

ELSA training in Dorset through TaMHS 2010-11

Our first group of 19 ELSAs came from schools and Learning Centres at the heart of the TaMHS project and were trained during January and February 2010. Two further courses ran between March and May for schools and Learning Centres in neighbouring areas. This meant that by the end of the Summer Term 2010 Dorset had 72 ELSAs working in 37 schools and settings across the county. It was from this group of ELSAs that much of our research data has been collected.

During the Autumn Term the training was extended to the parts of the county that had previously had little involvement with TaMHS; North Dorset, Purbeck and the West of the county. This developed the skills of 31 new ELSAs.

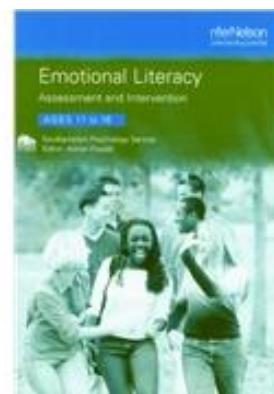
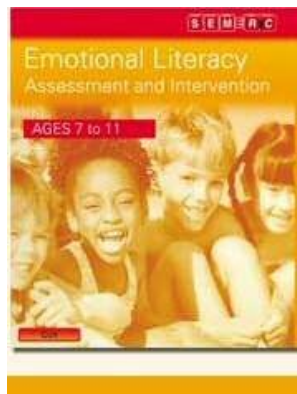
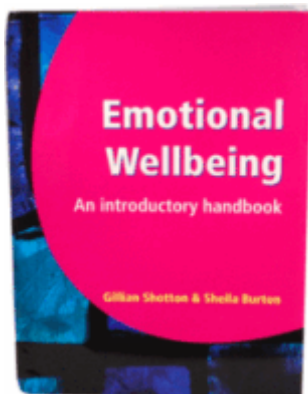
We discussed the value of ELSA training with head teachers of Dorset Special Schools, which cater for children with learning disabilities, at their Heads' association meeting and agreed to develop a course that was differentiated to meet their specific needs (see outline below). This was also run in the latter part of the Autumn Term and attended by 15 Special school support staff including two from a school in a neighbouring authority (Linwood School in Bournemouth). These ELSAs are now receiving supervision alongside those from mainstream schools in their localities.

Consequently by the end of 2010 we had 117 ELSAs operating in 61 settings across Dorset (34% of Dorset schools), including all 5 Learning Centres and all 5 Special schools. (All the schools and settings listed in bands A-D above)

To support the training and practice, each school that took part was given a copy of the ELSA handbook, and also an assessment and intervention tool to enable them both to measure and evaluate difficulties and plan programmes of intervention.

Emotional Wellbeing – an introductory handbook by Gillian Shotton and Sheila Burton

Emotional Literacy – Assessment and Intervention (Ages 7-11) or (Ages 11-16) by Adrian Faupel



The Emotional Literacy checklists – pupil / parent / teacher – have been used by our ELSAs as the basis for their evaluation of the impact of their work.

Outline of programme for Special School ELSAs

The ELSA programme was modified so that it would address the specific needs of those working in schools for children with learning disabilities. The format of this course is outlined below.

Day 1 Emotional Literacy in Schools - Focus on Special Needs

- Framework and Rationale
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- What is Emotional Intelligence / Emotional Literacy?
- An introduction to the development of the brain
- Why children with Special Educational needs might have greater risk of emotional and mental health difficulties
- The importance of school based emotional literacy interventions
- DVD – ELSAs in Action

Day 2 Self Esteem / Raising Emotional Awareness

- The self concept
- The building blocks of self-esteem
- Barriers to self-esteem for children with learning disability
- Recognition of feelings in self and others
- Expressing and communicating feelings – verbal and non-verbal
- Developing a 'vocabulary' for emotional understanding through play and activities
- Improving our own communication skills

Day 3 Understanding and Managing Anger / Using Puppets, Games and Projective Materials

- Checking our beliefs about anger
- What anger does to our physiology – body and brain
- The Breakwell model and how to support young people at each stage
- Designing a programme to help young people to learn to manage their anger
- DVD – Using Puppets
- Activities with puppets, games, picture cards, etc.

Day 4 Social Skills, Social Communication and Autism

- The purpose of communication
- Stages of skill learning
- Basic communication skills
- Designing activities to address basic skills
- Children with difficulty in social thinking
- Mind-mapping what we know about Autism – forum for discussion
- Comic Strip Conversations and Social Stories

