

THE EMOTIONAL LITERACY SUPPORT ASSISTANT (ELSA) PROGRAMME EVALUATION REPORT, September 2016

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Background to the ELSA Programme

The ELSA programme was originally developed in 2004 in the Hampshire area by Sheila Burton (Principal Educational Psychologist) and has since run successfully in several Local Authorities across the UK. It is a preventative intervention which aims to build the capacity of schools to support pupils' emotional/social needs from within their own resources. ELSAs are Teaching Assistants or Learning Mentors working within schools who attend five days of specific training from Educational Psychologists (EPs). The five days of training cover topics including Raising emotional awareness, Self-esteem, Active Listening and Communication skills, Anger Management, Working with Puppets, Social Skills, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Social Stories, Friendship Skills and Writing Therapeutic Stories.

Following initial training, ELSAs are responsible for planning and delivering interventions within their school, which may involve individual or small group intervention. ELSA training is based on psychological principles, meaning that it is relevant to pupils from Reception-Year 13, within both mainstream and specialist provisions.

Following initial training, ELSAs are offered half-termly group Supervision with CEPs. Supervision aims to offer ELSAs casework support, discussion of areas not covered in the five days of initial training, information about useful resources, access to peer support and opportunities for shared problem solving.

The ELSA Programme in Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC)

The ELSA programme was introduced to CWaC schools in September 2014, as part of the Psychology Service's traded offer. The model detailed in The ELSA Trainer's Manual (Burton, 2009) has been delivered, with ELSAs attending 5 days of initial training and later receiving half-termly supervision with a CEP. Supervision is offered within local areas, with Secondary School ELSAs attending Secondary specific Supervision. To date, 78 ELSAs have been trained within CWaC and work within Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Specialist Schools. Once ELSAs have attended initial training, and four supervision sessions, they become registered as an ELSA within CWaC. The majority of schools bought in supervision during 2015-16 for ELSAs trained the previous academic year. From September 2016, the Psychology Service will begin to offer a revised six day model of training (please see appendix one for further detail regarding training content).

The aims of the current report

This report offers an evaluation of the impact of the ELSA programme in CWaC during 2014-16. It summarises training and supervision evaluation forms completed by ELSAs during 2015-16. Also summarised are responses from two questionnaires that were sent to trained ELSAs and their line manager (i.e. Head Teacher or SENCo) to help evaluate the short-term impact of the ELSA programme within schools; 47 ELSAs and 22 Line Managers returned completed questionnaires.

A similar evaluation report, evaluating the impact of the ELSA programme during 2014-15, was written in September 2015; hence by comparing current evaluations to the previous evaluation report, a perspective is also gained as to longer term impact of ELSA locally.

Evaluation information

ELSA evaluations of the five days of initial training

40 ELSAs attended training during 2015-16. Following each day of training, ELSAs were asked to give an overall rating for the session on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being 'poor' and 5 being 'excellent'). The following ratings were evident (please see Appendix 1 for further details of the content of each training day):

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
4.91	4.82	4.69	4.86	4.86

As can be seen above, ELSAs were overwhelmingly positive about each of the five days of training. Although still receiving a high overall average rating, the lowest rated day was Day 3. This training day focuses on Anger Management and Working with Puppets. There were few comments from ELSAs regarding how this session could be improved, but it is possible that this training day could be slightly adapted to ensure it better meets the needs of ELSAs attending from secondary and specialist provisions. The content regarding working with puppets could also partially be revised as some ELSAs commented that they would prefer tutor demonstrations to showing of the 'working with puppets' DVD.

At the end of each training day, ELSAs were also asked to comment about (a) what they liked most about the training day, (b) what could have been better and (c) what key points they will take away. Responses can be summarised in terms of:

Positive aspects of training

- **Discussion and relationship building opportunities:** ELSAs spoke positively about the time available to discuss topics and experiences with each other. For example, *"[I liked] working alongside staff from other settings"*. There were also positive comments about the opportunity to meet and build relationships with other ELSAs, e.g., *"the support from all the other ELSAs"* and *"sharing experiences and meeting some lovely people"*.

- **The training approach:** ELSAs commented about course delivery and the support of trainers. For example, *“the pace of the session was excellent. The explanations to the course very informative”, “different Ed Psychs have been very friendly, helpful and approachable”* and *“informal discussions, positive attitudes to the needs of the children and families by all professionals”*.
- **Gaining resources:** ELSAs spoke positively about the practical approach offered and sharing of resources/ tools. For example, *“I thought the social stories examples were really helpful”* and *“[I liked] how much resources there is and how much more confident I feel at delivering them”*.
- **The theoretical and detailed overview:** ELSAs commented that they liked the theoretical approach to social-emotional well-being which as delivered in an in-depth and practical way. For example, *“fascinating insight into Autism. I will read more....”*, *“practical advice on how to structure sessions with a view to developing self-esteem”*, *“[I have a] better understanding of the different stages of anger and how to manage them”* and *“I enjoyed in depth consideration of what makes an effective and empathetic listener”*.
- **The chance to reflect:** ELSAs also valued the opportunity to reflect about their role, the use of resources and ELSA sessions. For example, *“good day to make me think about using the resources available in different ways than I have previously”*, *“I was concerned that I was already delivering ELSA in another form within my Learning Mentor role – now I am happy it will be a good way of measure and accountability”*, *“changed perspective on using puppets”*, *“I will think carefully about reacting to bad behaviour and try to get to the bottom of why the behaviour is being displayed”* and *“recognising skills I already have and learning new ones [was most helpful]”*.
- **Communication with other staff:** Attending ELSA training days appeared to have empowered individuals to communicate with school colleagues to embed ELSA support in their school. For example, *“[I want] to speak to SENCo on next steps and planning”* and *“[I will] speak to staff regarding their classroom from a distraction point of view”*.
- **Meeting existing ELSAs:** On Day 5, ELSAs who trained during the previous year were invited to speak about the ELSA role. Trainee ELSA comments included: *“opportunity to speak to trained ELSAs, [was] very useful”* and *“being able to share best practice with invited ELSAs”*.

