



M'Lop Tapang's Special Needs Program Parent's Perspective Survey

Children and youth with disabilities are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, particularly in low and middle-income countries such as Cambodia. They and their families are frequently subjected to stigma and discrimination, as well as a lack of services and support. There are insufficient services for children with special needs across Cambodia, and the program at M'Lop Tapang is the only one of its kind in the Sihanoukville area.

[M'Lop Tapang's Special Needs Program](#) has been operating since 2007. A designated team works with children and their families at M'Lop Tapang's Education Centre as well as with children and families in the local community. There is a range of learning, developmental and behavioral conditions

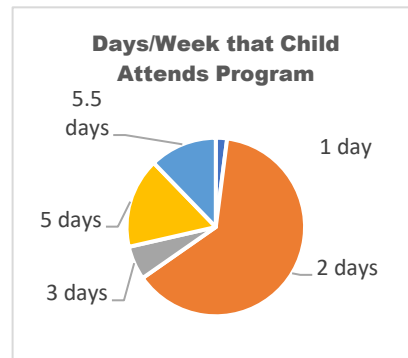


represented among the clients, including Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Down's syndrome, William's syndrome, Cerebral palsy (CP), and *Fetal alcohol* spectrum disorders (FASDs). Several of the children involved suffer from undiagnosed learning disabilities and developmental delay. As with other services at M'Lop Tapang, the program is provided for free to families.

In November 2023 we completed individual interviews with 50 parents who have children enrolled in the M'Lop Tapang's Special Needs Program.

Each of the 50 parents interviewed had one child in the program (35 boys/15 girls). The average age of the child was 9.36 years old.

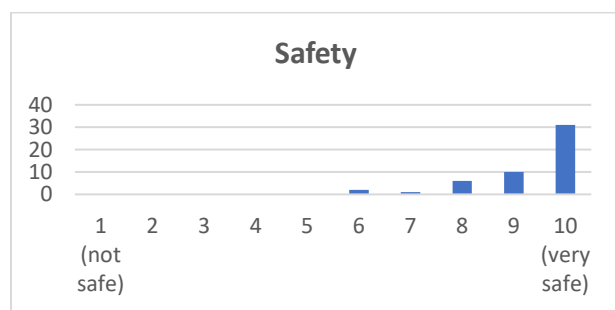
The children attend the program for a varying number of days each week. This is dependent on the needs of each child and the capacity/resources of the staff and classroom space. Because of the distance from our center, one of the parents interviewed does not bring her to the program but our teams visit their home once/month.



It was interesting when asked about the parent's employment and income; some informed us of the jobs (casino workers, stay-at-home parents, teachers, dentists, farmers, barbers), but some preferred not to tell us. As with any of the questions we asked during the interviews we respected the parents' decision not to answer any of the questions they did not want to. Of the 31 parents who did tell us about their estimated monthly income, the average was \$330 USD/month. It should be noted that MT's Special Needs Program, unlike the other programs we run, does not specifically target low-income families due to the fact there are no other services like ours in the area for people to access.

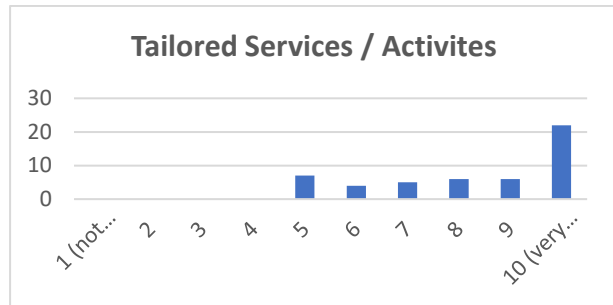
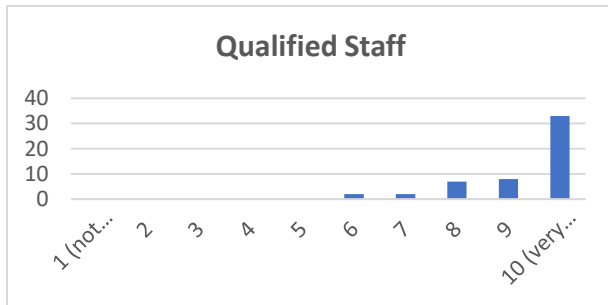
The series of questions we asked were basic and focused on common concerns that most parents have when choosing childcare options. For most, but not all, of the questions, parents were asked to rate their replies on a scale of 1 – 10.

When asked about how safe they felt their child was when attending the Special Needs Program, the majority of parents responded that they considered it to be very safe. Similarly, when asked if they felt their child was treated with kindness, patience, and respect, most parents also responded positively.

