

THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE SMALL STEPS BIG CHANGES FAMILY MENTOR SERVICE

Insights from a Survey of
SSBC Family Mentors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) Family Mentor (FM) Service is unique to Nottingham and has been funded and developed through Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC), part of The National Lottery Community Fund's "A Better Start" programme. Family Mentors (FMs) are a paid peer workforce and work with families in a supportive and empathetic manner.

Through scheduled home visits, FMs deliver the Small Steps at Home manualised evidence-based programme of child development and preventative health support to parents of 0–4-year-olds who live in four Nottingham wards. Previous evaluations have evidenced the positive impacts of the SSBC FM Service on families. However, there is a need to better understand how this is creating social value, particularly its impact on the workforce.



Aims

This report aims to answer the following questions: What are the characteristics of people attracted by the FM roles? And what impact does this role have on FMs and their households?

Methods and procedures

Family Mentor managers supported SSBC in developing and conducting an online survey among its staff. The survey aimed to clarify the characteristics of the Family Mentor workforce, including the demographic and social similarities they have with the families they support. The survey also explored the impact of being a FM on their employment circumstances and income, as well as the impact of their training and work experience on their knowledge and skills.

Results and outcomes

The Family Mentor workforce shows demographic and social similarities to the parents and caregivers they support, which is consistent with the peer-to-peer support for families that the service set out to achieve. FM jobs attract new and returner job seekers, and shifted some households from being out-of-work to having someone in work. FMs generally report good job satisfaction and see the positive impacts of the service on both themselves and the families they support. Their work as a FM has given them increased confidence and has fostered a range of knowledge and skills. Staff feel prepared for a variety of future job opportunities, including roles on a higher level beyond their current entry-level positions, as well as jobs that are not in their current field of early child development.

Conclusion and implications

In addition to supporting families, the Family Mentor Service contributes to the overall capacity building within local communities by offering accessible job opportunities. The social value of the workforce, both in terms of impacts on families and the FM workforce itself, underscores the importance of paid peer support services like SSBC's in making a positive impact on families and the broader community. The SSBC independent evaluator recommends that family support needs should partly be met through a trusted and non-judgmental peer support service like the FM Service model[1] as part of a strengths-based approach to community development.

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1. INTRODUCTION



Small Steps Big Changes

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC), part of The National Lottery Community Fund's "A Better Start" programme, is a test-and-learn programme aimed at improving the outcomes of 0–4-year-olds in four Nottingham City wards. In consultations with local parents at the beginning of the SSBC programme, the parents requested ongoing emotional support, reassurance and expertise around parenting in the form of a non-judgmental, peer-led, home visiting service. In 2015, SSBC launched the Family Mentor (FM) service, which embodies SSBC's principle 'Children at the heart, parents leading the way, supported and guided by experts.'

Family Mentors

Family Mentors (FMs) are a paid peer workforce that deliver the Small Steps at Home manualised evidence-informed programme of child development and preventative health support to parents of 0–4-year-olds. The FM Service delivery model is co-designed with parents and delivered by a paid peer workforce, employed by established Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners. The FM Service helps guide and support parents to achieve the best outcomes for their children through the delivery of an evidence-informed, home visiting programme – Small Steps at Home and other community-based activities.

The report discusses the background in regard to the social value of the FM Service (Section 2), the purpose of the current evaluation (Section 3), followed by the evaluation method (Section 4). Evaluation findings are discussed in Section 5, followed by a discussion in Section 6. Section 7 concludes the report and makes recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND



Organisations' commitment to provide social value changes communities for the better. The importance of social value is evident on both a national and local level, and policy has anchored social value expectations, with securing economic, social and environmental benefits as key objectives in procurement processes.[2],[3]

The SSBC FM Service is unique to Nottingham and benefits from over nine years of test-and learn. The service has been shown to add social value in a variety of ways.

Firstly, the SSBC FM Service model provides social value through commissioning established Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) organisations that, in turn, employ local people based on aptitude, not qualifications. The service employs around 70 FMs. With on-the-job training, they achieve a Level 2 Accreditation on Family Peer Support in the Early Years, which is equivalent to GCSE level. Continued professional development contributes to FM's ability to meet families' needs and the system's priorities. The VCS providers work in partnership with Early Help, Children's Public Health 0-19 Nursing Service and the Primary Care Network to promote and increase take up of a range of health, mental health and children's services. FMs act as change agents by enabling other services to gain insight into families, including via direct feedback, attending steering groups and learning events.

Secondly, SSBC has built the evidence base for the positive impact of the Family Mentor service for local families.

External evaluations by Nottingham Trent University show that parents perceive improvements in wellbeing and confidence in both themselves and their children, as well as children eating healthy food options, and improved sleeping routines and behaviour.[4] Furthermore, 100% of parents would recommend the service to a friend or family member with a young child if they were eligible.[5] As for improvements in children's attainment, it has been evidenced that children who accessed more Small Steps at Home visits scored significantly higher on communication and gross motor areas of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire in the first year.[6]

Thirdly, the FM Service aims to offer equitable access to its service provision. At the end of the first quarter in the 2023/24 financial year, 991 children were signed up for the Family Mentor Service, which means that 41% of eligible families living in the four SSBC wards engaged with the Service. 73% of children were living in the 10% most deprived Local Super Output Areas at time of sign-up. Greater percentages of eligible Asian/Asian British and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British children benefitted from the service (44.2% and 49.2% respectively compared to 39.8% White British). By mid-August 2024, FMs had delivered Small Steps at Home or community groups to 6204 individual children, totalling 139,158 interactions.

152 people have taken on roles as a Family Mentor and 189 volunteer positions since the start of the service. Currently, across the three providers, there are 67 FMs. Previous independent evaluation has shown that Family Mentors viewed their role very positively. They enjoyed their work and perceived their work as making a difference to families including not only improved outcomes for children (confidence and improvements in language and communication) but for parents also (confidence and increased knowledge/support). It was deemed particularly important that the Family Mentors were recruited from the community rather than professionals being brought in. Providing employment opportunities in local communities was also identified as a key strength of the Small Steps at Home programme, along with opportunities for training and development of knowledge and skills.[4]

3. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of the current evaluation is to gain a better understanding of the social value of employment as a FM. The evaluation seeks to answer two main questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the SSBC FM workforce?

This first main question seeks to clarify the characteristics of the Family Mentor workforce, including the demographic and social similarities they have with the families they support.

2. What is the social value of SSBC FM employment?

The second main question aims to evidence the impact of being a FM on their household's employment circumstances and income, as well as the impact of their training and work experience on their knowledge and skills.



4. METHODS



In July and August 2023, Small Steps Big Changes conducted an online survey with open and closed questions among Family Mentors to investigate the social value of the employment opportunities that the SSBC-commissioned FM Service has created.

This survey was co-designed with the managers of the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) providers of the FM Service.

SSBC undertook the data analysis, including a thematic analysis of open-ended questions, and report writing.

