National Evaluation of On Track Phase Two

Families’ views and experiences of On Track – Qualitative research with service users

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The NatCen and PRB research teams
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from qualitative research with children and parents using On Track services in six areas. It forms one strand of the Phase 2 national evaluation of On Track commissioned by the DfES. On Track is a long-term multi-component initiative aimed at children and the families of children aged four to twelve who may be at risk of offending and anti-social behaviour. At the time of the study On Track was operational in twenty four areas of particularly high crime and high deprivation in England and Wales. The research was conducted by the National Centre for Social Research and the Policy Research Bureau between May 2005 and May 2006.

Introduction (Chapter 1)

- The primary objective of this strand of the evaluation was to provide an in depth understanding of the views and experiences of parents and children using On Track.

- The findings are based on 56 depth interviews with a cross section of parents (36) and children (20) aged 7 years and above, across six On Track areas. The children and parents were selected from On Track users interviewed for the first wave of the quantitative longitudinal Cohort Study.

Mapping risk and protective factors (Chapter 2)

- A number of the factors that are considered to either increase the risk or protect against engaging in antisocial behaviour were evident in the sample of parents and children involved in this research. Whilst these factors have been grouped at the level of the child, family and community, in practice they often overlap.

- At the child level reports varied about the degree to which children displayed volatile temperaments; low self esteem; health difficulties; poor peer relationships; and low educational attendance and attainment.

- At the family level there was variation in terms of the quality of parenting; whether children had a supportive relationship with an adult; the degree to which a parent had been involved in their child’s education; health difficulties amongst family members; discord within the family, antisocial behaviour by parents and other family members; and whether they were managing on a low income or living in cramped housing conditions.

- At the community level families varied as to whether they considered they were living in a safe area or not. This was assessed according to perceptions about the level of crime committed in an area and the degree to which they had access to good amenities and facilities for children.

- A ‘risk profile’ was constructed for each individual or family and this revealed three broad levels of risk. At one extreme were individuals/families who appeared to have a high-risk profile as they reported a number of risk factors and few protective factors. At the other extreme were families who appeared to be exposed to little or no risk. Between these were families who were exposed to
both risk and protective factors. The degree of risk for these people was
dependent on the range of factors (whether risk or protection) that predominated.

Accessing On Track services (Chapter 3)

- There was limited awareness of On Track prior to becoming a beneficiary of the service. Even once respondents were using On Track they seldom appreciated that the purpose of On Track was to help prevent children from engaging in anti-social behaviour in the future.

- Respondents had received varying levels of information about their On Track service. For children, school appeared to be the only source, whereas parents obtained information from On Track service providers; non-On Track service professionals; and through word of mouth from family and friends.

- The different routes on to On Track, and the degree of involvement respondents reported having in the process, varied according to whether the provision was universal or targeted.

- The use of universal services was typically initiated by a school or parent, whilst the use of targeted services generally resulted from a professional referral (for example, through a GP or via school). For obvious reasons, targeted services involved a much more formal assessment process than for universal services.

- Motivations for using targeted services revolved around the need for support for various behavioural and emotional difficulties with children or family members. In contrast reasons for using universal services included the pursuit of a hobby, sporting activity or new skill in the case of children and for parents it was the need for help with parenting, or out of school child care.

- Initial reactions to using On Track were shaped by motivations for using the service and the person who made this decision. Inevitably this was underpinned by whether a respondent was involved in a universal or targeted service. Positive views about using On Track were expressed by parents who were relieved to have found some support and children who were excited about the prospect of engaging in a fun activity. In contrast parents sometimes expressed resentment at being invited to join a parenting group.

Using On Track (Chapter 4)

- Respondents reported using one or more On Track and non-On Track services. Non On Track services being used were very similar in terms of content and delivery to On Track services.

- There were two broad types of universal services used: those that were leisure or sport based activities, and those that had concentrated on personal development.

- The users of leisure or sport based universal services were predominantly children. Typically these services provided the opportunity for children to pursue a hobby, skill or social activity. They were either delivered at school or in leisure centres and were always provided as a group activity by On Track or teaching staff. These services were sometimes provided at a subsidised rate and were
either run on a daily, weekend or holiday basis. The level of attendance and type
of involvement appeared to be optional and was determined by the user.
Examples of this type of universal service included a range of sport, after school
clubs, and holiday schemes.

- Both children and parents were using universal services which focused on
personal development. As with the other services they were group based and
usually provided by On Track staff at school or in a community setting. There
was usually no charge involved and these services seemed to require a greater
level of commitment, for example, a parent signing up to attend a computer
course for six weeks. There were three types of services: those aimed at
developing children; developing parents; and providing information and raising
awareness.

- Targeted services focused on managing problematic behaviour of children at
home and/or at school and supporting and developing parenting skills. Unlike
universal services, where the child or parent could be the sole recipient of On
Track services in a family, with targeted services, it was common for both the
child and parent in a family to be using the service.

- Targeted services were delivered free of charge at the user's home, at school or
in the community, for example via therapy centres, clinics, and more exceptionally
in a dedicated On Track site. Irrespective of location, the services were provided
by specially appointed On Track staff, child psychologists or health visitors - on a
one-to-one basis or in groups. Unlike universal services, there was usually an
appointment system in operation, and participation, though not compulsory,
appeared to be expected. The targeted provision involved five different types of
services: individual and group-based behaviour and anger management work;
supporting children through school, for example with transition to secondary
school work; parenting support services; counselling for children and parents; and
family support through home visiting and family therapy.

- At the point of the qualitative interviews respondents varied as to whether they
were still using On Track services or not. Aside from where services had simply
come to their natural end others had been withdrawn when the home or school
situation had improved, a child became too old to be eligible, or where a there
was a lack of demand or a resourcing issue. Otherwise parents reported a lack of
time as the main reason for them no longer using universal services. Children
mentioned a lack of other beneficiaries of their own age, being bullied, or simply
not enjoying the activity as their explanations given for ending their involvement.

Views about using On Track (Chapter 5)

- Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the wide array of activities
provided by universal services, though some criticised the predomination of
sports-based options. These activities were valued for providing opportunities to
acquire new skills; engage in pleasurable and constructive activities (some of
which would not ordinarily be affordable); and spend time doing things as a
family. Respondents also appreciated the focus on self-development of both
universal and targeted services.
Parents particularly valued face-to-face contact that parenting groups and the home visiting service offered. They welcomed the opportunity to meet other parents in groups and establish new friendships in an atmosphere of mutual support. However, not all parents welcomed some of the techniques used in the parenting groups, and role-play exercises came in for particular criticism.

Reflections about the quality of the service provided was linked to a number of factors: respondents’ perceptions about the impact it had made on them or their family; the relationship with and responsiveness of the On Track staff; the accessibility of the service (in terms of location, timing, and transport); the continuity of the On Track worker, which was felt to be particularly critical when receiving one-to-one targeted support; and the adequacy of the information that they received about the service.

Reactions to On Track services ending varied according to who made the decision about the service ending, prior awareness of the service ending, and the consequences of a service ending. On the whole, beneficiaries were satisfied where they had unilaterally decided to end contact or where they had jointly agreed this with the service provider. Where service providers made the decision reactions depended on whether the beneficiary felt that there was still a need for the service or not.

Impacts of On Track (Chapter 6)

The nature and extent of impacts identified varied according to the level of clarity respondents had about On Track, the type and level of On Track intervention, the quality of the service provided, and any other changes occurring in respondents’ lives when they were in contact with On Track.

In view of the design and timing of the evaluation it is not surprising that these impacts are primarily concerned with more immediate social, educational and personal issues rather than longer-term crime prevention.

Targeted services were believed to have improved the behaviour of children by teaching them new ways to address their anger and control their feelings and actions. As a consequence of children improving their behaviour at school parents felt they were now taking more interest and performing better academically and this had ensured they remained in mainstream schooling. There was, however, concern about the sustainability of the improved behaviour once the child was no longer receiving help from On Track. Parents reported working alongside the school to continue the approaches used by On Track or applying the techniques used by On Track more widely at home.

Universal services were believed to have helped children develop their social skills; acquire a new interest or skill; indirectly helped to improve performance at school by for example developing their concentration; improved their health and well-being; and increased parent-child communication as they had provided a talking point for them.

Parents reported how their parenting skills had developed as they learnt more effective ways of dealing with their child’s disruptive behaviour at home and improved their communication with their child. The groups had also provided opportunities to form new friendships and build emotional, practical and social...
networks; provided respite from caring responsibilities; and increased communication with school.

- There was also evidence of On Track helping family relationships. An improvement in the child’s behaviour meant that there were fewer disruptions at home, better relationships between siblings, and the newly acquired parenting skills helped parents to be calmer and deal more effectively with situations at home. An improvement in a child’s behaviour at school as a result of receiving On Track services also reduced the burden on parents dealing with school related problems. On Track had also helped to improve the physical health of parents and families as a result of for example the healthy eating initiatives at their child’s school and their child participating in leisure-based activities, which had encouraged them to also take up some kind of physical activity.

- Generally On Track helped children and parents’ feel less isolated and more supported, and had helped to increase their confidence and self-esteem.

- Respondents had much less to say about the impacts on the local community. Where raised the impacts mentioned were concerned with the local area feeling safer because children were now engaged in more constructive activities. It also helped to garner a sense of community from seeing the play centres and leisure-based facilities as a community resource as well as providing opportunities to develop social and support networks.

Conclusions and recommendations (Chapter 7)

- Apart from specifying the core interventions, there was a high degree of flexibility for how service providers developed, targeted and implemented them. As a consequence On Track managers have provided a range of different services and targeted them according to whether they are focusing on universal services, targeted services or a combination of both. The choice between universal and or targeted services has inevitably shaped the level and type of need that is being met in an area.

- Although we did not develop area ‘risk profiles’, we found that across the six geographical areas, one area had a concentration of high risk families, one area had a concentration of low risk families, and the rest had a combination of high and low risk families. Whilst we are unable to establish whether such flexibility of approach may result in service providers failing to ‘pick up’ high risk families we might have expected to find similar levels of need across our sample of all areas, given that the On Track pilot areas were all specifically chosen because they were areas of high social deprivation.

- Our evidence does, however, question the appropriateness of providing universal services when they are being used by families who seem to be highly protected with little or no exposure to any risk factors.

- Service providers do appear to be successfully targeting families without labelling or stigmatising them as ‘difficult’ or ‘at risk’.

- On Track was intended to complement existing services and there is evidence of seemingly complementary packages of support being provided. To a lesser degree there was also evidence of On Track plugging gaps in existing provision.
This study provides ample evidence of multiple intervention packages being delivered. Multiple interventions ensure that a more holistic approach can be taken to help both parent and child. In this way there is greater likelihood of services being more effective in increasing the resilience of the child to other risk factors if the parent, for example, can also be helped simultaneously with any difficulties they may be experiencing at home.

Where we have evidence of multi-agency working it appears that the On Track worker often plays a pivotal role in managing the communication and coordination of a package of different services. Multi agency working appears to be less effective in passing On Track beneficiaries on to other services when a particular intervention ends.

Assessments of On Track as a service often revolved around the quality of the relationship beneficiaries had with the On Track worker and their ability to meet their needs.

It is clear that the continuity of the On Track worker for targeted services is particularly important for building a trusting relationship and for facilitating honest and open dialogue. Given the personal nature of issues discussed in a one-to-one targeted service, the need to see the same worker was seen as paramount.

On Track was addressing some of the identified precursors to youth antisocial behaviour by providing: schools with a range of options to address, manage, and improve behaviour and performance at school to avoid exclusion; support for parents that helped to improve relationships within the family and increase the stability of the family environment for the child; out of school child care through after school clubs and community based sport and leisure activities, which further contributed to the stable environment and provided respite from caring responsibilities; and provided a safe and constructive way for children to spend their free time through universal leisure and sport-based activities. These activities had also enabled children to develop their social skills; acquire a new interest or skill; and improved their health and well-being.

On Track appeared to be reaching people who were reluctant to approach school or statutory services such as social services. This was the key way in which On Track appeared to be providing ‘added value’ over and above the services already available to the families. On Track was also brokering contact between parent and school by providing services for parents that were located at school, or that involved parents learning about how their children are taught at school.

Amongst the suggestions made by respondents for improving services for families, as well as addressing the issue of prevention, was to extend the target and focus of On Track. A popular suggestion was that On Track should be extended to include teenage children. This was driven by the feeling amongst parents that it was in the teenage years that they started to have difficulties coping with their children and that that was also when they were more likely to be exposed to and become involved in crime. Another suggestion was to have parents as the primary focus for On Track because children learnt their behaviour from their parents, and consequently, by supporting the parent, the programme would be supporting the child. Also the case was made for a programme to be designed, which treats all children as being potentially at risk rather than targeting one section of the community.
In view of the considerable lack of awareness of On Track there would be value in doing more to promote On Track as an independent and confidential source of help, particularly for parents who may be wary of seeking help from statutory services. It would also help to do more to manage beneficiaries' expectations about the service, specifically, the eligibility criteria for On Track, the remit of a particular intervention and the duration for which services will be provided.

In terms of delivery respondents argued for a wide range of delivery modes to be available, for example, having one off drop in services and those that require a longer-term commitment (and combine one-to-one sessions as well as work in groups).

The evidence presented has demonstrated the overwhelmingly positive way in which respondents assessed the service provided by On Track. The wide range of impacts identified by children and parents is testament to its beneficial role and value. In view of the design and timing of the evaluation, it is not surprising that these impacts are primarily associated with more immediate social, educational and personal issues rather than longer-term crime prevention. There are, however, early indications that it may be addressing some of the identified precursors to youth antisocial behaviour. This research contributes to the 'risk' and 'protection' literature by providing evidence about the processes by which these factors combine and interconnect with each other. Moreover, it identifies a number of issues to be considered in developing future interventions with similar aims, primarily focused on the need for appropriate targeting and effective promotion, and for measures to ensure that positive impacts can be sustained over the longer term.
1 INTRODUCTION

Forming part of Phase Two of the National Evaluation of On Track, this report presents the findings from the qualitative research with service users. It is based on interviews with parents and children about their perceptions and experiences of On Track and the impact it had on them. The research was carried out by a team of researchers from the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the Policy Research Bureau (PRB) between May 2005 and May 2006.

1.1 The On Track programme

On Track is a multi-component initiative aimed at families with children aged four to twelve who may be at risk of offending and antisocial behaviour in England and Wales. It was originally devised by the Home Office in 1999 as a pilot or demonstration programme, funded through the national Crime Reduction Programme. The aims, objectives and shape of the initiative have roots in the US programme Fast Track. A preventative intervention, targeting high risk school-age children, Fast Track aims to intervene in early onset conduct problems. Research has shown that the programme can be effective in reducing later conduct problems amongst children and adolescents as well as improving educational and social outcomes for adolescents. Recent evaluations in the US report effectiveness in a number of specific areas, for example in increased emotional and social coping skills, improved reading skills, better peer relations, better school grades and fewer behavioural difficulties (Conduct Problems Research Prevention Group 1999, 2002).

On Track was launched in December 1999 and since April 2001 has been incorporated into the Government’s £960m Children’s Fund programme. There are twenty three\(^1\) local On Track projects in England and Wales, each located in areas of high social deprivation and covering an average population of around 2,000 school-aged children. The towns, cities and boroughs in which On Track is operating at the time of this strand of the research are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bradford</th>
<th>Greenwich (London Borough)</th>
<th>Manchester</th>
<th>Rochdale</th>
<th>Southwark (London Borough)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brent (London Borough)</td>
<td>Haringey (London Borough)</td>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>Sandwell</td>
<td>Sunderland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridgend (S Wales)</td>
<td>Haverhill (Suffolk)</td>
<td>Oldham</td>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>Wirral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td>Kerrier (Cornwall)</td>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>Sheffield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easington (Co Durham)</td>
<td>Luton</td>
<td>Rhondda (South Wales)</td>
<td>Solihull</td>
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\(^1\) At the outset of the initiative the projects numbered twenty-four. Bristol On Track was absorbed into the Children’s Fund during 2004.
Central to the ethos of On Track is the need for co-operation and multi-agency working between health, educational and social service providers, youth offending teams, the police and relevant voluntary sector organisations. In this way, children at risk of offending are identified early and provided with services which continue into early adolescence. The services follow a similar model to Fast Track in the USA and include both universal and targeted approaches which are delivered at school and at home. The services are intended to use methods of delivery that are shown by research to be effective (or at least ‘promising’) in reducing antisocial behaviour and offending.

This type of integrative, ‘multidimensional’ approach is very much in keeping with the model of service design and delivery that has been advocated in successive Green Papers produced by the British Government on services for children and families (Supporting Families, 1998; Every Child Matters, 2003). The development of On Track can therefore be seen in the context of the general evolution of policy and practice in children’s services in the UK over the last decade. These include, for example, the larger Sure Start initiative, another multi-component programme launched in 1998 as part of the child poverty reduction strategy. Other more recent developments in this ‘family’ of initiatives aimed at reducing poverty, reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, and enhancing positive outcomes for children include the establishment of multi-agency Children’s Trust Pathfinders, bringing together health, education and social care services for children under one umbrella; the gradual introduction of information-sharing systems and protocols known as Information Sharing and Assessment (ISA); initiatives such as Extended Schools and the Safer Schools Partnership Programme; and of course the establishment of funding streams such as the Children’s Fund, the Parenting Fund, the Local Network Fund and the Family Support Grant Fund that have made it possible for a wide range of innovative new services to be set up and trialled across Britain.

1.1.1 Risk and protective factors in the development of antisocial behaviour in young people

It is now widely accepted that the likelihood of embarking on or persisting in a criminal career is strongly influenced by a combination of risk and protective factors in children’s individual, family and community ecology (Farrington 2000; Rutter, Giller and Hagell 1998). By risk factor we mean characteristics or attributes of an individual, family, social group, or community that increase the probability of certain disorders or behaviours arising at a later point in time. Protective factors, on the other hand, ‘inoculate’ or in some way mitigate risk factors. They promote resilience, which is the process by which individuals maintain positive functioning in the face of adverse circumstances (see for example Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000). Critically, protective factors are more than just the mirror-image or absence of a risk factor: they should add something to our understanding of the causal pathways to different outcomes.

The precise nature of the causal relationships between risk and protective factors and various types of negative and positive outcomes remains, however, unproven (Rutter, Giller and Hagell, 1998). The relative contributions of ‘nature’ (genetics) and ‘nurture’ (environment) remain in debate, and in respect of the pathway to antisocial behaviour in young people, there are questions about whether some risk factors are more influential than others, and whether certain combinations of factors may have greater impact on future behaviour than others. In addition, relatively more is known about risk factors than about protective factors: protective factors have been identified as playing a significant role in preventing criminal behaviour but much of the ‘theory of protection’ remains at an early stage of development.
Risk and protective factors are helpfully thought of in terms of the ‘ecological’ model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979), which provides a framework for understanding how factors that impinge on children and families nest together within a hierarchy of four interconnected levels – the level of the individual, the family, the community or neighbourhood, and at the level of the wider society or culture. The ecological perspective reminds us that children do not develop in a vacuum but within a complex web of interacting, interdependent factors. It reminds us that we cannot understand factors associated with one level of the model without also exploring those at other levels.

The prevention research literature has drawn attention to a number of specific risk and protective factors that have been shown to be ‘predictive’ of the likelihood of future types of behaviour (Rutter, Giller and Hagell 1998). At the level of the individual child, commonly accepted risk factors (or precursors) for youth offending include: early onset behaviour disorders such as hyperactivity; difficulties with learning, poor verbal and planning skills and poor educational attainment; problems with impulse-control; and a tendency to misinterpret social interactions and circumstances as more negative or threatening than they really are. Engaging in other related forms of antisocial behaviour including truancy and substance misuse is also a strong marker for offending at the level of the individual. At the family level, having a family that includes criminal offenders; family violence and discord; and poor parenting (including use of harsh or erratic discipline, low levels of parental monitoring and supervision, and poor parent-child communication) have all been shown to be associated with poor adolescent outcomes in general and youth offending in particular. At the community level, associating with antisocial peers is a major risk factor, as is growing up in a poor, crime-ridden neighbourhood where opportunities for crime are abundant and there is little else constructive for young people to do.

In terms of protective factors, certain temperaments seem to help young people avoid becoming involved in crime, and children who engage well with school and make strong peer relationships with those who are not themselves inclined to antisocial behaviour also seem more resistant to becoming involved in antisocial behaviour. Within the family, at least one strong and reliable relationship with an adult who takes a warm interest in the child’s development can be protective, and within the community, providing the opportunity to engage in constructive leisure activities and develop talents as well as taking an active interest in the wellbeing of younger members of the community may be especially protective.

Risk and protective factors share a number of common characteristics. They tend to be:

- overlapping (for example, poor mental health is a risk factor for a host of problems, from substance misuse to unemployment);
- often occurring in multiples (people tend to be subject to several related factors, rather than just one at a time);
- cumulative in effect (the higher the ‘dose’ of factors the greater the likelihood of certain outcomes);
- not static; they change over the life course (what may be a protective factor at one stage of a child’s development – for example, high levels of parental supervision – may become a risk factor in later stages, as children grow into adolescence and need more independence);
- not deterministic (factors do not ‘inevitably’ lead to certain outcomes, though they may nevertheless be ‘predictive’ in a statistical sense); and
- differential in effect (the same factors may impact differentially on individuals depending on other characteristics present in the individual’s ecology).
Official statistics show that young people are responsible for between a third and quarter of all crime in Britain. As tackling crime – and especially youth crime – has risen up the policy agenda, interest has grown in exploring effective models of prevention, and in understanding not just how to ‘treat’ the problem but also in how to prevent it arising in the first place. However, designing an intervention to avert poor outcomes and foster good ones requires an understanding of the complex process in which these factors interact so that it can function on a number of levels simultaneously. Certainly, interventions at the ‘treatment’ end of the scale for young offenders have had to be complex and relatively intensive to make much of a difference. The most successful interventions (such as Multi-Systemic Therapy [MST], for example; Henggeler et al 1998; Borduin et al 2000) ‘wrap around’ young people’s lives, operating at all levels of the young person’s ecology.

In spite of these challenges, the interconnected and complex nature of risk and protective factors also - theoretically at least - offers great promise for preventative intervention (i.e., ‘getting in early’ before children begin to engage in outright antisocial behaviours). If risk factors are interconnected, so too are protective ones, and if we can both reduce the risks in young people’s lives and at the same time counter risk by nurturing protective factors, the chances of preventing problems should be greatly increased. The more risk factors that are tackled and protective factors that are boosted, the greater the pay-off should be. Further, since many different forms of problem behaviour share common risk factors, tackling these factors is likely to reduce multiple problem behaviours and poor outcomes above and beyond those directly connected with crime and antisocial behaviour.

