

**THE EMOTIONAL LITERACY SUPPORT
ASSISTANT PROGRAMME IN CHESHIRE WEST
AND CHESTER (CWAC): SUMMARY
EVALUATION**

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The ELSA programme was originally developed in the Hampshire area by Sheila Burton (Principal Educational Psychologist) and has since been adopted in a number of areas across the UK. ELSA is a preventative intervention which aims to enable schools to support pupils' social-emotional skills from within their own resources. ELSAs are Teaching Assistants/ Learning Mentors (from primary, secondary and specialist provisions) who attend 5 days of training delivered by Educational Psychologists (EPs). The five days of training cover the themes of: emotional literacy/ awareness, self-esteem, active, listening skills, anger management, working with puppets, social skills, autism spectrum disorder, friendship skills and therapeutic stories. Following training, ELSAs plan and deliver interventions within their schools (individual or small group) and are also offered half-termly group supervision sessions within local areas with EPs.

The ELSA programme was introduced to CWAC schools in September 2014 as part of the Psychology Service's traded offer. During 2014-15, 36 ELSAs completed initial training. This report provides a summary evaluation of the short-term impact of ELSA during 2014-15, from the viewpoint of 25 trained ELSAs and their Head Teacher/SENCo (23 responded). A longer evaluation report is also available and can be requested by contacting The Psychology Service.

ELSA evaluations of initial training

For each day of training, 100% of ELSAs rated training as a 4 or 5 (where 5 is excellent). ELSAs commented positively about the opportunity to share/gain ideas and resources, the supportive training approach, and the chance to discuss solutions to support pupils. ELSAs also commented that training had helped them to feel better able to share information with school colleagues to support pupils. They also spoke positively about feeling that their work in school was better recognised and that they had gained further skills, meaning that they felt more confident. Very few suggestions for improvement were given by ELSAs regarding their training experiences.

ELSAs' feelings of confidence regarding the ELSA role and experiences of supervision

During day one of training, ELSAs complete a rating scale to evaluate their confidence in relation to a number of key areas relevant to ELSA support. ELSAs were invited to re-complete this scale at the end of the academic year, following ELSA training. Results suggest that ELSAs have gained confidence in all areas, with the greatest gain being in their ability to support pupils' social/ friendship skills

Supervision sessions are rated overwhelmingly positively by ELSAs with comments suggesting that ELSAs value: discussion with other ELSAs regarding concerns/ progress in running ELSA in their school, sharing of resources/ ideas, the chance to have solution-focussed discussions

and the expertise of EPs facilitating the sessions.

ELSA evaluations regarding the impact of the programme in their school

100% of ELSAs commented that working as an ELSA had helped facilitate improved outcomes for pupils accessing sessions, with particular reference to improvements in behaviour, self-esteem, emotion recognition, anger management, social skills and feelings of anxiety. ELSAs also commented that they felt more confident in the ELSA role, were better able to identify pupil need and monitor progress and more able to share information and support other colleagues in school.

Head teacher/ SENCo comments regarding impact of ELSA support in their school

78% of Head Teachers/ SENCos rated a 4 or 5 (where 5 is very much so) in terms of the extent to which their trained ELSA has been better able to support pupils' social/emotional skills since undertaking ELSA training. Head Teachers/ SENCos rated the extent to which ELSA support had impacted on individual pupils in their school - the greatest impact was evident on pupils' self-esteem and confidence skills. Some Head Teachers/ SENCos also commented that pupils accessing ELSA support had improved relationships within school and some also shared parental information that pupils' behaviour and well-being at home seemed improved. Head Teachers/ SENCos were also asked how having a trained ELSA had impacted on their school as a whole. Head Teachers/ SENCos spoke positively about being better able to identify and provide early intervention to support pupils' social-emotional skills and noted that a positive

impact was evident on other pupils in the school. However, many also discussed that ELSA support needed more time to embed in their school.

Summary and future development of the ELSA programme in CWAC

This document provides a summary evaluation report regarding the impact of the ELSA programme within CWAC during 2014-15. It should be noted that this offers a very short-term evaluation with only a five month gap between ELSAs completing initial training and completing evaluation forms. However, information gathered suggests that both initial training and half-termly supervision sessions are rated very positively by ELSAs. It also suggests that, following training and supervision, ELSAs feel more confident in supporting pupils' social-emotional skills and a greater sense of value regarding their role in school. Both ELSA and Head Teacher/ SENCo evaluations also indicate that there are improved outcomes for pupils who have accessed ELSAs support, with the greatest perceived impact on pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Line managers also comment that having a trained ELSA has impacted on their school as a whole, particularly evident was a positive impact on peers and earlier identification of need and within-school intervention. However, 64% of ELSAs commented that they had experienced barriers in putting in place ELSA support in their school, in terms of time, resources, an area in which to facilitate ELSA sessions and a lack of understanding from school colleagues regarding the ELSA role. This was echoed by some Head Teachers/ SENCos. This highlights the importance of half-termly supervision sessions facilitated by EPs to ensure that trained ELSAs continue to feel supported in their role in school. The Psychology Service in CWAC clearly has an ongoing role in continuing to provide supervision sessions for

trained ELSAs and in supporting Head Teachers/ SENCOs to put in place ELSA support in their school.