ELSAs’ suggestions for improvement

Very few suggestions for improvement were offered at the end of each training day, suggesting a positive impact of training. Suggestions for improvement can be summarised as:

- **Training logistics and environment:** ELSAs commented about the warmth of the room, comfort level and provided refreshments. Wherever possible, adaptations were made at the end of each training day in response.
- **Timings of training:** Two ELSAs commented, e.g., *“more time to look at resources [would have been helpful]”* and *“there was a lot of visual lessons and lots to take in. A couple of extra breaks [would have been helpful]”*.
- **The need for more in-depth, practical information about ELSA sessions:** One ELSA commented, *“I would like to see a ‘perfect’ ELSA session or actors re-enacting a session”*.

- Meeting the needs of secondary school ELSAs:** For example, “*I would have liked to have learned a bit more about ‘triggers’ for secondary students*”, “*the puppet idea I think would not work for me at my school due to the nature of the kids*” and “*I think that ELSA would be better delivered in primary/secondary groups as the issues/ needs often seem to be very different*”. However, it is positive to note that secondary specific supervision is rated positively by all attending ELSAs suggesting that this model of supervision effectively meets the needs of secondary school ELSAs.

ELSA’s feelings of confidence in the ELSA role

In July 2016, trained ELSAs were sent a questionnaire to help evaluate the ELSA programme. ELSAs were asked to rate how able they currently feel in relation to a number of skill areas related to ELSA support and training. This was rated on a scale of 1 (not very confident) to 5 (very confident). The following responses were evident, with responses also being further separated to help understand any differences between recently trained ELSAs and those previously trained who had implemented the role for longer:

Skill area	Mean rating for all ELSAs	ELSA’s trained 2014-15	ELSA’s trained 2015-16
Identifying pupils that may benefit from support with emotional literacy skills and knowing what programmes of support may benefit them	4.53	4.84	4.29
Supporting pupils’ self-esteem	4.56	4.79	4.36
Supporting pupils presenting with challenging behaviour	4.24	4.68	3.93
Supporting pupils’ social/ friendship skills	4.4	4.74	4.14
Supporting pupils with social communication needs/ Autistic Spectrum Conditions	4.2	4.63	3.93
Helping other staff in your school to support pupils’ social and emotional needs	4.29	4.63	4.04
Establishing a relationship with pupils in ELSA sessions and seeking their voice	4.72	4.89	4.58
Communicating with and supporting parents of pupils accessing ELSA	4.23	4.37	4.12
Monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils attending ELSA sessions	4.09	4.42	3.85

This indicates that, overall, ELSAs feel a good sense of confidence in relation to putting in place ELSA support in their school. Although still highly rated, all ELSAs expressed the least confidence in relation to monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils attending ELSA sessions.

It is interesting to note that, in each skill area, ELSAs who trained during 2014-15 reported increased levels of confidence in comparison to more recently trained ELSAs. This is in line with the finding of Bravery & Harris (2009) that, after one year,

the majority of teachers surveyed described the programme as at an “establishing” or “enhancing” stage of development. It may also highlight the importance of continued supervision in providing support and continuing to build ELSAs’ skill levels. It is also useful to note that gains in mean reported confidence levels are evident for ELSAs who trained during 2014-2015, when compared to their mean confidence scores reported in the ELSA Evaluation Report 2015.

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF THE ELSA PROGRAMME

Completed ELSA evaluation questionnaires

47 ELSAs responded to evaluation form sent to ELSAs in July 2016. Of these, 5 were specialist provision ELSAs, 3 were secondary school ELSAs, 1 was a Nursery School ELSA and the remaining respondents worked within primary schools.

ELSAs were asked to describe what they had achieved so far in their role as an ELSA. Responses can be summarised in terms of:

- **Building pupils’ skills:** ELSAs spoke positively about the impact of ELSA sessions in building pupils’ skills in a number of areas, including social skills, self-esteem, confidence, management of emotions and providing bereavement support. Some ELSAs commented on the outcomes evident, e.g., *“working with a Year 5 boy with anger issues....[he] will now walk away from the situation, bring himself into my room and talk through what has happened”* and *“ELSA has helped children grow with more confidence, improved self-esteem and encouraged children to understand their feelings”*. For some ELSAs, training and supervision seemed to have reframed their approaches to supporting pupils, e.g., *“understanding and looking at where the child’s emotional understanding is and how to build on that rather than looking at the problem the child is having and trying to fix it”*.
- **Use of specific approaches:** ELSAs commented positively about the use of specific approaches gained during training, including Social Stories, The Firework Model, Loss and Bereavement resources, Solution Circles and Circle of Friends approaches. ELSAs also commented about using a flexible approach, e.g., *“I use different methods and resources which fit the children individually”*.
- **Continuous application of skills gained:** ELSAs spoke positively about applying skills/ approaches learnt during ELSA training throughout their role(s) in school. For example, *“I have used the skills gained....incidentally during the course of my work as a learning mentor e.g. when talking to parents, foster carers and other members of staff or when unexpectedly encountering a child with a problem”* and *“whilst carrying out my role through school I have found that I take more interest in pupils with additional needs”*.
- **Wider school and community impact:** ELSAs commented about a positive impact for pupils beyond ELSA sessions. For example, *“the support is then carried through to the classroom with the teaching staff involved as well”* and *“since doing ELSA training I have been able to improve emotional literacy support across the school”* and *“we have set up a program of support for all our children involved in plans e.g. team around the family, child protection”*. There was also a positive perceived impact upon communication with parents,

e.g., *“supported parents inbasic parenting skills, dealing with anxious child, behaviour strategies”*.

