.

Those interviewed made up a wide cross-section of people – from full-time and part-time to volunteers, those registered on employment schemes or retired; single, separated, married and divorced male and female parents; residents and non-residents, individuals from both of the main traditions, users and former users (now) turned tutors and/or facilitators; individuals who had a track record in a wide variety of work settings; those with learning difficulties and others connected to the organisation through partnerships or external organisations.

### **What was the highlight for you personally whilst working with Focus on Family (what impressed you the most and why) and on a professional level (the most important achievement that you witnessed during the time you worked with them)?**

It was clear from the response to this question that Focus on Family means an enormous amount not only to users, but both volunteers and staff alike. For many it has had a major if not a life-changing influence on their lives.

This ranged from the opportunity to socialise and/or interact with others- ‘others you wouldn’t have normally had the chance to meet’ to feeling welcomed and included in the life of the community which as we all know is absolutely essential to social cohesion in that people feel part of any community and therefore are more likely to take part in the life and social fabric of that community.

Friendship and the importance of building relationships not only with staff but between users and ultimately residents came across very strong. Both users and volunteers spoke of their warmth towards Focus on Family with one volunteer saying how much she loves ‘coming here on a daily basis’.

A long-term volunteer spoke about how Focus on Family had given him the confidence to take on a television interview with the BBC which might sound somewhat unremarkable but in overcoming a speech impediment to do so he attributes his growth in confidence to his time with the organisation.

Another user spoke about tutors as being 'very flexible' and how they 'put you at ease' therefore making learning easier. One individual on completing a computer course was motivated to such an extent he went out and bought his first computer and thus has continued to put his skills into practice.

Feedback from parents highlighted the critical difference that Focus on Family has made in their lives, not only in terms of benefits to themselves but also their children. They were able to identify among other things behavioural changes, improvement in speech and help with matters such as toilet training. One parent underlined the importance of the nurturing programme commenting on the experience as very beneficial, i.e. 'when you do the stuff it works'.

Focus on Family was also credited with helping to empower local residents by increasing confidence levels among users. One member of the Management Committee described how her involvement 'helps to empower people to feel good about themselves, feel confident and to say I can do it'. Anecdotal stories of how people have taken steps to improve or change their lives for the better supported this view and as one user testified, 'if I 'didn't have Focus I don't know where I would have been' whilst many others referred to Focus on Family as a 'Home from Home'.

This notion of 'Home from Home' was illustrated vividly when on one occasion the organisation helped to feed and 'house' 100 families from the 'bottom of the estate' who had to leave their home during a gas leak. This was further evidenced during the height of last winter when a 'Soup Kitchen' was laid on for those who were struggling with the cold or to heat their homes.

The term 'Home from Home' was used quite often and when people spoke about 'Focus' they emphasised the family element and thus a second home was what many implied or referred to, i.e., somewhere they could go to be with others and spend quality time with them whether or not that was to complete a course or to just drop in and have a conversation.

Ballysally has too often made the headlines for all the wrong reasons and thus has had to deal with not only a negative reputation among the media but also among those from outside the area. It is clear though from the feedback I received from those I spoke with that this has been changing though and continues to change. And the work of Focus on Family is in no small part a contributing factor in this change.

The range of people from Ballysally, its surrounding areas or further afield that have used and/or continue to use Focus on Family, has been significant in helping to increase the recognition of and appreciation for other communities and ultimately for diversity.

As the organisation continues to build its reputation for the work it does 'on the ground' more people use it and therefore they enter an environment which is welcoming, accessible and inclusive and with that has come a range of people not only from the immediate vicinity but outside this, be that users, tutors or others and in essence has 'forced' users into addressing any stereotype, prejudice and perception of 'others' they might have had. Focus on Family has also delivered programmes which addresses diversity directly and has worked specifically with the community to address how Ballysally can be less intimidating but more accessible and welcoming to 'outsiders'.

At a professional level the growth of the organisation from a drop-in (mainly for women) to a centre for the entire community with its wide variety of programmes and services alongside its ability to maintain not only services but demand (and at times over subscription) for childcare places (which facilitates parents/adults skilling or re-skilling themselves in order to enter or re-enter the labour market) is impressive.

This has the effect of encouraging greater mobility among users by providing access to accreditation and qualifications (alongside the flexibility and approach of the tutors) and is a testament to how far Focus on Family has 'travelled' over the last number of years.