5. RESULTS

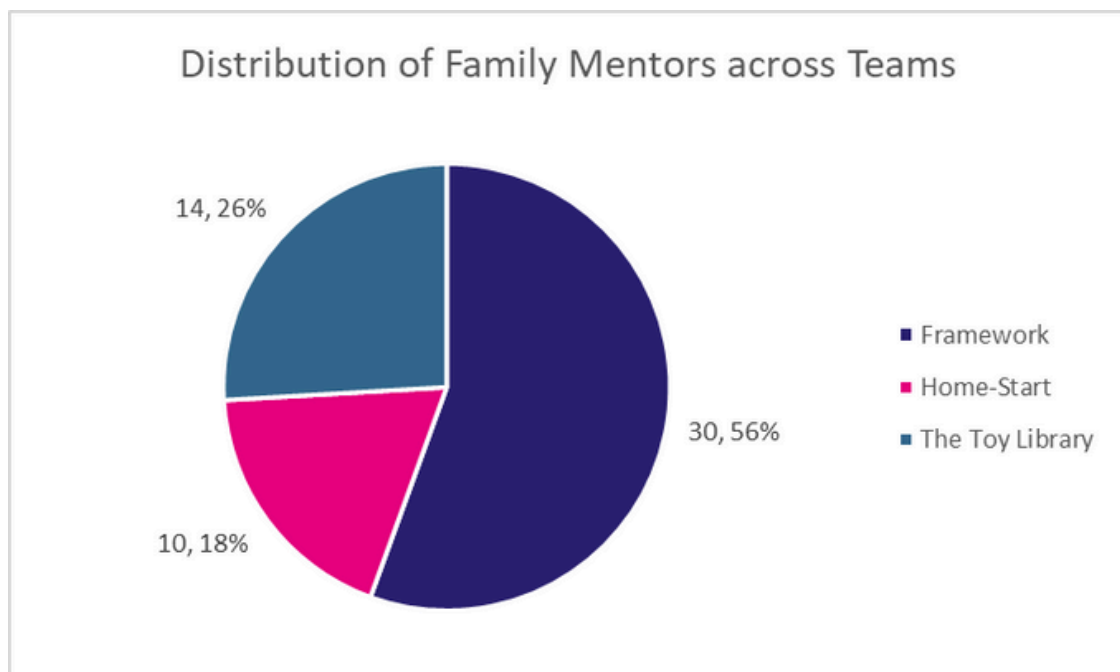


5.1 The characteristics of the Family Mentor workforce

The survey received 54 responses in total from FMs working for the three local providers of the Family Mentor Service, as shown in Figure 1.

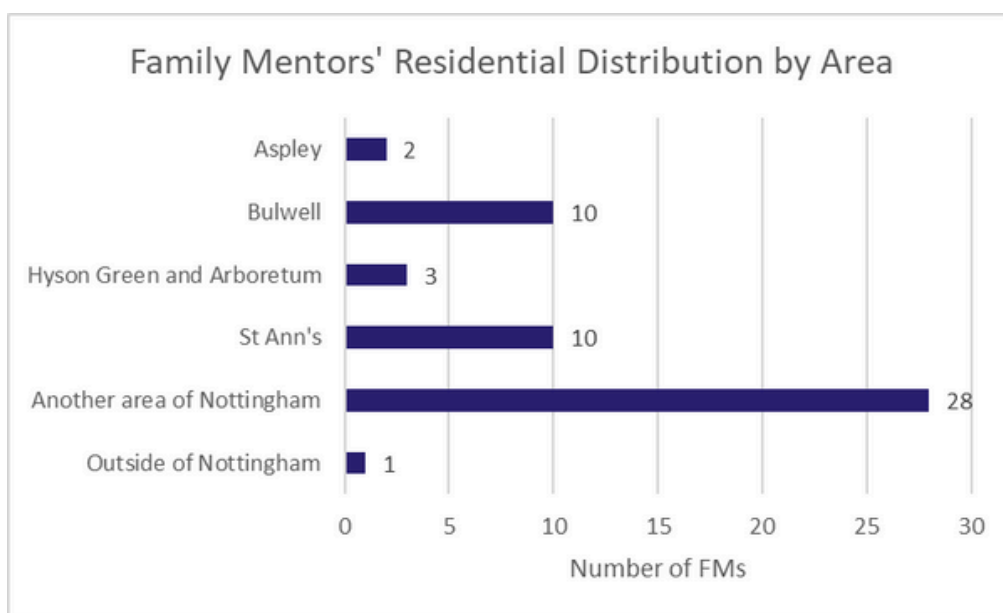
This is a good proportion of the approximately 67 FMs who were employed during the time of the survey.

FIGURE 1



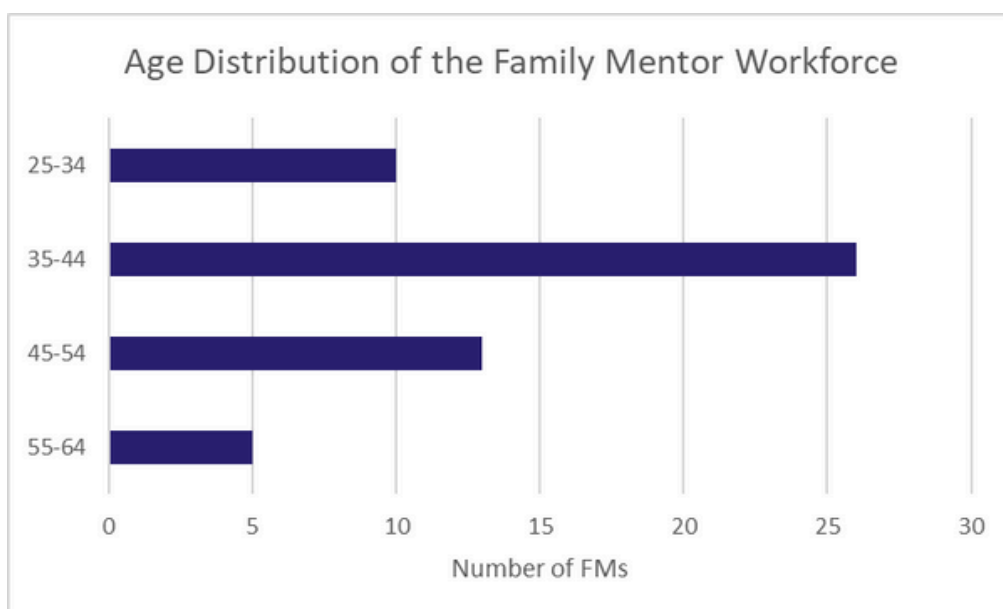
The Family Mentor workforce is predominantly female and all 54 participants were female. As for where FMs live, all bar one live in Nottingham, with nearly half living within SSBC wards, as shown in Figure 2. This indicates that the FM Service has indeed created jobs for local people.

FIGURE 2



The survey respondents were grouped into different age brackets, ranging from 25 to 34 years old, to 55 to 64 years old. The age group with the highest number of FMs was between 35 and 44 years old, as shown in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3



Parent to parent peer support

The majority of FMs (51, 94%) are parents themselves. This evidences the distinctive nature of the Family Mentor service as a kind of parent-to-parent peer support. Although 12 FMs have at least one child under the age of five, most have children in older age groups. 34 FMs have one or more children between five and 18 years old and 20 FMs have one or more adult children. Nine FMs (17%) indicated that they had experienced the FM Service themselves.