- **Knowledge and confidence:** ELSAs spoke positively about gains in their own knowledge and confidence, e.g., *“training has improved my confidence and given me the knowledge and resources needed to deliver interventions and share ideas with other members of staff in school who ask for advice”* and *“I now have a greater understanding of many of the difficulties the students face on a daily basis”*. ELSAs also commented positively of the benefit of having over a year’s experience working as an ELSA.
- **Assessment and planning:** ELSAs commented that training and supervision had supported their ability to assess pupil need and plan interventions. For example, *“it has helped us to recognise children who will benefit from ELSA and...deliver more prescriptive support”*, *“it has provided theory to my practice”*. Wider systemic impact in assessing and planning was also noted, *“ELSA has helped us to put in place a nurture referral system”*:
- **Relationship with pupil(s):** ELSAs also spoke positively about improved relationships with pupils accessing ELSA support, e.g., *“I have managed to create good relationships with the pupils and they are a delight to work with”* and *“gaining the trust of ELSA children has been really helpful”*

91% of ELSAs commented that working as an ELSA has helped facilitate improved outcomes for pupils accessing sessions. Some of the remaining 9% commented that it was too early to comment as ELSA support had only recently started to be put in place in their school. One ELSA commented *“some of the students have complex needs and the support is ongoing”*, highlighting the relevance at times of long-term ELSA support for pupils. Positive outcomes were noted for pupils in terms of:

- **Transitions and changes:** ELSAs commented about how ELSA support had been beneficial for pupils during changes including transition to High School and residential trips. For example, *“there has been an excellent response from a group of Year Six girls regarding building confidence and readiness for High School”* and *“one pupil was able to enjoy a residential trip, overcome and manage all his anxieties associated with being away and new experiences”*. There were also comments regarding a positive impact during more significant changes, *“a child whose parents had split up came to me very confused and upset....her teacher and mum both commented on how she seemed much happier once we started to do this [ELSA support]”*.
- **Resilience:** An increased sense of resilience in pupils was the most frequently stated outcome, e.g., *“our pupils have built up a trusting, respectful relationship with me and therefore this has helped them to believe in themselves and has improved many children’s self-esteem and self-worth by helping them to achieve the correct mindset to learning”* and *“the emotional strength of pupils has shown great improvement”*.
- **Improved attendance and engagement:** For example, *“pupils who were refusing to go to lessons and interact with staff have gained confidence”*, *“child’s progress in class has improved dramatically due to his emotional literacy”*, *“pupils receiving ELSA support have been more engaged and more able to access the school curriculum”* and *“two children with poor attendance/refusers – no further problems – 100% attendance recently”*.

- **A wider impact:** was also noted, with positive impact upon the classroom and home noted. There were also comments about how ELSA had become embedded in school, e.g., *“our staff...are able to identify and help support the social and emotion, needs of vulnerable children”*, with ELSAs also commenting on how they used skills gained on the ELSA course incidentally throughout their time in school, not only during designated ELSA sessions.
- **Behaviour and feelings recognition:** outcomes were commonly mentioned, e.g., *“we had some children who demonstrated very challenging behaviour towards other children and also adults in the school, and the way they recognised triggers and learnt how to manage their anger improved noticeably and the number of such incidents in class reduced or never happened again”*, *“less behaviour outbursts and therefore less disrupted lessons”* and *“some children have started to be more settled in school, seeking support before behaviour escalates”*. Supporting anxiety was also noted as a positive outcome, e.g., *“the anxiety work really benefitted the year six pupil who was discharged from the hospital and was much calmer leading up to and during tests”*.
- **Social skills:** ELSAs also commented on how pupils’ social skills had improved following ELSA intervention and how they had formed friendships.

Head Teacher/ SENCo evaluations regarding the impact of the ELSA Programme

23 line managers (i.e. head teachers / SENCos) responded to the evaluation questionnaire sent in July 2016. Responding line managers were responsible for supporting 32 ELSAs. Two line managers represented secondary schools, one a specialist provision, one a Nursery School, with the remaining working at primary schools.

95% of Head Teachers / SENCos rated a 4 or 5 (where 5 is ‘very much so’) in terms of the extent to which the ELSA in their school has shown increased competency in supporting pupils’ emotional well-being since undertaking initial training.

Head Teachers / SENCos were also asked to rate the extent to which ELSA support has impacted on individual pupils accessing ELSA sessions. This was rated on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 indicating ‘great impact’). Responses are summarised below, with responses further separated into ELSAs who trained during 2014-16 (i.e. in some schools there are ELSAs trained both academic years) and those trained during 2015-16.

Skill area	Average overall rating	ELSAs trained in 2014-16	ELSAs trained in 2015-16
Pupils’ self-esteem and confidence	4.45	4.57	4.25
Pupils’ presenting with challenging behaviour	4	4.36	3.38
Pupils’ friendship skills	4.23	4.43	3.88
Pupils’ social/ communication skills	4.14	4.43	3.63
School’s ability to gather and understand pupils’ views, wishes and experiences	4.17	4.29	4.25

This suggests that there is an impressive perceived impact of ELSA support upon pupils in a range of areas. The greatest perceived impact was upon pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Whilst a positive impact is still evident, the lowest perceived impact was upon supporting pupils with challenging behaviour, perhaps indicating complexities that can often lie in supporting this area of need. In each area, there was a greater perceived impact for ELSAs who have trained in 2014-15/ in schools where there was more than one ELSA, perhaps suggesting that greater impact is perceived when ELSAs are given further time to embed ELSA support in school or there are two ELSAs within a school working together to embed support.

Comments from Head Teachers/ SENCOs regarding the impact of ELSA support can be summarised in terms of:

- **Identification of need:** Line managers commented that they had gained a better understanding regarding the needs of pupils who had accessed ELSA sessions, e.g., *“we’ve identified children who need further support and assistance because of more specific complex needs”*. Line managers also commented about a positive impact upon other staff in the school, e.g., *“teachers have a greater awareness of individual needs and how to address them in the classroom which has had a positive impact on the whole class, not just pupils attending ELSA sessions”* and *“staff also feel that they are able to speak to our ELSA in a non-judgemental way if they want advice about children in their classes”*.
- **A wide impact:** Line managers commented upon the impact of ELSA support beyond ELSA sessions. For example, *“because [the ELSA] is making an impact on the child in question, other children are supported as they are no longer affected in their learning. They can fully focus on their work”* and *“ELSA sessions has had a huge impact on the emotional support that has been provided to our most vulnerable children”*.
- **Communication with parents:** For example, *“we believe that by supporting parents we are able to support the child further”* and *“parents know of all the good work going on and ask if their child can access a group/ support”*.
- **Gains in specific skills:** Line managers spoke mostly about the impact upon pupils' self-esteem, challenging behaviour, confidence and social skills.
- **Increased confidence of ELSA(s)** was also noted.
- **Pupil enjoyment of sessions:** was commented on by three line managers.