The growth and development of any organisation can be measured by its ability to respond to a local (or very specific) need and in developing a 'Perpetrators Programme' (where the violent behaviour of all participants is addressed) Focus on Family have shown leadership and sensitivity at the same time whilst dealing with a very difficult issue particularly one where participants are drawn from the very community they serve.

Success of such a programme has to be judged with sensitivity but very clear indicators can be at one level with children 'being taken off the at risk register' whilst at another level feedback from the partners or former partners of perpetrators crediting the programme with how it has 'changed their men'.

Efforts to respond to local need does not merely manifest itself in the form of sensitive work like the 'Perpetrators Programme' but also through creative and innovative programmes like working with projects such as CECF (Coleraine Education Community Project) which was recently added to the list of courses available to users which provides the opportunity to build relationships with parents and help them back into employment which inevitably has a positive knock-on effect on their children's attendance at school.

This kind of programme sits comfortably alongside other existing programmes but one that deserves a mention is the completion of a sign language course by 5 people who 'persevered' over the course of eighty weeks. The level of commitment, perseverance and energy required to do so can be attributed not only to the individuals concerned but equally says as much about the approach of Focus on Family in creating an environment where participants obviously felt safe, welcome, wanted and catered for.



Focus on Family has also developed a strong history of volunteering and has provided opportunities for up to twenty individuals (through its on-going partnership with Elle Enterprises), many of whom were unable to secure employment, to benefit from placements where they have enhanced essential skills allowing them to 'come out of their shell' and thus put them in a much better position to re-enter the Labour Market.

Learning is at the heart of Focus on Family which in turn is at the heart of the Ballysally community. It provides a familiar and comfortable environment for users and as a result there is evidence to demonstrate growth in many individuals moving (in many cases) from 'quite weak to becoming stronger' in an environment where a positive atmosphere not only exists but is positively encouraged by the openness and welcoming nature of staff, a staff that have often gone the 'extra mile' and this contributes to creating a strong sense of community spirit.

This is further strengthened by the rapport between staff with many highlighting the strength of communication between colleagues and the genuinely positive relationships that exist in many cases. This is also made possible as well by the satisfaction staff get from the work they do, be that setting up courses or working with parents to working with children with additional needs or seeing a child's development over a period of time.

Progression among users can be measured in many ways but tangible proof of course is the significant numbers of users not only having secured accreditation but returning for more courses.

Other non-accredited programmes have provided outlets to develop a range of skills, knowledge and attitude and this includes for example, the development of and involvement in cross-community work which has brought many benefits to both Focus on Family, and its many users including a greater awareness of other communities.

**In your own words describe the impact that Focus on Family has made on you or that you have witnessed impacting on other people at an individual level and/or the wider community or communities it has come into contact with?**

Impact can be measured of course from the number of people passing 'through the door' on a daily basis to the numbers completing courses but more significantly impact can and should also be considered in the context of significant, lasting and visible change that it brings to the area, a sea change in approach, attitude, belief and outlook as it were. So for example, and as highlighted in the previous question Focus on Family has had a positive impact in helping to address the perception of Ballysally to the 'outside world' not to mention the perception of those living within the area.

This can't necessarily be measured by the numbers crossing the door or by the numbers completing IT courses but rather the difference in the quality of life being offered or range of opportunities provided. So if the context that existed when Focus on Family was set up was one where Ballysally was dominated or 'ruled' by Loyalism and this is no longer the case then a correlation between this change and in an increase in aspiration not to mention a change in the attitude of Focus on Family users can be drawn or at least assumed.

This can be attributed to among other things, a mixing with others which results in challenging perceptions and beliefs, an increase in confidence and self-awareness, enhanced self-esteem and growing awareness of others.

Evidence of impact was provided through a wide range of examples including the opportunity for staff to work in areas 'close to your heart', residents having somewhere to go and the opportunity to complete essential skills training alongside the development of the crèche and the evolution of Focus on Family from a 'women only' organisation to one catering for the entire community.

A number of 'spin off' programmes were also mentioned including Nurturing Programme and IT courses as well as plans to develop a programme addressing domestic violence against men which was highlighted in order to demonstrate how far Focus on Family had 'travelled' and by addressing a subject often viewed as taboo could only be seriously considered if there was a clear need and if the skills base existed to implement such.