Household situation and employment

Almost all participants stated that they live in a household with family or others, with only one Family Mentor indicating that she lived alone. As for their household situation, 19 FMs (35%) reported that they are single parents. When we see this proportion of lone parent Family Mentor employees (35%) against the wider demographic background, the Family Mentor roles appear to provide an accessible job opportunity for single parents. In 2022, 15% of families in England and Wales were lone parents. [7]

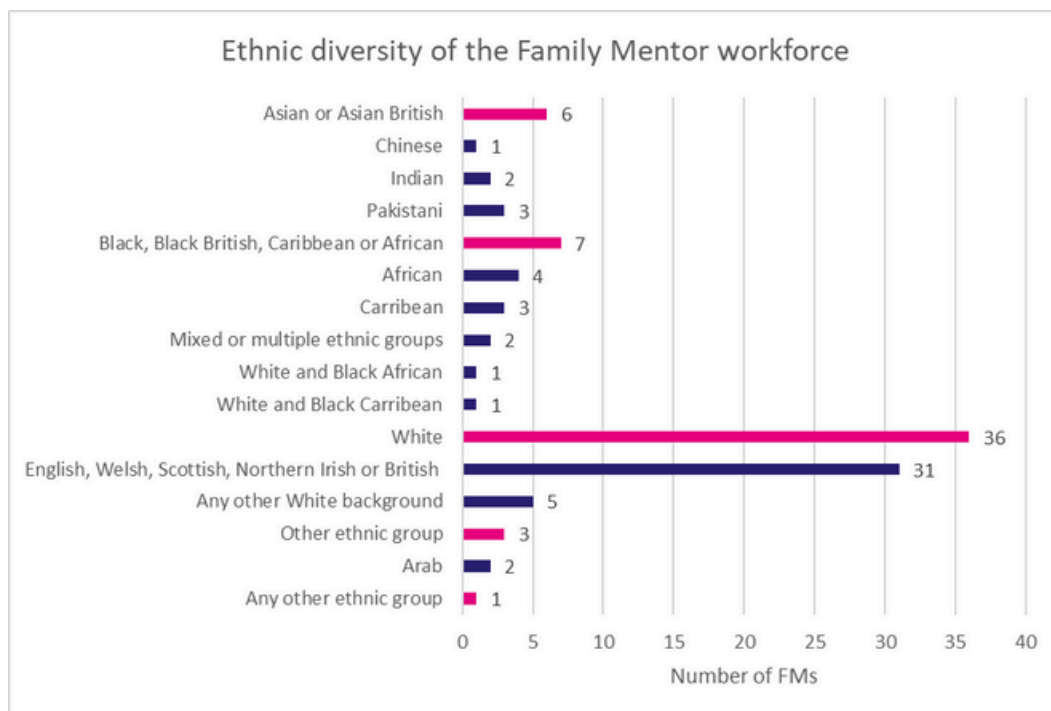
In addition, the 2021 Census in England and Wales has shown that employment rates of parents living with dependent children show stark differences depending on their family type.[8] Couple versus lone parents of dependent children have employment rates of 86.6% versus 69.3%. The age of the youngest child has a big influence on this difference in employment rates.

For parents with a youngest child aged 0–2 years old, 84.4% of parents in a couple are employed compared to 42.2% of lone parents. For parents with a youngest child aged 3–4 years-old, couple and lone parent employment rates stand at 87.7% and 63.8% respectively. The relatively high proportion of single parents suggests that there may be valuable lessons to be learned from Family Mentor service in terms of job accessibility.

Ethnicity

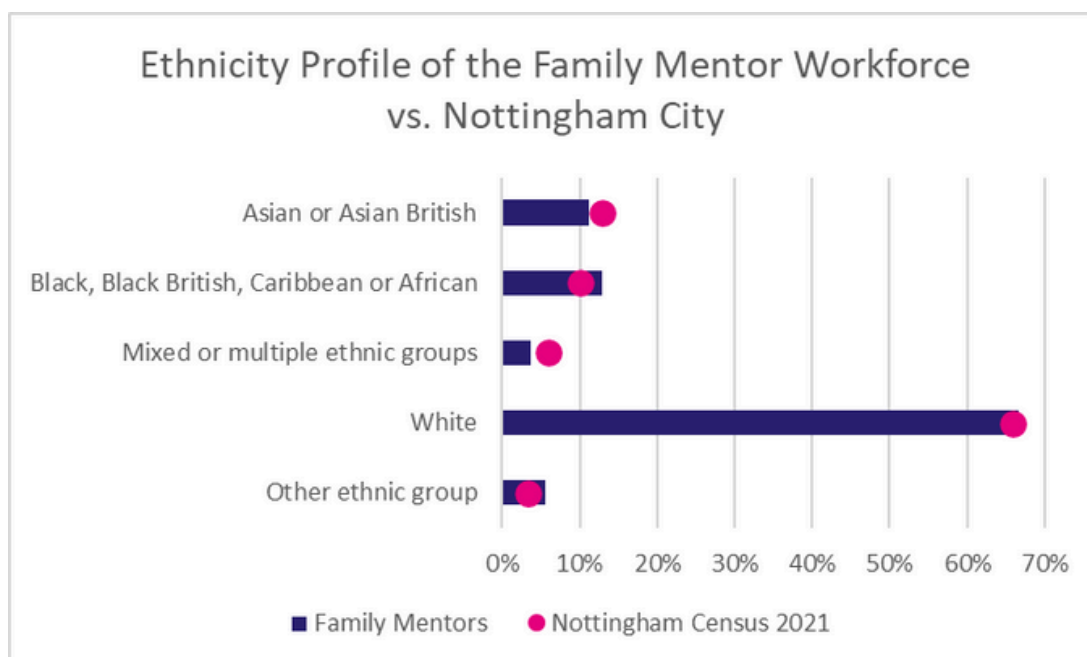
The survey asked people about their ethnicity. Figure 4 shows an overview of the high-level ethnic categories in pink and more specific ethnic groups in blue.

FIGURE 4



The survey used ethnicity categories aligned with the Census 2021. Figure 5 compares the high-level categories, revealing a close match between the ethnicity profile of FMs and that of Nottingham City.

FIGURE 5



Language

Out of 54 surveyed, 42 FMs (78%) stated that English was their home language. Four FMs reported speaking another language or languages besides English at home.

In Nottingham, many people speak languages such as Polish, Urdu, Arabic, and Romanian. [9] These languages are included among the 14 non-English languages spoken by FMs. Other languages spoken by the workforce include Albanian, Hindi, Gujarati, French, Hungarian, Mandinka, Mandarin, Pashto, Slovak, and Yoruba.

Religion

Figure 6 shows Family Mentor responses to the question on their religion. The majority of FMs (23 FMs) described themselves as having “No religion”, followed by “Christian” (13 FMs), and “Muslim” (7 FMs) as the second and third most common answer.

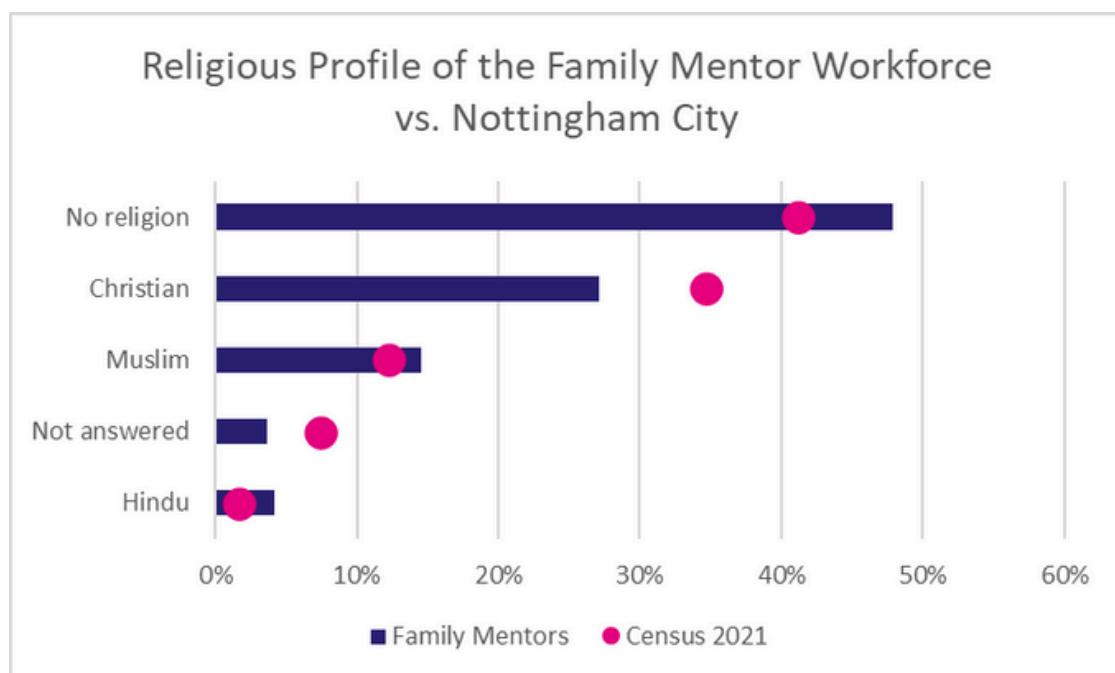
FIGURE 6



The questions and answer options in the Family Mentor survey don't exactly match those in the Census 2021 regarding religion. In our survey, we included "Atheist" as a choice and allowed respondents to select "Other" with an option to self-describe their religion. These options weren't included in the Census 2021. However, the top five answer categories in our survey match those in the Census 2021.