The ELSA Programme has clearly had a positive impact on schools in CWAC and both initial ELSA training and half-termly group supervision sessions will continue to be run by the Psychology Service. In the near future, it is hoped that at least two cohorts of ELSA training will run each academic year. This forms part of the Psychology Service's traded offer with a current cost of £500 per ELSA trained. This includes five days of initial training, a handbook, resources and four half-termly supervision sessions. Supervision sessions for the following academic year are currently at a cost of £150 per ELSA (for five half-termly supervision sessions) and it is recommended that schools that train ELSAs buy in ongoing supervision to allow ELSAs to experience regular peer and clinical support (via EP advice). To gain a place on upcoming ELSA training, or for further information, schools can contact The Psychology Service on 0151 337 6836.

The below information has been provided by a local ELSA who trained during 2014-15 to offer an understanding of how ELSA works within a Secondary School setting.

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) is a training course aimed at teaching assistants in schools.

As a fully trained ELSA based within a local Secondary School in Cheshire West and Chester, I was asked if I could create a leaflet aimed at helping Secondary Schools see how ELSA runs in Secondary Education and what a difference it can make to individual pupils. I hope that the information enclosed helps your school see the benefit of training Learning Support Assistants as ELSA's and how the whole school can benefit from the ELSA programme.

Who can be trained as an ELSA?

Learning Support Assistants with a natural enthusiasm to help and a strong motivation to deliver a "counselling" styled programme would be best suited to ELSA. The role demands an individual who is caring, sensitive and well organised. Working as an ELSA requires planning of lessons, resourcing of own materials as well as delivering and evaluating lessons and pupils progress.

How were pupils identified for ELSA?

Pupils were identified through a conversation with SENDCO and Year Leaders. Pupils' chosen for ELSA displayed an emotional need that could not be met within the classroom. Issues included Anxiety, Anger Management, Low Self Esteem and children on the Autistic spectrum. It is expected that after receiving help from the ELSA programme that pupils would be able to further engage within the classroom and display improved behaviour.

How were the sessions organised?

A meeting was arranged between the ELSA and SENDCO to allocate 3 hours of the working week to ELSA. Within my own personal timetable that worked out as 3 lessons on a Wednesday afternoon in my first year, progressing to include 30 minute morning registration slots in the second year. Pupils received 30 minute slots 1:1 and 1 hour slots for small groups. I personally found that 1:1 sessions worked better for pupils as most preferred not to open up in a group situation. Pupils receive the same time slot each week and the consistency of keeping these slots is key to their continued development.

Conversations were had with Subject teachers as to appropriate lessons for pupils to be taken out of and core subjects such as Maths, English and Science were avoided. It can take a lot of juggling around at first to pick appropriate slots for all pupils, but with a little understanding from Teachers for the emotional need of the pupils and backing from the SENCO usually minimises problems.

How is ELSA measured?

It's always an issue within Secondary School education for the work of pupils to be 'measurable.' All pupils who receive ELSA have a personal Learning Plan that outlines learning objectives, SEND meetings and termly reviews of progress made. To measure progress of the pupils' I provide support within class lessons, this allows me to see how behaviour is changing and how well the pupils are adapting and engaging with their studies. All pupils who receive ELSA are included on the SEND register as a provision provided by our school to meet the pupil's emotional and social needs.

What resources are available?

It can be really hard to find resources that are age appropriate for secondary schools. Most resources that teach about emotions can be very primary focused and would probably make our pupils feel patronised. I found some fantastic resources, easily bought from Amazon, at a reasonable price, called "An instant help book for teens." They are a brilliant series of photocopiable resources that track through an easy to follow programme of study. They take a mature angle and are full of social stories that relate to secondary school life. Books include: "The anxiety workbook for teens," "The anger workbook for teens," "The self-esteem workbook for teens," and "The social success workbook for teens." These resources are perfect for minimising lesson preparation time and measuring progress.

Other great filler activities I've found teens to enjoy are simple card games by the "Feelings in a Jar" range, these are great to use within the first sessions to build a therapeutic relationship with the pupil and gain their confidence in opening up. They are also great as a cool down activity, especially when discussing very emotional issues during a session, so as to send the pupil back into lessons in the right frame of mind. These are easily purchased from Amazon.