The impact that Focus on Family has had on parents was something that came up time and time again and there was most certainly a belief that the reason parents come to programmes was because of the relationship they have with Focus on Family and this has for many provided an outlet in developing a clear path in their lives in relation to work or merely social interaction with others and this is because of a range of underpinning elements - open door policy, non-judgemental approach, style of delivery (both accredited and non-accredited courses), the respite it offers and the ethos that governs the organisation which all-in-all brings real change to individuals in terms of their self-esteem, outlook, attitude to others, perceptions of self and the confidence to interact with others and their surroundings.

For many families, Focus on Family has provided a 'lifeline' or has been a source of 'family' whilst for others they would have been unable to remain together had it not been for the intervention and/or support of Focus on Family.

The organisation has also been integral to the lives of many single mothers that without the offer of crèche facilities, for example, would have not been able to contemplate re-entering the labour market not to mention just finding means of social interaction with other parents in the same position as themselves.

Family life in the area has been ultimately enhanced as a result of the services offered not least childcare facilities (which of course also helps to cement relationships between parents and their children which contributes to Social Cohesion beyond the 'Focus Door') but also because of the inclusive welcome at Focus on Family and 'a sense of home and kindness towards them and their children it offers'.

The point was also made that services are also user-led and have evolved in response to need or requests and people using services are willing to 'drive' these services. It has been possible to respond to need through successfully securing unrestricted funding which has offered flexibility in developing programming and as one member of staff described, 'the difference in learners confidence has been unbelievable'.

**What in your own words would you say wouldn't have been possible without the involvement/intervention of Focus on Family?**

Much of the feedback offered by those interviewed reinforced responses to previous questions. Interviewees talked about Focus on Family as 'a safe space and place for residents', whilst access to childcare enabled parents to pursue education alongside respite from parenting duties and the availability of courses not to mention their range and diversity were hugely beneficial.

Focus on Family also helped to reduce the sense of isolation felt by many by providing support to individuals with particular sets of needs and also further enhancing career prospects and employment opportunities whilst indirectly aiding the development of friendship between users and ultimately residents.

Other examples were quite specific such as access to essential services such as laundrette, 'women coming off anti-depressants', children coming off the 'At Risk' register and families staying together whilst external tutors spoke of meeting course participants whom after completing various courses saw vast improvements in their visible appearance and confidence.

Of course whilst most users, staff and volunteers were vocal in their praise for Focus on Family a number of respondents were also keen to point out that, given the range of organisations in the area, much if not all of the services provided by Focus on Family could have been provided but acknowledged the role Focus on Family has played (and continues to play) in the creative and innovative provision it has developed and believed that current or past participation in the provision would not have been possible had Focus on Family not existed.

## **What do you believe have been or are the challenges that Focus on Family has faced?**

The responses to this question proved interesting in that they begin to offer an indication as to what Focus on Family has to consider in order to enhance and to ensure its provision is not only meeting the needs of its users but is doing so within the context of the wider community and the demands that this brings.

As expected, funding inevitably came up time and time again and considering there was no history of funding it's all the more impressive as to how far Focus on Family has 'travelled' and of course this journey will prove more challenging as competition for limited or declining resources increases. Interestingly enough, this has had the effect that as the recession bites some parents have had to take their children out of childcare

An interesting array of responses however demonstrates vividly a staff, volunteer and management team who alongside users, course tutors and other individuals from partner and/or external organisations are fairly 'clued in' to what is necessary to ensure not only the viability of Focus on Family but the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Creating long-term sustainability, development of a strategic vision, enhanced 'business acumen' alongside a 'heightened' community or response-led approach as well as the need for a more organised and more robust service in partnership with other organisations whilst trying to avoid duplication yet expand services are among the challenges that respondents identified.

Operating in a Loyalist area with all the issues or 'baggage' that this brings whilst trying, or rather encouraging residents to come 'in the door' has been something that Focus on Family has had to contend with over time and in fairness to them they have managed this particular relationship sensitively. This continues to remain a challenge however as getting 'new' people through the door as opposed to regular users will be something that Focus on Family has to consider in the context of sustainability and visioning process.