These categories also align with the top five in the Census 2021 for Nottingham City in terms of their ranking. This comparison is shown in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7



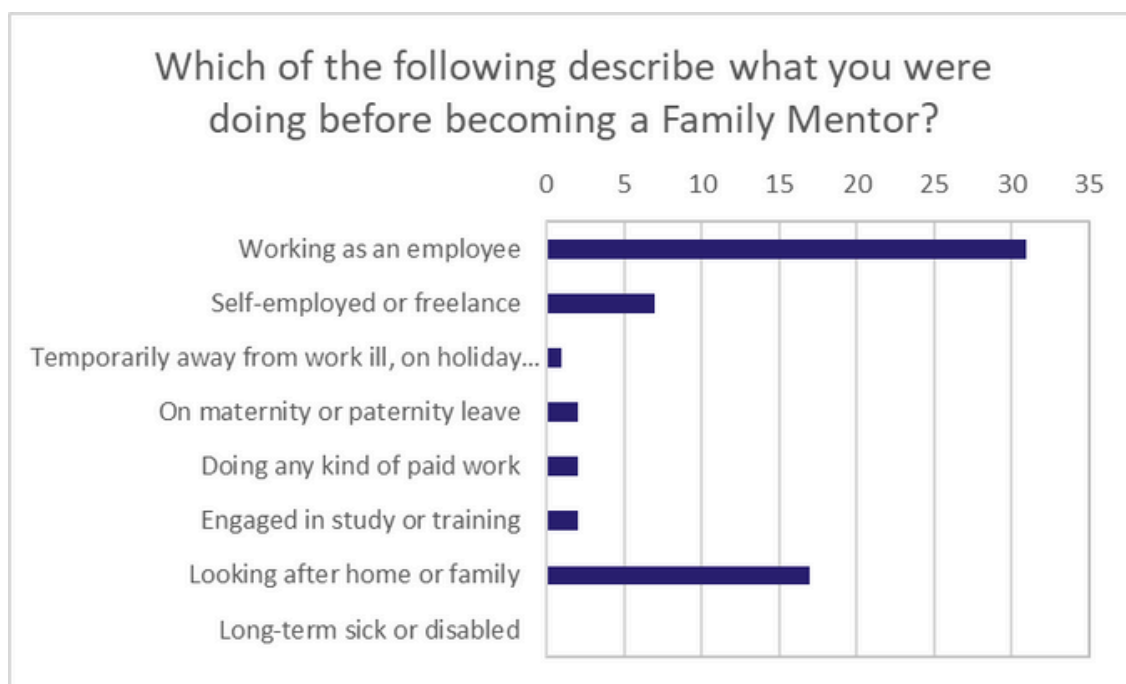
5.2 What is the social value of Family Mentor employment?

In order to understand the social value of Family Mentor employment, the survey aimed to evidence changes regarding employment, household income and confidence in the knowledge and skills of respondents, before and after their employment in this role.

Employment situation

Figure 8 gives an overview of what the Family Mentors were doing before they took on the role. Respondents were able to indicate multiple options that applied to their situation. Sixteen FMs selected the answer option “Looking after home or family.” For 11 of the FMs this was the only option they selected. Two selected “On maternity or paternity leave,” and one of them selected “Working as an employee” alongside this. Two FMs selected “Engaged in study or training” as their sole answer.

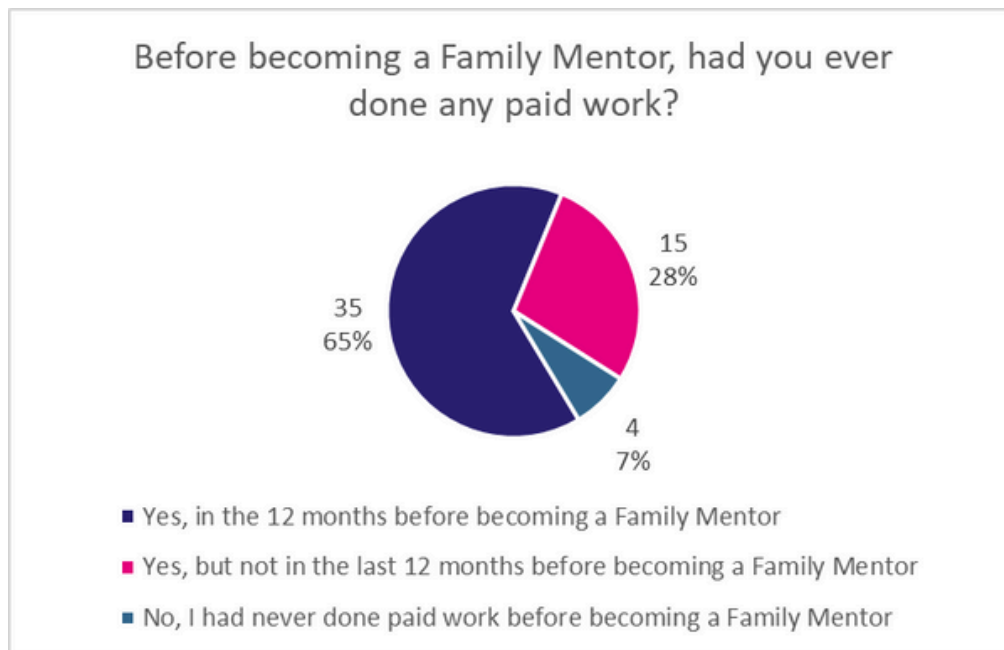
FIGURE 8



In line with the findings of what respondents had been doing before becoming a Family Mentor, the survey found that 15 FMs (28%) had not done paid work in the last year before their employment as a FM.