One line manager also commented on the need to select an appropriate person to train as an ELSA, *“I think getting the right person into the role is fundamental to improve the emotional well-being of our children. Once this has been achieved the impact is phenomenal”*.

Head Teachers / SENCOs were also asked to rate how having a trained ELSA in school had impacted on the school as a whole. This was rated on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being 'great impact'):

Skill area	Average overall	ELSAs trained	ELSAs trained
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	rating	in 2014-16	in 2015-16
School's ability to identify pupils that may benefit from support with emotional literacy skills and knowing what support may benefit them	4.18	4.14	4.25
Other children in school	3.86	4.23	3.25
Other staff members in school	3.86	4.14	3.38
The school as a whole	4.05	4.29	3.63
Communication between staff and parents/ carers	3.95	4.08	3.75

This suggests that the greatest perceived impact has been on schools' ability to identify pupils that may benefit from support with emotional literacy skills and providing support to benefit them. Pleasingly there is a positive level of impact in this area for both schools who have recently trained and more established ELSAs. Line Managers of more recently trained ELSAs perceive less impact than those of more established ELSAs in terms of the 'impact upon other children in school', 'staff members', 'the whole school' and 'communication between staff and parents'. This may be a result of the limited time in which ELSA support had been in place in their schools. Comments can be summarised as follows:

- **Support for other staff members:** This was most frequently mentioned and line managers spoke positively about having a knowledgeable and trained member of staff in school, noting that this had had a positive impact upon strategies and teaching within the classrooms. For example, *"staff have asked [the ELSA] for advice on how to best support pupils displaying emotional and behavioural difficulties and she has competently been able to do so", "resources and strategies have been shared with staff and are being implemented in the classroom with a positive effect on all children in the class" and "good communication between staff members has meant a universal approach and understanding"*.
- **Embedding of the ELSA Programme:** Many line managers commented positively that ELSA support had become embedded in their school, e.g., *"members of staff are talking more about emotional needs" child as a whole", "ELSA sessions come into the classroom" and "the ELSA training has cascaded through school and has formed a huge part of our school ethos"*.
- **Communication with parents:** e.g., *"ELSA sessions have helped to develop more positive communication links with some of our parents" and "parents like the ELSA programme and are keen when we discuss it with them"*.

Line managers also commented about further improvements that they were planning to make next academic year, suggesting positive views of ELSA and a desire to further embed the programme within their schools.

77% of line managers reported that having a trained ELSA in school had helped to monitor and evaluate outcomes for pupils. Three line managers commented that ELSA had only recently been set up in their school and so it was too early to comment regarding this, one line manager also commented that such systems had already been in place before training ELSAs. Comments can be summarised as:

- **Record keeping:** Line Managers spoke positively about tools and systems that ELSAs had put in place to evaluate and monitor outcomes. For example, “[ELSA] keeps up to date, accurate records of the work that she completes with the young people, along with records of incidents etc ...have helped us to identify patterns in behaviour and appropriate support strategies that other LSAs and teachers can put in place” and “the diligent tracking of outcomes by our ELSA has allowed us to be able to describe clearly the impact of sessions over a defined period”. Line managers also commented about staff involvement in this, “teachers complete the checklist before and after sessions to see what impact the sessions have had. ELSAs coordinate this and keep it as evidence”.
- **Coordination with other evaluation measures:** Line managers commented positively about how ELSA measures had been effectively used alongside other existing tools, e.g., “we have been able to check attendance, behaviour and exclusions data and our ELSA has had a significant impact” and “in a lot of cases this has also improved their academic outcomes”.
- **Further identification of need:** For example, “for children we have been concerned about it has confirmed their social and emotional needs with a measure to actually evaluate and provide us with an evidence base for children to continue with ELSA and/ or investigate further through support of outside agencies”.
- **Improved liaison:** Line Managers spoke positively about the use of evaluation tools in improving effective liaison, both within and outside of school. For example, “[ELSA] has been able to feedback ‘wishes and feelings’ of pupils in ELSA sessions”, “meeting with ELSA, SENCo and Head using school’s continuum for Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties to ensure all children’s needs are met”, “[the ELSA has an] excellent role within review with parents, was able to be specific about barriers to progression with behaviour and emotional needs” and “the work that our ELSA carries out with pupils helps support recommendations from our Educational Psychologist, which in turn feeds into our termly intervention evaluations and towards review meetings”.

One line manger commented, “it has allowed us to evaluate outcomes which are not just academic. Pupils have been able to self-evaluate their work and emotions in ELSA sessions”. Two line managers, however, commented on the need for further evaluation/ monitoring tools, e.g., “it would be nice if a questionnaire could be developed to seek the child/ parental/ carer voice before and after the intervention” and “I don’t think that ELSAs have had much input on how to record progress and evaluate outcomes as this remains a weakness currently, although they are having a huge practical impact, it’s hard to measure formally. The latter comment was from a specialist provision, suggesting that the Psychology Service may have a role in helping ELSAs to evaluate and monitor outcomes for pupils with complex needs.

100% of Head Teachers / SENCos stated that they were planning to purchase Supervision sessions from the Psychology Service for their ELSA during 2016-17. This suggests that schools value Supervision and are committed to continuing the ELSA role in their school. However, although keen to continue to purchase

supervision, two line managers commented on the cost implications of having more than one trained ELSA in their school who attends supervision.

Perceived barriers to ELSA support

Completed evaluation forms indicated that 53% of ELSAs and 58% of line managers reported that there had been barriers to putting ELSA support in place in their school. From the ELSA perspective, there was little difference in terms of year within which ELSAs were trained with barriers being perceived by 47% of ELSAs trained during 2014-15 and 43% of ELSAs trained during 2015-16.