1.1.2 Intervening in antisocial behaviour: On Track interventions

Intervention programmes like On Track make three key basic theoretical assumptions:

- antisocial behaviour is multiply determined;
- the main risk factors which place children at increased likelihood of future offending can be reliably identified at an early stage; and
- certain types of intervention have been shown to be effective in terms of reducing the likelihood of future offending.

Although primarily concerned with longer-term crime prevention, the On Track programme was also devised in order to impact directly upon more immediate social and community problems – that is, the precursors to youth antisocial behaviour - such as under-achievement in school, poor school attendance, poor ‘readiness to learn’ on entry to primary school, and poor parenting. The movement of policy responsibility for On Track from the Home Office to the Department for Education and Skills via the Children and Young People’s Unit has undoubtedly enhanced the family support aspect of On Track’s identity. Moreover, broader child and family welfare outcomes may well be the most immediate concern of both the service providers and the users of On Track, rather than the risk of long-term criminal behaviour. Thus, although On Track is a ‘crime prevention’ initiative, its outward form has much in common with initiatives more frequently described in the UK as concerned with ‘family support’.
The central feature of On Track is the use of five ‘core’ interventions — many of them based on (primarily American) research that indicates effectiveness. The five core interventions, specified by the Home Office at On Track’s inception were:

- Home visitation
- Parent support and education
- Family therapy
- Home/school partnerships
- Pre-school education

In addition, to allow for local flexibility and innovation, another ‘specialist’ category of intervention was allowed to develop alongside these five, covering a multitude of different services. Many of the school-based elements of On Track projects fall into this group.

No formal guidance was issued to projects to specify how these different types of intervention might translate into models of service delivery. Thus, projects were left free to interpret the brief in widely varying ways. In addition, very few projects produced manuals documenting in detail how services were to be delivered. For these reasons, it is not known to what extent the models of service delivery employed by On Track projects conformed to the interventions shown in the literature to be effective.

The development of the On Track pilot programme, especially in relation to the five core interventions, has in general reflected well the attributes of risk and protective factors outlined above. Projects have been designed to be both targeted and universal, multi-dimensional and ongoing. Thus key assumptions underlying the On Track programme design are that:

- The concepts of risk and protection can be used appropriately by a wide range of service providers, in order to identify those groups of children who are most at risk of criminal or antisocial behaviour.
- Providers then work with children and families identified as most at risk in ways that ensure that they positively engage in particular interventions on a voluntary basis, and are not stigmatised.
- The provision of two or more core interventions at critical points through the child’s life is likely to be more effective than the provision of only one type of core intervention.
- There should be a focused ‘continuum of care’ in which children are tracked through their development, and whereby agencies should co-operate in providing appropriate services as and when required.

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the objectives, design and conduct of this strand of the evaluation. It is followed by six further chapters: Chapter 2 maps the risk and protective factors present in the lives of the service users included in this research; Chapter 3 considers how children and/or parents accessed On Track services for the first time and the factors that facilitated this contact; Chapter 4 explores respondents’ experiences of using On Track services; Chapter 5 discusses respondents’ views of the service they received from On Track; and Chapter 6 examines the impacts of On Track on individuals, their families and the local community. The final chapter reflects upon the value and role of On Track and outlines some suggestions for change as recommended by the study participants.
1.2 About the Phase Two evaluation

Phase One of the national evaluation of On Track was conducted by the University of Sheffield between 2000 and 2004 (Doherty and Kinder, France et al., Harrington et al., Hine and Harrington; 2004).

Phase Two of the evaluation (2003-2006) has been carried out by a consortium led by PRB in collaboration with the NatCen and the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science (University of London). The aim of the evaluation was to measure the short- and (to a lesser extent) medium-term outcomes of On Track for children, families and communities.

Phase Two consists of six main strands of research:

- **Schools survey**: explored the risk levels of pupils in On Track areas and if/how these have changed (lead organisation: PRB)
- **Tracking strand**: provided central monitoring information about each of the 23 On Track areas and about On Track as a whole (lead organisation: PRB)
- **Community profiling**: collected neighbourhood-level statistics to describe the communities in which On Track services are being delivered (lead organisation: University College London)
- **Cohort Study**: employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine children and families' views and experiences of using On Track services, and its impact on them (lead organisations: NatCen and PRB)
- **Qualitative research amongst service providers**: explored process and operational aspects of On Track and the impacts of the initiative on families and professionals (lead organisations: NatCen, with PRB)
- **Qualitative research amongst schools**: explored how On Track is working from the perspective of primary schools in On Track areas (lead organisation: PRB)

Each strand, with the exception of the qualitative research with schools, has reported separately. An integrated synthesis report on the overall messages arising from the study will be produced by the end of 2006.

1.3 Aims of the qualitative research with On Track service users

The primary objective of this strand of the evaluation was to provide an in-depth understanding of the views and experiences of parents and children using On Track. In order to achieve this, the research sought to explore the:

- characteristics of the families using On Track services, and the circumstances within which On Track interventions were received;
- motivations and triggers for accessing On Track services, and initial expectations
- range of On Track services received;
- experience of using On Track services and dealing with service providers;
- views about On Track services and the degree to which the service met user expectations and needs;
- impacts of On Track interventions on individuals, their families and their community; and
- suggestions for how On Track could be improved to better meet user needs.

In exploring these issues, this strand also aimed to amplify and extend understanding of the quantitative longitudinal Cohort Study.
1.4 Research design and conduct

A qualitative approach was adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of parents and children’s views and experiences of On Track. A total of 56 in-depth interviews were carried out, 36 with parents and 20 with children aged seven years and over, across six On Track areas. In line with the quantitative longitudinal Cohort Study the decision was made to exclude children aged under seven years.

The children and parents were selected from On Track users interviewed for the first wave of the quantitative longitudinal Cohort Study, who had agreed to take part in further research. The original intention was to select the sample from the same On Track areas as those covered by the qualitative work with On Track service providers\(^2\), in order that we could compare experiences and views of those involved in the same On Track project and operating in the same local context. However, the low numbers identifying themselves as On Track service users in two of our selected areas limited our ability to select a follow-up sample in all six areas. As a consequence two of the areas were replaced.

In order to maintain the confidentiality assured in the service providers report, the areas will not be identified. However, the six locations were chosen to reflect diversity in terms of:

- On Track service delivery structures (‘in-house’ and ‘contracted out’ models of delivery);
- universal open access and targeted services;
- geographical spread;
- regional or locality variations including inner city, urban and rural locations; and
- ethnic composition of local population.

The sample was designed to ensure coverage of the key sub-groups within the target population in order to identify and explain variations in the nature of their experiences and views. In order to achieve this, the sample was *purposively* selected according to a range of key characteristics identified as relevant to the families such as age of child, gender and ethnicity of parent and child, family type (one- or two-parent), and household employment status.

The intention had been to carry out a total of 60 interviews (42 with parents and 18 with children): 7 with parents and 3 with children in each of the 6 areas. However, the low numbers identifying themselves as On Track users limited the overall sample population from which we were recruiting, and resulted in a total sample of 36 parents and 20 children. This also limited our ability to select our sample purposively according to the above range of characteristics.

Respondents were initially approached by letter and subsequently recruited by telephone (see recruitment documents Appendix A). Parent interviews were organised to take place before the child interview. Written consent was obtained from children before their interviews commenced. The purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the guarantee of confidentiality were reiterated.

The interviews were carried out between November 2005 and January 2006. They were exploratory and interactive in form so that questioning could be responsive to the experiences and circumstances of the parents and children involved. They were

\(^2\) Graham, J., Colyon, J., Bhabra, S., Woodfield, K. & Ghate, D. with Hauari, H. *Qualitative study of service providers’ perspectives*, London: DCSF RR 754 and PRB, May 2006. References are made to the interviews with the On Track service providers throughout this report when comparing the user and provider experiences of On Track.
based on topic guides that outlined the key themes to be addressed and the specific issues for coverage within each. Although topic guides ensured systematic coverage of key points across interviews, they were used flexibly to allow issues of relevance to parents and children to be covered. Where necessary we used visual prompts to encourage the children to participate. Topic guides and other materials used in the interviews can be found in Appendix B.

The first wave of the longitudinal Cohort Study\(^3\) had revealed lower than anticipated levels of usage of On Track. In order to assess whether this may have been due to low levels of awareness of On Track, service maps, developed from the interviews with service providers, were used to establish which On Track services had been received. Information sheets containing responses from the Cohort Study were also used to confirm On Track usage. Examples of the service maps and information sheets can be seen in Appendix C.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the respondents' permission. Parents were offered a cash incentive and the children a gift token as an appreciation of their time.

1.5 Analysis and presentation of the findings

Verbatim transcripts, produced from the recorded interviews, were then subject to rigorous content analysis using, ‘Framework’\(^4\) a method, developed by NatCen. This involves systematically sifting, summarising and classifying verbatim material according to key issues and themes, within a thematic matrix. Further classificatory and interpretative analyses were then derived from the analytic charts and these formed the basis of the findings reported in subsequent chapters. The thematic framework used for the analysis can be found in Appendix D.

The findings reported have been illustrated with the use of verbatim quotations, case illustrations and examples. Where necessary pseudonyms have been used and the details of certain cases changed slightly to protect anonymity. Where appropriate, views and experiences have been attributed either to children or parents, or to ‘respondents’ where they apply to both parents and children.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by the parents and children. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the small sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions.

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1.6 Sample profile

A total of 20 children and 36 parents took part in the research. As can be seen from Table 2, the qualitative sample was generally well distributed across the key sample variables.

In common with the quantitative longitudinal Cohort Study, the qualitative sample was skewed in terms of gender, with more boys in the sample of children and more mothers in the sample of parents. For the children, this partly reflected the higher proportion of boys using On Track services than girls. Also, as in the longitudinal Cohort Study, interviews were carried out with the sole or main carer, and this was predominantly the mother of the child.

In contrast with the survey evidence, the qualitative sample included more families receiving multiple rather than single interventions. A number of these respondents, however, had reported being single service users in the first wave of the longitudinal Cohort Study. This appears to suggest that lack of awareness of On Track has resulted in respondents underreporting the range of services they were using. The opportunity to probe and explore responses in more depth during the qualitative interviews enabled us to establish that respondents were using more than one service.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2  Sample profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child respondent</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Base = 20 children</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
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<td>11+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
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<tr>
<td>African</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent respondent</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Base = 36 parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base = 36 families</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family type</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>One parent family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two parent family</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OT intervention:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>service pathway and number of interventions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Base = 36 families</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>No. of OT interventions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>OT intervention:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Family and parenting support including:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Community-based leisure activities including:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychiatric / therapeutic</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.7 On Track services accessed by sample

An overview of the wide range of services being accessed by the sample is presented in the following sections. The details are primarily based on the accounts of the On Track service providers (Graham et al, 2006).

1.7.1 School-based services

**Massage in schools**

Massage was a universal service delivered in schools by an On Track worker or by a teacher trained by On Track. It involved the On Track worker teaching children massage with the aim of using this to calm children so that they could concentrate more effectively in class.

**After school club**

After school clubs were either delivered as a universal or targeted service. In both cases they involved play and social activities. Targeted after school clubs tended to work on a one-to-one basis with children, using various tasks to manage their behaviour. Some targeted after school clubs also provided support for parents dealing with a child’s disruptive behaviour at home.

**Transition from primary to secondary school**

Support with the transition from primary to secondary school was either delivered as a universal service to all children in year 6 or targeted to those children who were displaying difficulties managing the transition. The aim was to ease the transition from primary to secondary school by discussing concerns about the move and providing an opportunity to visit the new school and meet some of the teaching staff. Where such services were targeted, these discussions would take place in small groups or on a one-to-one basis.

**Learning mentor scheme**

The learning mentor scheme was targeted at children struggling with the transition to secondary school, particularly those with learning or behavioural difficulties at home. The service involved talking about the roots of difficult behaviour and discussing strategies for dealing with this. The service was provided before or after joining secondary school and was delivered during the school day either in the classroom or in a learning mentor room/area. It could also involve home visits.

**Small group / one-to-one anger management work**

Anger management was a targeted service usually delivered in school, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Sessions addressed anger management, behavioural issues and problems with concentration in class, and aimed to develop techniques to manage behaviour and anger.
1.7.2 Family and parenting support

Parenting groups
Parenting groups were either a universal or targeted service, with the latter aimed at parents with a higher level of need. These groups were held in school or in another location in the community, during or outside school hours. The aim of the service was to improve parenting skills by considering, for example, communication, behaviour, sex education for children, and personal hygiene. They also aimed to address the personal needs of the parents through, for example, exploring issues around self esteem and relaxation techniques.

Home visiting service
Home visiting was a targeted service delivered in the user’s home with the aim of helping families cope with difficult situations. This approach could involve consideration of specific aspects of family life such as morning/bedtime/eating routines, family relationships, and parenting skills. The On Track worker might also link families to other services, and may accompany them to new services for the first time, as well as providing advocacy or emotional support.

Child and family support
Child and family support was targeted at harder-to-reach families and those with a higher level of need, either via school or at their homes. The service involved therapeutic work which was delivered on a one-to-one basis with different family members, to parent and child, or to the whole family together.

1.7.3 Community-based leisure activities

Leisure centre activities
Leisure centre activities were delivered as a universal service to provide children with an opportunity to socialise, gain confidence, and develop a healthy lifestyle through sport and other recreational activities. The activities were free or charged at a minimum level.

Swimming club
Swimming clubs were provided as a universal service and delivered in a local leisure centre. In addition to teaching children to swim, lessons were also seen as a diversionary activity, and as helping children relate to one another and develop social skills.

1.7.4 Psychiatric / Therapeutic

Child psychologist
Sessions with a child psychologist were offered as a targeted service to address issues around school attendance, behaviour, family relationships and self esteem. The specifics of the sessions were individually determined and the service was delivered on a one-to-one basis.
2 MAPPING RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In order to understand more about the circumstances and lives of On Track beneficiaries, this chapter provides contextual evidence about the respondents in our sample. These profiles were developed by comparing the accounts of respondents’ circumstances, views and experiences with the risk and protective factors identified in the literature. As this evidence was collected for contextual purposes there was a limit to how far we could investigate the factors with individuals. As a result there is some variation in the degree to which individual risk or protective factors were discussed. Amongst the areas discussed were household composition; employment status; family relationships; experiences and views about parenting; and a child’s temperament and schooling.

The profile presented here is based on the point at which respondents were interviewed (and not the point at which they first accessed On Track). At this stage they had either recently started to use an On Track service, been in contact with On Track for some time, or were no longer receiving an On Track service. Where more than one On Track service was received, respondents had often been using different services for varying periods of time. The nature and duration of contact that respondents had with On Track will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

We begin by describing the risk and protective factors present in the sample and then, using specific individuals, illustrate the ways in which the factors presented in each case.

2.1 Risk and protective factors in On Track service users’ lives

As can be seen from Table 3 below, McKeown and Ghate (2004) suggest a range of factors at the level of the individual child, family and community that are considered to increase the risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour. As will be seen in the following sections, a range of these factors were also present amongst our sample. Whilst the factors have been grouped at the level of the child, family and community; in practice they often overlap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volatile temperament</td>
<td>Poor parenting (including harsh or erratic discipline; low levels of parental monitoring and supervision, poor parent-child communication)</td>
<td>Growing up in a poor, crime-ridden neighbourhood where there are opportunities for crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
<td>Absence of a strong relationship with an adult who takes a warm interest in the child’s development</td>
<td>Little or no opportunities to engage in constructive use of leisure time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Lack of parental involvement in child’s education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships with those inclined to antisocial behaviour</td>
<td>Poor health and wellbeing of family members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor educational engagement and attainment (including truancy and exclusion)</td>
<td>Discord within the family (including absence of family cohesion)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antisocial behaviour by parent or family</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.1 At child level

The following factors were present at the level of the individual child:

Temperament

Children with a volatile and sometimes violent temperament were described by parents as being ‘fiery’, ‘quick tempered’ or ‘aggressive’. Comments from children also suggested the presence of this sort of temperament when they spoke of becoming ‘really mad’ and when ‘no one can control it [their behaviour]’. In contrast, there were children who displayed a gentler nature and were described by their parents as being ‘affectionate’, or ‘very loving and caring’.

Self-esteem

Low self-esteem appeared to be an issue for children even if it was not specifically mentioned by children or parents. Instead it was implicitly suggested when parents described aspects of their child’s views and behaviour. For example, a parent described how her son was always ‘trying so hard to be accepted’ and that he got into trouble doing something to impress children who did not like him. Conversely, there were parents who talked about their child in a way which implied they were socially and academically confident.

Health and well-being

A range of health difficulties were reported. These included ADHD, depression, asthma, sub-clinical autism, dyslexia, diabetes and various phobias. Poor physical and mental health was reported as having affected a child’s life in three ways:

- Causing them to be absent from school for treatment, which in turn could impact on the quality of their work and attainment of qualifications;
- Resulting in poor behaviour at home or at school and thus shaping their ability to relate to family, friends or teachers; and
- Causing deterioration in the quality of the relationship between the parent and child as the parent found it difficult to cope.

Peer relationships

Poor peer relationships was an issue for parents who were concerned about their children having friends who ‘weren’t trying very hard’ at school, or who were a bad influence. An example of the latter involved a parent who explained that ‘when he hangs out with kids his own age, he’s home on time, if he’s with older kids, he stays out late….they fill his head with loads of crap’.

Although such relationships could be seen as a risk, friendships did also provide a source of emotional support, which is considered in the literature as a protective factor. A case in point involved a child who described his friends as being ‘naughty’ but added that he could ‘talk to friends about things I don’t want anyone else to know about’.

A desire was expressed by parents for children to form friendships with ‘well-behaved’ or academically bright children who would be a ‘good influence on him [child] because it would make him work harder’.

Other evidence of strong supportive friendships was conveyed by children describing long-standing friendships that originated when they were at nursery, or more recent
friends with whom they shared common interests. It was these friends that the children turned to - as one child put it: ‘I talk to my best friend if something was bothering me’.

**Educational attendance and attainment**

Children with poor attendance records at school had either lost interest in school and consciously decided to play truant, or they were reluctant to go to school for a specific reason such as being bullied. In these cases they were sometimes receiving help and support outside of school. There were also cases of children being excluded or suspended from school because of their bad behaviour.

Evidence of poor performance at school was either reported by parents’ accounts of a child being ‘behind in his work’ or by parents and children discussing poor test and SATs results.

In contrast, there were children who spoke positively about school. They described enjoying school, liking their teachers, and doing well in tests. They appeared to take pride in never having ‘bunked off’ or for being excluded. Children also reported being proud of the prizes and awards that they had received for their achievements. Parents expressed similar levels of satisfaction when they recounted such events. Underpinning this was an appreciation that ‘it’s important to do well at school because you need education to get a good job’.

### 2.1.2 At family level

The following factors were present at the level of the family:

**Parenting skills**

Our sample included families where there appeared to be little or no evidence of parental monitoring or supervision. Disagreements between parents about the appropriate approach to parenting could also result in the child having little or no guidance. Sometimes parents confessed that their parenting skills might be poor or that they found parenting a struggle as a consequence of their emotional difficulties and problems.

Evidence of stronger parenting skills was illustrated where parents described:

- their ‘routines’ and ‘house rules’;
- placing an emphasis on good communication with their children such as, for example, ‘making time for a one on one’ with their child; and
- treating the parent-child relationship as ‘an equal partnership’ as far as possible. An example of this involved a parent who talked about always offering her child an explanation for her guidance and rules.

**Relationship with an adult**

There was evidence of children having reliable supportive relationships with parents, grandparents or other members of the extended family. In situations where parents had separated, there were cases where the child saw the non-resident parent regularly and maintained a good relationship with both parents.

The loss or deterioration of family relationships illustrated their importance to children. Parental separation was felt to have had a detrimental effect on the quality of some parent-child relationships. Parents in these situations sometimes made a direct link between a parent leaving the family home and the child’s behaviour deteriorating, or their going ‘off the rails’. Also, there were reports of a child’s
behaviour changing whenever they stayed with the non-resident parent, as a consequence of their routine being disrupted. In addition, a separation could lead to families moving to a new location which could result in children losing touch with their friends.

Otherwise the loss or deterioration of a supportive relationship was mentioned in relation to a:

- parent, friend or relative dying and
- parent’s hours of work or study changing or increasing so that the amount of time they could spend at home with their child was reduced. Similarly, parents having to work away from home also resulted in a reduction of time spent with children.

**Parental involvement in child’s education**

Parents varied as to whether they had proactively got involved in their child’s education or been invited or compelled to discuss this by the school. Schools had initiated such meetings to investigate the reasons why a child was struggling or having difficulties, either in their school work or in relationships at school, or having problems at home, and the appropriate action that should be taken to deal with these issues.

The degree of involvement that parents initiated ranged from attending parents’ evenings or other events such as open days to taking an active interest or role in the school, for example, by becoming a governor or joining the PTA. Another way parents involved themselves in their children’s education was by discussing their progress at school with them. It was clear that certain parents had emphasised the importance of their children getting good qualifications - ‘getting a couple of GCSEs is no longer enough’. Another illustration of a positive attitude to education was a parent who was considering private tuition in order to ensure that her child got a place in a good secondary school.

However, parents sometimes found it hard to involve themselves in their child’s education or to seek help from the school. Examples of such difficulties involved attempts to discuss a child being bullied or to address a child’s reluctance to attend school.

**Health and wellbeing of family members**

The health and wellbeing of other family members was a factor in cases where siblings had been diagnosed with epilepsy, Aspergers or autism. This placed additional strain on the parent caring for the sibling and could affect the quantity and quality of time they had with the On Track child. However, in circumstances where extended family members lived locally, they could provide a valuable support network.

The parent’s emotional wellbeing could similarly shape their relationship with the On Track child. Some parents reported having had abusive childhoods or violent relationships with ex-partners, which had resulted in them having emotional and mental health problems, such as depression, or a nervous breakdown, or self-harming either currently or in the past. These experiences appeared to have affected the development of their parenting skills as they described having difficulties communicating with or relating to their child.
Discord within the family

Exceptionally, there was evidence of discord within the family in the form of domestic violence and this had resulted in an injunction against a parent. In contrast, there were parents who described more harmonious interactions within the family. These involved discussing issues openly, making decisions collectively, spending time together and engaging in activities as a family.

Antisocial behaviour by parent and family

There were exceptional reports of parents engaging in antisocial behaviour. Where this had occurred, it involved substance misuse or violent behaviour, which had led to them being arrested.

Family poverty

As respondents were not specifically asked for details about their financial situations we cannot assess levels of family poverty amongst our sample. However, references were sometimes made by parents to living in cramped conditions or in poorly-maintained homes. There were also parents who described difficulties managing on a low income or struggling because the family was not receiving child support from the non-resident parent. Alongside these families, there were other parents who appeared to have well-paid jobs and did not make such references.