Getting residents through the door is one thing of course but the support that is then required can vary and therefore prove quite demanding, i.e. supporting parents and in particular lone parents, for example, to find child care places so that they can access available courses and upon doing so helping to put them at ease whilst providing on-going support through more difficult times whilst all the time of course acknowledging there are limits to the levels of support that can be offered and therefore what Focus on Family has managed thus far has been nothing short of admirable.

And of course with success comes extra demands, e.g., having to cope with ever-increasing numbers, greater demand in the variety of courses required, finding space to host courses and pressure on available childcare spaces.

It should be noted however that not everyone who uses Focus on Family is motivated and this in itself throws up challenges for staff and volunteers as they endeavour to make Focus on Family more amenable and accessible to users whilst also attempting to reach out to non-users as the support of the entire Ballysally Community still remains a concern for Focus on Family.

Focus on Family also has to contend with its own competing tensions and aspirations, e.g. strategic plans versus people, easy-going versus formal, structured versus unstructured and of course these alongside managing an organisation with the competing needs of numerous staff (sixteen in this case) is a fine balancing act.

### **What in your own opinion could Focus on Family do better and why?**

The previous question considered the challenges that Focus on Family has so far faced and in many respects paves the way for the more important question of what can Focus on Family can do better.

This question was not designed in any way to 'pick holes' in the work of Focus on Family or offer carte blanche in allowing people to list grievances but rather (and in a constructive fashion) identify ways in which existing provision can be enhanced, where gaps can be identified, practice developed and resources and services maximised against a backdrop of depleting resources and a greater emphasis on partnership and complementarity between organisations.

This question also provided the opportunity for respondents to 'think outside of the box' so to speak and create (an almost) kind of wish list, where they had freedom to express themselves and imagine Focus on Family in a different way.

**Staff relationships:** a number of areas for improvement were highlighted - better communication between management and childcare staff, more team building between all staff with an emphasis on the relationship between those staff ('upstairs') and childcare staff (on the ground floor).

There is a need to work on enhancing the atmosphere between staff internally by increasing contact and knowledge of one another in order to reduce any negative perceptions – this is not to suggest that there is animosity, open or otherwise between staff but the feedback from respondents suggested there were some underlying tensions and a commitment to a more open, honest and transparent working environment would help to minimise these.

As part of the process to achieve this there should be a focus on creating an environment where people can (or at least they feel they can) air their differences without recrimination and free of prejudice and where necessary establish a mediator or someone in a mediation-type role that staff can turn to when required to help resolve issues.

It was also suggested that there was a need to identify and implement mechanisms where staff can voice concerns or express opinions anonymously, e.g. comment box.

Some members of staff were seeking greater equality across roles, i.e. an agreement between staff or greater acknowledgement that no job or task they perform is viewed as less important than any other. Obviously, there are some jobs that have (or will have) greater levels of responsibility but there was a sense among some that less value was placed on their roles and therefore a need to reinforce the value or importance of all staff roles is necessary.

The need for more effective management of staff was also highlighted in relation to time management, i.e. staff concentrating on their main tasks rather than a variety of tasks which ultimately dilutes their focus from their main job. Some staff felt they were being asked to take on responsibilities that weren't necessarily theirs and this was lessening their capacity to do their job.

This was also set against a background where some staff perceived other members of staff as being in roles that either they weren't qualified to do or had less or limited experience for. Whether or not this is the case is in some ways irrespective but rather highlights the need for not only greater interaction between staff but greater transparency and openness about the skills and background of staff.

This can also be done in advance of appointments by sharing information with staff regarding qualifications and experience being sought as opposed to having to share information about individuals and where certain criteria has to be waived, explanations regarding appointments can be made.

**Buildings:** improve access for disabled (including wider corridors) alongside an up-to-date computer suite with space for young people to meet and with resources they can use, e.g. internet access, games consoles, etc. Also a suggestion was made to increase resources available to staff in childcare so that they can enhance the level of interaction and activities with children that are attending.

**Internal Systems:** implement new or enhance existing methods of collecting data to document impact of the projects.

**Sustainability:** develop greater levels of 'business acumen' so as to enable the organisation to become 'free-standing' and implement a model which incorporates a social enterprise approach and increases income generation from current levels of 6.5% to 35%. The role of the management committee in developing a 'greater liaison' with the business sector was viewed as important for the long-term future of the organisation.