From the ELSA point of view, barriers experienced can be summarised in terms of:

- **Lack of funding:** For example, ELSAs commented that they have accessed some ELSA resources using personal funds.
- **Allocated time:** Many ELSAs commented that they were allocated insufficient time for ELSA sessions or that allocated time was not always delivered, e.g., *“it is difficult to stick to a timetable when delivering ELSA as sessions may sometimes overrun or I may be needed elsewhere to deal with something else”* and *“list grows ever longer and hard to meet the demands in my allocated time”*. ELSAs also commented that they were not always allocated planning time or that they may be taken from ELSA sessions in order to fulfil class cover. However, some ELSAs appeared to have overcome such obstacles, e.g., *“ELSA is noticed and respected across the whole school and sessions are seen as a priority”*.
- **Recognition of the ELSA role:** Some ELSAs commented about difficulties communicating with other staff regarding ELSA support, e.g., *“sometimes getting teachers on board is a struggle”* and *“at the start of introducing ELSA sessions, teachers were not as keen to allow pupils to come out of lessons for ELSA support”*. However, several ELSAs also commented that improvements were evident in recognition of the ELSA role in school and having more allocated time.
- **Parent consent:** For example, *“two sets of parents unwilling to allow ELSA support for their children”*.
- **Room:** Some ELSAs commented that they did not have a permanently allocated room/ space to run sessions from.

Similarly, from the line manager point of view, perceived barriers can be summarised in terms of:

- The greatest concern was the ELSA didn't always have sufficient time to put in place regular ELSA sessions.
- Finding a suitable space for ELSA sessions.
- One line manager commented about a lack of funds.
- Other working commitments of the ELSA – line managers commented about ELSAs balancing other roles such as safeguarding responsibilities. One line manager also commented that the ELSA may often be called to support children who were upset/ angry. Whilst it is specified in training that this type of support is not the role of the ELSA, it seems that the role may sometimes be perceived as such.

- Teacher awareness of ELSA support and willingness for pupils to attend ELSA sessions.

Suggestions for improvement

Line managers were asked how they felt the Psychology Service could improve support offered to ELSAs and schools. Fifteen line managers responded to this question, with 7 giving positive comments regarding the programme or no further suggestions for improvement. Suggestions for improvement can be summarised in terms of:

- The role being linked to that of a Higher Level Teaching Assistant so recommended pay scales reflect the role accurately.
- Offering SENCOs a free 15 minute session to give overview of the programme, what it entails and its parameters.
- Advice for ELSAs on monitoring impact and reporting.
- Providing further resources for ELSAs, based on supporting particular areas of ELSA need.
- The need for CEPs to take a more active role in facilitating supervision sessions.
- Reducing the cost of supervision where the school has more than one ELSA.

ELSAs were also asked to comment regarding suggestions for improvement. Of the 29 ELSAs who responded to this question, 48% stated that the current support was appropriate. One ELSA commented on the need for a greater focus/ structure during supervision sessions and once expressed a desire for ELSAs who trained the same academic year to be placed together. 35% of ELSAs commented that they would like access to further top-up training sessions, suggesting that this could take place within supervision sessions or as a separate training event. The following topics were mentioned by ELSAs as being desirable for ELSAs:

- Loss and bereavement – this was most frequently mentioned.
- Facilitating ELSA sessions with pupils who struggle to concentrate.
- Supporting children with autism and challenging behaviour.
- Supporting pupils with complex/ multiple needs.
- How to create effective targets for ELSA work.
- Supporting pupils with attachment needs

The need for top-up training sessions was also echoed by one line manager, *“it would be beneficial to have added on training in specific areas such as play therapy, attachment etc”*.

The above suggestions for improvement have been taken into account and implemented and changes made and offered to ELSAs during 2016-17.

SUPERVISION

ELSAs’ experiences of Supervision

At the end of each half-termly Supervision session, ELSAs are asked to complete evaluation forms, giving a rating on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 is completely) of (a)

how helpful the supervision session was and (b) how empowered they now feel about undertaking ELSA work. 132 completed Supervision evaluation forms were analysed. An average rating of 4.84 was evident in relation to how helpful ELSAs found the Supervision session, with an average of 4.6 in relation to how empowered they felt after the session. This suggests an impressive impact of the Supervision process in enabling ELSAs to fulfil their role in schools.

ELSA comments suggest that they value:

- The opportunity to share information about different approaches, and having activity demonstrations.
- The opportunity to share and gain resources.
- The opportunity to share experiences with each other and for peer support/encouragement. One ELSA commented that she liked having a larger supervision group to enable this.
- The chance to share any worries/ concerns and gain solutions.
- Approaches used in sessions, such as Solution Circles and the Iceberg Model.
- The chance to regularly meet and keep enthusiasm for ELSA going.
- One session where a secondary school ELSA attended a group for primary school ELSAs was rated positively.
- Focussing on specific cases/ topics, with ELSAs commenting positively about opportunities to focus on topics such as bereavement, adoption, how to manage ELSA referrals, speaking in staff meetings, anxiety and attachment.

One ELSA commented, *“the supervision sessions are invaluable and really help me to move forward”*.

Supervision evaluation forms indicate very few suggestions for improvement, although some ELSAs commented that they would like:

- Further suggestions of web based resources.
- Further support as how to best communicate with parents about pupils' behaviour.
- Further handouts/ resource packs, including ELSAs bringing resources to sessions which are proven to work well.
- The opportunity to meet with ELSAs they trained with who are not in their current supervision group.
- One ELSA commented that she would like consistent ELSAs attending each group (i.e. rather than newly trained ELSAs joining the group midway through an academic year), however, in contrast, one ELSA commented that she found the perspectives of newly joined ELSAs helpful.
- The chance to focus upon specific topics, such as Loss and Bereavement,

ELSAs also gave examples of the impact that Supervision has had upon their practice as an ELSA. Comments can be summarised in terms of:

- Recommendations of resources, this was both generally commented upon and specific resources which had been beneficial were also mentioned (e.g., loss and bereavement resources).
- Gaining new ideas of ways to use particular approaches/ resources.