2.1.3 At community level

The following factors were present at the level of the community:

Safety of area and adequacy of amenities

Unsafe local areas were commonly described as being subject to vandalism (e.g. burning cars, broken windows), racism, burglary, drugs, prostitution, and occasionally gang murders. There were also reports of respondents’ homes being burgled, sometimes on more than one occasion. Also there were recollections of children finding or stepping on a discarded syringe. These experiences had made parents fearful of letting their children play outside. However, the presence of ‘good neighbours’ for parents and ‘friends from school’ living locally could help to overcome some of the difficulties experienced by living in what respondents perceived as ‘a bad neighbourhood’.

Respondents varied as to whether they felt there were sufficient facilities in the local area. In circumstances where there were limited facilities available, it was said by parents that this resulted in children ‘hanging around street corners doing things they’re not supposed to’. Children described their local areas as ‘boring’ because there were no youth clubs or parks, or very little for them to do. Even where there were facilities such as parks and open areas, they had sometimes been vandalised or parents considered them unsafe for children to go to unsupervised. The lack of affordable childcare was also noted as a problem by parents, as was the insufficient number of school places to match local need.

In contrast, other respondents talked of living in safe areas with ample space for children to play outdoors. They also reported having access to good local leisure facilities, a wide range of shops and good transport provision.
2.2 Interaction between risk and protective factors

Having established the range of risk and protective factors present within the sample, a ‘risk profile’ was constructed for each individual or family. The risk profiles revealed three broad levels of risk. At one extreme were individuals/families who appeared to have a high risk profile as they were exposed to a number of risk factors and few protective factors. At the other extreme were individuals/families with a low risk profile who were exposed to a number of protective factors and few or no risk factors. Between these were families who appeared to be exposed to both risk and protective factors. The degree of risk for these people depended on the range of factors (whether risk or protection) that predominated.

**Families at lower risk**

In this group were families for whom evidence of risk was found at the community level only. These households were in full employment and had no serious health problems. The On Track child was actively participating and performing well at school, and had supportive relationships with family and friends. Below is an example of family with a low risk profile.

Taliq (On Track child) is 12 years old and he lives with his parents and his older sister. Both parents are in employment: his father works as mechanic and his mother is a part-time teaching assistant. They have lived in their home, which is owned by Taliq’s grandparents, for 16 years. They described how the local area has deteriorated with the increase of drug deals being carried out in cars parked near their home. Also, they recalled a stolen van being set alight last autumn and problems with children banging on their door and running away. Apart from Taliq’s eczema, the family is in good health. Members of the extended family live locally and the children get on well and play together. At school Taliq is doing well although his teacher wants him to improve his handwriting, which he found quite upsetting.

**Families at medium risk**

This group comprised families exposed to both risk and protective factors. In these families the impact of the risk factors could be mitigated by a range of the protective factors. For example, an informal network of family and friends might provide valuable support for a family coping with a severely disabled child. Equally, the risk posed by a child displaying disruptive behaviour at school might be reduced by the availability of local facilities for constructive use of leisure time and a strong supportive relationship with a parent. Conversely, the impact of such protective factors could be undermined by the existence of certain risk factors. The following case illustration presents a medium risk family.
Ann is 9 years old and lives with her mother, Val and her mother’s partner, and her younger brother, Andy, aged 4. Ann’s mother is training to be a classroom assistant, and her partner is a builder.

Val suffered from very severe post-natal depression when Andy was born, for which she received support from a health visitor. During this time she suspected that something was wrong with Andy and had difficulty getting him diagnosed with severe eczema, which is still a problem.

At the moment Val is worried about the consequences of Ann’s current school merging with another local school that has a lot of bullying and truancy. Generally she thinks Ann’s current school is a good one because they do a lot with the children. However, when she tried to get help for Ann and others who were being bullied at the current school she did not feel it was dealt with severely enough. For about six months last year Ann started complaining that she was bored at school and did not want to go. She also used to become emotional and get angry with her brother. Val suggested to her teachers that Ann was behaving in this way because she was under-stimulated in class. The school was not very responsive until they saw her SAT results and realised how bright she was. In the interim, Val bought books and tried to help her study at home.

Val has a good relationship with Ann, they do activities together and she helps her with homework. Val sends her children to their room if they misbehave and only smacks them as a last resort. Ann is very outgoing to the point that Val worries that she might talk to strangers.

There is very little for children and young people to do locally. There is a local park but Val does not let them go there unaccompanied because it is overlooked by houses. There is, however, a good local bus service and not much crime in the area. Also the local area is being developed as the older houses are being replaced by new homes.

Families at higher risk

These were families exposed to significant risk factors and few or no protective factors. In these cases there was usually evidence of risk factors at the child, family and community levels. The following case illustration describes a higher risk family.

Pete is 10 years old. He lives with his mother, Anne, two older brothers – Steve and Dom - and his 20 month old baby sister, Kerry. They have been renting their home from the local housing association for the last 12 years. Despite the local area being ‘rough’, with drug users and prostitutes hanging around, the family feels settled. It would also be difficult to move as their house has a purpose-built extension to accommodate Pete’s middle brother Steve, who has Asperger’s, dyspraxia and joint problems.

Pete has ADHD and has been prescribed Ritalin. He recently stopped going to school due to the problems he was having, preferring to go to a hospital school twice a week. At his old school he used to have panic attacks because he found it hard to cope in large classes and struggled to understand what was being said if more than one person was talking. Anne used to take him to the school gates but he would often refuse to go into school. On occasions when she did manage to persuade him to go in, he would be well-behaved and so the school did not see him being disruptive. As a consequence, they did not feel there was a problem and would not statement him, even though he was falling behind and needed extra help.
When Pete was much younger, Anne had a breakdown due to her difficulties bringing up Steve. At the moment Anne is finding it difficult to cope with Kerry alongside Steve and is back on anti-depressants. Anne also looks after her brother who has learning disabilities and lives across the road. They have no family living locally who can help.
3 ACCESSING ON TRACK SERVICES

This chapter describes the processes by which respondents accessed On Track for the first time and the factors that motivated them to do this. As will be seen, there was limited awareness of On Track prior to people using the service. The different routes to On Track and the degrees of involvement respondents reported having in the process, varied according to whether the provision was universal or targeted. The use of universal services was typically initiated by a school or parent, whilst the use of targeted services generally resulted from a professional referral (for example, through a GP or via school). In addition, for obvious reasons, targeted services involved a much more formal assessment process than for universal services. Equally, motivations for using targeted services revolved around behavioural and emotional difficulties with children or family members, in contrast with the more practical reasons for accessing universal services.

Respondents’ initial reactions to using On Track were shaped by the ways in which they had come to access the service, and who had made the decision that led to this. Much of the evidence presented in this chapter is based on the accounts of parents rather than children, as they tended to have a greater involvement where formal assessment and decision making processes about using On Track occurred.

3.1 Awareness of On Track

Prior to using the service there was a low level of awareness of On Track. Even once respondents were accessing On Track they seldom appreciated that the purpose and role of On Track was to help prevent children from engaging in antisocial behaviour in the future.

Respondents’ can be classified into three types according to their initial awareness and understanding of On Track:

**Little or no awareness of On Track**

Parents with little or no awareness of On Track struggled to recall their initial impressions of the service and attributed this to the lack of promotional literature at the time. As a consequence these parents found it hard to differentiate between On Track services and those provided by other organisations.

**Service-specific awareness of On Track**

Parents with some level of awareness tended to equate the service with the specific intervention/s they had accessed. This appeared to influence parents’ views of the function of On Track as a whole, as they had not received information about other aspects of the service. Consequently, anger management sessions were equated with On Track aiming to help children with behavioural problems, or home visits with the development of parenting skills. Other examples included users of after school clubs and play schemes associating On Track with providing out of school child care, or those attending cooking classes linking On Track with the promotion of healthy eating.

Children also spoke about On Track in a similar way, for example, seeing anger management classes helping them to ‘better behave at school’, or healthy eating classes helping them to ‘learn to cook better’.
Broader awareness of On Track

More exceptionally, parents’ observations suggested a broader awareness of On Track. Their comments reflected the objectives of the programme rather than just the service they were receiving. These ranged from a very generic image of On Track as being an ‘organisation that helps with families’, to a more child-focused idea of On Track being there ‘to help children and young people of society …give them some rules or guidelines on how to behave and deal with things’. These types of comments tended to be from parents who were also using On Track.

Generally, these parents tended to be using targeted services and, as will be seen, had therefore received more information about On Track. Where parents using universal services exhibited this degree of awareness, it appeared to be due to a more intensive promotion of the programme in their local area. Otherwise parents’ knowledge had resulted from discussions with other professionals, such as a parent who had been given information about On Track by a relative who worked for Sure Start.

3.1.1 Sources of awareness of On Track

Respondents reported having received varying amounts of information about their On Track service. School appeared to be the sole source of information for children, and was also by far the most common source of information for parents. Other sources of information for parents included:

- On Track service providers such as health visitors, social workers and at leisure centres;
- non-On Track service professionals such as GPs or Sure Start or other providers of support for domestic problems or drug use; and
- informally, through word of mouth from family, friends and other parents.

3.1.2 Factors influencing awareness

There were two main factors that influenced respondents’ awareness of On Track. Not surprisingly, these factors were underpinned by the type of service being provided – principally whether it was universal or targeted.

- **Beneficiaries of the service and location where delivered**

  Awareness varied according to who was the beneficiary of the service and the location where it was delivered. For example, parents tended to have very low awareness of universal services which were provided for children at school, during school hours. Parents had not always been consulted about the provision of such services, and were sometimes unaware that their child was receiving any service at all. Where they were aware of a service being provided, they usually presumed that it was part of a school initiative. For example, the On Track ‘free fruit at school’ scheme was presumed to be part of the school target to obtain healthy eating status.
Similarly, out of school clubs were not necessarily identified with On Track. This may be because families had previously accessed an after school club or had used various leisure centre facilities which had not been connected to On Track. As a consequence, they did not necessarily realise the provider had changed to providing these services via On Track.

In contrast, there were higher levels of awareness where parents (with their children) were also using services. This was the case irrespective of whether it was a universal service such as an open access parenting skills course, or a targeted service such as family therapy, as the details about the service would have been sent directly to the parent. Parents also tended to have been sent information about services targeted at children, for example anger management sessions, and this was regardless of whether the service was delivered at school or elsewhere in the community.

- **Involvement in decision to use On Track**
  The extent of involvement in the decision to use On Track services was another factor that could shape awareness levels. Targeted services entailed a formal assessment process which involved parents and children. As such, it followed that these respondents were better informed. Parents who had actively approached universal school or community based services such as before and after school clubs or leisure centres also tended to be well-informed. However, as these services did not usually involve a formal assessment process, respondents might lack awareness of the connection between the service they were using and On Track.

### 3.2 Referral to On Track for the first time

There were three referral routes on to On Track – via a school, by a parent, or by a local non-On Track service provider. Once respondents had accessed an On Track service, some were referred to other services – both On Track and non-On Track. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4. Here we shall focus on the experience of referral to On Track for the first time.

**School-initiated**

Schools played a key role in referring respondents to On Track services. For universal school-based services, schools adopted one of three approaches, which all involved writing to parents. These letters were variously designed to:

- inform them about their child’s participation in an On Track scheme that the school was running, such as the free fruit at school scheme;
- provide details of services such as after school or breakfast clubs, and to invite them to put their child’s name down for the service; and/or
- seek consent for their child to participate. Examples where this approach was adopted included seeking consent for children to participate in cookery classes, and in the massage at school scheme, and in leisure activities.

Occasionally, schools had also invited parents to promotional and introductory sessions to explain or demonstrate an initiative, for example, the massage at school scheme.

For targeted services, the usual practice was to invite parents into school to discuss the situation and then for the school to make a referral to On Track. More exceptionally it appeared that parents had received a letter from school seeking
permission for their child to access a targeted school-based service such as one-to-one sessions for behavioural difficulties.

**Parent-initiated**

Parents had sometimes initiated the referral process themselves. This had, for example, occurred in the case of universal community-based services for children (such as activities at a local leisure centre). Parents had either seen publicity at school or in the community, or heard about a service by word-of-mouth and had decided to make contact themselves. In other cases, parents had chanced upon On Track when they had been proactively seeking an activity for their children to do in the school holidays. Parents had also referred themselves for universal school or community-based courses, for example, in parenting skills or IT.

In exceptional cases, parents had self-referred themselves onto a targeted service, such as a home visiting service. It was, however, more usual for a parent to approach a non On Track professional for help who then referred them to a targeted On Track service. These parents were not necessarily aware of On Track, but were seeking help more generally. Examples of this type of referral process included a parent being referred by a GP having voiced concerns that the school had expressed about her child’s behaviour, and a referral via a health visitor with whom a parent had shared her worries about coping with her child’s disruptive behaviour at home.

**Local service-initiated (i.e. not On Track service)**

Families who were already in contact with local support services had sometimes been referred to On Track by GPs, social workers, health workers and voluntary sector agencies. It was not, however, always clear whether these providers had made the actual referral or merely signposted the families to On Track. We know from the service provider report that providers found it more difficult to initiate multi-agency working with certain services including CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), YOTs (Youth Offending Teams) and the police. These services were also absent from the accounts of respondents.

### 3.3 Involvement in decision to use On Track services

The level and type of respondents’ involvement in the decision to use On Track also tended to vary by service type. As targeted services tended to require a much more formal assessment and decision-making process than universal services, there was greater opportunity for parents’ involvement. Parents who were reluctant to be involved in the referral process said that they trusted the professional (e.g. the GP or teacher) making the referral, or they were finding it difficult to deal with the situation on their own. This reflects the difficulties that service providers reported when they had been trying to engage parents.

Children said they were not involved in the decision to take part in either universal or targeted services, indicating that teachers and parents had decided on their behalf. A rare exception to this involved a parent who explained that she would not have proceeded with referral to a targeted service if her child had not been happy for her to do so because as she put it ‘once he says no, he backs off, so [it would] be pointless’. The child in question painted a similar picture in his interview.

Those parents who wished to be involved in the decision-making process identified two reasons for this:
Having the option to refuse

It was important to parents that they had the option to refuse the offer of a service. This gave them a sense of participation in the decision. Therefore, parents welcomed a letter from school seeking consent for their child to participate in a school-based universal service. There was evidence of parents refusing permission if they felt the service to be inappropriate for their child, for example one parent who gave permission for her older child to take part but felt her younger child (at four) was too young.

Not having an opportunity to opt-out could make parents feel that the decision was being taken away from them, especially if they did not feel their child needed the help being provided. An illustration of this involved a parent who described finding out that her son was receiving additional classes during the summer holidays to prepare him for the move to secondary school. She explained that, although she considered it to be a good idea given that some children can be nervous about moving to secondary school, she was surprised at her son’s inclusion in the scheme ‘…because he’s been looking forward to it for the last two years, that’s all he’s gone on about. He’s going to secondary school. So I don’t know why he was in it’. Even where parents were happy with their children participating, not having been consulted still invoked some resentment. The ‘free fruit at school’ initiative was an example of this: parents recalled being informed rather than consulted about their child’s participation, and did not like the school telling them ‘that your children had to eat fruit for their tuck’.

Being informed and consulted about the service

It was important to parents that they were given sufficient time to learn about the initiative that was being proposed and raise any concerns they might have. This added to the parents’ feeling that they were genuinely involved in the decision-making process.

In contrast, where parents felt they had to make a decision without sufficient information or consultation, concerns were sometimes voiced. An example of this included a parent who felt that she had been asked to give permission for her child to participate in a sports activity at school without knowing enough about the activity. She mentioned that she would have liked to have known more about the sports coach’s background and about the scheme itself.

3.4 Reasons for using On Track services

In view of the way respondents were referred on to On Track not all had made a deliberate decision to use the service. Where a specific reason for accessing the service was identified, parents and children tended to give the same reasons. Broadly speaking, the reasons or triggers for accessing On Track differed according to whether a person was accessing universal or targeted services.

One specific exception to this pattern was where the reason for accessing On Track was attributed to the need for parenting skills as there were both universal and targeted services with this objective. Here, the level or type of need tended to drive the type of provision accessed. Parents accessing universal parenting skills courses did so because of a general interest in child development or a need for help with a particular difficulty with their child. An example of the former involved a parent who was studying a psychology and education degree, whilst amongst the problems mentioned by the latter group were difficulties with their child’s eating habits or sleeping patterns. Accessing targeted support for parents was likely to have been triggered by a higher level of need in terms of the child’s disruptive behaviour at home or at school, and/or the parent’s inability to cope with the situation.
3.4.1 Reasons for accessing universal services

The reasons for accessing universal services included:

Child wanted to take part in this activity

A key motivator for children to access a leisure-based universal On Track service was that it was offering something that matched their interests and hobbies, for example swimming or playing football. This was also suggested as a reason by parents. Where such facilities were not available at other sites, for example at the child’s school, this provided an added incentive to use On Track.

Opportunity to learn new skills

If an On Track service offered the opportunity to learn a new skill this could also provide a trigger to use the service. This applied equally to parents and children. Parents mentioned opportunities to learn computer skills, while children also mentioned learning to swim and taking drama lessons.

Needing help with parenting

Parents reported wanting to attend a parenting skills course because they were having difficulties parenting. The types of help that they were seeking included guidance with discipline and advice on, for example, children’s eating or sleeping habits.

Needing out of school childcare

Parents tended to use services such as after school clubs or summer holiday schemes primarily for practical reasons. The likelihood of them using these services increased if the service was conveniently located, or the dropping-off and picking-up arrangements could be shared with another family.

3.4.2 Reasons for accessing targeted services

The reasons for accessing targeted services included:

Needing help with parenting

As already noted, the main reason that parents used targeted services such as parenting groups and home visiting services was to help them cope with parenting. They hoped that improving their parenting skills might help them to relate better to their child. Among the explanations that parents offered as to why they were finding it difficult to relate to their child was their own problematic childhood, which had negatively affected their parenting skills or a destructive relationship with an ex-partner which had created an environment of conflict within the household.

Needing help with child’s behavioural difficulties

A key trigger for accessing targeted services such as anger management sessions, individual or family therapy was the expectation that it might help deal with a child’s disruptive behaviour at home and/or at school. The types of problematic behaviour described included having temper flare-ups, finding it difficult to manage anger, and having trouble relating to teachers at school. In all these cases both parents and children talked about thinking that the service would help to change this type of behaviour.
Underpinning these reasons also appeared, for certain parents, to be a perception that the service delivered by On Track would be independent and confidential. This finding was also confirmed by the evidence from the service providers report. The reassurance that their case would be handled in confidence by On Track appeared to be an issue for parents who were reluctant to discuss with a professional the problems they were having with their child. This point was made with particular reference to the independence of On Track from social services. One such parent explained that she would not have approached social services because that would have made her feel like ‘an unfit mother’.

3.5 Initial reaction to accessing On Track

Initial reactions to using On Track were shaped by motivations for using the service and the person who made this decision. Inevitably this was underpinned by whether a respondent was involved in a universal or targeted service.

**Universal services**

Where there had been an active choice made by the respondent, usually the parent, to use a universal service, the reaction to accessing On Track was initially positive. For example, where the motivation for a parent to use a play scheme during the school holidays was the need for out of school hours childcare, the parent’s initial reaction was a sense of achievement at having found some support, and the child’s was usually one of excitement at the prospect of engaging in a fun activity. Similarly, where a parent had chosen to attend a parenting course because they required help with a particular difficulty at home, accessing On Track felt like a positive move, along with the anticipation of finding a solution to their difficulty.

**Targeted services**

As respondents were less likely to have initiated their involvement in targeted services, their reactions were likely to be very different to those described above. For parents who were prompted by a need for help with parenting or with a child’s behavioural difficulties there usually appeared to be a sense of relief that they would now receive support to help them cope. In contrast, there were cases where parents expressed a degree of resentment at having been invited to attend a parenting course. They believed their invitation to be part of the service that their child was receiving to help them manage their poor behaviour. This confirms evidence from the service providers who identified parents’ reluctance to engage with these programmes as the major barrier to their using them.

Generally children had little to say about their initial reaction to using On Track. Where reactions were expressed, these usually revolved around them feeling ‘bored’ about the prospect of, for example, attending a behavioural support session. In an exceptional case, using On Track had left a child with a sense of sadness because it had made him realise that ‘some people aren’t like me, they don’t get mad’, however, he added that he was also ‘looking forward to getting to know more people’.
4 USING ON TRACK

In this chapter we compare On Track and non-On Track services that respondents were using. We also consider movements in service usage – both between different On Track services and between On Track and other services, as well the process of ending contact with On Track. Views about these experiences will be reported in the next chapter.

In view of respondents’ lack of clarity about On Track, it sometimes proved difficult to explore experiences of specific On Track services during the interviews. Service maps of On Track services in each area were used to prompt respondents and help to establish their On Track usage. Despite this approach, there were occasional differences between respondents’ accounts and those services identified by service providers in each of the area maps. These discrepancies could be due to services changing as a result of resourcing issues or mainstreaming of services. Equally, they may result from respondents mistakenly identifying a service as being an On Track service.

In the sections that follow we have primarily based the evidence on the accounts of respondents, supplementing this in places (such as in the identification and labelling of different types of staff delivering services) with knowledge from the service maps.

4.1 Overview of On Track services

As reported in Chapter 1, a wide range of universal and targeted On Track services were being provided:

- to children aged four to twelve years, or to parents of children aged four to twelve years, or both;
- on a one-to-one basis or in a group (all universal services fell into the latter category);
- at school, in the community (e.g. On Track premises\(^5\), at leisure centres, or via existing counselling or psychiatric services) and at the respondent’s home;
- during school hours, out of school hours, and during school holidays;
- by specially appointed On Track workers or existing service providers such as teachers, health visitors, psychiatrists, and counsellors; and
- free of charge or at a subsidised rate (the latter applied only to universal services).

In the following sections we discuss these services in greater detail.

4.2 Universal On Track services

Universal services in our six areas varied as to whether they were delivered to all, for example in a particular class or school year (e.g. free fruit at school scheme) or to those who wanted to take part in them (e.g. parenting groups, after school clubs, and school holiday schemes).

\(^5\) The service provider report noted that in general it was unusual for service delivery to take place in a dedicated On Track site, as these offices tended to be used for administrative purposes only. The absence of a central On Track delivery point had arisen for a variety of reasons, including a preference for outreach service delivery; external agencies commissioned to deliver services sometimes had their own premises away from the On Track offices; and On Track administrative offices were often located in the buildings of other agencies that were considered inappropriate settings for service delivery.
Despite the variation in universal services, they can be broadly grouped into leisure or sport-based activities and services focused on personal development. Arguably some of the sport-based activities could also be seen as supporting personal development.

4.2.1 Leisure or sport-based activities

With the exception of parents attending keep fit classes, the users of leisure or sport-based universal services were predominantly children. Typically these services provided opportunities for children to engage in a hobby or the visual arts, socialise, pursue a particular sport or develop their fitness. They were either delivered at school or in leisure centres. They were always provided as a group activity by On Track or teaching staff. The services were sometimes provided at a subsidised rate and were either run daily, at weekends or during holidays. The level of attendance and type of involvement appeared to be optional and was determined by the user depending on whether it was an after school club or a one-off excursion organised by a holiday play scheme.