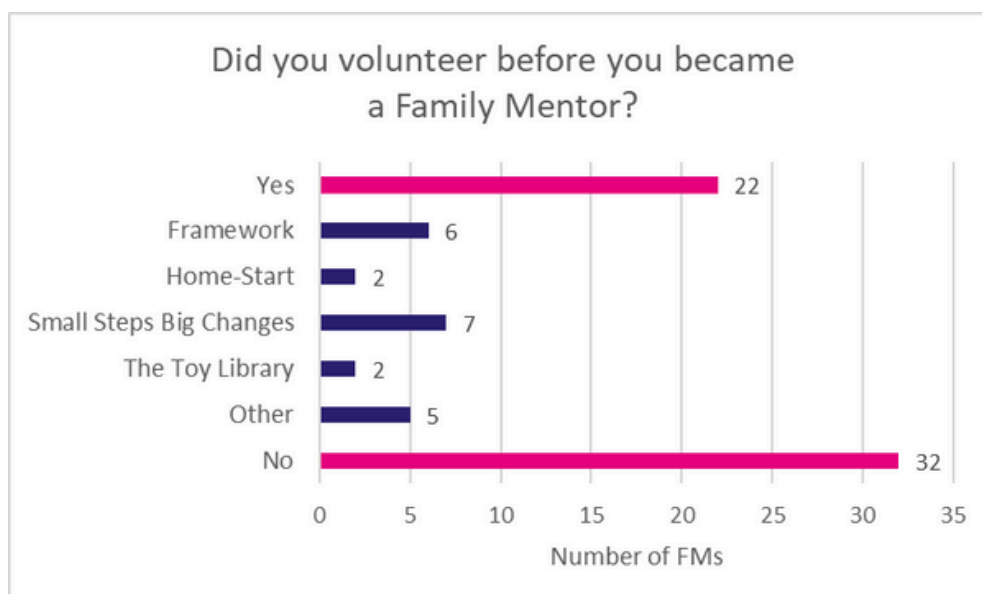
In addition, four FMs (7%) indicated that they had never done paid work before their current Family Mentor work. These findings, illustrated in Figure 9, evidence that the Family Mentor service assists people in successfully starting or returning to work.

FIGURE 9



22 FMs (41%) volunteered before becoming a Family Mentor. The majority did so with one of the Family Mentor service provider organisations or SSBC, as seen in Figure 10. This highlights the potential value of volunteering as a pathway to move into paid work.

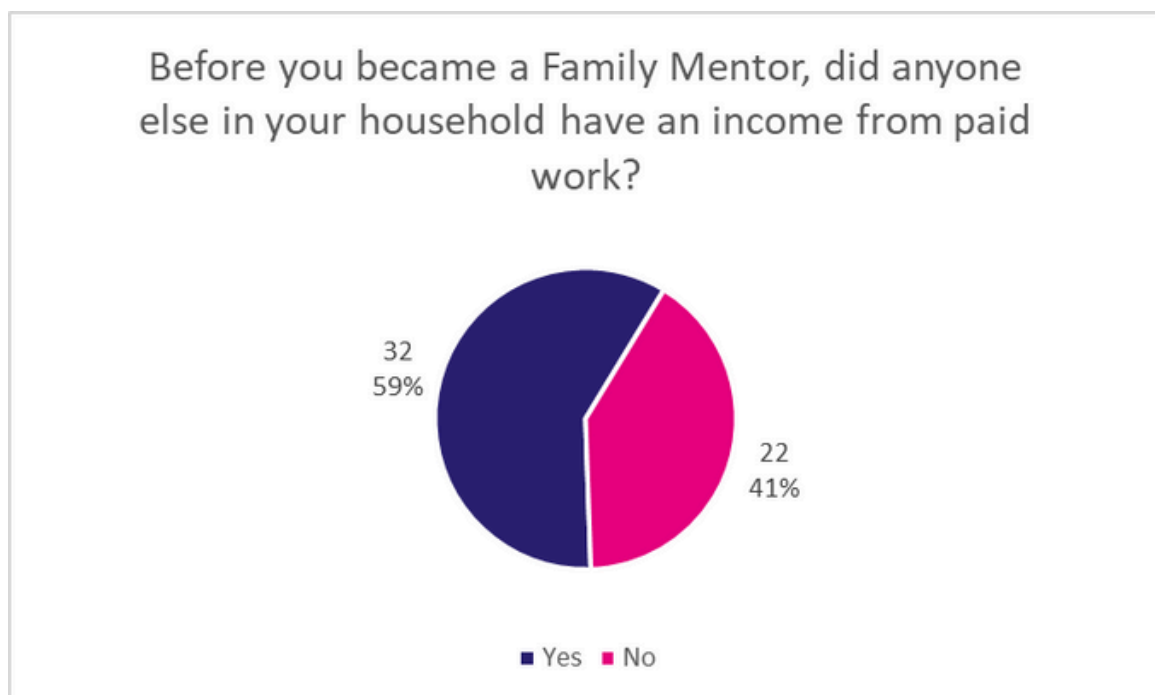
FIGURE 10



The households of 22 FMs (21%) did not have anyone else with an income from paid work before their employment as a Family Mentor. Ten of these 22 FMs had indicated that they themselves had not worked in the year before they started their paid Family Mentor role or had not had paid work ever before starting their Family Mentor role. Findings are illustrated in Figure 11.

These findings suggest that Family Mentor roles support families to shift from being out-of-work to having someone in-work.

FIGURE 11



Household income

The survey asked FMs about the total annual income of their household before their employment as a Family Mentor and their current total annual household income.

Figure 12 shows the apparent positive impact that employment in the Family Mentor role has on household income, with less households falling in the “Below £10,000” income bracket, and increases in the number of households that now fall in the “20,001 to £30,000” and “£30,001 to £40,000” income brackets.

