

ELSAs in Bournemouth: Review of ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) training 2010-2011

1. Introduction

1.1. ELSA intervention is an individualised programme (regarded as a Wave 3 intervention) for children with significant social and emotional difficulties who need intervention at a level beyond group work at Wave 2 (eg Silver SEAL or being part of a nurture group). All children receiving ELSA intervention should also have access to Wave 1 intervention eg SEAL. ELSA work is essentially individual, and time limited. It covers topics such as self esteem, feelings, and anger management, but may also include group work on topics such as social skills or friendship skills. The work is planned around the needs of the individual child.

1.2. 17 Teaching Assistants (TAs) attended the 5 day ELSA training, from June 2010 - November 2010:

- 12 TAs from Primary schools
- 4 from Secondary schools (including 2 Academies)
- 1 Teaching Assistant from Nigel Bowes School (Pupil Referral Centre).

15 TAs were funded through the one-year TAMHS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools) project, for which ELSA training formed the core training in Bournemouth.

This brings the total number of trained ELSAs in Bournemouth to 108.

1.3. This report is based on 12 evaluation forms returned at the end of the 2010-11 course. It reflects how the newly-trained ELSAs are using their skills. For a broader evaluation of ELSA work in Bournemouth see Bravery and Harris 2009.

2. Outcomes

2.1. 11 of the 12 newly trained ELSAs are currently doing ELSA work in their school, from Reception to Year 11.

2.2. Time spent by ELSAs per week working on *individual* ELSA programmes is as follows:

1-5 hours	7 ELSAs
5-10 hours	1 ELSA
10-15 hours	0

2.3. Time spent per week on *small group* work is:

1-5 hours	6 ELSAs
5-10 hours	2 ELSAs
10-15 hours	0

(NB Some ELSAs are working just with individuals, some just with small groups, and others with both.)

2.4. The number of children that individual ELSAs are timetabled to work with ranges from 2 to 14 each week. 6 ELSAs expect the number of children they work with to increase during the current academic year. 4 ELSAs expect the number of children they work with will stay about the same. For one ELSA, the time available is reviewed on a weekly basis at a meeting in school. One thought the amount of ELSA time would *decrease* over the year (perhaps reflecting the fact that the TAMHS project will come to an end on 31.3.2011).

- 2.5. A 'snapshot' taken when these data were collected indicates that the 12 ELSAs work directly with about 57 children. Across the borough, several hundred children have received ELSA support since the project started in 2007.
- 2.6. Of the 11 ELSAs, most (10) have a special area or room for ELSA work. In some schools the room is also used for other purposes eg reading, outside agencies, Nurture Group, School Nurse, parent meetings, intervention work, Lunchtime Games Club, ICT, EAL, Peer Mediation.
- 2.7. Time to plan and review ELSA sessions is important. New ELSAs reported that time available for planning ELSA work each week is as follows:

More than 2 hours	1 ELSA
1-2 hours	2 ELSAs
Up to 1 hour	6 ELSAs
None	2 ELSAs

- 2.8. The opportunity to regularly discuss their work with their line manager is also important. The new ELSAs report discussing work with their line manager as follows:

Once a week	1 ELSA
Once a month	1 ELSA
Half termly	2 ELSAs
Termly	2 ELSAs
None	3 ELSAs (this may be because new ELSAs in TAMHS schools are getting weekly supervision with TAMHS practitioners until 31.03.2011).

- 2.9. In addition to children timetabled for ELSA work, many more benefit from informal contact with an ELSA. ELSAs were asked to give a rough estimate of number of these informal contacts. One (a secondary school ELSA) responded with '*Loads, every time you step out of ELSA room; they come up to see us all day long*'. Others estimated numbers which totalled about 170. ELSA skills are also being used in other planned interventions such as Nurture Groups.
- 2.10. Schools are encouraged to build up motivating resources for EL eg games, puppets, books, activities, which are interesting and fun not only for the children but also for the ELSAs. Of the 12 ELSAs, 2 said their school was '*very well resourced*' in terms of EL resources, 5 felt they were '*quite well resourced*', and 5 felt their school was '*not very well resourced*'. 8 had been able to make requests for resources and 4 had not yet made requests. One commented that the school was '*Building a resource bank with TAMHS money*'.
- 2.11. On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is '*no awareness of EL*', and 10 is '*strong culture of EL*', ELSAs rated their schools as follows:

	strong culture of EL									
No awareness of EL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of responses	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3

There is a wide spread amongst this small cohort. The EPS, BSS and TAMHS practitioners will continue to work with schools with lower ratings to help raise the level of EL, and encourage schools with a greater awareness of EL to share their insight and skills.