Sports

Various sporting activities including football, basketball, cricket, swimming and ice-skating were provided out of school hours. They were provided free of charge or at a subsidised price. These services were arranged at lunchtimes, in the evenings or at weekends, either at the schools or in leisure centres.

After-school clubs and breakfast clubs

These took place on school premises and were available during term times before and after school hours. Breakfast clubs ran daily, as did some after-school clubs, while others functioned only on specific days each week. Most carried a charge for attendance, although in one case the after-school club was free. They were run by teachers, classroom assistants or lunchtime supervisors. Although these activities provided out of school childcare for parents, they were primarily aimed at providing social and leisure activities for children, offering art, games, competitions and access to play stations. They were not designed as homework clubs.

Holiday activities

Holiday activities involved a variety of play schemes, dramatic art activities, and outings and excursions to places of local interest. Times of operation varied between a full and half day, and were provided daily or on specific weekdays. The service was delivered by play leaders.

4.2.2 Personal development

Both children and parents were using these types of universal services. As with the other services they were group-based and usually provided by On Track staff at school or in a community setting. There was usually no charge involved and these services seemed to require a greater level of commitment, for example, a parent signing up to attend a computer course for six weeks. There were three types of services, aimed at: developing children; developing parents; and providing information and raising awareness.
Developing children

The first type involved services for children designed specifically for their personal development or to provide the opportunity to acquire a new skill. Examples of this included:

- **Child as evaluator scheme**
  This scheme provided training in basic evaluation to a small number of selected children who had been involved in other On Track activities. An On Track worker provided training, originally at an off-school site. Once trained, the children carried out evaluations of various On Track universal services and of agencies and premises such as the local police station and GPs' surgeries to assess, for example, whether they were child-friendly and suitable for people with disabilities. Additionally, children were involved in the selection process for school staff. Parents were required to provide written consent for their child to take part in these activities and correspondence between the child and the trainer was treated as confidential. Children were rewarded with social activities and received payment for completing their tasks; however it was unclear whether this was in cash or as vouchers.

- **Playground peace-making initiative**
  Children were given the opportunity to be trained by a member of the On Track staff in skills which appeared to be aimed at preventing arguments and fighting between pupils in the playground.

- **Year Six transition work**
  Children in Year Six at primary school were provided with support to help them make a smooth transition to Year Seven in secondary school. This included a visit to the new school to familiarise themselves with the facilities and layout and meet some of the teaching staff during the summer term.

Developing parents

The second type of services aimed at the personal development of parents, either solely or alongside their children. This focused on generally developing their parenting or other skills through, for example, parenting groups, or aimed specifically to engage parents in their child’s schooling, through their involvement in school activities.

- **Parenting groups**
  Parenting groups were usually accessed by parents seeking help with specific problems. Groups consisted of about six or seven parents who met once or more each week, over a period of time which might coincide with a school term-time. Most groups operated during school hours (though one was held in the evenings) and mainly took place on school premises. Groups were run either by On Track staff, by a health visitor working with On Track, or by other workers. In two cases the programme was structured and the intervention didactic and time-limited. In other cases the group was informal and more akin to a self-help group where parents could discuss their problems openly and receive mutual support on an ongoing basis. The nature and focus of the group occasionally changed in response to parental preferences.
• **In-school activities for parents**
  One of the in-school activities for parents was provided during one lesson period per week for several weeks. The service involved the parent and child spending time together reading and playing educational games with the aim of encouraging reading as an educational activity at home. Another in-school activity for parents appeared to be aimed at helping them support and encourage their children by giving them information on matters such as healthy eating and nutrition. In this case, parents went into school during lesson time for a whole day but did not work alongside their child.

• **Classes in computing**
  A computer course for parents was provided on On Track premises one morning a week. The group consisted of about eight to ten parents. Although the objective was to teach parents basic computing skills, the class appeared to have developed into a more social and supportive environment where parents met for enjoyment and also took along issues such as benefit queries which were dealt with by On Track staff.

**Providing information and raising awareness**

The third type of service provided more generic information about, for example, healthy living.

• **Healthy eating initiatives**
  Education about healthy eating took place in primary schools. It took two forms, one instructional and the other pragmatic. In the former, an outside worker, described by a child respondent as ‘a nurse’, came into the school to tell a class of nine-year-old children about the superior nutritional value of certain foods. There is a lack of evidence about whether this was a one-off event or a series of talks to the children. In the latter case, all children in the school were provided with a piece of fruit each day at registration, to be eaten during the break. The aim appeared to be to replace the less healthy foods traditionally available in schools at break times and introduce children to alternative options. Parents were also given information on matters such as healthy eating and nutrition as part of some of the in-school activities for parents.

### 4.3 Targeted On Track services

Targeted services appeared to focus on managing problematic behaviour of children at home and/or at school and supporting and developing parenting skills. Unlike universal services, where the child could be the sole recipient of On Track services in a family, with targeted services, it was common for both the child and parent in a family to be using the service.

Targeted services were delivered free of charge at the user’s home, at school or in the community, for example via therapy centres, clinics, and more exceptionally in a dedicated On Track site. Irrespective of location, the services were provided by specially appointed On Track staff, child psychologists or health visitors - on a one-to-one basis or in groups. Unlike universal services, there was usually an appointment system in operation, and participation, though not compulsory, appeared to be expected. The targeted provision involved five different types of service.

#### 4.3.1 Behaviour and anger management work with children

The first group comprised services that aimed to help children to manage their behaviour and control their anger. These services were either provided on an individual basis or in groups where the focus was explicitly on the child’s behaviour.
Otherwise they were provided through after school clubs where the child’s behavioural difficulties were addressed as part of general play and social interaction.

**Individual support for behavioural problems**

Children with behavioural problems were offered one-to-one support during the school day from On Track staff. This type of service used play to show children ways to control their anger or frustration and improve their behaviour.

Occasionally, children received this service in the home rather than at school. In these circumstances, the On Track worker had worked with both the target child and his/her siblings. The usual format appeared to be individual work with the children through drawings or worksheets, followed by discussion and strategies to deal with specific issues such as bullying or family interaction.

More exceptionally, this type of help had been provided at school and at home, such as in the case where a child’s behaviour regressed after the school sessions had ended. This resulted in the worker visiting the child at home on four or five occasions per week. Worksheets were used with the child and his siblings, and the worker spoke with the mother afterwards about the content of the intervention. The parent was under the impression that the aim of the service was to try to help the child control his anger and to interact more positively with others.

**Group support for behavioural problems**

Support during lesson time in primary schools was also provided in small groups of four or five children who were experiencing similar behaviour problems in class. This was sometimes provided in addition to the one-to-one support. As with the individual work, play was used to improve social interaction and help children manage their anger. Children discussed their problems as a group. The service typically took place once a week and had in some cases continued for up to two years, or until the child left primary school.

**Targeted after school club**

After school clubs were provided for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. These functioned in the same way as a universal after school club, providing a similar range of activities to those referred to above: painting, drawing, crafts, music, games, sports and use of a computer, as well as trips to local attractions. This appeared to be helping children with emotional and behavioural issues. One such targeted after school club involved seven to ten children going to a club in a dedicated On Track site once a week after school until 5.30pm.

In addition to the group work, there was also an opportunity for individual attention from one of the On Track workers who ran the scheme. This had taken the form of educational help with language or reading; activities aimed at increasing a child’s self-esteem or developing tactics for managing anger and disruptive behaviour; or it had simply afforded the chance for a child to have one-to-one conversations with an adult who was not a teacher. Practical interventions suggested by staff to the children and their parents included a system of rewarding good behaviour through attaching stars to a chart in the home.

During the school holidays, the workers organised outings and day-trips on which the children could be accompanied by their parents and/or friends. These appeared to be free of charge to the On Track child but subject to payment by others.
4.3.2 Supporting children through school

These services focused on helping children at critical points in their school career, such as the transition from primary to secondary school, or helping them cope with difficulties in their school life such as bullying.

Transition to secondary school

This was similar to the universal transition work with Year Six pupils, but the support was provided in small groups. The group met with an On Track worker twice a week during the month before they moved to secondary school so they could receive information and discuss their feelings about this transition. Children were also taken on visits to the secondary school to acclimatise them to the new environment and provide an opportunity for them to meet teaching staff.

Learning mentor support

A learning mentor was allocated to children with emotional problems who, for example, might be experiencing problems with bullying at school. In addition to giving specific support to the children during a one-to-one session in school, the learning mentor also worked with the children during other school-based activities and arranged social trips. The learning mentor also supported children through the transition to secondary school.

4.3.3 Parenting support services

Parenting support services came in the shape of parenting groups and telephone helplines. The parenting groups were similar in content and style to the universal parenting groups described above. After parents initially contacted the helpline, advisers would agree times over a period of weeks when they could talk to parents over the phone and suggest ways that the parent could deal with their problems, such as a child’s disruptive behaviour.

4.3.4 Counselling for parents and children

Individual counselling sessions were offered to children with behavioural difficulties. These varied from a brief couple of visits to sessions lasting a period of four or five months. The sessions were either weekly or less frequent than this and took place away from the school premises, for example in therapy centres and clinics.

Individual counselling was also used by parents. These sessions took place at their home or at an outside location, including on school premises or at an On Track centre. The frequency of the interventions varied between once a week and once a month: in one case, the parent had been receiving this service for four years.

4.3.5 Family support services

The final group of targeted services involved supporting, to a varying degree, the family as a whole.

Home visiting

Home visiting, also known as family support, was provided to parents who were experiencing problems with their own health and/or the health or behaviour of one or more of their children. A dedicated worker visited the mother at home on a regular basis, weekly or fortnightly, to offer advice, information and support. Although
children might sometimes be involved in the visits by the worker, the prime intention was to support the parent rather than the child. It appeared that the support was primarily to help the mother deal with her child/children but workers also provided information on matters such as welfare benefits, other services available, and practical help in buying household goods or assisting with domestic organisation. In addition workers sometimes responded to requests for help from the parent between visits, and accompanied her on visits to other, non-On Track support services and meetings. Home visiting did not appear to be a time-limited intervention – or, if it was, parents were not aware of this – and some had received this type of support over a lengthy period of time.

**Family therapy**

Family therapy was another type of On Track service provided for parents and children together. Two different models of intervention appeared to be used. In one, the parent and child might both be present in a session with one worker, with the focus directed to the child and his/her behaviour. In the other, the parent and child might visit the service at the same time but be seen by separate workers, with rules of confidentiality applying.

4.4  **Multiple service use**

Respondents often reported that they had used more than one On Track service (details of On Track multiple service use are presented in Table 2 on page 10). The combination of services being accessed varied in terms of whether they included universal and or targeted services and who was receiving them. There was evidence of children and/or parents being in contact with:

- **Multiple universal On Track services** – such as free fruit or massage schemes at school and attending On Track swimming sessions in the local leisure centre. There were cases where the child was accessing multiple universal services and the parent was also attending, for example, a parenting group.

  Phillip is using a number of universal On Track services. He is taking part in the free fruit initiative where every morning his class shares 30 pieces of fruit amongst them. He is also taking part in the massage at school scheme which involves massaging other class members over their clothes each day after lunch. Phillip also uses On Track leisure activities at the local swimming pool. When he was younger he used to use the leisure activities organised by Sure Start. His mum has also taken a range of adult learning courses as part of other initiatives held at their local college and at Phillip’s school.

- **Multiple targeted On Track services** - in these cases, a child might be involved in one-to-one and group anger management or behavioural support sessions at school. Counselling for children also seemed to occur in conjunction with other services for children (such as the targeted after school club or small group work in school) and/or with support for the parent through home visiting and counselling. Also, it was common for the child to attend a targeted after school club and the parent to be receiving a home visiting service or counselling, or attending a parenting group.
Tina and her family are using a range of targeted services. Tina goes to see a child psychologist every few months, her mum attends a parenting course, and they have an On Track worker, Mary, who visits them at home. Mary comes to their home every two weeks and they discuss different subjects, such as bullying. Mary gives the children worksheets to work through on their own which involve writing about what has been happening at home and at school. They subsequently discuss as a family how these issues have arisen and consider how to address any problems. Because Tina was having problems at school, On Track asked her mum to go to a weekly parenting course. During these sessions the parents talk about the difficulties that they are having at home and consider ways to overcome these problems.

- **Combination of universal and targeted On Track services** – Children and parents accessed a combination of the services mentioned in the previous two groups.

  As part of his class, Bob is getting help with the move from primary to secondary school. This involves taking part in a weekly discussion during lesson time about his feelings and concerns about the move. These sessions were held just prior to the summer holidays. Bob also does anger management work with a group of about four other children. A woman comes from outside the school to run the group and the sessions involve role-playing and group discussions. They are taken out of lessons and meet in an empty classroom at school. He also sometimes has one-to-one sessions with the woman who runs the group to discuss his behaviour and any problems that he is having.

As well as using On Track services, be they universal and/or targeted, respondents were also sometimes using non-On Track services for children and families. The non-On Track services being used were very similar to the types of On Track services outlined in the earlier sections, both in terms of content and delivery.

As might be expected, only specialist, non-On Track services targeted those with ‘high end’ risk such as drug abuse and domestic violence. Longer-term or ongoing services delivered by, for example, a family social worker, a SEN teacher, or a health visitor (for postnatal depression or for support looking after a disabled child, for example) was delivered by non-On Track service providers. Amongst the various On Track/non-On Track service combinations were cases where children were: receiving free fruit at school and also participating in a Youth Inclusion Programme (YIP) which organised social and sport activities; involved in transition work at school with On Track and having sessions with a non-On Track psychiatrist; and teamed-up with a learning mentor at school via On Track and attending a non-On Track course on domestic violence with their family.

Margaret, an On Track worker, is helping Ed on a one-to-one basis to control his anger. She has also arranged for him to have sessions with his brothers with a non-On Track child psychologist and to take part in social and leisure activities organised by the YIP. She also visits the family as part of a home visiting service. During these sessions she talks to Ed’s mum about how things are going at home and advises her how to communicate with her children and ask them to do things. Every month Ed and his brothers go to see the child psychologist. Through games and play, they discuss with the psychologist their parents’ break-up. When the boys are good, they are rewarded with social and leisure activities run by YIP. This involves things like swimming, rock climbing and football.
4.4.1 **Referrals and communication between services**

Although there was evidence of multiple On Track service use and respondents receiving packages of On Track and non-On Track services, there was very limited discussion or detail about referral routes and communication between services. What little information respondents did provide is discussed below.

**Referral routes between services**

Respondents mentioned On Track workers making onward referrals from one targeted service to other targeted services, such as parent support groups, individual counselling or family therapy. They also said that On Track workers had referred them to non-On Track services for children. Amongst the reasons offered for referrals to non-On Track services were, for example, a need to engage in an extra activity at a YIP or because the child was no longer eligible for an On Track service. Generally, however, respondents were unclear about the sequence of referrals to other services, and from universal to targeted On Track services. Therefore, the absence of discussion about the order of receiving services, especially where the package included universal and targeted On Track services, makes it impossible to conclude whether universal services were acting as a gateway to targeted services.

**Communication between services**

Comments about communication between services were also limited. Where references were made to this, it appeared that respondents had been provided with assurance of confidentiality between the targeted services they were using. An example of this involved a parent who was being counselled by a different worker from the person who carried out the home visiting. In both cases the respondent was reassured that their conversations with each worker would be kept confidential.

Similarly, in another case involving family therapy, although the parent and the child visited the service at the same time, they were seen by separate workers, with rules of confidentiality applying.

However, where a child was receiving On Track and non-On Track services, there was evidence of either the On Track worker or the non-On Track worker ensuring that there was communication between services. For example, an On Track worker was responsible for helping to obtain a statement of special educational needs, engaging the services of a psychologist and making a referral to a pupil assessment centre. She maintained links with all of these services and either accompanied the parent or attended on her own any meetings to discuss the child’s welfare. In contrast a SENCO teacher in school was characterised as the lynchpin between different services for another respondent. She ensured that the services worked alongside each other in a ‘joined-up’ way and that all professionals involved were aware of how the child was being helped by the other services. She organised periodic meetings for the parents and the staff so that the links between home, school and services could be maintained and relevant issues discussed.

4.5 **Ending contact with On Track**

At the point of the qualitative interviews, respondents varied as to whether they were still in contact with On Track services or not. Depending on the nature and duration of the different services there were varying experiences reported about this. Indeed it was clear that On Track services had often simply come to their natural end, particularly those providing a service for a short or limited time span, or where the child was no longer eligible or had moved school. Examples of this included universal
short term computer courses for parents and school-based universal initiatives such as the free fruit or massage at school schemes for children.

Aside from these cases, contact with On Track had either ended as a consequence of the beneficiary deciding to stop using the service, or as a result of a decision taken by the service provider.

**Decision taken by service user**

Users typically made the decision to end contact with universal services.

A lack of time was a key reason that parents cited for deciding to end their involvement with On Track. In these circumstances parents mentioned being unable to have time to go to a universal open access parenting group because their child had been ill or they were embarking on a new course themselves, which meant that they were no longer able to continue with On Track. Occasionally, the On Track worker maintained contact with a parent and held a place open for her to return to once she had stopped going to a targeted child and family support service due to her own ill health.

Children had decided to stop using universal after school clubs or holiday play schemes. A lack of children their own age, being bullied, or simply not enjoying the activity were amongst the explanations given for ending their involvement.

There was little evidence of the user making the decision to end contact where a targeted service was involved.

**Decision taken by service provider**

Both universal and targeted services were withdrawn once children were over the age of eligibility for On Track. However, there was evidence of On Track workers continuing to support children informally for a short time after they had reached this age limit. This was typically the case where the child had been receiving targeted services and support had continued through the first few months of their first term at secondary school.

Providers also appeared to have ended a child's contact with targeted services where their behaviour had improved to the point that they no longer needed the support. A similar reason was also suggested for why service providers had withdrawn targeted services such as a home visiting service from parents.

Otherwise it seemed that demand and resourcing issues were given for services coming to an end. For example, services appeared to have closed when there was insufficient take-up for them to remain viable, as was the case with a summer holiday drop-in service for children.

In contrast, some children had actually stopped using On Track services due to a shortage of places and the perceived need for turnover in order to provide as many children as possible with the opportunity to be involved. This particularly applied to universal after school clubs.
5 VIEWS ABOUT USING ON TRACK

We now turn to respondents' views about the service provided by On Track. Respondents were specifically asked to assess the quality of the service provided by On Track in relation to the nature of the services they received; the format, frequency and duration of their contacts; and their relationships with On Track staff. Each of these aspects of the service will be covered in the following sections. As will be seen, respondents were generally very positive about the support provided by On Track. They welcomed the range of activities offered and appreciated the way services were delivered to children during the school day, and to parents at home. The relationship with the On Track worker was also pivotal to their assessments of the service. Whilst there was a general feeling of disappointment when an On Track service ended, being aware that it was going to end, or being involved in the decision to end it, helped to make the process less distressing.

Reflections on the quality of the service provided were inevitably linked to respondents' perceptions about the impact it had made on them or their family, which is addressed in the next chapter.

5.1 Views about the nature of services provided

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the wide array of activities provided by universal services. These activities were valued for providing opportunities to acquire new skills as well as to engage in pleasurable and constructive activities for children, parents and families. Among the activities On Track had enabled children and parents to take part in were those that would ordinarily have been prohibitively expensive. This point was made in relation to football and swimming clubs that had been subsidised by On Track. Parents maintained that they had engaged in new and different activities with their child, such as going on excursions with them in the school holidays, or making Christmas cards together at after school clubs.

In addition to the enjoyable, 'fun' and social aspects of On Track services, respondents appreciated the focus on self-development. This view applied to universal services (such as the massage at school scheme, the playground peace-making initiative, the child as evaluator scheme, computer courses and in-school activities for parents) and targeted services (such as anger management and parenting groups, where respondents were keen to learn behaviour management techniques and discipline strategies respectively).

The way in which On Track services had helped children address important issues and concerns whilst taking part in an activity was also welcomed by parents. An example of this involved an after school club where the children produced leaflets about how to deal with bullying and designed anti-bullying bracelets. Furthermore, some parents believed the existence of adequate adult supervision for these activities had helped to discourage bullying.

There was, however, criticism of those after school clubs and leisure activities that charged the full amount even if the child was only going to be able to take up a fraction of the service. More exceptionally, concerns were expressed about the predomination of sports-based activities and the lack of alternatives such as learning a new instrument or language.

Views about the nature of targeted services seemed to be more bound-up with assessments of On Track itself, and the organisation and delivery of services.
5.2 Views about On Track staff

Generally, children and parents described having a positive relationship with the On Track staff with whom they were in contact. They appeared to value broadly similar qualities in an On Track worker, even if they expressed these differently. For example, they both valued an On Track worker who respected them — children discussed this in terms of being consulted and involved in decisions, and parents described feeling respected because their On Track worker had adopted a non-judgemental approach. The factors discussed in the sections below appeared to underpin the quality of relationships between On Track users and workers.

5.2.1 Independence of On Track worker from school

Although children were often vague about On Track, they appeared to value the fact that On Track workers were not members of the teaching staff. In one location, On Track workers wore badges in the school so that they could be identified by children and not mistaken for teachers or classroom assistants. Whilst other areas did not operate such an arrangement, children were nevertheless clear about the difference between On Track and teaching staff. Parents also noted the independent status of the On Track worker as having contributed to the ease with which their child could talk openly and honestly without getting into trouble. However, On Track workers were not always the only adults with whom children could speak openly: those children receiving non-On Track support in school (for example, from a learning mentor) also appreciated having a dedicated person to talk to, about both their problems and general matters.

5.2.2 Their manner and ability to engage with users

For children accessing both universal and targeted services, it appeared that building a relationship which was neither formal (as in the pupil/teacher model) nor overly familiar, but which was forged on mutual respect, was a key factor in successful service provision. On Track staff had achieved this by:

- Relating to children on their level. This was conveyed by one child who described her worker as being ‘childish, but not in a bad way’, as this appeared to demonstrate she understood the children she worked with. This aspect of being able to relate to the children in a familiar and non-didactic manner was also mentioned by some parents in terms of being on, or coming down to, ‘the children’s level’.

- By consulting and showing respect and consideration for their needs and interests. Children commented on the way staff listened to them, engaged in joint decision-making with them about the activities they were going to pursue, and delivered on their promises. This had resulted in children respecting and heeding the advice of On Track staff. On Track workers were also praised for taking an interest in the feelings and ideas of children about the activities they engaged in, such as in the case of a summer holiday play scheme. Parents emphasised the way On Track workers had shown respect to their children and engaged in a familiar relationship which was unusual for adults in positions of authority.