**External organisations:** Focus on Family should consider existing services provided by other organisations or agencies in the immediate and surrounding areas in an effort to minimise (or avoid completely) existing or potential duplication of services and in doing so strengthen relationships with these organisations with a view to develop formal and informal partnership working.

**Marketing:** Focus on Family should embark on a renewed public relations 'push' to not only raise awareness of existing services but to also explain how it uses its funding to provide services for the community in an effort to address any negative perception among local publics and in doing so endeavour to build and sustain connections with current non-users.

**Programmes:** initiatives aimed at addressing approaches to traditional attitudes and lifestyles is developed within a stronger good relations context so as to provide users with increased understanding and learning about others which of course would enhance community cohesion and where users are better prepared to deal with Community Relations.

**Approach:** consideration should be given towards developing a stronger 'signposting' role where a greater focus should be placed on helping to map out (future) career or life steps in an effort to increase mobility and reduce any potential 'dependency factor' among users and allows Focus on Family to ensure it is inclusive by reaching out to others so as to avoid becoming dominated in any way by a select few.

Consideration should also be given to how Focus on Family can respond to the needs of young people as opposed to providing for parents and children only. Some respondents thought that the current focus on parents and young children ignored the role and importance of young people to the family and therefore they should not be viewed in isolation. Equally, some respondents felt the same about the over-60's and saw the need to consider this age group in provision as well.

A number of respondents felt that Focus on Family had lost some of its 'personal touch' and warmth and had become (in some ways) a victim of its own success so whilst the growth and increased professionalism of the organisation is welcomed it is not only necessary but vital to the continued success of the organisation in that it retains its personal touch and does not lose sight of its reason for being set up in the first place.

Alongside this, Focus on Family should consider how it might become better organised and this would begin with considering how it currently serves the Ballysally community and how it might do this against a changing social, economic, political and cultural environment and in a sector where demands on the pooling of resources grow greater and emphasis on partnership continues.

It is also against this changing environment where the need to consider the relevance of murals with the aim of making the community less intimidating to others from outside the area should be explored with the community.

## **What if anything would you change about Focus on Family and if so why?**

From the feedback received it seems that Focus on Family may have developed a culture of trying to be 'all things to all people' in its efforts to respond to the wider needs of the community on an on-going basis and has perhaps slipped into the trap and not being able to say 'no' and thus is in danger of spreading itself too thin and rather than doing 'X' number of things well is in danger of doing lots of things only reasonably.

This kind of approach can be dictated by funding of course and as funding has become available over the years Focus on Family has been successful in competing for it. This however poses problems for organisations as inevitably they not only move away from services which initially defined them but in effect become funder-led. In its efforts to secure its own survival, Focus on Family has, like many organisations in the voluntary sector become somewhat dependent on funding and this of course impinges on its ability to become sufficient in the long-term.

A consequence of competing for funding also means that organisations that might normally work in partnership with one another become a little more protective and end up competing for scant resources with the consequence that mistrust develops and communication and interaction becomes less and less so until virtually non-existent.

As already pointed out some respondents felt that Focus on Family had not only moved away from its *raison d'être* but as it has become more successful in securing funding this has served to only reinforce that move away. It has also had the consequence where Focus on Family appears 'on the face of it' to be securing most of the available funding for the area and even if this is not the case without developing or maximising partnership working across the Ballysally area it only serves to create a level of distrust and resentment.

It's essential that Focus on Family secures its long-term future and the importance of developing a growing self-sufficiency is vital of course but given the current economic context it is paramount that this takes place within the spirit of and commitment to partnership working with other organisations and agencies in and around the immediate and surrounding Ballysally area.

This not only relates to developing joint initiatives together but avoiding or minimising duplication and where possible ensuring services complimenting one another. This will also have the benefit of enabling Focus on Family to reach out to sections of the Ballysally community they have been unable to engage by maximising their relationship with other organisations but of course such a move has also to be reciprocated and therefore will enable Focus on Family to enhance its 'signposting' service as a result and ultimately residents can benefit from a wide range of services provided through strong partnership working.



A number of suggestions made by respondents have already been mentioned but it's worth reinforcing these and highlighting those not yet mentioned. Whether or not it's possible to realise all of these they are worthy of consideration. These include greater (or at least more effective) communication between staff, staff meetings to include all staff, more openness and honesty between staff, greater understanding and appreciation of the roles within the different units within Focus on Family, getting the 'family atmosphere back', a greater emphasis on recreation and introducing services for the teenage age group and this would of course mean developing the role, remit and skills of youth work staff.