- Creation of a suitable space/ room for ELSA sessions after ideas gained during Supervision.
- Feeling a sense of increased confidence which they felt, in turn, had a positive impact upon ELSA work with pupils.
- Gaining ideas of how to identify pupil need, organise sessions and monitor outcomes.
- Positive impact of the Solution Circle approach, e.g., *“we were having difficulties with a little girl...she was really struggling with the idea of not being in school and seeing her key person everyday. Her behaviour was becoming more and more challenging to the point where she was lashing out and wouldn't stay in the classroom. We had a solution based activity and the other ELSAs gave some brilliant strategies to try...they worked brilliantly and the little girl became much happier and calmer and behaviours de-escalated quickly”*.
- One ELSA commented that she felt that Supervision can have a negative impact in terms of time away from school and colleagues needing to cover for her during that time.

In the evaluation form sent to ELSAs in July 2016, ELSAs were asked to comment on the impact that they felt that attending Supervision has upon a number of areas. Ratings were given on a scale from 1 (very little impact) to 5 (great impact) in the following areas:

	Mean rating
Their personal and professional development	4.36
Pupils accessing ELSA sessions	4.39
Other pupils in school	3.96
The ELSA's school colleagues	3.76
The school as a whole	4.02

This suggests that ELSAs perceive that Supervision has an impressive impact upon their personal and professional development, and in turn, upon the pupils who they work with as part of ELSA sessions. It is also pleasing to see that a good impact is perceived upon the school as a whole and other pupils who may not have accessed ELSA sessions. The least perceived impact was upon other colleagues within the ELSA's school suggesting that ELSAs may benefit from additional support within Supervision sessions and/or training to share information with colleagues about ELSA principles and support.

ELSAs were asked to comment about what they look to gain from ELSA Supervision, and what they find most helpful. Responses can be summarised in terms of:

- Peer support, encouragement and acknowledgement regarding appropriateness of own ELSA interventions. For example, *“[I feel a] sense of being part of a team with similar aims, even though we are all working in different schools”* and *“feeling part of a very important group who are making a difference to children's lives”*.
- Support of the CEP leading the group.
- Sharing and gaining of resources and ideas.

- An arena for open discussion.
- Expanding own knowledge base and having continued training opportunities.
- The opportunity to visit different schools for supervision sessions and see the how ELSA areas have been created.
- The emphasis on solutions as well as the use of the Solution Circle approach, e.g. *“it always relates to something you can do for your own students”*.
- The opportunity to reflect, e.g. *“time out to reflect on work that can be extremely demanding”*.

Comments regarding ELSA Supervision also included, *“I do find the supervision really helpful for my own professional development and for the way I deliver my ELSA for the children in the school. I am always open to feedback, usually have plenty of questions which I want to discuss and these meetings enable me to learn from other people’s experiences and ideas we share. I think [CEP] is fantastic in the way of running these sessions and very approachable when certain things need support/ guidance. We’re always looking forward to the next meeting”*. One ELSA also commented, *“ELSA supervision is hugely important to our practice. Sharing our practice with other ELSA and learning from others. It gives you the opportunity to ask for help with difficult situation from people who may have already experienced something very similar”*

However, three ELSAs expressed a desire for more structured focus during supervision sessions, *“many of the sessions end up being a group chat”* and *“[it’s better when] sessions stay focussed and are relevant to each other’s needs”*.

ELSAs were also asked to comment as to whether their present supervision arrangements meet their needs. 83% commented that their needs were met by the current supervision arrangements, with 8.5% stating that supervision wasn’t meeting their needs and 8.5% of ELSAs not responding to this question. For those that felt that the present supervision arrangements didn’t meet their needs, suggestions for improvement can be summarised in terms of:

- A dislike of changes to group participants during the academic year, for example, *“I have moved supervision groups a couple of times. I have found this hard, and found that the consultations where we were with the people we trained with were much more supportive. I think this is because there was a common bond training together”*.
- A desire to work in Supervision with different schools to those within the local area/ cluster in order to gain further practice ideas, for example, *“I have learnt a lot from listening to ELSAs from a range of schools”*.
- In groups where there were both newly and previously trained ELSAs, some ELSAs expressed concerns about limited learning opportunities for less recently trained ELSAs, and felt that there was an over-emphasis on supporting more newly trained ELSAs.
- ELSAs expressed a desire for a specific focus in Supervision sessions on topics of interest (e.g. grief, planning and analysing impact and progress). Further support regarding loss and bereavement was particularly highlighted, suggesting that ELSAs may benefit from the available loss and bereavement ‘top-up module’.

- The opportunity for 1:1 Supervision with CEPs to discuss more complex cases.
- A need for more open discussion, for example, “structured discussion can limit how many ideas/ concerns we share”.

Line manager’s perceptions of the impact of Supervision

Line managers were asked to rate the impact that they perceive ELSA Supervision has upon their school. This was rated on a scale of 1 (very little impact) to 5 (great impact). A mean rating for all respondents was calculated and also further separated to gain an understanding of recently and previously trained ELSAs. The following mean ratings were evident:

Impact upon	Mean rating for all respondents	Mean rating for ELSAs trained in 2014-16	Mean rating – trained in 2015-16
Pupils the ELSA works with	4	4	4
Other pupils in school	3.53	3.77	3.13
Other staff in school	3.26	3.62	2.63
School as a whole	3.49	3.7	3.13

This suggests that line managers perceive that ELSA Supervision has a good impact on pupils accessing ELSA support. Ratings for impact upon other pupils, staff and the wider school are lower, but are noticeably higher for ELSAs who trained in 2014-15/ in schools where there is more than one ELSA. This may suggest that ELSAs develop in confidence in the role over time, and gradually sharing more information about ELSA with other staff and pupils in the school. Equally, it could suggest that where there are two or more trained ELSAs in a school, there is a more impressive impact of Supervision upon the wider school environment.

One line manager commented, *“supervision is imperative for anyone within this role and I believe that it should be made a condition of buying into the package. I would also thoroughly recommend that ELSAs do get trained further with safeguarding”*. Another expressed concerns about ELSA Supervision, *“the supervision needs to be more personalised.... feedback from other ELSAs is that they receive updates etc but this doesn’t happen at our supervision session”*.

Summary and Key Learning Points

The information contained within this report provides an evaluation of the ELSA Programme within CWaC during 2014-16, thus providing a useful perspective of both short term and longer term impact of the programme locally.