Parents who were receiving intensive support to help them with their parenting skills appeared to be highly sensitive to criticism. This may be due to their lack of confidence or their previous involvement with statutory agencies which had adopted a somewhat censorious approach. One such case involved a mother who reported her dealings with social services and how she had been made to feel ‘inferior’ when her daughter was taken into care (and subsequently adopted). Another such case involved a respondent who had a long history of contact with social services resulting
from her children’s involvement in a series of accidents, who described herself as feeling ‘insulted’.

For this reason, the non-judgemental approach of the On Track worker in targeted services was held in especially high regard. This was particularly evident in home visiting services, where the worker was seen as a reliable friend who offered much-valued listening time: ‘I think they’ve been a really big help. I feel like I can talk to them about anything and sort of off-load as well…. I know it’s not doing much, but the fact that we’ve got someone to talk to and someone to share our problems with is a good thing.’

This relationship between parents and workers was based much more on the mutual ability to see beyond, rather than judge, individual shortcomings. This was apparent in a case involving a parent who was quite dismissive of her home visiting worker’s appearance - which she likened to a Barbie doll - and her lack of parenting experience; nevertheless she felt the best thing about the worker’s involvement was being ‘just friends’.

Parents appreciated the down-to-earth approach of workers who were neither ‘stuffy’ nor ‘looked down on people’. Workers were valued for providing guidance in a friendly and non-threatening way, which boosted parents’ confidence so that they felt reassured rather than judged in their parenting role. Also, parents emphasised that they were not made to feel that they were to blame for the circumstances in which they found themselves. One mother commented that she was encouraged by being told that she was doing a good job and ‘never put down’ as a parent.

5.2.3 Amount of time available

For both types, but more so for targeted services, parents felt able to trust the On Track staff because of the level of patience they exercised, and the amount of time that they spent with the child. For example, a parent who saw a reduction in her son’s aggressive behaviour and an improvement in his school performance commended the willingness of the On Track workers at the targeted after school club he attended to change their strategies and try a range of approaches in order to help him. Parents commented on the difference between the amounts of time On Track workers had available to spend with their children, compared with teaching staff. It was, however, recognised by one parent that the On Track worker had a lot of patience and time for her son because she was only working with a small group of children and not an entire class. This was reinforced by another parent who contrasted the way teaching staff had sent her son out of the classroom, with the On Track worker who had the patience to explain and reason with him and could, in her words, ‘talk him round’.

5.2.4 Confidence in ability

On the whole parents felt confident that the On Track workers were doing their job properly. They spoke very highly of the staff with whom they came into contact. They were routinely seen as helpful and supportive, but, just as importantly, knew what ‘their job, role and duties’ were.

For some, the confidence in the workers’ ability came from knowing that the service was being provided by a local person. This was particularly the case in a rural area where parents were impressed because the On Track staff were local people, presuming them to be sensitive to local issues and therefore to be trusted to understand the local problems which occurred.

Parents needed to be able to trust the On Track workers providing services to their children in order to have confidence in their ability. In terms of workers providing universal sport- or leisure-based activities in or outside school, parents based their
trust on two key factors. They felt that their children were in safe hands because they assumed that workers had been trained. This was the assumption of, for example, parents of children attending after school clubs where the service was not being provided by teachers. Others simply believed that the people providing the service were the ‘right sorts of people’, basing this on the positive ways in which they saw the workers and children relating to each other. Parents were also inclined to trust workers who were able to provide them with information about the service in which their child would be engaging. For example, parents of children undertaking the massage course in school needed reassurance from staff about the nature of the activity, but once this was provided they were usually happy to allow their children to proceed.

That said, parents did question the ability of On Track workers who did not have children of their own to be able to deliver an effective service. A parent who attended a parenting group that was facilitated by two On Track workers who did not have children themselves, commented that he liked the people running such courses ‘to know what they’re talking about, rather than making it up and bullshitting’.

5.2.5 Accessibility of On Track staff

Another important aspect of the service was the accessibility of On Track staff. This was particularly an issue for parents who were experiencing problems coping with children, and who were likely to have frequent crisis points. Several parents spoke of their ability to call on their worker either in person at the On Track centre or on the telephone whenever they had a problem, and to be sure of receiving a prompt and sympathetic response. Others praised the speedy response of the workers, ‘There’s nobody like On Track (workers) that can come round that quick. The only other one is the law that will come round as quick’.

However, in circumstances where parents were unable to access help at the point when they needed it, this could undermine their views about the value of the service provided by On Track. One parent whose child was using a targeted service to help her with emotional and behavioural difficulties was displeased by both the infrequency of the appointments (every six months) and her inability to receive an appointment at short notice in a time of crisis. She objected to the fact that the worker never saw the child when she was at her worst and that consequently any judgements made about her progress were unrealistic.

5.3 Views about the organisation and delivery of services

Assessments about the way the service was organised and delivered revolved around the mode of delivery, the location of services, the timing of activities, the provision of information about services, and the continuity of the worker.

5.3.1 Views about the way services were delivered

Group work seemed to provoke a reaction from parents in a way that other types of service did not. Those who approved of the approach particularly emphasised the role that other parents played in making it a positive experience for them.

Generally, parents using parenting support groups welcomed the opportunity to meet new people and establish new friendships in an atmosphere of mutual support. Parents accessing group-based activities, both targeted and universal, were keen to indicate the closeness and warmth generated by being in a group with other parents, whether this was to learn a new skill or to receive help with parenting problems. For example, a parent described the computing course she undertook as ‘like a social
Club': parents learnt a new skill but also had time for 'giggling and drinking coffee'. At the end of one course, parents were required to write comments about each other on a notice board and this had resulted in a respondent feeling very touched by the positive remarks made by others about her, which had increased her self-esteem.

Parents also valued the information, support and encouragement that they received from the workers and from other parents. Being with other parents who were facing similar difficulties was particularly endorsed as a positive feature of group activities. This enabled parents to share experiences, discuss problems in a relaxed atmosphere, identify solutions to difficult situations at home and take advice from other parents who had been in a similar situation.

In this way groups were also appreciated for alleviating certain parents' sense of isolation. For example, a parent described her initial trepidation about going to a parenting group as she was concerned that she would be over-burdened by other parents' problems. She was pleasantly surprised that the meetings bore no resemblance to the group counselling that she had been anticipating. Instead she said sessions revolved around tea and biscuits and a free, non-judgemental discussion in confidence about any problem that a parent wanted to bring to the group. This allowed her to speak freely about the sort of issues which, she suspected, 'they'd be locking you up for if you told a psychiatrist.' She concluded that she would only ever consider using an On Track parenting service 'as I know no one will criticise.' This echoes the findings of the service provider report where the supportive environment of parenting groups was identified as helping to overcome concerns around stigmatisation and engagement.

The content of some of the group activities, such as the type of role-play exercises engaged in was occasionally raised as an issue. It was felt to be inappropriate, for example, to use role-play to discuss personal issues or work out how to deal with difficult situations in a group situation, as this had sometimes left parents feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed.

In contrast with parents, the experience of being in a group did not appear to be an issue for children. Some children referred to the fact that their friends had also received a targeted small-group service, but this was not especially important to them and did not influence their enjoyment or attendance.

The coverage of targeted services such as anger management work with children, home visiting services and family therapy appeared to yield fewer comments. Parents were, however, critical if they did not think a particular service was of benefit to their child, such as in the case of a parent who had been attending counselling sessions with her son over a period of about nine months. She reported that she would have preferred them each to have had individual sessions with the counsellor, which would have avoided the constant arguing between herself and her son that characterised their meetings. She was, in addition, dismissive of the strategy put forward by the counsellor, which involved rewarding her son's good behaviour with a system of stars on a chart, as her son had refused to co-operate. She emphasised her preference for a much fuller exploration of the child's behaviour, including establishing whether or not he was suffering from ADHD.

Unlike the delivery modes discussed thus far, the parenting telephone service was felt to be too formal and not as amenable as the face-to-face contact provided through parenting groups, counselling and home visiting services.
5.3.2 Location of On Track services

Understandably, the location where On Track services were delivered was principally assessed in terms of how accessible and convenient it was for parents and children. In addition there were issues relating to the safety of particular locations.

On Track services provided at home such as home visiting were unanimously appreciated by parents as they made it possible for them to engage with these services. As these services were typically directed at those with multiple family problems, it is not surprising that parents suggested that this helped to overcome the barriers and difficulties they faced engaging with services delivered elsewhere. For example, a respondent commented that home visits by the family support worker were far preferable to having to find the motivation to leave home and go elsewhere for the service. Another parent found that having the counsellor visit her at home was the only way she could use the service because of her son’s irregular pattern of schooling and her own poor health, which made travelling difficult. Interestingly, the same parent had received similar support from social services and held a very different view of that experience, which she felt had been intrusive and designed to ‘check up’ and pass judgement rather than support her. This suggests that it is not only the location of delivery that is important. In contrast with the service providers’ accounts, parents did not seem to be preoccupied with the importance of providing services in a non-stigmatised location.

It was evident that children did not always share their parents’ positive views about having a home visit. In these cases, they were frustrated by, for example, the disruption to their play-time at home and the amount of time the workers spent talking with the parent rather than with them.

Parents welcomed On Track services provided at school for two main reasons: convenience and safety. The convenience of services was emphasised in relation to both targeted and universal services provided for children in school. This applied equally to universal class-based activities, to targeted one-to-one and group-based support, and to those targeted services which required children to be taken out of school (such as the transitions service) where responsibility for their transport rested with teaching staff. The second reason parents were keen on a school setting for certain activities, such as football training, was that the school premises were seen to be a safe. This was predominantly because parents believed that the children would be better supervised.

In contrast with home and school, parents referred to the difficulties in taking their children to out-of-school activities which were located in the community and may be some distance from the family home. These were typically leisure or sporting activities which took place out of school hours or, more frequently, during school holidays, and required going to local leisure centres or On Track premises.

Travel to and from activities had to be taken into account and rural and urban areas each had their own associated difficulties. In an urban area, concern was expressed about children (particularly older children who wanted to go independently) travelling to after school clubs which were in ‘not a nice area’ and meant they had to walk down unsafe streets - a particularly unpleasant and potentially dangerous activity on dark evenings. Also there was concern about children negotiating busy roads. In one area none of the children in the sample went to the local youth club as it was not in a safe area, even though there was sparse provision of services for them. In another case a child was not allowed to go to an after school club during the winter months because her mother did not allow her to walk home alone on dark evenings.

In rural areas, the availability of transport determined whether children and parents were able to attend services and activities. In one semi-rural area ill-served by public
transport, a minibus was used to collect children attending groups (such as the targeted after school service or holiday activities) and taxis for parents and children using the service individually (for example, for counselling). All these beneficiaries mentioned the importance of this provision and how it had enabled them to use the service. One such user described On Track as being ‘marvellous on transport’, she was particularly appreciative because the unreliable state of her health meant that she could not always guarantee getting her son to the service. When the minibus service was withdrawn from one part of the catchment area, a child was no longer able to use the service.

In other rural areas where this type of transport was not available, parents who did not have a car talked about having to make elaborate arrangements, relying on lifts from relatives, or having to use taxis to ensure that the children could benefit from the services.

5.3.3 **Timing of activities**

Activities for children which took place in school time presented no problems to parents or children. Indeed, children appeared to have no objections to being taken out of class to receive special services such as those targeted at their behaviour, or to help them with the transition to secondary school.

Similarly, services for parents that took place during school hours made them easier to access. Perhaps surprisingly, there were no adverse comments from parents who were in paid employment, but this may be due to the very limited number of parents who were working and also wanting to use the services themselves or attend those designed to help their children.

The timing of before and after school activities was, however, raised by parents in employment. As would be expected, they specifically valued breakfast clubs provided at school as this ensured they could work a full day and at the same time be reassured of their child’s safety at school.

Where an after school activity did not follow on directly from the end of the school day, parents found themselves making several journeys to and from school. This sometimes resulted in a child having to miss out on an activity, such as in the case of a child who had been forced to forego a football club because her parent found it too demanding to bring her home after school and then return an hour later.

Where parents and children were both accessing On Track services, a preference was indicated for the timing and location of both services to be co-ordinated. This was evident, for example, in the case of a child who went to a football club at the same time and in the same location as a keep fit class that took place at the same time and in the same location and meant the parent could use this service.

The amount of time that some services required parents to commit, for example, for a six-week day long activity, could make parents reluctant to engage with such initiatives.

5.3.4 **Provision of information about services**

The organisation and promotion of activities was raised in relation to universal services.

Parents valued service providers sending them information about services but pointed out that the information did not always reach them. They noted that sending information from school via children was not always a reliable route.
Respondents appreciated the way leisure and sports facilities and after school clubs (both targeted and universal) had provided a list in advance of the forthcoming activities in which children could engage and the days on which they would take place. This also meant that they could manage expectations in case there were no more places left for an activity for their child.

Another example that illustrates the value parents placed on being provided with information about services involves the massage at school scheme. Parents welcomed the invitation to go for a demonstration at the school and the opportunity to hear more about the initiative from the person who would be delivering the service. As already mentioned, this had allayed their initial concerns about their children using the service.

In contrast, there were other cases in which it was suggested that a lack of promotion had been one of the factors that resulted in low take-up of services, and even eventual closure. For example, in one case, a parent was disappointed that their local scheme had not been better utilised by the local children, with only two children typically using the service. She thought that the lack of interest might have been because the scheme was attached to the school and was therefore unappealing to children. For this reason, she suggested the service should be promoted as being independent of school, as this might make it more appealing. This concurs with the issues around branding raised in the service provider report.

5.3.5 Continuity of worker

An important issue for both children and parents was whether they were able to see the same member of staff throughout their contact with a particular service. The continuity (though not the users’ appreciation of it) was somewhat surprising given that the service providers emphasised the problems of short-term contracts and staff retention. It would, however, appear that the majority of users in this sample had been fortunate in receiving supportive services from the same workers over a considerable period of time. As one parent stated: ‘Out of all of them, On Track is always there. They’re not two-minute wonders, here today and gone tomorrow.’

Though this was important in all service use, it seemed to be particularly crucial in one-to-one targeted services, both for parents and children. The continuity of the worker bred confidence in the parents that the situation was being fully understood over a period of time and repeated explanations to new workers were not necessary. One such parent stressed the importance to her son of having the same worker throughout, as he had difficulty with change and took a long time to build up relationships. Continuity of the worker was also important for parents’ ability to re-contact the service when they considered their child needed further help, ‘I knew that because [child] was familiar with [worker] he would be OK and he’d be willing to work with him again rather than have to meet someone new’.

A case where a parent did experience a lack of continuity with her worker illustrates the negative effect that this can have, especially on parents whose own confidence is already fragile. In this case, two successive home visiting workers each left after only two months in post, leaving the parent wondering if she had been in some way responsible for this happening.

5.4 Reactions to On Track services ending

Reactions to On Track services ending varied according to the following factors:
**Who made the decision**

On the whole, the service users were satisfied where they had unilaterally decided to end contact or where they had jointly agreed this with the service provider. Typically, respondents made the decision themselves to stop using universal services. So for example, children welcomed not having to engage in an activity they found boring or not having to attend an after school club where they had no friends. Equally, parents appreciated the time it freed up to follow other interests, and were happy for their children to leave after school clubs where they were being bullied. More exceptionally, parents were less happy about a service ending. This tended to be the case when they had been forced to stop using the service, for example because circumstances outside of their control, such as a child’s poor health, had prevented them from continuing their involvement, for example in a parenting group.

The decision to end contact where a targeted service was involved was likely to be made by the service provider with varying degrees of consultation with users. Reactions to this decision depended on whether the respondent felt that there was still a need for the service or not, and this issue is discussed below.

**Awareness of service ending**

Awareness that services would be coming to an end clearly varied. Respondents who lacked this awareness expressed their surprise about the service ending and spoke of service providers ‘pulling the plug’ or ‘bolts out of the blue’. This reaction was usually from those receiving universal sport- or leisure-based services or after school clubs, where there had to be a certain level of turnover to sustain the service. In such cases parents accepted that, given limited funding, it had to be this way, but they nevertheless felt disappointed, as did the children who had been enjoying the activities.

In contrast, respondents who were aware that On Track services were time-limited appeared to be more resigned to the situation. For example, respondents were aware that initiatives such as massage at school was only for Year Five children, or that the play scheme was running only during the holidays, or that a computer course for parents was six weeks long, or that all On Track services ended when children reached 12 years of age. This meant that although there was some regret at the ending of a service which had been useful and/or fun, it was not accompanied by frustration or confusion to the same extent as when respondents were unaware of the time-limited nature of the service. Nevertheless, parents and children in these circumstances expressed a wish for the service to continue.

**Consequences of ending contact**

Views about a service ending were inevitably linked to the nature of the service provided and the consequences that the termination had or was perceived to have on respondents. As described above, respondents generally valued the services they had received and whilst they would have been happy for them to continue, for some their cessation was not a particularly significant issue. Indeed it had sometimes resulted in parents believing that their child was ‘not as bad as other kids’ as they assumed the service had been allotted to another child.

It did, however, become an issue, where respondents believed that services had been withdrawn before their needs had been met. One such case involved the ending of behavioural support for a child because the workers considered that the child’s behaviour had improved to the point where he no longer needed the intervention. His parent was not in agreement and was critical about the service
ending ‘halfway through’ because her child’s behaviour had regressed to the point it was at prior to the intervention starting.

Similarly, parents were concerned about their home visiting service ending when they still felt they needed help. In one case a parent felt particularly let down as the service had been withdrawn when she was briefly reconciled with her partner. She felt the support should have continued despite her change in circumstances, and would have been particularly helpful when the reconciliation foundered. In addition to her own needs, she indicated that it was also confusing for the children, when the ‘support worker disappeared’. However, such cases involving home visiting services were rare. More common was the perception that it was a continuous service where parents could make further contact whenever they wished. One parent thought that ‘they don’t leave you until you want them to’ while another, who was informed whenever the service was going to stop, simply requested - and received - support when she needed it.

A similar case was made about universal leisure and sport activities being withdrawn from an area that had no similar alternative resource. For example, in one isolated area where On Track had seemingly become an integral part of the community, parents experienced a level of dismay at the closure of an after school club. Some were of the opinion that funding difficulties had led to a cut in services, and a parent reported that the disappointment had been too great for her son who had become very angry and ‘returned to his old ways’.
6 IMPACTS OF ON TRACK

This penultimate chapter considers the short to medium term impacts of On Track identified by children and parents in the six areas we visited. In view of the design and timing of the evaluation it is not surprising that these impacts are primarily concerned with more immediate social, educational and personal issues rather than longer-term crime prevention. As expected, the nature and extent of impacts identified varied according to the level of clarity respondents had about On Track, the type and level of On Track intervention, the quality of the service provided, and any other changes occurring in respondents’ lives when they were in contact with On Track. These are issues that we turn to first.

6.1 Assessing impacts

The impacts that were reported covered a wide range of social, educational and personal contexts. Often the impacts appeared to be interconnected and had combined to result in wider consequences. For example, the participation in an activity could result in the acquisition of a new skill and improved interpersonal skills, which in turn could increase levels of self confidence and improve relationships at home, and behaviour and performance at school.

6.1.1 Level of clarity about On Track

The degree of clarity that children and parents had about On Track inevitably affected the ease with which they could identify impacts arising from their use of On Track services. There were two types of circumstances where it proved difficult for parents and children to discern whether any tangible benefits or impacts had resulted from their contact with On Track. These included:

- Where they had a limited exposure to the service, such as those who were receiving a leisure-based universal service and in particular parents of children in these circumstances. As a consequence these respondents did not have a clear sense of what On Track was and the type of service being provided; and

- Where they were receiving more than one On Track service or a combination of On Track and non-On Track services, it was sometimes difficult to disentangle the impact arising. The ability of respondents to discern impacts of On Track in these situations depended on the degree to which these services were providing distinct interventions. Where services were complimenting each other and tended to be similar in nature, it was much harder for respondents to single out impacts resulting from a particular On Track intervention. For example, a parent of a child who was having sessions with a non-On Track psychologist and also receiving On Track family therapy noticed an improvement in her child’s behaviour but felt unable to attribute it completely to one service. In contrast, a parent whose child was going to On Track one-to-one anger management sessions and a non-On Track youth club was able to attribute with a little more confidence an improvement in behaviour to the former and the development of social skills to the latter. There also appeared to be less hesitation with respect to the impact of medication. For example, some parents confidently credited a reduction in their child’s aggressive behaviour to the introduction of medication for ADHD.

6 In chapter 3 we presented evidence of service users low awareness of On Track particularly amongst parents of children using school-based universal services, who were sometimes unaware of their children even receiving an On Track service.
The clarity of vision that users had of On Track and their ability to identify impacts arising from the services received could also be confounded if the shape of services provided had evolved and changed over time. The service providers report provides evidence of the flexible approach individual service providers have exercised in delivering services in order to reflect changes in the overarching management of On Track at central and local governmental level, fluctuations in the funding base, numbers of staff they can employ, and of course local needs and preferences.

6.1.2 Type and level of intervention

The type, duration and frequency of intervention being used – whether universal or targeted – inevitably shaped the degree to which On Track was felt to have made an impact and the nature of this impact. As the type and level of risk in an individual’s life underpinned the nature of the intervention received, this also appeared to have a bearing on the range of impacts reported.

Generally, the impacts of universal services revolved around children participating in leisure activities or learning new skills. In contrast the impacts reported by respondents from targeted services were primarily concerned with behaviour and relationship issues. Also, targeted services were more likely to produce family-wide impacts as they were more likely to involve both children and parents.

A case where a child was using universal On Track services
Sue has been going to a local youth club and a leisure centre where she has been taking part in On Track activities including swimming and trampolining. Sue has really enjoyed these activities particularly swimming as it is something she has always liked. Sue’s mum, Rachel, thinks these activities have helped to build her confidence and character and raise awareness of the importance of staying active. It has also helped Sue widen her network of friends beyond those people she meets at school. Rachel said Sue would continue to go swimming after On Track ends because this is something they have always done as a family.

A case where a child was using both universal and targeted On Track services
Jill has been going to an On Track swimming club and to a play scheme during the holidays. She has also been going once a week to an On Track activity group where she has been playing different sports and doing creative activities such as drawing, which a member of staff uses to talk to Jill about her behaviour. Jill’s mum thinks these activities have helped improve her behaviour. She said Jill had made some new friends and has stopped bullying other children at school, although she has still been having problems with her reading. Jill’s mum has also appreciated having a bit of respite from her whilst she goes to these clubs and groups.

However, there were two clear exceptions to this as parenting groups and transition to secondary school support for children were delivered as both universal and targeted services. For this reason family-wide impacts and changes in behaviour of children and relationships within families could also result from these types of universal service.

A case where a child and parent were using universal On Track services
Tom has been learning massage at school with On Track, and his mum, Val, has been going to an open access On Track parenting course. Val has not noticed any change in Tom as a result of taking part in the massage scheme, but feels that she has really benefited from the parenting course. She feels that it has helped her to be more patient and spend more time listening rather than shouting at them. She has also used some of the techniques for disciplining her children that they discussed on
the course, like stopping their pocket money when they misbehave and encouraging them to earn it back by improving their behaviour.