Some small changes that could be made which seemed to have caused resentment among childcare staff is the return of 'their break', less paperwork, all staff should be qualified and in addition to this should be on 'the floor' during working hours (including supervisors) and not as seems to have been case on occasions 'doing courses upstairs while they should be in crèche', and that staff should be more selective as to where they smoke during smoke breaks, i.e., 'people should smoke away from building as it comes in the windows'.

Many of these comments were made anonymously but of course highlight some of the underlying tensions that exist and these may be true or at least in the perception of some are true. The benefit of eliciting the views of all staff when carrying out the evaluation is that issues have been identified and this presents the opportunity to introduce change so as to minimise or eradicate tensions which could manifest themselves in other ways.

On a more practical level respondents suggested 'refreshing' the building, creating more space within Focus on Family, increasing access for the disabled, purchasing 'bigger and better' equipment, a 'bigger and better play area out the back for crèche-kids only', increased childcare facilities or capacity (to allow more parents to attend courses), the development of a soup kitchen, a larger laundrette, comment box for parents and securing (surrounding) empty properties with a view to developing both properties and services or alternatively looking at a purpose-built facility on the current site or in another location.

### **From your perspective how has Focus on Family changed people's lives?**

Focus on Family is viewed by many as an integral part of the community – with many experiencing a warm reception, welcoming environment and friendly staff alongside accessibility for all and essential services such as the crèche. Many view it as not only having contributed much to the fabric and spirit of the area but also believe that it has mirrored change in Ballysally itself. As one respondent stated it gives residents 'somewhere that is comfortable, confident, engaged, encouraged and empowered'.

There was also a genuine recognition of the work that has been accomplished over the years not to mention the contribution it has made to the community and the difference it has made in people's lives. For example, parents have benefitted from the space available to them even as a means just to 'get out of the house' whilst the nurturing programme has, as another example, been attributed to better parenting and family intervention.

In general respondents felt they have benefitted from 'signposting' services on offer whilst courses and programmes have enhanced people's career prospects leading to not only an increase in confidence and skills but qualifications also. Respondents also felt they had a better quality of life and that Focus on Family provided a listening ear for people who 'needed someone to listen to them' and provided assistance when there was none. The benefits of having a relationship with other users has brought great personal benefit allowing people to put things in perspective and at a very personal level it has given people more confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem and people have developed an empathy towards one another but equally possess appropriate expectations of others. These sets of relationships have also led to a widening of perspectives, a stretching of boundaries and a development in understanding of others.

One volunteer went as far as saying that Focus on Family 'makes you feel you're actually a human, they'll see something in you and work to bring it out,' whilst another respondent referred to the progress that one woman made since she had become involved with Focus on Family whereas prior to her involvement she 'would never have left the house' but had 'moved' to the point of having the confidence to 'going into a hotel' which might sound minor but in the context of never leaving the house this was considerable.

**How do you think (if you think) has Focus on Family changed relationships between people within Ballysally, between people in Ballysally and Coleraine and on wider basis with other communities across NI and beyond?**

Respondents felt that Focus on Family has made a significant contribution primarily to relationships within the Ballysally area and whilst to a lesser extent beyond Ballysally it still has made a notable contribution nonetheless.

Focus on Family had brought people together and in doing so provided a space for them to go to. Through its wide range of programmes and activities people have changed their focus to one of an emphasis on learning.

People from all over use the service which has had a direct impact on Ballysally 'calming' down and where socialising 'in-house' carries on outside this makes a difference to relationships between people from the area, changing attitudes locally and making it possible for people to engage in good relations work whereas before this might not have been possible.

This has had one direct effect where the opportunities for parents to tell their story has led to their identifying their needs, developing a supportive role, focusing more on their children and becoming a strong and protective parent.

Specific projects have included involvement in an Intergenerational Festival with residents from the Millburn area, joint work with residents from Creevagh and some cross-community work in 'The Heights' area.

Relationships around the 12<sup>th</sup> of July parades has changed whilst it's noticeable that there are less flags that adorn the area and not only do residents now feel more comfortable attending cross-community events but it has also become more acceptable to do so.