FIGURE 12

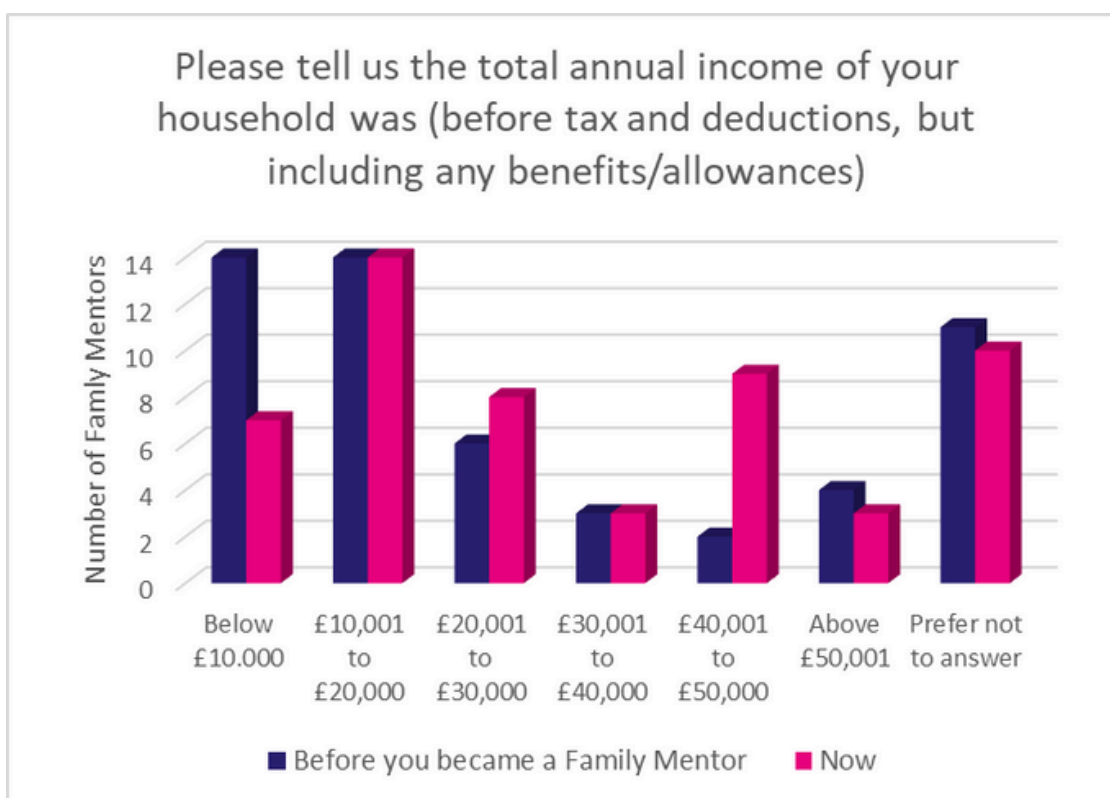


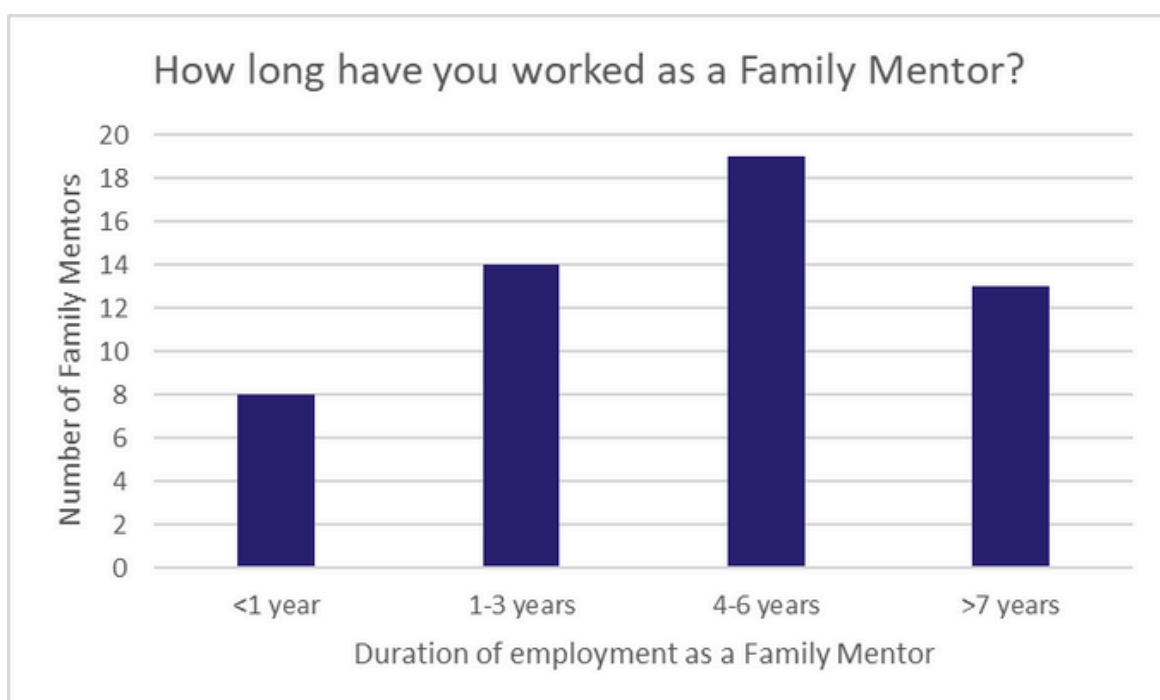
Figure 12 shows a shift in household income for FMs when we compare their reported household income now to their reported household income before they became a FM. There is a decrease in the number of respondents that fall within the “below £10,000” annual household income bracket.



The increases in annual income since employment as a Family Mentor needs to be interpreted with some caution, because respondents have worked as FMs for different durations, as seen in Figure 13.

Figure 13 shows that retention is high, with 13 FMs reporting having been in their current roles for over 7 years, meaning they have been with the FM Service since its early beginnings.

FIGURE 13



Also, household income increases may be due to other family members' income. FMs are paid at the National Living Wage and respondents differ in the number of hours they work each week, see Figure 14.

While 18.5 hours per week is the most common number of hours worked per week (29 FMs), 37 hours per week is the second most common working pattern (10 FMs).

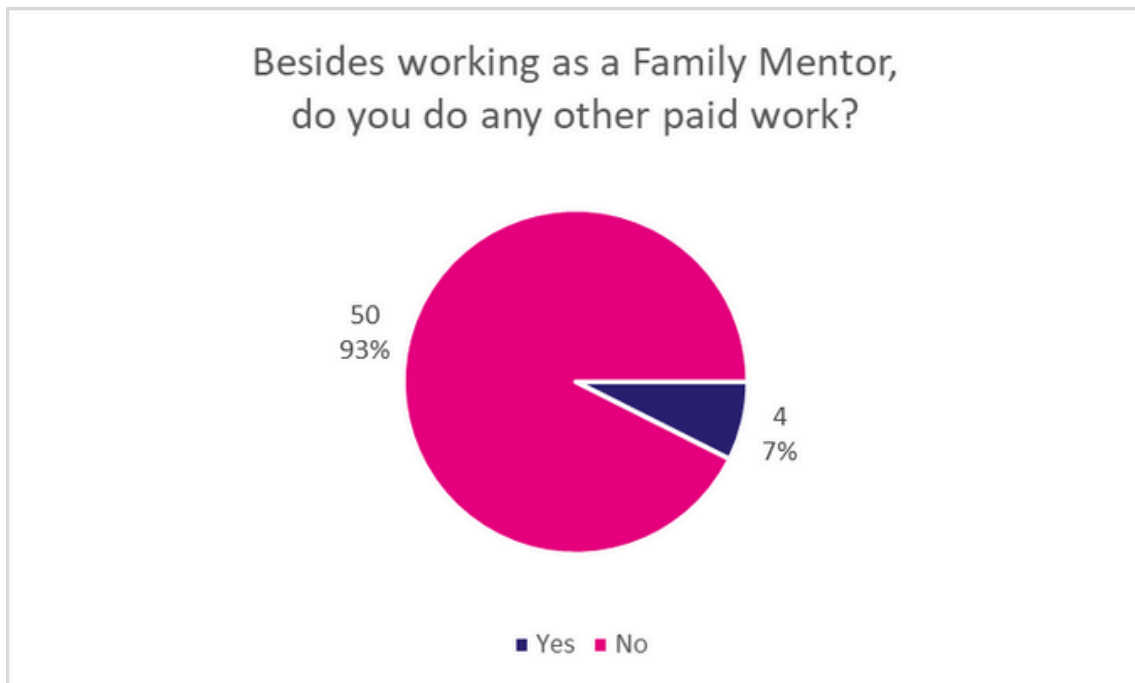
However, there is a vast range of working patterns among all respondents. As many respondents work part-time hours, the increase in respondents with a household annual income of £40,001 to £50,000 (Figure 14) may be due to other family members' income rather than their work as a FM.

FIGURE 14



Moreover, a small number of respondents (4, 7%) indicated that they have income from other work, see Figure 15.

FIGURE 15

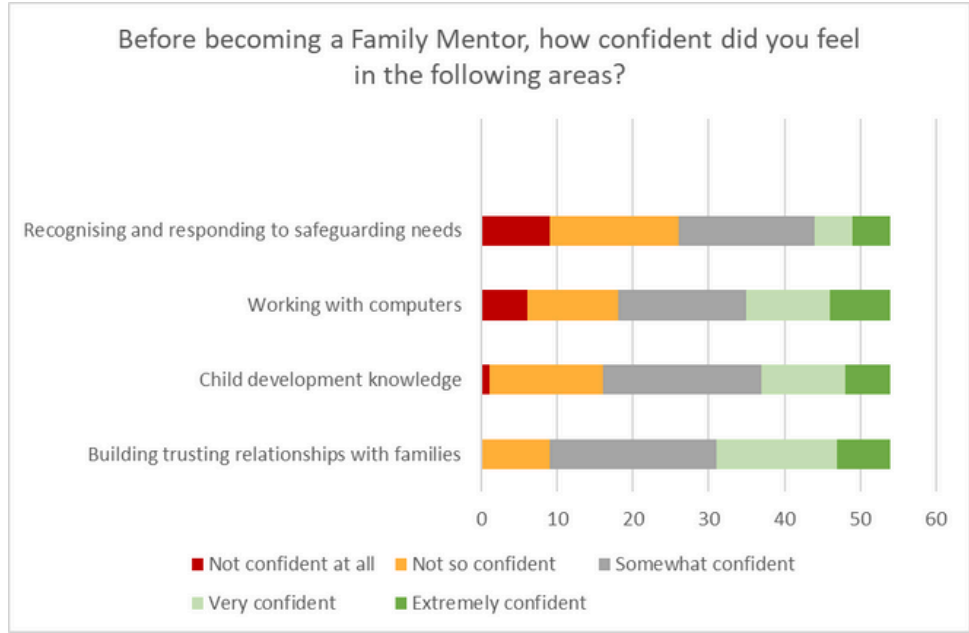


Confidence in work-related knowledge and skills

In order to understand the difference that employment as a Family Mentor has made on respondents' confidence in work-related knowledge and skills, the survey enquired about four different areas of work competencies. These are "recognising and responding to safeguarding needs," "working with computers," "child development knowledge," and "building trusting relationships with families."