The accessibility of services could also influence the degree of impact made as it affected how easily respondents could use the service and thereby benefit from it. For example, parents spoke of the convenience of the home visiting service, and of the parenting groups that ran during school hours, which ensured they were able to use these services more regularly. These parents believed that the accessibility of these services had helped to increase their impact.

Multiple services produced a wider range of impacts than a single service if the package involved services for more than one member of the family and of different types (for example, free fruit at school, transition to secondary school support for children, and a home visiting service). In these circumstances, the services had an impact on both the child and the family, and the impacts included improvement in the child’s diet; an increase in the child’s confidence; and improvements in parenting skills, family communication and relationships.

A case where multiple universal and targeted On Track services and non-On Track services were being used by a child and their parent

Carl’s family have been working with an On Track worker in sessions at school and at home to help manage his disruptive behaviour. Carl has also been receiving one-to-one anger management sessions at school. In addition, Carl and his two brothers have been having regular sessions with a child psychologist, which is not part of On Track. They have also been involved in sports activities run by the YIP. Carl’s mum, Irene, says that, as a result of the help, the boys seem to have been getting on better and there has been a lot less bickering in the house. They have also been trying to use some of the techniques they learnt to tackle situations at home. Irene has valued the support she has received as it has made her feel less isolated and provided the chance for her to discuss things with another person. However, Irene has found it hard to work out whether the improvements in behaviour have been as a result of the service provided by On Track or the sessions with the psychologist. In addition, she felt the improvements at home were also due to the boys growing up as well as improved relations with her ex husband, Carl’s father. In particular she mentioned that he had explained to Carl the reasons why they had divorced. This, Irene said, had improved her relationship with Carl, as he had always blamed her for the break up.

6.1.3 Assessments of the quality of the service

Not surprisingly, respondents’ assessments about the quality of the service and the degree to which it met their needs had a bearing on whether they believed it had helped them and made an impact on them. For example, a parent explained how, before On Track, her difficulties getting her child to sleep were making it hard for her to cope with other parts of her life and had left her thinking she would, reluctantly, have to go and live with her mother. As a result of On Track she had learnt techniques which had helped her to manage her child’s sleep patterns and ensured she could continue to live independently. Consequently, she rated the quality of the On Track service highly and believed it had made a big impact. Conversely, a parent who had chosen to go to a universal parenting group expecting advice on how to deal with a specific aspect of his child’s behaviour was frustrated that the service had been unable to resolve the issue. As a result he felt that On Track had made no impact.
The way in which contact with On Track had ended could also influence respondents’ perceptions of the quality of the service and its resulting impacts. Namely, where parents had felt that the (usually targeted) service had been withdrawn before their needs were entirely met, their assessment of its impact was negative.

Underpinning assessments of the quality of the service was the nature of the relationship with the On Track staff. Parents did not rate a service very highly if they did not have confidence in the credibility of those delivering it. For example, as previously mentioned, parents showed little confidence in those running parenting groups or offering a home visiting service if they did not have children themselves. In these circumstances they doubted the On Track worker’s ability to relate to beneficiaries and provide meaningful support.

In contrast, a good relationship with On Track workers appeared to have increased the positive impact that a service had made on respondents. Parents valued the non-judgemental approach that was adopted by the On Track staff and believed that this had helped them build confidence in their parenting skills. Another example involved a parent who spoke highly of the fact that a drop-in service for children was being provided by a relatively young member of staff. She thought that the fact that her son ‘respected’ the On Track worker but also felt he could ‘mess about’ with him had meant that her son had engaged with the service and become more confident and assertive as a result.

The degree to which a respondent had enjoyed taking part in or receiving an On Track service shaped their assessment of the quality of the service and the extent of its impact. In this respect children who had enjoyed participating in leisure- or sport-based activities spoke of making new friends or becoming fitter. For those who had attended parenting groups, it was clear that the impacts resulted from parents having the opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences with others who were ‘in the same boat’ as much as the actual nature of the help provided.

6.1.4 Other changes occurring whilst using On Track

The nature of any other circumstantial changes that occurred whilst respondents were in contact with On Track also had a bearing on the nature of the impacts reported. For example, children moving to new schools or new areas, or making new acquaintances, could all result in circumstances improving or deteriorating irrespective of On Track.

Aside from circumstantial changes, parents also alluded to the way their children had matured and developed over time and felt that this made it difficult for them to disentangle the impacts of On Track from the changes resulting from their children growing up. In this way it was said that an improvement in a child’s behaviour might be because he/she ‘is maturing and finding new ways of handling things’. Equally deterioration in behaviour could be attributed to the child ‘becoming a teenager’.

6.2 Impacts

The impacts reported have been grouped into those relating to the child, the family and the local community. As will be seen, there were fewer impacts identified in relation to the local community than for the child and family. With the exception of the local community the impacts identified are broadly in line with those reported by On Track service providers. The following sections outline the impacts identified in each of these groups.
6.2.1 Impacts on children

Among the impacts reported on children were those covering social, educational, health and personal contexts.

Improved behaviour

A key way in which On Track had made an impact was in improving the behaviour of a child at home and/or school. Targeted services, such as one-to-one anger management work, sessions with a psychologist and family therapy, were largely credited with having helped children to become more disciplined and obedient. Also, children reported learning new ways to address their anger and control their behaviour. Among the approaches adopted as a consequence of the service provided by On Track were: children consciously removing themselves from situations which they found frustrating; using the ‘red, amber, green technique’ to calm themselves down; and children warning a parent when they were becoming frustrated so they could discuss how to deal with their feelings. Children also reported that targeted work had enabled them to avoid getting into fights, and one child specifically mentioned that it had stopped her bullying other children at school. These types of improvements in behaviour had also prevented children from being excluded from school.

As a consequence of behaviour improving, parents reported that there was ‘less shouting’ in the family home and fewer confrontations between the siblings. In addition, there were felt to be some more practical benefits such as children clearing up after themselves, or tidying and cleaning their bedrooms.

Parents identified three consequences of behaviour improving at school. One result was that children were taking more interest in school. Such a case involved a parent who explained that her son had stopped fighting in class and instead had become a school councillor. Another result was that children’s academic performance improved. In these situations parents mentioned that their child was receiving more positive reports from school and attaining better results in tests. The third consequence of an improvement in behaviour was that children had been allowed to remain in mainstream schooling. A parent who held this view described her son as a ‘difficult package who was hard to handle in a normal school environment’. She believed that without the anger management work her son might have had to go to a special needs school, which she did not want to happen as he was academically capable of remaining in mainstream education.

There was, however, concern about the sustainability of the improved behaviour once the child was no longer receiving the On Track service. Such views were expressed by parents where On Track services had recently ended and the parents had already observed their child returning to their previous poor behaviour. A case illustrating this point involved a parent who maintained that following the end of the one-to-one support her son was receiving and his return to his original class, he had reverted to his former disruptive behaviour.

Parents reported trying various tactics to attempt to sustain the impact either working alongside the school to continue the approaches used by On Track or applying the techniques used by On Track more widely at home. These approaches appeared to have varying degrees of success.

Improved social and communication skills

A number of the On Track services, such as leisure-based activities, before and after school clubs, and schemes like massage at school involved children socialising with other children. Through these activities, children ‘made new friends’ and developed
their social skills, which they used to form friendships in and outside school. Parents described children becoming ‘more sociable’ and emphasised how some of the activities, such as massage, had broken down barriers between children and enabled them to make friends. This was particularly welcomed by parents who said that their children had usually spent their time with other family members, and that On Track had provided an opportunity to broaden their network of friends.

Another consequence of participating in On Track activities was that it helped to increase parent-child communication as it had provided a talking point for them. The massage at school scheme seemed to be a particularly popular subject for discussion between parents and children. Also, activities such as cookery or gardening offered the child an opportunity to discuss and help their parent in these activities at home.

**Acquiring new interests/skills**

Another impact of participating in these activities was that children had acquired a new interest or skill, such as learning how to fish, cook, or do massage. It was said that a few of the activities, for example, horse riding, drama classes and massage, would not ordinarily be affordable for families in deprived areas.

Also it was believed that taking part in these activities had indirectly helped to improve performance at school. For example, it was reported that drama classes had led to an improvement in reading skills and memory; playing in a football team had helped develop a sense of discipline; and the massage at schools scheme had led to improved concentration.

**Improved health and well-being**

Leisure-based activities, the ‘free fruit at school’ scheme and other healthy eating initiatives had had an impact on children’s health and well-being. As a direct result of engaging in healthy eating initiatives, there were reports of improvements in children’s diet, as well as positive weight gain or loss. More indirectly these initiatives had provided an opportunity to take part in some kind of physical activity or provided a distraction from ‘sitting in front of the TV all day or playing on the play station’.

Parents emphasised the way healthy eating initiatives (such as The Free Fruit at school scheme) had encouraged children to try food that they had previously shunned. One such parent noted that her child was persuaded to try a wider range of fruit after observing other children in his class eating this fruit. Also, it was said that as a result of the healthy eating initiative another child was trying a wider range of food. Previously this child had been a very fussy eater and was underweight as a consequence.

**Felt supported**

There was evidence of children feeling less isolated and more supported as a consequence of their contact with On Track. They particularly appreciated having someone to talk to at an after school club or at a drop-in service about, for example, their concerns about making the transition to secondary school. Parents believed that children valued the fact that the support was provided by a ‘neutral’ source that was not a teacher or a member of the family.

**Raised child’s confidence/self-esteem**

Increasing a child’s confidence was felt to be a key impact of On Track and was underpinned by a range of the impacts noted above. In this way, levels of self esteem...
increased as a consequence of a range of impacts including: behaviour improving at school and at home, acquisition of new skills, and improved social and communication skills. Self-esteem was also boosted among those who had lost weight or become more physically fit as a result of taking part in recreational or healthy eating initiatives.

Respondents identified further positive benefits resulting from children being more confident. For example, there was evidence of children becoming more assertive and confident about expressing their views, or stopping a child bullying them.

Where the child’s confidence had increased as a result of their participation in a recreational On Track activity, parents felt positive about being able to sustain the improvement even after their child stopped receiving the On Track service. This was because they believed that they would be able to access similar services from another provider.

6.2.2 Impacts on family

Aside from making a difference to the lives of children, On Track had also made an impact on their parents and or/other family members. Clearly these impacts arose either as a consequence of parents or other family members being involved in a particular service or more indirectly as a consequence of the child improving their behaviour at school or at home. As will be seen, the range of impacts identified broadly covers those identified for children.

Developed parenting skills

A common impact parents reported was that On Track had helped them develop their parenting skills. In particular they had learnt more effective ways of dealing with their child’s disruptive behaviour at home and improving parent-child communication. Specific examples were given of parents who had learnt to avoid smacking a child when they misbehaved. Instead they, for example, used the removal of rewards, such as a child’s toy or pocket money, as incentives to encourage children to improve their behaviour. Equally there were reports of parents saying they now ‘asked’ rather than ‘told’ their child to do something. There was also evidence of parents reassessing their whole approach to parenting. One such parent described that she had learnt that ‘you have to earn children’s respect’. This was an entirely different philosophy to the one in which she was brought up.

Although parents welcomed developing these skills to resolve difficult situations, they did not necessarily feel that they had solved all their problems. Underpinning this view was the sense that whilst they were now able to cope with their child’s disruptive behaviour they could not prevent it occurring.

Improved family relationships

There was evidence of On Track improving family relationships in two key ways. One was as a result of the child’s behaviour improving, which meant they were now getting on better with their siblings and parents. The other way was attributed to parents improving their parenting skills, which had resulted in them being calmer and dealing more effectively with situations at home.

An improvement in a child’s behaviour at school as a result of receiving On Track services also reduced the burden on parents dealing with school-related problems. As a consequence, relationships at home were easier and less stressful. Examples of this included parents not being called into school to deal with problematic situations as often as they had been previously. It was also said that parents felt
happier about sending their children to school because he/she was now more interested in school.

**Felt better supported**

Another positive consequence of accessing On Track services was that it had helped parents feel more supported. This had helped them to realise that they were *not alone*, and that there was support available. As one parent explained *‘whereas before I didn’t know who I could go and see…so they’ve sort of opened my eyes, as in there are people that you can see’*. It had also provided the opportunity for parents to *‘offload’* and share their concerns with other parents or with On Track workers. Parents valued the chance to have someone *‘who listens and doesn’t judge’*. For some this had been the first opportunity that they had ever had to speak about their life in this way. This, for example, was the case for a parent who said that she had always *‘kept everything bottled up’* because she had nobody with whom to discuss her concerns.

As well as the support they received during the sessions, participating in parenting groups had also provided the opportunity to form new friendships and build emotional, practical and social networks.

**Increased confidence/self esteem**

In common with children, there was evidence of On Track helping to improve parents’ level of confidence and self-esteem. For some parents, attending a parenting group had resulted in them feeling more confident, as they viewed it as an achievement and were impressed and pleased with themselves for going. It had also resulted in parents considering other further education courses. For others, being assured by On Track workers in family therapy sessions or on home visits that the difficulties in the family were *‘not all their fault’* also helped to reassure and boost levels of self esteem. In some of these cases, parents had experienced difficult relationships with their families when they were young or been in destructive relationships, which had left them with very low self esteem and a sense of self-blame. Receiving such assurances had given some parents the confidence to end destructive relationships, or to ask their violent partner to leave the family home. As a consequence of their new-found confidence parents sometimes felt able to support other parents who were having similar difficulties.

**Improved health and well-being**

On Track had also helped to improve the physical health of parents and families. This was usually in response to healthy eating initiatives at their child’s school, which had made them reassess their own eating habits. A child participating in leisure-based activities had also encouraged some parents to take up some kind of physical activity.

**Provided respite for parents**

On Track activities in the holidays and before or after school had provided much-needed respite for some parents from their caring responsibilities. In these cases, parents talked about, for example, *‘getting a couple of hours to myself while he’s at football’*. 
*Improving the communication between parents and school*

It appeared that On Track had helped to improve communication between parents and schools although it was not clear if this had occurred to the same degree that service providers suggested. Parents typically became involved in school either voluntarily, by taking an active interest in their child’s academic progress, for example, or at the request of the school, for example in response to their child’s disruptive behaviour at school. It was not, however, always clear whether this involvement pre-dated their contact with On Track or not.

Where it was clear that On Track had prompted contact between a parent and the school (though again this may not have been their first contact), there were three ways in which On Track had helped to improve communication between the two. The first was where parents had attended a course run at school where a key aim was to involve parents in school, for example, family learning classes. Another way in which communication had improved was as a result of discussions with staff when they collected their child from a school-based out of school hours On Track activity, such as an after school club. Although this did not involve school teachers directly, parents described discussing how their child was doing at school and at the club with On Track workers. The third way in which On Track had prompted contact was through triggering discussions between parents and schools aimed at planning ways of maintaining the improvements that the On Track service had made after it ended.

**6.2.3 Impacts on community**

On this point there was dissonance between the service providers’ views as presented in their report and those of the respondents in our sample. Unlike the service providers, respondents noted limited impact of On Track on the local community. Where the issue was raised, comments about impacts identified were typically made by parents rather than by children. The comments were usually with reference to services that could be seen as a community resource such as after school clubs, play centres and other leisure-based facilities. However, there was some evidence of interventions that aimed to develop parenting skills having a community-level impact.

*Made area feel safer*

Parents described the local area as feeling safer. This observation was usually related to the provision of recreational and sport facilities, which meant that older children had places to spend their leisure time in a constructive way rather than ‘hang around street corners’.

*Increased sense of community*

A sense of community was garnered from seeing the play centres and leisure-based facilities as a community resource. Also, friendships formed at parenting groups had helped to develop social and support networks in the community. Usually parents spoke quite generally, for example, about recognising people from their group and ‘just stopping and having a chat’. However, there were more exceptional reports of On Track having had a more specific impact of helping to bring people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds together within the local community.
7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter draws together some of the key themes that have been raised throughout this report and considers these in the light of the design of On Track and other time-limited flexible programmes of this nature. It also reports on respondents’ views about the value and role of On Track, as well as their suggestions for changing and improving the service.

7.1 The context

On Track is an area-based social crime prevention initiative that aims to work with children (and their families) who appear to present a high risk of involvement in criminal and anti-social behaviour in the future. The emphasis is on early prevention focusing preventative activities and interventions at those ‘at risk’ rather than those already engaged in anti-social or criminal behaviour. The underlying idea of On Track is that the concepts of risk and protection can be used by service providers to assess those most at risk of developing in this way. Once identified, providers work with children and families in ways that ensure that they positively engage in particular interventions that will address the factors that increase their propensity to engage in crime and anti-social behaviour on a voluntary basis. Apart from specifying the core interventions, there was a high degree of flexibility for how service providers developed, targeted and implemented them.

This local flexibility has been a crucial feature of On Track and the way in which service providers have been able to meet beneficiaries’ needs. As a consequence of the way in which the programme has been implemented, a wide range of interventions are operating across the pilot areas. Variations between pilot areas, as identified in the service provider report, include the:

- organisational structure adopted – whether services are provided by in-house staff, or by commissioned external agencies, or through a ‘mixed economy’ of provision;
- way in which services are delivered – whether focusing on universal services (those provided to everyone within a specific group), or on targeted services (aimed at specific children or families), or a combination of both; and
- nature of interventions offered – generally universal services tended to involve school-based classroom activities or community-based leisure or sport. Targeted services involved higher intensity support to deal with difficulties for example with a child’s behaviour or with parenting skills.

7.2 Key themes from the research

We now turn to some of the key themes that have arisen from the research and consider these in the light of the design of On Track and other time-limited flexible programmes of this nature.

7.2.1 Targeting On Track

As discussed in Chapter 2, the ‘risk profiles’ revealed varying levels of risk among the individuals and families in our sample. At one extreme, there were families who appeared to be exposed to a number of risk factors and very few protective factors. At the other, there were families who seemed to be highly protected and had little or no exposure to any risk factors. Between these were families who were exposed to
both risk and protective factors. The degree of risk for these people depended on the
range of factors (whether risk or protection) that predominated.

Although we did not develop area ‘risk profiles’, we found that across the six
geographical areas, one area had a concentration of high risk families, one area had
a concentration of low risk families, and the rest had a combination of high and low
risk families. When these area ‘risk profiles’ were mapped onto the service provider
profile (taken from the service provider report) we discovered that the area with high
risk families had carried out a risk audit and had developed their On Track services
accordingly. In this area, service providers focussed on targeted high-intensity
support for difficulties with child behaviour and parenting. In contrast, the area with
low risk families had adopted an inclusive approach to On Track, generally delivering
universal services at school or in the community with a focus on sport, leisure,
learning new skills and developing new interests. We also know from the service
provider report that this On Track area had been subsumed within the Children’s
Fund – and the Children’s Fund strategic manager saw On Track as needing to
target ‘early signs’ and that anything ‘high risk’ was beyond the projects’ remit. This
therefore suggests that the choice of either universal or targeted services will
inevitably shape the level and type of need that is being met in that area.

Whilst we were unable to establish whether such flexibility of approach may result in
service providers failing to ‘pick up’ high risk families we might have expected to find
similar levels of need across our sample of areas, given that On Track pilot areas
were all specifically chosen because they were areas of high social deprivation.
Our evidence does, however, question the appropriateness of providing universal
(typically leisure-based) services, which are used by families who seem to be highly
protected with little or no exposure to any risk factors. Indeed, service providers
commented that On Track was attracting the ‘wrong kind of parents’ in the ‘low risk
area’. This was also reflected in the views expressed by the parents using open
access parenting groups in all areas who commented that the ‘parents who really
need this don’t come to these sorts of things’.

7.2.2 Promoting On Track

We know from the service provider report that On Track was promoted and branded
in one of three ways:

- Branding the On Track team and its associated services with the On Track
  label;
- Avoiding using the On Track label at all; or
- Identifying the project by the outcomes it achieved for families and
  communities.

Irrespective of the branding approach adopted, in promoting the services, all areas
attempted to avoid labelling families and children as ‘difficult’ or ‘at risk’, emphasising
instead the role of On Track in making a difference to the lives of families and to the
local community. Based on the evidence from this study, it would appear that they
are succeeding in this objective. Alongside this, the decision to refrain from labelling
On Track was also driven by a desire to manage change and avoid confusion
amongst users when the On Track programme ends or is subsumed into other
agencies or initiatives. This may help to explain the low profile that On Track has
amongst its users in our sample. The lack of awareness was especially strong with
respect to universal services. In such cases, it was assumed that school-based
universal services were provided by schools, and community-based leisure or sport
activities were run by local leisure or sport centres. In addition, respondents’
conception of On Track was usually shaped by and limited to the specific service(s) that had been used.

Whist we cannot establish whether this lack of clarity about On Track is resulting in potential beneficiaries missing out on the service, we do know that referral to targeted services is unlikely to be initiated by the user. Furthermore, there is clearly a reticence about users seeking help from statutory services of whom they are wary. For these reasons, there may be value in doing more to promote On Track as an independent source of help for parents who may not be in contact with services. There would also seem to be value in doing more to manage respondents' expectations about the type of service that On Track can provide. This might help to ensure that prospective beneficiaries have a clear understanding of the eligibility criteria for engagement in a particular service, the remit of a particular intervention and the duration for which services will be provided. Whilst there are inevitable difficulties involved in trying to promote a service which has such a degree of local flexibility and is temporary, there is a need to ensure that services are being reached by those most in need. If this is to be successful, any promotion needs to be carried out in a way that does not stigmatise children and families.

7.2.3 Complementing existing services

On Track was intended to complement existing services and there is evidence of seemingly complementary packages of support being provided. Services were being combined in two key ways. One involved a combination of universal On Track and non-On Track services such as play schemes youth clubs. The other involved packages comprising targeted On Track and non-On Track services. Examples of the latter included group-based anger management work at school which was being provided by On Track alongside one-to-one sessions with a non-On Track psychiatrist; or access to an On Track learning mentor at school and family sessions at a non-On Track course for domestic violence.

To a lesser degree there was also evidence of On Track plugging gaps in existing provision. An example of this was the support provided to children making the transition from primary to secondary school. This type of support was not offered by any other provider.

7.2.4 Single versus multiple interventions

A cornerstone of the On Track programme was that the provision of multiple interventions was likely to be more effective than the provision of a single intervention. This study provides ample evidence of multiple intervention packages being delivered to one member of a family, usually a child, and of single interventions being delivered to one or more members of a family. The impacts resulting from both models of intervention have been shown to have a number of beneficial impacts.

Multiple interventions ensure that a more holistic approach can be taken to help both parent and child. In this way there is greater likelihood of services being more effective in increasing the resilience of the child to other risk factors if the parent, for example, can also be helped simultaneously with any difficulties they may be having coping at home.