Information gathered suggests that ELSAs are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of ELSA training. ELSAs seem to particularly value the opportunity for discussion and building relationships with other ELSAs and the theoretical, but practical, approach. Training evaluations also suggest that ELSAs feel more empowered as a result of training and more knowledgeable about social-emotional resources which can be used to support pupils. There were very few suggestions of improvement for training sessions; some secondary school ELSAs commented that *The ELSA Programme in Cheshire West and Chester – Evaluation report*
 Dr. Lisa Edwards, September 2016

they would like more focus in training on meeting the needs of secondary pupils. However, supervision evaluations of secondary ELSAs are positive suggesting that secondary-specific supervision sessions appropriately meet their needs.

Line manager evaluations also indicate a perceived positive impact of the ELSA programme with impact evident upon ELSA confidence, pupil skills and indeed the whole school. From the line manager point of view, self-esteem and confidence was the greatest perceived gain for pupils. A positive impact was also noted upon other staff within the school with comments regarding the important role of ELSAs in advising other staff members, sharing resources and promoting communication with parents. This perceived positive impact appears to be greater in the case where ELSAs were trained during 2014-15 and/ or there are two trained ELSAs within a school.

77% of line managers also commented that having a trained ELSA had impacted positively upon evaluating and monitoring pupil outcomes, with comments regarding ELSAs putting evaluation systems in place, better identification of need and the effective use of some evaluation and monitoring tools. Some line managers expressed a desire for further tools to evaluate the impact of ELSA support and queried how to better evaluate ELSA support.

91% of ELSAs commented that ELSA support had facilitated improved outcomes for pupils, with the remaining 9% commenting either that it was too early to comment or regarding the complexity of some pupils' needs. ELSAs commented positively about supporting pupils through changes/ transition, increased resilience of pupils, improved attendance, social skills and emotion regulation skills. Positive changes in both the classroom, and at home, were noted. Several ELSAs also pleasingly commented on how effectively ELSA support had also been embedded within the classroom and wider school setting. ELSAs also commented that, since undertaking training, they feel more confident in supporting social-emotional needs, are better able to identify pupil need and plan social-emotional interventions and feel more confident in advising school colleagues regarding social-emotional skills support. In these areas, higher overall ratings were evident for ELSAs trained during 2014-16, suggesting that allowing ELSAs/ Schools time to embed the programme may be beneficial, as may having two trained ELSAs within a school. It may also highlight the importance of continued supervision in providing support and continuing to build ELSAs' skill levels and to help them to embed ELSA support. ELSAs expressed the least confidence in relation to monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils attending ELSA sessions.

Although a positive impact of the ELSA Programme is clearly evident, 53% of ELSAs and 58% of line managers perceived that there had been barriers to putting ELSA support in place in their school. The main areas of concern reported were in relation to a lack of available funds, time available and recognition of the ELSA role within school. Comments also suggest that, in some schools, ELSA support can sometimes be reactive, with ELSAs being called to support pupils and/or being given insufficient time in school to plan and deliver sessions. For some ELSAs, there appeared to be a continuing difficulty in embedding ELSA intervention and principles within school.

Supervision evaluations indicate that ELSA supervision is well-evaluated and 100% of line managers commented that they intended to buy in supervision sessions next academic year, suggesting that the value of supervision. ELSAs appear to value the opportunity in supervision sessions to reflect regarding their role/ support, to problem solve with the CEP and other ELSAs and to gain further ideas/ resources. Peer support appears to be particularly important to ELSAs. There appears to be some difference in opinions of ELSAs regarding the level of structure desired in ELSA supervision, with some ELSAs commenting that they desired further structure in sessions and some commenting that they found supervision sessions too structured. 83% of ELSAs commented that the current supervision arrangements met their needs, 8.5% of the remaining respondents commented on a dislike regarding recent changes in members of their group with some ELSAs commenting about a preference to have supervision sessions with ELSAs they trained with; this suggests the importance of the relationships that ELSAs establish with each other during initial training. One ELSA commented that she would prefer to attend supervision sessions outside of the locality area to have the opportunity to work with different schools and gain additional resources. ELSAs also commented on a desire for supervision sessions to focus on supporting specific areas of pupil need. 35% of ELSAs also expressed a desire to have further 'top up' training sessions (either within supervision or as a separate even). The following topics were mentioned by ELSAs as being desirable: Loss and bereavement, concentration skills, supporting children with autism and challenging behaviour, supporting pupils with complex/ multiple needs, how to create effective targets for ELSA work and supporting pupils with attachment needs.

In line with the above, the following recommendations are made:

- Continuing to allow time to embed ELSA support within their school, whilst also continuing to offer ELSAs supervision. There appears to be a continued CEP role in discussing with senior school staff ways to implement ELSA support within individual schools.
- There is a clear continuing role for the Psychology Service to continue offering ELSAs half termly supervision sessions. However, 8.5% of ELSAs commented that supervision did not currently meet their needs. With this in mind, the Psychology Service could consider:
 - Meeting as a team to review feedback from ELSAs regarding supervision experiences and how supervision is offered within different localities and by different CEPs.
 - Wherever possible, minimising changes to ELSA supervision groupings as ELSAs comment positively about the relationships they form.
 - Wherever possible, offering ELSAs supervision sessions with peers they completed initial ELSA training with.
 - The Psychology Service reviewing the structures used within ELSA Supervision to determine models of best practice for the sessions.
 - Offering ELSAs further input in supervision sessions regarding specific topics (tailored to the needs of individual supervision groups), for example, sharing information regarding attachment, working with pupils who struggle to concentrate.
 - Empowering ELSAs in supervision sessions to feel able to share information with staff at their school regarding the ELSA programme.