Across these four areas, only a minority of FMs rated their confidence levels as "very confident" or "extremely confident" before their employment as a Family Mentor, see Figure 16 overleaf.

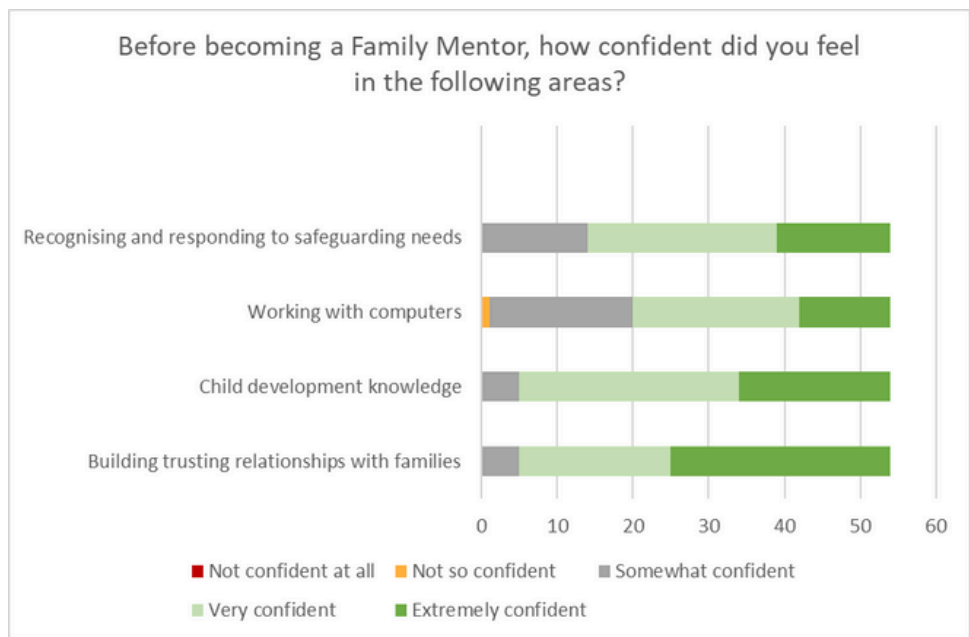
FIGURE 16



This answer response contrasts with their current confidence levels in these four areas.

Figure 17 shows a clear reported improvement in current confidence levels across the four areas of knowledge and skills, with the majority of FMs now indicating “very confident” or “extremely confident.”

FIGURE 17



Qualitative analysis

A qualitative analysis was conducted on the Family Mentor's answers to the survey's open-ended questions; following the approach described by Maguire and Delahunt.[10] Participant's answers varied in the amount of detail given. Due to the method of data collection via a survey, there has not been an opportunity to ask FMs to elaborate on their answers. The following subsections set out the findings.

Importance of making a difference for their community

FMs shared their passion to support families and their community, with a focus on making *“a difference in my community and help people”* and wanting to *“give back.”* Being committed to helping was viewed as a quality that made them suitable for their role. FMs talked about their *“passion for this job”* and being *“dedicated, motivated and committed to helping and supporting families in parenting and any other life difficulties.”*

FMs expressed their job satisfaction and a strong sense of fulfilment from their role. They mentioned building trusting relationships, empowering families, offering support and guidance; and emphasised their love of helping families within the community and the positive impact they have on them. One FM shared her enjoyment of being a family mentor and the satisfaction it brings:

“I thoroughly enjoy being a Family Mentor and my role gives me great job satisfaction. [...] I adore helping families within a community and offering support, help, guidance to them to be better parents to their amazing children.”

Another FM echoed this sentiment, stating, *“I love making a difference at a grass roots level. I love delivering groups and meeting lots of people.”*

Motivations for applying to the SSBC Family Mentor role

Experience with the FM Service, including both personal encounters, especially as parents benefitting from FM support, and professional or voluntary involvement with the service or service provider organisations, drove many applicants to seek Family Mentor positions. This underlines the impact of first-hand experience with the FM Service on their decision to apply.

One FM explained: *“Having had a Family Mentor, I felt it was something that I could do really well,”* while another shared *“I also wanted to make that difference to another family that my Mentor gave to me.”*

Some FMs moved into their current roles from paid positions, with several seeking a career change, particularly following their interest in child development. Others took on FM employment after gaining experience as a volunteer. For example, one respondent described, *“Volunteering gave me the chance to try something new and feel comfortable.”*

-Paid work following career breaks

The FM role provides an opportunity to get back into paid work after a career break due to maternity or previous job loss. Several respondents referred to the fact that the positions are salaried roles. For example, *“I felt that having a wage job will improve our chances of moving from the home we were currently living in.”*

-Parenting experience

FMs applied for their roles due to feeling they met the job requirements. For example, one FM shared the role *“did not need any special qualification”* while another shared *“I loved the fact that you needed to be a parent as the main experience required.”* FMs linked their suitability for the role to their life experience, and particularly their parenting experience, with some FMs mentioning their experiences of overcoming challenges. For example, one participant shared,

“My honesty around being a parent and the struggles I’ve experienced. I believe it puts me in a good position to help and be empathetic to what challenges families may face.”

This finding highlights the importance of the peer support nature of the FM Service.

-Interpersonal skills

Personality and interpersonal skills were mentioned as essential components of being the right person for the job. FMs mentioned personal characteristics such as being “empathetic,” “non-judgmental”, “friendly” and “a people person,” as well as communication skills such as “able [to] converse with a variation of people” and being “a good listener.”

Several FMs mentioned their willingness to learn as a factor in their suitability for the role, which is illustrative of the on-the-job training and continuous professional development in the FM position.

Despite the FM role being entry-level and candidates being chosen based on aptitude rather than work experience or education, many FMs cited prior knowledge, training, and voluntary or professional work experience as reasons for their suitability. This included expertise in childcare, safeguarding, mental health, and child development, as well as professional experiences like working as a qualified Nursery Nurse or managing a home visiting service. Thus, the FM role attracts individuals whose education and experience surpass the job requirements.



Professional and personal development

Becoming a Family Mentor had been a transformative journey for many respondents, leading to personal and professional development. *“It's challenged me in working within different comfort zones and it has made me grow as a person.”*

Family Mentors reported developing knowledge and skills related to the early years, including safeguarding and child development. FMs shared examples of this; *“child development knowledge, science factors behind this, i.e., baby brain development, attachment, bonding, building and maintaining positive relationships”* and *“child's development [at] different ages, how to understand when the child has red flags or what to do.”*

Some FMs shared examples of specific child development topics such as oral health, breastfeeding, and speech and language development.