As a consequence, multiple interventions have the advantage of resulting in wider-reaching impacts than single interventions. An illustration of this involved a case where the child was attending a targeted after school club, receiving one-to-one behavioural support at school, and was part of the school’s universal healthy eating initiative. Alongside this his mother was participating in a parenting course. The multiple interventions had resulted in multiple impacts. These included an increase in
confidence and self-esteem of both parent and child; an improvement in the child’s eating habits leading to positive weight-gain; the child learning new techniques for managing his behaviour so that he was able to remain in school; the parent learning more effective ways of disciplining her children; and more frequent and effective parent-child communication.

7.2.5 Multi-agency working

Central to the ethos of On Track is the need for co-operation and multi-agency working between health, educational and social service providers, youth offending teams, the police and relevant voluntary sector organisations. In this way children at risk of offending are identified early and provided with services which continue to early adolescence. Where we have evidence of multi-agency working, it appears that the On Track worker often plays a pivotal role in managing the communication and co-ordination of a package of different services. As a consequence it appears that they have ensured services are better able to meet the needs of beneficiaries and allowed effective communication and information exchange between different agencies (as respondents were not having to repeat information with each service provider). Furthermore, there is no evidence that beneficiaries have been receiving duplicate services. Multi-agency working appears to be less effective in passing On Track beneficiaries on to other services when a particular intervention ends. Clearly we only have evidence from parents and children (and not service providers) but in certain cases the withdrawal of all services at the age of 12 years was too soon, and had resulted in the deterioration of a child’s behaviour. At this point it did not seem that these children and parents were being passed on to other services. Indeed, in some cases On Track workers had continued to provide support after this point on an unofficial basis. In view of the discussion about the sustainability of impacts, this does suggest the need to have greater flexibility around the age criterion for On Track, or to find alternative provision to support these individuals.

7.2.6 Sustainability of impacts

Clearly, without longitudinal evidence it is difficult for us to assess the sustainability of impacts of On Track across our sample. However, as we have just mentioned, we did find cases where behaviour appeared to have deteriorated after an On Track intervention had ended. Such a case involved a child who had been increasingly refusing to attend school because he had been finding it difficult to cope in a large classroom setting. Once he had started receiving one-to-one support via On Track his school attendance had improved. However, since the service had ended his behaviour had deteriorated and his attendance was beginning to be affected.

The importance that parents place on sustaining improvements was obvious. There were, for example, cases of parents trying to sustain impacts by trying to apply the techniques that On Track had been using at home. For example, in one case where the service had involved the school, a parent had tried to work alongside the school to consider how they could both continue the approaches used by On Track.

7.2.7 Quality of On Track workers

Assessments of On Track as a service often revolved around the quality of the relationships beneficiaries had with their On Track workers and the workers’ ability to meet their needs. Generally, children and parents described having a positive relationship with the On Track staff with whom they were in contact. A number of factors underpinned the quality of these relationships.
Children particularly valued the fact that the On Track worker was independent from school, that they tried to relate to them at their level, and that they consulted and involved them in decisions. The key to developing a good relationship appeared to be getting a balance between being too formal and being overly familiar. This created a relationship of mutual respect where the children heeded the workers and the workers kept to their word when undertaking whatever they had promised to do.

Parents appreciated the On Track workers providing support in a friendly, non-threatening and non-judgemental way. This appeared to be particularly important for those with previous negative experiences of statutory service providers.

The availability of On Track workers was another quality that parents valued. This was appreciated in relation to the amount of time that they were able to spend with their children (one-on-one) as well as the responsive way they handled any issues or difficulties parents had outside of formal appointments or groups.

Parents’ confidence in the ability of On Track staff to meet their needs was partly the result of an assessment of their local knowledge and their personal and professional experiences of working and communicating with children.

### 7.2.8 Continuity of worker

It is clear that the continuity of the On Track worker for targeted services is particularly important for building a trusting relationship and for facilitating honest and open dialogue. It also ensures that beneficiaries do not have to explain their circumstances and answer the same questions with different workers. In addition, it made re-contact for further help easier.

Given the personal nature of issues discussed in a one-to-one targeted service, the need to see the same worker was seen as paramount. This allowed respondents to feel confident that there was a thorough understanding of their situation, and for a rapport and trust to build between beneficiary and worker. The latter point was especially critical where the beneficiary had difficulties managing change.

### 7.3 Role and value of On Track

Generally, respondents were very positive about their On Track experience. In terms of universal services, they particularly valued the learning and social aspects, whereas for targeted services, they appreciated the way in which the service had boosted their confidence and resulted in improvements in behaviour, relationships and communication.

As expected, we are unable to comment on the longer-term crime prevention outcomes of the programme. However, On Track appeared to be addressing some of the identified precursors to youth antisocial behaviour such as poor educational achievement, disruptive behaviour, and poor parenting. In this way On Track appeared to be playing an important role in:

**Improving educational achievement and behaviour**

On Track provided early interventions to address risk factors such as exclusion from school. Through one-to-one and group-based anger management and behavioural support, and more inclusive alternatives such as targeted after school clubs, it provided schools with a range of options to address, manage, and improve behaviour and performance at school.
Also, through the transition to secondary school work, On Track provided support at a critical point in a child’s school career. As noted above, this support did not appear to be available from other service providers.

**Improving relationships at home**

By providing parenting courses and family therapy, On Track has attempted to support families in addressing their communication as well as their parental monitoring and discipline practices at home. This has helped to improve relationships within the family and increase the stability of the family environment for the child.

**Providing respite at home**

On Track provided out of school childcare through after school clubs and community-based sport and leisure activities. This further contributed to the stable environment noted in the above point by providing much-needed respite for parents.

**Providing outlets and opportunities for children**

On the whole, the universal leisure and sport-based activities provided a safe and constructive way for children to spend their free time. However, there was some evidence of bullying which had led some children to stop participating. It was clear that in certain deprived areas these activities had not previously been available free of charge. Engaging children in this way also provides an alternative to children ‘hanging around on the streets’.

**Reached individuals missed by other service providers**

On Track appeared to be reaching people who were reluctant to approach school or statutory services such as social services. This reluctance either appeared to be driven by actual negative past experiences or a fear of the expected consequences. In this respect On Track provided a valuable source of support. This was the key way in which On Track appeared to be providing ‘added value’ over and above the services already available to the families.

The issue for children was slightly different, in that they were not making the decision to avoid using statutory services. There were, however, children who reported being similarly unsupported because they felt unable to approach their school or family with their concerns. For these children, On Track provided a source of support to discuss concerns away from the family and school environment.

**Brokered contact between parents and schools**

On Track helped with parent-school relationships, which was especially critical given the point made above about some parents’ reluctance to approach school. By providing parents with an opportunity to see how their children learn (for example, through in-school activities for parents) and being able to discuss their child’s schooling with non-teaching staff (for example with On Track workers running after school clubs or teaching massage at school) On Track was able to involve parents in their child’s education. This was a (positive) unanticipated outcome that was also noted by the service providers.
7.3.1 Suggestions for improving On Track and addressing the prevention/early intervention agenda generally

Whilst there was a high level of satisfaction with On Track, respondents did make suggestions for improving the range of services available, as well as addressing the issue of prevention. There were three key areas for development and they revolved around the design, delivery and promotion of On Track. Suggestions for addressing the prevention/early intervention agenda emerged from the suggestions about the design of On Track, and these are presented together as part of the discussion about extending the target and focus of On Track.

Clearly, suggestions were influenced by levels of awareness of, and accuracy of information about, On Track. As would be expected, these suggestions tended to revolve around the aspects of the service that respondents felt were not working.

Extend the target and focus of On Track

A popular suggestion was that On Track should be extended to include teenage children. This idea was driven by parents who felt they only started to have difficulties coping when children reached adolescence and that this was also the period when children were more likely to be exposed to and become involved in crime. Also, a request was made for tougher sanctions by school on bullying and truancy as a way of preventing and reducing difficulties with children when they are older.

Another suggestion was to make parents the primary focus for On Track. This comment was made by parents from families falling at the lower end of the risk continuum. Underpinning this idea was a view that parents are primarily responsible for preventing children's involvement in antisocial behaviour. They therefore felt that children learnt their behaviour from their parents, and consequently, by supporting the parent, the programme would be supporting the child.

A case was made for a programme to be designed which treats all children as being potentially ‘at risk’ rather than targeting a section of the community. This again confirms the evidence from the service providers’ report. In a similar vein, there was a view that services should be targeted to the ‘average’ child as well as the ‘low achievers’. Underpinning this view was the idea that whilst there is support for low achievers, and recognition for high achievers, there appears to be a gap for the child in the middle, who could become at risk as services are not focusing on them.

A final rather specific suggestion related to the range of activities available for children through universal services. It was suggested that the emphasis on sports should be broadened to include a wider choice of activities for children such as learning a new language or an instrument.

Delivery of On Track

There was a view that a wide range of delivery modes should be available under On Track. Suggestions included having services that are one off drop-ins and services that require a longer-term commitment, for example six weekly sessions, and running one-to-one sessions as well as work in groups.

Promotion of On Track

The low levels of awareness of On Track prompted parents to suggest that there was a need for more effective promotion of the programme.

Related to the reluctance of some to access statutory services, parents felt that the publicity should make it clearer that the service is not part of, for example, school or
social services. They also argued for confidentiality between On Track and statutory services.

Another suggestion related to more effective publicity and targeting of fathers and male carers, who it was felt would also benefit from attending parenting groups.

7.4 Concluding remarks

This strand of the evaluation set out to provide an in depth understanding of the views and experiences of parents and children using On Track. As has been evident throughout this report, the lack of awareness that respondents had about On Track has presented a number of challenges in executing this aim. It has presented difficulties establishing the range and type of On Track and other interventions being accessed, respondents’ assessments about the role and value of these interventions, and their resulting impacts.

That being said, the evidence presented has demonstrated the overwhelmingly positive way in which respondents assessed the service provided by On Track. The wide range of impacts identified by children and parents is testament to its beneficial role and value. In view of the design and timing of the evaluation, it is not surprising that these impacts are primarily associated with more immediate social, educational and personal issues rather than longer-term crime prevention. There are, however, early indications that it may be addressing some of the identified precursors to youth antisocial behaviour. This research contributes to the ‘risk’ and ‘protection’ literature by providing evidence about the processes by which these factors combine and interconnect with each other. Moreover, it identifies a number of issues to be considered in developing future interventions with similar aims, primarily focused on the need for appropriate targeting and effective promotion, and for measures to ensure that positive impacts can be sustained over the longer term.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A  RECRUITMENT DOCUMENTS

- Letter to parents
- Information leaflet for parents
- Letter to children
- Information leaflet for children
Dear

Thank you for contributing to the On Track Wave 2 Survey recently, which we carried out on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills. At that time you kindly agreed that we could approach you again about further research, and I am writing to invite you to take part in a follow-up interview.

The aim of the follow-up interview is to hear your views about OT services. Don’t worry if you’re not sure you’ve used an On Track service. Not all On Track services use the name On Track so you might have used an On Track service without knowing it as one. The information you provide will help in developing services for children and families.

Everyone who takes part will be offered £25 as a thank you for their time. The interview will be carried out by a NatCen researcher at your home and last about an hour to an hour and a half. As with the Survey, everything you say will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. No names or anything else that may identify you will be included in the final report.

A member of our research team may contact you (in the next couple of weeks) to discuss the study a little further and answer any questions that you may have. If following this conversation you are happy to take part, the researcher will make an appointment for a time that is convenient for you.

We are also interested in hearing children’s views about On Track services. So when the researcher calls, they may invite (name of child) to take part in a separate interview after yours, if you are happy for us to do that. I have enclosed a letter and leaflet for (name of child) explaining the study. We would be grateful if you could pass it on to (name of child).

Unfortunately we will not be able to interview everybody, so if you do not hear from us, thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for taking part in the Survey. However, if you have any questions in the meantime, please don’t hesitate to call me or another member of the research team.

Yours sincerely

Ini Grewal
Senior Researcher
Research Team
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National Evaluation of On Track: Phase Two

Hearing from families and children - qualitative research

What do you think of On Track services? Talk to us about your experiences....

On Track is a programme in your area providing help and support to children and parents. We’ve been asked by the Government to talk to people who have used On Track. You may not know the name On Track, but please read on anyway...

are carrying out the research and this leaflet provides you with further information about the study and why we’ve asked permission to contact you about it.
Thanks for agreeing to be contacted again. Here are answers to some questions you might have.

Why are you asking to contact me again?
We want to talk to people in your area who have experience of On Track services. It’s a different kind of interview to the one that you’ve just done. We want to hear about your views in your own words so there won’t be any set questions or answers. This will help us to understand people’s experiences of On Track in more detail.

The new interview is part of the same research programme for the Department of Education and Skills as the interview you have just done.

I don’t think I’ve used an On Track service. Are you sure you want to contact me?
Don’t worry if you’re not sure you’ve used On Track. Not all On Track services use the name On Track, as different organisations may be providing them. So you may have used an On Track service without knowing it was one.

Will you definitely contact me?
Not necessarily. We are only able to involve a small number of families, so we may not be in touch. If we’re not able to involve your family we’d like to thank you for your help up to now.

When will you be in touch?
If we are inviting your family to take part then we will be in contact with you at some time between Oct-Nov 2005.

If you do contact me, what would another interview be like?
Interviews will be informal and confidential. They will normally last about an hour.

We’d like to talk to parents and in some families, children too. But we will discuss this with you at the time if we are inviting your children to take part.

The interview would be about:
- The On Track services used (whether it’s something your child has done, or whether it’s something you’ve been involved in as a parent)
- Your views and experiences of the service(s)
- How the On Track services did or didn’t help you or your children
- Anything that could be improved.

Each family that takes part in this next stage of the research will receive a small gift as a thank you for their time.

Our responsibilities to you:
- We guard your privacy: your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contact details and your contribution will be used for research purposes only. When we write up research, we make all the data anonymous so that there will be no way of identifying you or your family.
- We respect your wishes: participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to take part – it is your choice. If you do take part, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to.
- We answer your questions: we will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.
Dear

Thank you very much for taking part in a survey that we did recently. We wondered if you would help us again.

The government has asked us to find out what young people like or don’t like about school, what they think of the teachers and children at their school, and about any special groups or clubs that they go to. It would be great if you took part in the study but it is totally up to you if you want to, and we won’t mind if you decide not to take part. We’ve also written to your mum or dad telling them about this, and asked them as well if they want to take part.

If you decide to take part, one of our team will come to your home to interview you. The interview will take about an hour and you will be given a £15 gift voucher as a thank you for your time. The leaflet tells you a bit more about what we’re doing.

Please let your mum or dad know if you’d like to be interviewed, so that when we call them, they can tell us if you’re interested and we can arrange a time to come and see you. If you’ve got any questions you can call me (020 7549 9544) or email me (i.grewal@natcen.ac.uk) or tell your mum or dad and they can ask us when we call them.

Unfortunately we won’t be able to interview everybody, so if you don’t hear from us, thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for helping us before with the Survey.

Thanks again and we hope to see you soon.

Ini Grewal
Senior Researcher

Research Team
Ini Grewal
Jenny Graham
Kandy Woodfield
The research is being carried out by 2 charities:

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is the largest independent social research institute in Britain. We design, carry out, and analyse, research studies in the fields of social and public policy.

NatCen is a company limited by guarantee (Company registration number: 4392418) and a registered charity (Charity number: 1091768).

The POLICY RESEARCH BUREAU (PRB) is an independent, social policy research centre based in London, specialising in research on and with families and children. PRB is politically independent, not for profit and has charitable status.

PRB is a department of The Dartington Hall Trust, a company limited by guarantee (Company registration number: 1485560), registered in England as a charity (Charity number: 279756).

We would like your help with a project about children’s activities at school and outside school. We want to find out about the different activities you are involved in and what you think about them.

We are also talking to your mum or dad about any activities that they are involved in and what they think of them too.

We would like to find out what you like and dislike about your school. What the teachers and children are like and the different things you do at school.

We also want you to tell us if you belong to any special groups or clubs and what kind of things you do there.

You would be really helping us – and we hope you can help us make things better for children at school and outside school.

We will not share what you say with anyone. We won't pass on anything you say to your mum or dad or teacher or anyone else. And you won't have to tell us anything you don't want to.

Your mum or dad has said that we can talk to you, but only if you want to talk to us. So, it’s up to you!

We'd be happy to answer any questions you have about helping us.

If you have any questions, please just ask

Look inside this leaflet for some useful telephone numbers and interesting web-sites!
Useful Telephone Numbers

**Children’s Express**
A news agency run by and for children and young people.
☎ 020 7833 2577

**Article 12**
A children’s rights organisation run by and for young people.
☎ England and Wales 020 7843 6026
Web England and Wales www.article12.com

**Youth 2 Youth**
Y2Y is a confidential telephone and e-mail helpline service run by young people for young people. They will call you back so you can speak to them for free.
☎ 020 8896 3675
email help@youth2youth.co.uk

**Anti bullying campaign**
For young people who are being bullied at school or anywhere else.
☎ 020 7378 1446
(open Mon-Fri 9.30am - 5.30pm).

**ChildLine**
A confidential helpline for children and young people in trouble or danger. Open 24 hours a day, every day. No problem is too big or too small. All calls are free and do not show up on any phone bill.
☎ 0800 1111
Web www.childline.org.uk

**NSPCC**
A confidential helpline if you are worried or unhappy. Calls are free and won't show up on a phone bill, unless you call on a mobile phone. Call any time, day or night.
☎ 0800 800 5000
Web www.nspcc.org.uk

**Interesting Websites**
- www.there4me.com
  Confidential online advice for teenagers
- www.ruok.net
  Mental health information and advice for young people
- www.bbc.co.uk/health/kids
  Sections on body and mind with general advice about trouble with friends, family school and more.
- www.healthykids.org.uk
  Good resource on health designed for younger kids.
- www.youngminds.org.uk
  Sections for children/parents and professionals. Reams of information about everything.
- www.itsnotyourfault.org
  All about divorce and separation. Sections for younger children, teens and parents.
APPENDIX B  INTERVIEW MATERIALS

- Consent form for children
- Topic Guide for parents
- Topic Guide for children
- Visual materials for children
National Evaluation of On Track: Phase Two
Hearing from families and children - research

Consent Form

To be read and signed before the interview:

- The research has been explained to me.
- I understand that the interview will be taped.
- I understand that no one will tell anyone else what I say. Names won't be used in any writing.
- I am happy to take part in this research.

Signed……………………………………………… Date…………………………………………

To be read and signed after the interview:

- I have been given an information leaflet.
- I have received a voucher worth £15

Signed……………………………………………… Date…………………………………………

Thank you for helping us out!

ID Number: P157-6b………………
Aim and objectives

Evaluate the process and impact of On Track services on the risk and protective factors* (list of factors attached at end of topic guide) connected with offending and antisocial behaviour by exploring:

- The context in which interventions received
- The risk and protective factors in the child’s life
- Details of OT services received
- Reasons for using OT services - referral process, role in decision making
- Experience of using OT services
- Impact of OT services on child
- School (e.g. behaviour, learning, bullying/victimisation, attitude and attachment to school)
- Peer and social relations
- Antisocial behaviour and substance use (behaviour, attitudes, peers)
- Mental health (strengths, difficulties, self esteem), physical health
- Impact on family
- Family relations and parenting (e.g. parental supervision, communication, relationships)
- Family involvement with school
- Impact on wider community
- Impact of receiving multiple interventions

1. Introduction

- Introduce self, PRB & NatCen (if appropriate explain about paired interviewers)
- Introduce the study: who for, why doing it
- Explain link to survey and differences to survey interview
- Explain purpose of interview
- Discuss use of tape recorder
- Remind about confidentiality and how material will be reported
- Inform about length of interview
- Mention the thank you payment
- Any questions
- Check happy to continue
2. General household background

- Family composition - number and age of children, lone or dual parent family
- Tenure - type, length
- Parent(s)' current activities (benefits/training/employment details), children's current activities
- Parent(s)' disability/health problems, children's disability/health problems/SEN
- Local area - feeling about living in area, amenities etc, views about neighbourhood (probe sensitively to develop profile of risk and protective factors - e.g. poor or crime ridden neighbourhood, leisure facilities, opportunities that allow young people to use their time constructively)
- Household relationships - views about how feel about living together, how get on, any problems (probe sensitively to develop profile of risk and protective factors - e.g. type and level of parental monitoring/supervision, approach to discipline)

3. How and why they started using On Track services

Use, as appropriate, details from Strands 6a and 7 to gently probe parent to identify OT services used. Where receiving more than one OT service, explore views about each service one at a time - sections 3&4

Awareness and knowledge of OT
- How first heard about/came into contact with the programme
- Prior knowledge of programme, sources of information

Service details
- What service, who service user(s)

Profiling child’s risk and protective factors

Identify the child connected with the OT service, and sensitively probe in order to develop a profile of the risk and protective factors in the child’s life, asking for examples of how these manifest in the child’s life.

- Description of their personality, temperament and behaviour
- Relationships with friends and peer group, and parents
- Experience of school, e.g. participation in early years education, academic achievement, engagement with school/education, exclusion, whether happy at school
- Any anti-social behaviour (e.g. bullying, truancy substance misuse)

Service details
- How found out about that particular service
- Expectations of service before use - who for, what purpose, what hope to get from it
- Motivators and barriers to using service (i.e. factors shaping decision to use service and anything that made them think twice about using service), for example:
  - Content of service
  - Style of delivery
  - Past experience of similar services
  - Service site (e.g. in school, in city centre, near or far away from home)
  - Accessibility (e.g. public transport, wheelchair access)
Language/cultural issues (e.g. in terms of form filling or communicating with service providers)
Timing/opening hours (e.g. compatibility with working hours or childcare hours)

Experience of referral process
- How referred, who referred (self/via professional), compulsory or voluntary referral, involvement in referral decision making process
- Circumstances/situation that triggered referral, what made parent/professional feel needed to seek help
- Whether in contact with other family support services at that time and if so for what purpose, and whether that influenced their decision to use OT services

4. Experiences of On Track services

- Details of OT service currently receiving, whether changed over time, reasons for any changes
  - What, when, by whom, where
  - Is it like anything else they’ve used, how compare
- Relationship with OT service providers
  - Rapport, positive aspects, less positive aspects
  - What kind of relationship would have liked
- Extent to which identify staff as OT workers, whether this matters
- Views on the aspects of service that have worked well and those that have worked less well
- Views about service delivery (spontaneous and then probe on content, quality, and resources)
- Extent to which continuity of care has been maintained over time (in terms of getting services needed for as long as they needed them, and having the same provider during the lifetime of receiving a service - does that matter)
- Extent to which OT service met their expectations
- Views on how OT service could be improved and made more responsive to their needs
- Comparison of On Track service to other family support services used, critical differences relating to experiences and delivery issues

Where receiving more than one OT service
- How different services sat together, ease of moving between them, perception or not of them as different services
- If more than one provider, their experiences of dealing with different providers

5. Ending contact with OT

- Details of OT service that used to receive but do not receive any longer
  - What, when, by whom, where, who user
  - Key components of service used
  - Evaluation of quality/contact/content of service
  - Key factors accounting for satisfaction/dissatisfaction
- Whether expected OT services to end or came as surprise
- If they chose to end OT service:
  - What factors influenced their decision to end contact/drop out
  - Who took the decision, e.g. joint family decision, mainly decided by one family member, by service provider, other
  - What might have persuaded them to stay on
6. Impacts and Outcomes

Begin this section by asking the parent/carer to give an open and spontaneous response on what they think the impacts have been (for example: ‘Can you tell me what difference taking part in OT (or other) has had on you or your child, your family or wider community?’ and then prompt them to explore the following issues, throughout probing for illustrative examples.