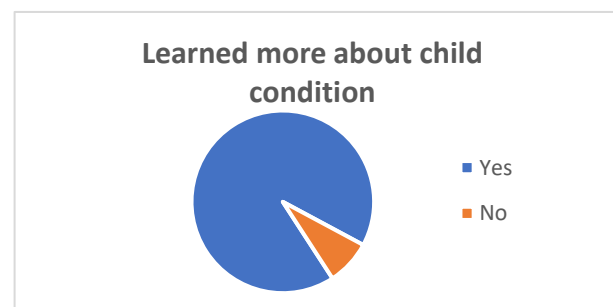
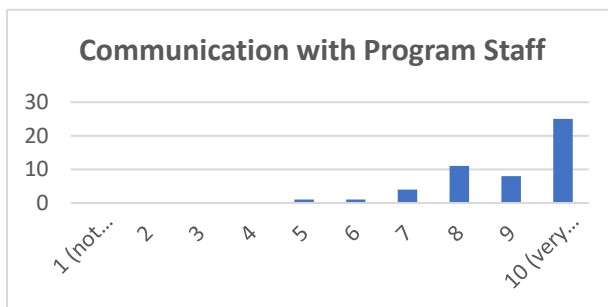




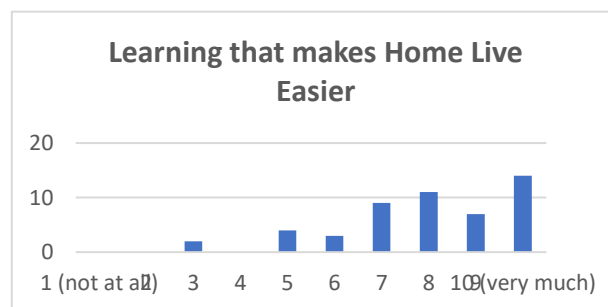
We also asked the parents how qualified they thought the staff at the Special Needs Program were and the responses were positive. When asked if they thought the program provides enough services/activities tailored to meet the specific needs of their child, most responses were on the positive end of the scale, but it did appear that there was room for improvement in this area.



When asked if they thought they had enough communication with staff, most parents replied that they thought so. When asked if they have learned more about their child's diagnosis/condition since joining the program, an overwhelming 92% reported that they had.



We asked the parents if their child learned things in the program that helped to make their home life easier. Although more on the positive end of the scale, the responses were mixed.

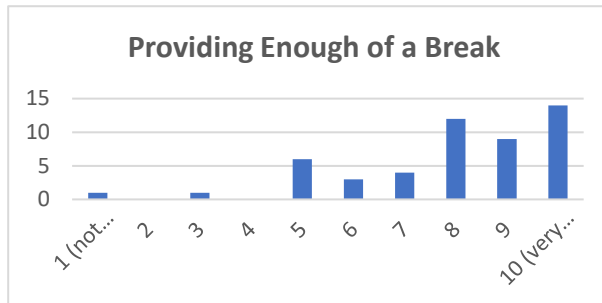
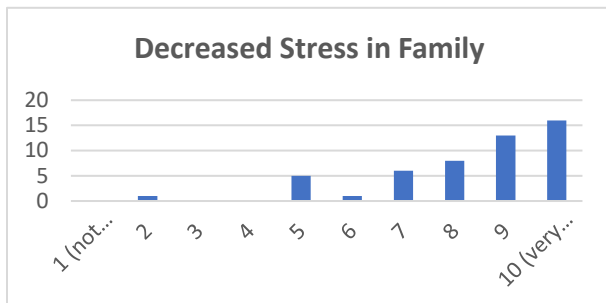


Percentage of parents reporting having noticed improvements in their child	
Improved ability to focus	76%
Improved behavior/relationships	74%
Improved speaking	72%
Improved health	72%
Improved movement	68%
Improved ability to dress/fees self	66%

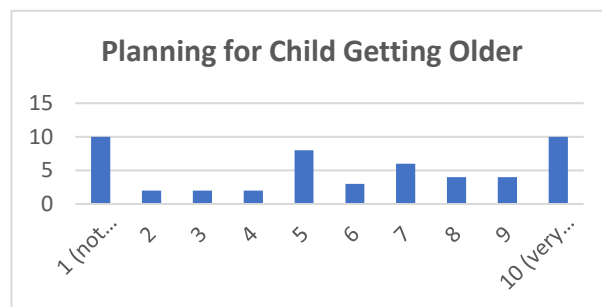
There were several areas of the child's life that parents reported they had seen improvements in since starting the program.



When asked if having their child attend MT's Special Needs Program helps to reduce stress in the family environment, most stated that it did to some extent. We also wanted to know if the program was providing enough of a break for the parents. Again, most said that it did provide a break, but maybe not enough as they wanted/needed.



Lastly, when asked if the program involved enough planning for their child when they got older, about half of the parents thought so, but the other half did not think so.



A day at the beach with children and staff.



Summary /Recommendations:

Overall, the results were not surprising to our team. It does appear that most parents feel that the program is having a positive impact on their children, but there are areas that the team could focus on improving, including:

Planning for children getting older:

- Staff have already planned meetings/workshops in 2024 to address this issue. In March there will be small group meetings to talk about this more. Starting in June the team is planning topic-focused meetings with individual parents.

Providing enough of a break for parents:

- There will be a private school opening soon in Sihanoukville for children with special needs. Our team is currently investigating how many of the parents we work with, specifically those not in the low-income status, plan to send their children to this school either on a full-time or part-time basis. Having some of the children from higher-income families attend another facility even part-time will free up classroom space and resources at MT and allow more time for others and more new children.
- Also, the government is now promoting more inclusion and encouraging children with special needs to integrate more into the regular school system. Our team will work with some of the children already in our program to do this, even on a part-time basis, with the parent accompanying their child to the school. If this does happen it will also free up resources and space at MT's Special Needs Program to concentrate more time with other children.

This parental survey was a helpful exercise for our team, and they plan to do similar surveys/evaluations every 2 years. This parental survey format was easy to implement and informative and is something that we can use as a model to use with other program teams at M'Lop Tapang.