Participants also referred to elements of the FM Service they had learned to deliver, including *“delivering handbook to families,” “ASQ delivery,” “baby massage”* and *“Triple P”*. Relationship-building with families was also mentioned by several FMs, including having a non-judgmental attitude. One Family Mentor explained,

“I feel it's opened my eyes to struggles and challenges some families are going through, as St Ann's is such a diverse area. [...] I also think this job really teaches you to be patient and resilient, not every family engages well, but you have to keep trying and pushing to find the best way to keep that bond and connection.”

FMs reported acquiring transferable knowledge and skills in their work, including knowledge in mental health, trauma-informed practice, and domestic violence, which are applicable in support roles beyond the early years, as well as knowledge around food and hygiene. FMs developed various transferable skills including IT proficiency, group facilitation, team working, as well as leadership, communication, and organizational abilities such as time management and conflict management.

As one respondent shared: *“I’ve gained managerial experience as I started as a Family Mentor and became Team Leader [...]. I’ve realised that I have really good organisational skills, even better than I thought.”*

FMs also identified areas of personal development due to their role. Multiple FMs mentioned increased confidence, patience, empathy, and resilience. One of the FMs shared:

“I am so grateful to have found this job. It has massively boosted my confidence and helped me realise that I can do things that I didn’t think were possible for me.”



A few respondents linked their development through their work experience to improved mental health.

“The confidence it has given me and self-belief is also unmeasurable. I’ve suffered with anxiety and PTSD for a long time, so stepping out of my comfort zone and putting myself out there was petrifying. I would hate getting on a bus by myself if I didn’t know where I was going. But since beginning this role, I don’t think twice about going somewhere new or taking my kids on an outing.”

Impacts of the FM role on their own families

Some FMs mentioned the positive impact of their role in maintaining work-life balance, both in terms of flexibility in working hours, “hours suited my family,” as well as convenient location, “closer to home.” One FM shared,

“This role has massively affected my life, and my family’s! [...] I worked nearly 50 hours in my last job and was out the house 15 hours a day. This role has been the best decision or risk I ever made. I get to have breakfast with my family and be home for tea also. It just means the world to me and very hard to put into words”.



However, a small minority of FMs reported negative impacts on their work-life balance, with one mentioning, “I think at times management as a whole forget that the reason we have been taken on as family mentors is because we are parents and I think some people forget some of us still have young children that we have to care for.”

Working as a FM has influenced their own parenting. Many FMs mentioned applying the knowledge they gained in their own family lives. One FM explained, “It has a big impact on me and my family. I can understand my children more.” Another FM shared a similar sentiment, stating, “For me, this has had a very positive impact, as I can use all my training within my family home.”

A few FMs expressed regret at not having access to the FM Service themselves in the past and not having had their current level of knowledge when their own children were younger. One participant told us, *"I wish there was a service around like this when I had my children as I would have welcomed the support of a family mentor."*

This view was shared by another FM who believed the service should be universally accessible, stating,

"A fantastic scheme that I believe should be accessible for all families with young children. I feel myself and my children would have benefitted greatly had this program been available when I was a first-time mum."

Future aspirations

The improved confidence that Family Mentors developed in their roles influenced their future aspirations. One FM shared, *"I have also learnt that I am extremely confident when it comes to delivering groups, which has helped me to realise this is something I can do in the future,"* while another shared *"the world is my oyster and I am skilled and worthy to do whatever my heart desires."* FMs recognise the value of their child development knowledge and transferable skills for potential future career paths. One respondent explained feeling prepared to work in *"Fields supporting families and under 5s but many roles outside child development, as the skills you learn are transferable to many different roles,"* which captures the overall sentiment of future aspiration among the workforce.

Many FMs saw job roles which, like their FM roles, involve supporting expectant families and families with children aged 0–4 as potential next career option, such as *"Family Support Worker," "working within Early Help settings," "Assistant Health Visitor," "Infant Nutrition Peer Support Work"* and *"Maternity Support Worker."*

Moreover, FMs recognise the transferability of the knowledge and skills they developed in their current roles and suggested career prospects that extend beyond the field of early child development. Their suggestions for employment span various sectors, with education, healthcare, and social

services often mentioned. Specifically, they mentioned positions in schools, such as “EYFS roles,” “teaching assistant” and “parent support worker within schools.” In terms of health and social care, FMs cited examples such as “NHS support roles,” “teenage services,” “youth work,” “social worker” “social prescribing.”

Additionally, some FMs noted potential roles as receptionists or administrators, while others saw the potential to transfer their leadership skills to roles such as “facilitator roles,” “group work delivery” and “supervisor, team leader, [...] facilitator, management.”

Among this broad spectrum of potential career paths, FMs expressed aspirations beyond their current entry-level positions, including roles that would require further training or education. One FM shared:

“I feel like this job has also given me the confidence to explore further education with the intention of trying to do a job more psychology-based working with families and children helping with behavioural Issues.”

Another suggested the following career paths: “Support roles that could potentially lead to counselling roles etc (with further qualifications), with further education social care roles, with further education childcare roles.”



6. DISCUSSION



By working in partnership with local Voluntary Community Sector organisations, SSBC's Family Mentor Service offers accessible entry-level job opportunities. This approach has created a workforce that has demographic and social similarities to the parents and caregivers they support, indicative of the peer support nature of the service they provide. Nearly all FMs live in Nottingham and are parents themselves, with 35% of them single parents. As for its ethnic and religious diversity, the FM workforce reflects the diversity of the local communities. This diverse workforce offers an advantage for the families they support. For example, FMs can be matched to families of similar cultural backgrounds and deliver the Small Steps at Home visits in their home language.

The SSBC FM Service provider organisations offer excellent new and returner job opportunities, as well as volunteering opportunities that can serve as a pathway into a paid FM role. These roles provide an opportunity to earn and learn, with on-the-job training and certification at Level 2. The positions attract people who have not recently or never before had an income from work and shifted some households from being out-of-work to having someone in work. Our findings suggest working as a FM has a positive impact on household income. FMs report good job satisfaction and see the positive impacts of the service on both themselves and the families they support. Their work in these roles has increased their confidence in a range of knowledge and skills, and they feel prepared for a vast range of future job opportunities.

7. CONCLUSION



The current report adds to the evidence base around the benefits of a paid peer workforce that supports families with 0–4-year-olds via the delivery of an evidence-based programme of home visits. In addition to supporting families, SSBC's FM Service has locally added social value through:

- Creating growth opportunities for local Voluntary Community Sector organisations. SSBC allocated resources to three local community organisations to deliver the FM Service and address the needs of local families with babies and children up to age four.
- Increasing accessible employment opportunities for new and returner job seekers, including local people who faced additional barriers in the labour market such as long-term unemployment.
- Creating on-the job training opportunities to acquire professional skills and experience in the labour market, including a Level 2 qualification, which have made FMs feel prepared for a wide range of career options with and beyond the early years field.
- Creating volunteering opportunities that provide a pathway into paid work.
- Creating a FM workforce that is representative of the local community which successfully engages local families.

Considering the success of the FM Service, SSBC's recommendation is for the support needs of families with babies and children up to age four to be partially met through a trusted and non-judgmental peer support service. This has additional benefits in terms of building capacity and aspirations in the local communities, as well as creating accessible entry-level job opportunities for new and returner job seekers.

REFERENCES

SSBC is currently considering the programme's legacy website. Hence, for some of the reports which have been commissioned and/or produced by SSBC, the references below include a weblink to the SSBC website homepage (www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk) rather than a weblink to the specific report. Please use the search function on the SSBC webpage to locate the specific report titles.

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