- For The Psychology Service to continue to offer secondary-specific supervision as secondary school ELSAs rate this experience positively. In September 2016, the service will begin to offer a revised model of 6 day training which includes sessions on resilience; it is possible that the revised training may better meet the needs of secondary school ELSAs.
- It may be beneficial for the Psychology Service to consider as a priority offering ELSAs further information regarding strategies to support specific areas of need. The Service may need to consider whether this be offered via current supervision arrangements and/or via 'top-up' training to trained ELSAs. 'Top-up' training modules regarding using *solution-focussed approaches in ELSA, loss and bereavement, engaging parents and working with worries* are currently available for delivery to ELSAs. The Psychology Service has also developed training modules for other groups which could be adapted for the ELSA audience (e.g. attachment, sexualised behaviour, domestic abuse) in the future.
- Surveyed ELSAs expressed the lowest levels of confidence in relation to 'how to assess and evaluate outcomes for pupils'. Therefore the Psychology Service may have a role in compiling and sharing evaluation resources with ELSAs/ schools in order to further support this.
- It is of concern that 53% of surveyed ELSAs and 58% of line managers reported that there had been barriers to putting ELSA support in their school. The Psychology Service clearly has an ongoing role in continuing to promote and help embed the ELSA role in schools, thereby ensuring that both new and trained ELSAs continue to be appropriately supported. The following is suggested:
 - CEPs encouraging larger primary schools and secondary schools to train two ELSAs in order to support each other and to help embed ELSA support.
 - CEPs to support school staff to select an appropriate staff member to train as an ELSA.
 - Providing further information to schools regarding how to best support ELSAs, with particular reference to the need to allocate time, resources and an area for ELSA sessions. A revision has been made to training delivery during 2016-17 which will allow Line Managers to attend part of day one to learn about the ELSA programme and to jointly plan with the ELSA at their school. The impact of line managers being invited to this session will need to be evaluated.
 - Providing schools with further information regarding the ELSA role and the function of ELSA support. It may be relevant for the link CEP to deliver a brief whole school training regarding the ELSA programme (a presentation which is available within the ELSA Trainer's Manual). Schools could be encouraged to allocate core time for this. Alternatively, a useful outcome of Supervision may be skilling up ELSAs to deliver an information session regarding ELSA support to staff within their school.
 - CEPs may need to address any ELSA concerns with SENCo/ Head Teacher in order to ensure that ELSAs are adequately supported within schools.
 - Providing further opportunity for Line Managers to share ideas with

- each other as to how to promote ELSA in their school.
- Continuing to evaluate the experiences of ELSAs and their line managers via both regular and end of year evaluation methods.

Appendix 1

Content of five day training course delivered during 2014-16:

- Day 1: Emotional literacy skills in schools; Raising emotional awareness.
- Day 2: Active listening skills; Self-esteem.
- Day 3: Anger management; Working with puppets.
- Day 4: Social Skills; Autism; Social Stories.
- Day 5: Therapeutic Stories; Friendship Skills.

Content of the six day training course to be delivered from September 2016:

- Day 1: Raising Emotional Literacy Awareness; Emotional Literacy in Schools.
- Day 2: Building Resilience Part One.
- Day 3: Building Resilience Part Two.
- Day 4: Emotional Regulation; Social and Friendship Skills.
- Day 5: Loss, Bereavement and Family Break-Up; Therapeutic Stories and Social Stories.
- Day 6: Active Listening and Reflective Conversations; Using puppets in ELSA work.

Appendix 2: The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) Programme.
End of Year Evaluation Form 2016: For completion by ELSAs

Name _____ School _____

Today's date _____

I completed ELSA training during (please tick): 2014-15 2015-16

Please rate how able you currently feel in relation to:

(with 1 being 'not very confident' and 5 being 'very confident')

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Identifying pupils that may benefit from support with emotional literacy skills and knowing what support may benefit them					
2 Supporting pupils' self-esteem					
3 Supporting pupils presenting with challenging behaviour					
4 Supporting pupils' social / friendship skills					
5 Supporting pupils with social communication needs/ Autism Spectrum Conditions					
6 Helping other staff in school to support pupils' social and emotional skills					
7 Establishing a relationship with pupils in ELSA sessions and seeking their 'voice'					
8 Communicating with and supporting parents of pupils accessing ELSA					
9 Monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils attending ELSA sessions					

Please give details of what working as an ELSA has helped you to do so far in your school (e.g. please give examples of the skills/ information you have gained and used, the support put in place or the tools/resources used to help identify and support pupils)

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.....

Has working as an ELSA helped bring about improved outcomes for pupils accessing sessions?

Yes No

Please further describe the outcomes seen:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Have you experienced barriers when putting ELSA support in place in your school? If so, please describe further:

Yes No

.....
.....
.....
.....

What do you look for from ELSA supervision?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Do the present supervision arrangements meet these needs?

Yes No

If you answered no, how could they be improved?

.....
.....
.....

What do you find most helpful about supervision sessions?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Please rate the impact that you attending ELSA supervision has had upon:

(with 1 being 'very little impact' and 5 being 'great impact')

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Your personal and professional development					
2 Pupils you work with as part of ELSA					
3 Other pupils in your school					
4 Your colleagues in school					
5 Your school as a whole					

Are you able to provide an example of the impact supervision has had on your ELSA practice? If so, please describe this below:

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.....
.....
.....

Is there any further support that you require or anything The Psychology Service could do differently to improve ELSA training/ support?

.....
.....

If yes, please describe further:

.....
.....
.....

Thinking about your school as a whole, to what extent has having a trained ELSA(s) in school impacted upon: (with 1 being 'no impact' and 5 being 'great impact')

	1	2	3	4	5
School's ability to identify pupils that may benefit from support with emotional literacy skills and knowing what support may benefit them					
Other pupils in school					
Other staff members in school					
Your school as a whole					
Communication between staff & parents/carers					

Please describe your above responses further

.....
.....
.....

Have there been any barriers to supporting the ELSA(s) to set up ELSA sessions in your school?

Yes No

If yes, please describe further:

.....
.....
.....

Please rate the impact of the supervision sessions the ELSA(s) attends on:

(with 1 being 'very little impact' and 5 being 'great impact')

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Pupils that the ELSA(s) works with					
2 Other pupils in your school					
3 Other staff in school					
5 Your school as a whole					

Is there anything that The Psychology Service could do differently to improve the support we offer ELSAs/ Schools as part of the programme?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Are you planning to buy half-termly ELSA supervision sessions from our service for the school's trained ELSA during 2016-17*?

Yes No

** Please note that this will be at a cost of £150 for the year. You will not be under any obligation to purchase supervision from your response on this questionnaire.*

Please give any additional comments

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