Success Stories

(*Names of pupils have been changed for confidentiality purposes.)

Year 7 Girl with Aspergers and Social Anxiety

Jenny found it difficult to relate to her peers and struggled with anxiety and self-esteem related issues. She'd experienced bullying at Primary school and found it difficult to build new friendships. I worked with Jenny learning about Anxiety: how it displays in the body, triggers and coping techniques. Jenny was then able to take some control over her

feelings. During this time Jenny was diagnosed with Aspergers syndrome, we further worked on her understanding of social skills and due to her love of reading, placed her as a monitor in the library helper club at break times. Being part of a group helped Jenny to try out social skills learnt in her ELSA lessons and allowed her to build new friendships. Feeling like she belonged somewhere helped Jenny to build in confidence and slowly we saw her anxiety issues fade away. The moment I realised how far she'd come was at the end of Year 7 when she turned to me and said "Miss, I don't want to go on Summer holidays because I will miss School and all my friends in the library."

Year 8 Girl Self-Esteem Issues

Sally had Dyslexia and low self-esteem, she found it difficult to engage with her English lessons and often gave up on assessments before really trying. ELSA helped Sally to learn about thought patterns and identify positive and negative thinking. Working on Sally's self-esteem helped her to build in confidence, Sally became very fluent at verbalising her feelings and this helped her to explore and express what she was thinking and feeling when it came to exams. Although Sally still finds English exams difficult she has now learnt to counteract her negative thought patterns and have some self-belief that she can succeed if she tries. Sally recently exceeded her target in English and is improving every day.

Year 9 Boy with Phobia and Anxiety issues

Connor has a phobia of high ceilings which caused him to experience panic attacks during assembly time at school. I worked with Connor on exploring his phobia and learning about its links to anxiety. Through learning about anxiety and gaining a better understanding of his own body and the way anxiety is experienced, Connor was able to

put his phobia into perspective. Connor still finds the hall a difficult place to be in, but through a process of slow reintegration with the hall using calming techniques he was able to attend an assembly. Even though Connor may always have a phobia of high ceilings he now knows that it is a situation that he can endure and cope with. Learning about anxiety and understanding his own thought patterns has helped Connor to build in confidence socially and has inspired him to try new things including learning to swim and taking up boxing classes. Connor now has a “can do” attitude, knowing that as long as he tries his best he can achieve. All of which has enhanced his mental well-being and motivation with school life.

Year 9 Boy Insomnia

Matthew was coming into school feeling sick through lack of sleep, he often ended up falling asleep in class and being sent home due to exhaustion. Matthew was missing a lot of school and it was beginning to affect his educational progress. Matthew had ELSA support to discuss his sleep patterns and to identify sleep problems. ELSA helped Matthew to become more self-reflective and recognise behaviours that were affecting his sleep. We discussed the bedroom being a tranquil space from sleep with no entertainment systems, having a balanced diet, exercise routines, talking about worries and using relaxation breathing techniques. After one term of ELSA Matthew was able to structure his life more effectively and look after his body with a good balance of exercise and diet. Matthew’s school attendance improved and he became noticeably more alert and engaged in his learning.

Year 10 Girl with Anger Management Issues

Amy was struggling in the classroom with managing her anger. She was easily wound up

by her peers and got frustrated easily with class activities she found difficult. After two terms of ELSA sessions and support, Amy can now control her anger more effectively; she knows her anger triggers, what to do to avoid them and has learned cool down techniques that work for her. Once able to control her anger more effectively, Amy was able to concentrate in class and attend more lessons as her anger was no longer causing her to be extracted from the classroom. Once Amy’s anger was under control, we were then able to explore her emotions masked by anger. Amy was able to discover that most of her anger was fuelled by her anxiety of not performing well at school. We did another terms ELSA sessions focusing on anxiety, what it is and how it can be managed before it develops into anger. By the end of Year 10, Amy became a self-aware, confident, respectful and motivated young lady, ready to take on the challenges of Year 11.

Conclusion

As you can see, pupils may receive ELSA support for a variety of different reasons. However whatever the initial reason for referral, all pupils gain in confidence, self-awareness and personal well-being. All of this can only help enhance pupils’ engagement in school and motivation to achieve. Just the simple act of having a staff member give their time to listen, support and understand a child’s feelings can make a huge difference in the lives of that pupil. I hope this information encourages you to seek ELSA for your Secondary school and see the huge benefits it can provide for pupils.

Best wishes, Natalie Williams, Learning Support Assistant, Cheshire based High School.