Outside Ballysally Focus on Family has introduced many people to diversity and this has included trips to the Festival of Colours and Meile in Belfast and St. Patrick's Day Celebrations in Derry. This had helped increase a greater sense of awareness and knowledge of others not to mention a stronger appreciation of residents' own culture and background.

The work that Focus on Family has engaged in has helped to underpin an ethos and acceptance of diversity. If there was any criticism levelled at Focus on Family it is one where it has become a little 'too cliquish' working closely with some organisations and not others and as already pointed out it probably needs to network more particularly with other organisations in the Ballysally area.

### **What has been your overall impression of working with Focus on Family and the work they do?**

As is clear from respondent's feedback this has been largely positive although there is clearly room for change and improvement. The staff to staff relationships are generally good, communication is effective and there's more than a willingness to support families. Members of staff are also friendly, there is also willingness to learn and for many it is a pleasure to work at Focus on Family and staff treat their work as more than just a job – it's akin to a vocation. Focus on Family ultimately offers a precious and vital service which benefits residents and users

Focus on Family has according to some succeeded in, although not intentionally, creating an 'Us & Them' within the Ballysally area which also creates vulnerability and therefore a negative impact and should be addressed. And whilst there were many positives in the relationship between staff there was also a need to address existing relationships in an effort to address underlying tensions.

The 'Us & Them' context refers to what's become more commonly known as 'community politics' within the area where through a lack of partnership or networking, little or poor communication and a failure to engage in an effective and meaningful way in either a personal and professional capacity helps to feed prejudice, misinformation and negative perception and as a result working in competition and isolation results thus creating a 'Us & Them' context.

## Respondents

Paul McLennan	Coleraine Education Community Project
Ruth, June, Chris, Roger, Annie, Charlene & Colette (Tutor)	Creative Writing Group
Julie Simpson	Elle Enterprises
Elaine Donnelly	Coleraine SureStart Partnership
Anna Wachala Kelly	Ballysally Youth & Community Centre
Gary Morgan	Volunteer & User (Parent)
Lynn McCullagh	User (Parent) & Resident
Sharon Hall	Staff Member & Parent
Ian Rainey	Staff Member (Buildings Supervisor)
June Gamble	Volunteer
Jacq Wray	Staff Member (Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator & Clinical Hypnotherapist)
Susan Comerford	Staff Member (Training Officer)
Brendan Patterson	Staff Member (Manager)
Bob Curran	Chairperson of Management Committee & Local Historian
Alison Adams	Committee Member and Volunteer (Reiki Master)
Anna Burton	User & Resident
Mark Barnes	User & Resident
Child Care Staff x 7	Staff Members
Dee McGrellis	IT Tutor
Paul Connolly	Pilates Tutor
Sarah Neill	Creative Crafts Tutor

## Biography of Evaluator

Fergal Barr works at Inside Out youth project at the Diamond Centre and has been involved in Youth Work full-time since leaving school in May 1987. During this time he has worked for a vast array of organisations across both statutory and voluntary sectors in diverse areas such as Youth Information, Education Welfare, Volunteering, Peace & Reconciliation, Conflict Management & Resolution, Community Relations, Mentoring, Street Work, Research and Participation. He was also a member of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland between 2000 and 2003 and has been a Youth in Action Assessor for the British Council since 2009.

Fergal is also a freelance trainer and has worked for a number of organisations including Co-Operation North/Ireland, The Warrington Project, SEEDS, NUS/USI, Leargas, Anna Lindh Foundation, Viennese Association of Youth Clubs and ELT in Austria, Klick e.V. in Germany and YouthArt in Turkey. He has co-ordinated, hosted, facilitated, and/or participated in more than 80 international programmes since 1998 working with partner organisations in more than 30 countries. He is a registered trainer with SALTO - [www.salto.org/fergalbarr](http://www.salto.org/fergalbarr)

Educated at St. Patricks Boys Primary School and St. Brigid's College in Derry Fergal also attended the University of Ulster at Jordanstown and Coleraine where he gained Diplomas in Youth Work and Management and a Masters in Education.

Fergal made legal history in Northern Ireland in 2001 by representing himself at an Industrial Tribunal and changing Employment Law (Test Case) concerning Unfair Dismissal.

Fergal has also published two books, *The Things People Say, Political Quotations from the Northern Ireland Peace Process* in 2008 and *The Yet Unknown Little Brown Book...A Collection of Poems* in 2011.