**Impacts on the child(ren)**
- Impacts on behaviour and temperament e.g. in and out of school, victimisation/bullying
- Impact on relationships e.g. with parents and peers, school staff, community engagement
- Impacts on school attainment e.g. academic performance and achievement, engagement with school, attendance and truancy, exclusion
- Impacts on wellbeing and physical health e.g. physical health and development, mental and emotional health
- Impact on antisocial behaviour e.g. crime, substance misuse, bullying, lying, stealing, causing trouble
- Impacts on motivation and aspirations

**Impacts on the parents/carers and wider family**
- Impact on parenting skills, confidence and knowledge
- Impact on relationship with child(ren)
- How the rest of the family, including siblings, has been affected
- Impact on family cohesion
- Impact on relationship with service providers and attitudes towards professionals delivering family and children’s services, and how attitude might change in the future
- Effect on access to services and social (informal support) networks

**Impacts on wider community**
- Impact on community/neighbourhood cohesion
- Impact on awareness of services available in area
- How would things have turned out if not have OT services, what used instead

For all
- Any unexpected impacts or outcomes - positive or negative
- Views about sustainability of changes in behaviour, attitudes, activities and relationships
- Expectations about future/longer term changes resulting from OT interventions
- Prioritising of positive impacts, ‘best thing got out of it’
- Views about key factors leading to positive and negative outcomes (i.e. staff/provider role, content of intervention etc.)
7. Suggestions for the future

- Anything they would do differently if they were involved with OT again, e.g. interact with service provider differently, seek more or different services, etc
- Critical gaps in OT provision
- Suggestions for new or different OT services
- Suggestions for ways in which services (providers) could increase positive impacts/decrease the negative impacts of interventions
- Suggestions for ways in which OT providers could engage other families (if appropriate, specifically ideas about how to engage fathers)
- Expectations for the future, if and how OT and other family support services feature in these
- Any other comments/reflections/thoughts about OT

- Thank respondent
- Reassure about confidentiality
- Offer thank you payment
- Where will be potentially interviewing their child, discuss process, consent, etc


Risk and protective factors operate within a hierarchy of four interconnected levels - at the level of the individual, the family, the community or neighbourhood, and the wider society or culture.

Risk factors

At level of individual child
- Early onset behaviour disorders such as hyperactivity
- Difficulties with learning, poor verbal and planning skills, and poor educational attainment
- Problems with impulse-control
- Tendency to misinterpret social interactions and circumstances as more negative or threatening than they really are
- Engaging in other related forms of antisocial behaviour including truancy and substance misuse

At the family level
- Having a family that includes criminal offenders
- Family violence and discord
- Poor parenting (including use of harsh or erratic discipline, low levels of parental monitoring and supervision, and poor parent-child communication)

At community level
- Associating with antisocial peers
- Growing up in a poor, crime-ridden neighbourhood (where opportunities for crime are abundant and there is little else constructive for young people to do)
At social or cultural level
- Tolerance or even endorsement of violence as a means to an end by the wider society (for example, a proliferation of glamorised depictions of interpersonal violence in the media).

Protective factors

At level of individual child
- Certain temperaments (that help young people avoid becoming involved in crime)
- Engaging well at school
- Making strong peer relationships with those who are not themselves inclined to antisocial behaviour

At the family level
- Having at least one strong reliable relationship with an adult who takes a warm interest in the child’s development

At community level
- Opportunities to engage in constructive leisure activities and develop talents
- A community that takes an active interest in the well-being of its younger members

At social or cultural level (No example noted)
check questionnaire

Overarching aim:
To provide information from child’s perspective that helps in the interpretation of the cohort study results

Specific objectives of the interviews:

(1) Explore process factors in On Track delivery

- Explore the context in which On Track services were received
- Explore risk and protective factors in children’s lives, esp wrt crime prevention, and child’s perception of his or her needs
- Check services used by child, wrt to those detailed in survey interviews
- Get child’s experiences of the On Track services wrt delivery aspects – staff skills and quality, content, frequency/dosage, practical factors. Unpack survey responses and elaborate on them
- To obtain child’s role in decision making (?) and understanding of services and availability

(2) Explore impact and outcomes of On Track services on child and family across various dimensions (what has changed, and to what extent On Track or other services associated with this)

- School (behaviour, learning [Sec], bullying/victimisation, attitudes and attachment to school, family involvement w/school);
- Peer & social relationships
- ASB & substance use (behaviour, attitudes, peers)
- Mental health [Sec] (Strengths and Difficulties, Self esteem)
- Family relationships and parenting (parental supervision, communication, relationships)
- Child’s view of services parent has used

(3) Provide methodological insights

- Check recall of services and ability to correctly identify providers
- Check services used but not mentioned in survey (esp school based)

Structure

Outcomes (general, not OT specific): behaviour, relationships etc

Use of activities/services (which may or may not be OT)

Interviewer to identify OT services from the above information

On Track services – discussion of process

On Track services – discussion of impacts

Closing questions (wider discussion)
Interviewer notes and reminders – please explain

- Who we are
- Intro to the research study
- Length of interview *(between about an hour and an hour and a half – depending on how much child has to say)*
- Why and how the child was chosen to take part *(incl. briefing on how we got their name and details)*
- Consent *(obtained from parents and that they don’t have to take part but we would be pleased if they did)*
- No right/wrong answers – child’s chance to tell us what they think about some important parts of their life
- Confidentiality *(carefully explain conversation will be private, nothing will be passed on to parents, teachers or anyone else. Want child to be honest about that they think! Don’t have to answer any questions they would rather not)*
- Tape recorder
- Thank you payment
- Any questions (allow time)
- OK to proceed?
- BEFORE START OF INTERVIEW: CHILD TO SIGN **CONSENT FORM** AND GET INFORMATION LEAFLET

Background and warm up

- **Tell me about this area. What is it like to live round here?** *(probe playgrounds, transport, shops, youth clubs, night life, friendship networks)*
  - How would you describe the area to others that don’t live here?
  - What’s the best thing about living around here?
  - And what’s the worst thing about living around here?

- **Tell me about who lives with you here** in this flat/house? *(Probe names of household members, pets etc)*

- **Background about school**
  - What school do you go to, what year are you in, how long there, what school at before that etc

- **Views about school environment in general**
  - Do you like your school; enjoy being there / like going to school? *(probe why/why not)*
  - Best and worst things about your school *(probe fully, are all schools like that or is this school different to others etc)*
  - What are teachers like *(probe why like/don’t like etc)*
Activities / On Track services use in and out of school (‘now I’d like to ask you about some of the things you do apart from ordinary lessons’)

Prior to the interview list here the OT services in this area that the child would have been eligible to use.

Check existing information to establish which OT services the child has accessed and establish which of the services referred to in the above section are also OT.

Ask the following questions for each service used: make sure you clarify for the tape which service you are talking about (use name of venue, staff or other identifying info)

- Activities / OT services at school during school hours
  - Are there any clubs or activities at school apart from normal lessons (probe for things the school does on service provision front, – check details before interview)
  - Does child take part (why, why not, probe survey responses)

- After/before school and out of school activities / OT services
  - Are there any clubs or activities that you go to/used to go to after school? (probe what, when where, how often, If no, probe for clubs/activities they used to go to)

On Track service use (‘I’d like to know a bit more about some of the clubs and activities you mentioned before’).

- Availability and accessibility
  - How did you find out about it?
  - What made you decide to go?
  - Where did you go? (try to get exact venue established)
  - Was it easy to get to? (and probe views of venue – comfortable, child friendly etc)
  - How many times did you go? (probe frequency of use – how long each session, regularity of attendance, get sense of intensity of use vs. one-off infrequent use)

- Content
  - What did/do you do whilst you were at X service (probe, activities, talked, what about, alone or with others etc)
  - Did you enjoy anything about it/was anything especially good (probe which bits, why)
  - Was there anything you didn’t/don’t enjoy about it/was anything especially bad (probe, which bits, why)

- Approachability and attributes of professionals and services
  - What did/do you think of the people who ran it? (Probe, staff qualities – was there anyone they liked, didn’t like, and why)
  - Did/do they ever ask you what you wanted to do whilst you were there?
  - Did/do they ever ask you what you thought was important to do or talk about?
  - Did/do they listen to what you had to say? (probe, how do you know this?)
  - Did/do you trust them? (Probe why, why not)
  - Did/do they do what they said they would do? (if not, probe examples)
Impact and outcomes
- Before you started going to X service, how did you expect it to be? (probe why)
- And when you went/go there, was it/is it like you expected it would be? (probe why/why not)
- What do you think they were trying to do/trying to get you to do? (probe as relevant, why did you get sent there, why did they run that club - what was it for)
- Did going to X service help you find out anything useful? (or interesting? Or helpful? And probe what, how, why)

- Did it give you any ideas of things to do:
  at home
  at school?
- Did you talk about what you did at X service with your parents/any of your family?
- Did you make any new friends or meet any new people? (probe who, how many)

- Earlier you told me you are quite a good/naughty child. After you'd been there did you behave any differently? (probe, in what way – give concrete examples; why; refer back to questions about behaviour, truancy, exclusions, have these improved)
- Did it change the way you feel about anything? (what, why did that change)
- Did it change the way you think about anything? (anything at all – and probe what, why)
- Did going there change the way you think about yourself or the way you feel about yourself?

- If survey responses indicates child has antisocial peers, probe what child thinks of them after attending X service and whether any changes
- Would you have gone there/done those things (ie at X service) if you had been with your friends (trying to establish if child would have gone to service as matter of free choice, or was 'pushed)
- If any of your friends (other friends/brothers/sisters) had gone to X service, would they have enjoyed it? (probe why/ why not)
- If you had the chance, would you go to X service again (probe why/ why not)
- Overall, what was best about X service?
  -and overall, what was worst?
- If you were in charge of running X service, what would you do differently (if anything)

Peer relationships
- Do any of your friends live around here? What sorts of things do you like doing with your friends? (in area, at school, at home etc)
- Describe your friends to me (girls, boys, ages, personalities, naughty or good etc, explore ASB & influences on the child’s behaviour)
- Are the friends you have these days different from the ones you had before? (How are they different)
- Do you have more, or less friends, these days then you did in Year__ of? (How number and types of relationships have changed and probe why)
Family life and relationships (*should follow on from above*)

- **Parent/family involvement with school**
  - Do Mum/Dad/ (adapt to reflect makeup of family) ever ask you about school (probe: how the day went, how things going generally, what likes, dislikes etc, if they don’t, what do they ask about, what kind of things do you talk about)
  - Does mum/dad ever go to the school to talk to teachers? (Probe when, why and probe for whether parents more/less involved over past year or three)
  - Does school try to get parents to spend time at school/get involved in school activities (probe what, how etc)
  - How does child feel about parents’ involvement with school (probe would like more, less etc)

- **And at home**
  - What about at home, how do you behave at home? (show little angel/little devil card, probe different or same as school)
  - What do you think your parents would say about how you behave at home?
  - Would they say your behaviour over the past year is better, worse same than a year ago? (Probe why and try to get at underlying reasons if has changed. Come back to this later if suspect service use may be involved… anything to do with what you did/learned at X service)
  - How do you get on with your Mum/with your Dad generally? (probe why)
  - Do you talk to them about things if you are worried?
  - Some people say the way they get on with their parents changes over time/as they get older – what about you? (Probe why, whether changes in recent past, and come back to this if suspect service use might have been involved)

School life (*‘now I'd like to ask you a bit about school’*)

- **Behaviour issues at school in general**
  - What are the other children like (probe for behaviour issues at school, learning environment, changes over time)
  - What happens to children who are badly behaved – do they get told off/punished; do they get helped, etc (probe for school policy (Is that what always happens? Are there rules about that sort of thing at school, is the teacher meant to do that?’ Also probe for presence of support services etc)
  - Who do children go to school to if they are bothered by bad behaviour
  - Do you feel safe at school (probe for bullying & other victimisations etc)
  - Has anything at your school changed in last year/few years (are thing worse or better; are schools getting better)

- **Child’s school behaviour, attachment and performance (& Antisocial behaviour)**
  - If you had to tell me what sort of a pupil you are, how would you describe yourself?
  - How interested are you in school subjects (probe for favourite subjects, if they’ve won any prizes – what for)
  - Performance and views on school marks/how doing at school, (probe for performance in maths, reading and writing and whether they’re improving, best and worst subjects, how has this changed over time, if got better/worse, probe why, probe did they do well in SATS, are things getting easier)
  - Does it matter whether people do well at school or not? (matter to you, matter when you get a job, matter to your parents)
- Are you well-behaved at school? (1) [Show the little angel/ little devil card]. Thinking about the way you behave at school and the things you do, which stepping stone would you put yourself on in this picture? (probe why they say this and get concrete examples)
- Have you ever been in trouble at school (excluded, suspended, concrete eg, how many times)
- What kind of things makes you to get into trouble?
- What are the kinds of things stop you from getting into trouble
- Thinking about the last year have you had more of the things that make you get in to trouble or more of the things that stop you getting into trouble (probe, is this the same as other years)
- Have you ever missed a day off school without any one knowing (teacher, parent etc)? (if yes, how many, why and what could have prevented you from doing so, has attendance pattern changed over time etc)

Closing questions

- Some people think children get into trouble a lot these days. If you were the Prime Minster what would you do to stop them from getting into trouble?
- Is there anything else we haven’t talked about that you’d like to tell me?

(Thank the child and close by reiterating confidentiality and deal with payment and get a receipt. Leave the information leaflet (‘We are giving one of these to all the children we talk to in this research project. This one is for you’ )
## APPENDIX C MATERIALS FOR IDENTIFYING SERVICE USE

### Data from On Track Cohort Study: information sheet for qualitative interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial number:</th>
<th>12345678</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Parent rating of relationships and behaviour (BSD11-24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often fights with others and bullies them</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often unhappy, downhearted or tearful</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally liked by other children or young people</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily distracted, concentration wanders</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous in new situations, easily loses confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind to younger children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often lies or cheats</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picked on or bullied by other children or young people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often volunteers to help others</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinks things out before acting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steals from home, school or elsewhere</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets on better with adults than with people of own age</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many fears, easily scared</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Use of services (W2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: On Track Small Group Work 3845</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who in contact (B1CONT):</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location (B1PLACE):</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (B1FREQ):</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived aims (B1AIM2):</td>
<td>3 7 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Use of services (W1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: On Track Small Group Work 3845</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who in contact (A1CONT):</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Nurse Sp 3100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Child’s rating of relationship with parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk to parents if worried</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever goes out without parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often parents know…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…where going</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…who going with</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…what doing</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…when will be home</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home more than an hour late</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told off by parent</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told done well by parent</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to parent about school</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to parent about other things</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Child’s rating of peer networks (PBFRIE01-06, SBFRIE01-06)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friends ever done…</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fare-dodging</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoplifting</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noisy/rude – complaint</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from school</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking things</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written/sprayed paint</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Child’s rating of school – attainments/achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How interesting subjects…</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBINTS8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How good at maths</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How good at English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How good at sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How good at reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In trouble at school</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good marks important</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble working out answers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBSELFFE4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# On Track Phase 2 Evaluation Strand 6b – families and children’s qualitative study

Service provision map from interviews with service providers (Strand 7) for Area X

**PRIMARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN (YEARS 1 to 6 inclusive)**

## One-to-one services for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of service</th>
<th>Name of staff delivering service</th>
<th>Location of delivery (and time of day if relevant)</th>
<th>Agency providing service (if contracted out)</th>
<th>Aims of service</th>
<th>Any info on service content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Service</td>
<td>X and Y</td>
<td>Mornings (once a week) in 7 OT primary schools.</td>
<td>CAMHS</td>
<td>Improve access to C&amp;F services &amp; engage families who would normally miss appointments in traditional clinic settings. Children normally referred as showing disruptive, aggressive, oppositional behaviour.</td>
<td>Therapeutic service by appointment. Happens on one-to-one basis. Sometimes home visiting with parent/guardian occurs too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(there is also Family Plus – see family based services)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Play Worker Plus</td>
<td>Numerous workers A-D</td>
<td>In primary school playgrounds, at break &amp; lunch times once a month. NB some schools funded this service once a week.</td>
<td>Play Council</td>
<td>Children teachers are concerned about. Aims to improve co-operation &amp; constructive play</td>
<td>Playworker monitors individual children, concentrates work to include them and reports back to teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Universal services/ open access services for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of service</th>
<th>Name of staff delivering service</th>
<th>Location of delivery (and time of day if relevant)</th>
<th>Agency providing service (if contracted out)</th>
<th>Aims of service</th>
<th>Any info on service content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitions sessions/ learning mentor visits (TO ALL OT YR 6 PRIMARIES)</td>
<td>X or another learning mentor from Y School</td>
<td>In school, in class – 4 sessions, one a week about ‘going up to the big school’</td>
<td>Learning mentors at Y School (n.b. although there is a designated OT learning mentor – she shares work among other learning mentors in school)</td>
<td>Ease transition to secondary, improve attendance records in yr 7 and IDENTIFY children who may need more support on arriving at the school.</td>
<td>Sometimes v non-interventionist in play, sometimes do intervene. Depends what’s happening in each context. Do some work one-to-one with some children too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Centres (for local children aged 5-14 – OT part fund this)</td>
<td>Numerous play workers in the centres. Some funded by OT, most not.</td>
<td>3 centres in OT area: names of streets. Each centre has indoor and outdoor play areas.</td>
<td>Play Council</td>
<td>Provide safe, quality play environments for local children. Work with children to promote better inclusion, co-operation &amp; constructive learning in play.</td>
<td>Sometimes as above in playground context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play workers in playgrounds</td>
<td>Numerous play workers. A-D</td>
<td>In primaries, at break and lunchtime once a month</td>
<td>Play Council</td>
<td>Promoting more ‘positive’ play in the playground – working on co-operation, inclusion, social skills</td>
<td>Same as above in playground context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Secondary school aged children (year 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service type</th>
<th>Name of service</th>
<th>Name of staff delivering service</th>
<th>Location of delivery (and time of day if relevant)</th>
<th>Agency providing service (if contracted out)</th>
<th>Aims of service</th>
<th>Any info on service content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targeted. By referral either before or after joining secondary school.</td>
<td>Learning mentor support</td>
<td>X is the designated OT mentor. She may have 20 OT cases at any time, but other LMs in schl carry up to 10 other OT cases.</td>
<td>In school, during class times in learning mentor room/area. Each child receives a 40 min appointment each week. Times change each week. Can also ‘drop in’ during break and lunchtimes</td>
<td>Y High School (learning mentors)</td>
<td>Support children struggling with the transition into secondary, particularly those with learning, behavioural or home difficulties.</td>
<td>Talk about roots of issues/ motivators for difficult behaviours. Talk about strategies for dealing with things differently. Set weekly aims, which class teachers sign ‘e.g. staying in seat in lesson’. ALSO home visit when first referred &amp; keep in touch with parent/guardian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THIS AREA: Names

OT SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THIS AREA: Names
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service type</th>
<th>Name of service</th>
<th>Name of staff delivering service</th>
<th>Location of delivery (and time of day if relevant)</th>
<th>Agency providing service (if contracted out)</th>
<th>Aims of service</th>
<th>Any info on service content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referral Only (targeted) FAMILY BASED SERVICE</td>
<td>Family Plus</td>
<td>X and Y</td>
<td>In primary schools, in the afternoons. Home visits also happen sometimes.</td>
<td>CAMHS</td>
<td>Like the child &amp; family service in schools – this is a more intensive version for families that are harder to reach, or higher level of need.</td>
<td>Therapeutic (solution focused) work. Can be 121 with different family members, parent &amp; child, all family members depending on what's appropriate. X and Y sometimes work separately with different members of the same family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open access/universal PARENTS</td>
<td>Parents Telephone Service</td>
<td>Outreach worker X promotes services in area. Numerous workers on support line.</td>
<td>Telephone support line for parents (24/7)</td>
<td>Parents Telephone Service</td>
<td>Providing information on services, support and activities to parents. Also providing generic support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open access-referral/self referral PARENTS</td>
<td>Parents programs (parent support groups)</td>
<td>Trained facilitators. There are a couple. X covers most of the OT area.</td>
<td>Groups held at local community settings (e.g. church halls, community halls etc). Different times of day depending on group. Run for up to several months.</td>
<td>Parents Telephone Service</td>
<td>Groups where parents support each other, with help from facilitator. Aims to address confidence issues in parenting, dealing with challenging behaviour and difficulties in parent-child relationships.</td>
<td>Have workshops and programmes, although tailor these to the group working with. Start out looking at parents own wellbeing to stress this isn’t parenting ‘class’. Parents able to input to agenda for programmes of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral only PARENTS</td>
<td>Home visiting service</td>
<td>OT home visitors are X and Y</td>
<td>In service user’s home. May visit once or more a week, or less - &amp; tailor off (exit strategy inbuilt)</td>
<td>Name of Voluntary Society</td>
<td>Empowering people to live within their communities, make decisions for selves and cope. Links families to other services – liaise, advocate, support, encourage. Work with families that other services struggle to engage.</td>
<td>Visit parents referred in their homes. Spend time establishing r’ship of trust – are a support service. May go with them to a new service for the first time, advocate, may just provide emotional support to parent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX D  THEMATIC FRAMEWORK MAP FOR ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Background and context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Household composition and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Risk Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Personal, School-based, Socio/cultural, Parental, Family, Area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Protective factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Personal, School-based, Socio/cultural, Parental, Family, Area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Case summary of engagement with OT (key life events)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>Service use (all services)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Summary of non-OT service use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Awareness of OT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>OT services used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Referral routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Experience of OT referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Factors shaping decision to use OT service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Content and delivery of OT services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Experiences of OT service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Context of delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Accessibility of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>OT staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Content of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Other OT service users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>OT as a ‘package’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Meetings expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Ending contact with OT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Comparisons between OT services and between OT services and non-OT services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Impacts of OT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Impact on child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Impact on parent (interviewed) / wider family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Impact on community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Key sources / explanatory factors bringing about positive impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Key sources / explanatory factors inhibiting positive impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Fit of impacts with expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Suggestions for the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Suggestions for improving OT services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Suggestions for improving awareness of and engagement with OT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Gaps in family service provision generally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>General suggestions for avoiding ASB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>