- 2.12. ELSAs were asked what they would say was the value of ELSA work:

- '*For me, it has been a fantastic insight as it has encouraged me to look more into the background knowledge of children, as to why they may be displaying difficult behaviours. I think ELSA is a positive area to encourage all schools (to provide) a more encouraging environment.*'

- *'Invaluable.'* (3)
- *'If a child is not emotionally well then they will not achieve their full potential at school.'*
- *'ELSA work has improved school life for a lot of children in our school, it has improved behaviour in general and the children value it highly and get a lot out of the sessions.'*
- *'The ELSA training has been very valuable. I would recommend schools to invest in ELSAs and training - it does work and (is) very effective to support children in preparing and settling them for positive learning.'*
- *'The emotional support given and the opportunity to give strategies to build the child's own way of handling things in a positive way.'*
- *'Really worthwhile as so many students could benefit from it.'*
- *'Valuable, worthwhile, seeing transformation in children.'*
- *'To meet the educational needs of a pupil you must meet the emotional needs.'*
- *'Make it a whole school aware activity. Emphasise the importance of time for feedback and evaluation.'*

2.13. Examples of successful ELSA work include:

- *'Anger strategies worked with a pupil - finding ways to deal with their own explosive reactions. Done in group work.'*
- *'Bereavement sessions.'*
- *'Anger management programme.'*
- *'I have recently been working with a child who is unable to recognise his emotions. We have used mirrors, made a puppet, and playdough faces to help him recognise emotions. He will now give eye contact and smile.'*
- *'Individual behaviour management strategies used in group discussion - what went well? What could you have done differently?'*
- *'I have only done one session so far - with a 4 year old and at the end of the session she said 'I like telling you how I feel.'*

2.14. Other comments made by ELSAs:

- *'I'm looking forward to ELSA Network meetings to discuss experiences of people in similar roles.'*
- *'If funding/time constraints were not an issue more school staff should have training even if just to heighten awareness of issues pupils can have which can have a negative impact on their future.'*
- *'Feel this course has made me a lot more confident in what I am doing. The folder has lots of good resources to use and adapt.'*
- *'I look forward to learning and sharing experiences with other ELSAs.'*

3. Next steps

- 3.1. ELSAs indicated that they would like to know more about:
- Bereavement (2).
 - Anxiety in children.
 - Cognition affecting children's understanding, therefore resulting in inappropriate behaviour.
 - Would like to look at all (topics covered) more deeply.
 - Does ELSA work better, or a 1:1, or group sessions? (ie research).
 - Session planning and assessments.
 - Asperger's syndrome.

Some of these are topics covered in the initial training, others are new. There is a need for on-going support to revisit topics covered, and to introduce new ones.

- 3.2. Locality-based ELSA Networks are held half-termly, led by the Educational Psychology Service. The Networks offer supervision and give ELSAs the opportunity to share successes, problem solve, and continue to learn. ELSAs should continue to get in-school support from their line-manager. Most do, but of concern is a small number who do not. It is important to emphasise the need for this, prior to schools sending TAs on ELSA training. Schools that are currently relying on external TAMHS practitioners for supervision and support will need to plan for sustainability (ie in-school support for the ELSA) when the TAMHS project comes to an end.

- 3.3. As with previous cohorts, ELSAs show a wish to further develop their skills. ELSA training is an *introduction* to EL skills and many ELSAs go on to do further training and skill-development in the field of EL. This year, as last, a number of previously-trained ELSAs attended the ELSA Conference in Southampton on 19.10.2010. Many ELSAs have also attended the additional training offered by the EPS and BSS on Understanding Anger; Listening and Counselling; and Attachment. These training days are 'stand alone' but also complement the ELSA initial training.

- 3.4. There is a need to increase awareness of EL across all staff in school, and to parents. Ideas to address this include developing a course on EL for teachers and for those who line manage ELSAs in schools, and producing a leaflet for parents that explains the work of ELSAs in Bournemouth.

References

Bravery, K. & Harris, L. *Emotional Literacy Support Assistants in Bournemouth: Impact and Outcomes*. July 2009. Unpublished.