Day 5 Developing Friendships and an Understanding of Reciprocal Relationships

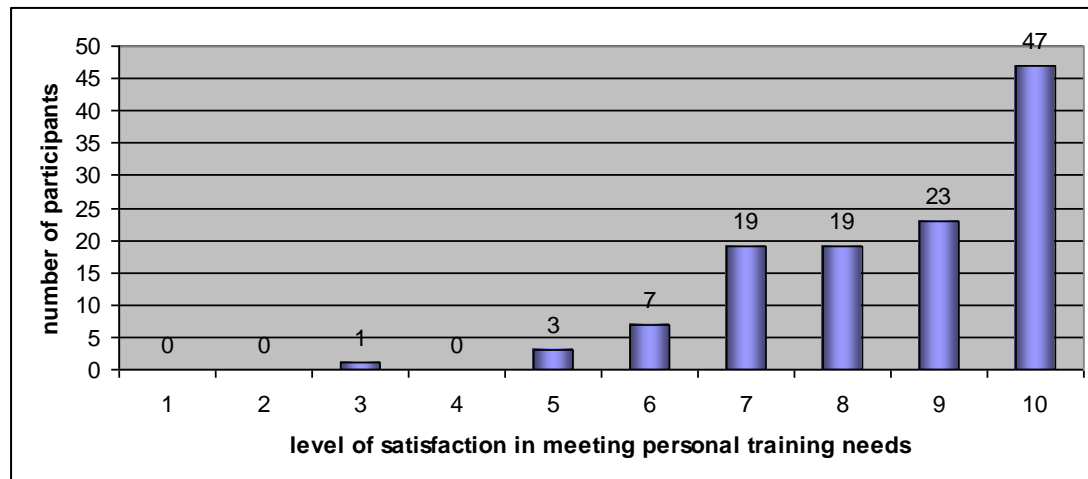
- Reflecting on what we've learned
- A five step model to reduce inappropriate outbursts
- Teaching about reciprocal relationships
- The circles of friendship
- Developing friendship skills through group work
- Therapeutic stories

Evaluation of training

1. How well this course met the personal learning needs of participants

At the end of each course the new ELSAs were asked to rate on a 10 point scale how well the training had met their personal learning needs. Their responses are shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7.



Their comments included:

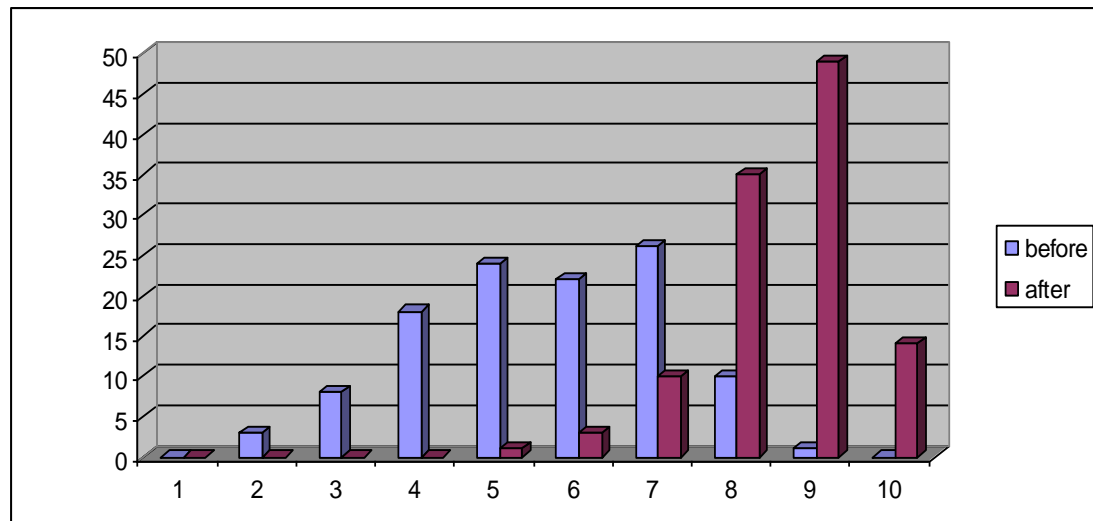
- *Quite a lot of the material was new but even if I already knew of some things, ie. circle of friends, it was good to consolidate.*
- *It gave me a deeper understanding, made me more tolerant, enabled me to see other schools' ideas/difficulties.*
- *Opened my eyes to a lot of the in depth reasons for a variety of behaviours.*
- *This course was all new to me and I have used so much of it in my job role already. It was the missing piece of the puzzle to my knowledge.*
- *Excellent, have a greater knowledge and understanding on behaviour trigger points, etc.*
- *Brilliant – learnt many new skills, ie. social stories, therapeutic stories. Lots to take back to school.*
- *Absolutely fabulous!*
- *Enhanced awareness of different needs and so many ideas to help make a difference.*
- *Exceeded my hopes hugely.*
- *This was all new learning for me. I am both very excited but also nervous about putting it into practice.*
- *Made me more aware – and thinking about using different language.*
- *This has been the most informative course I've attended in relation to my role.*
- *Great course. Looking forward to putting into practice.*

2. Level of confidence in meeting the emotional needs of pupils before and after this training.

They were also asked to indicate their level of confidence in supporting the emotional needs of children and young people prior to training and at the end of the course. The average improvement in confidence was 2.9 points on a 10 point scale.

The before and after scores are shown in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8. Level of Confidence Before and After ELSA Training



Their comments included:

- *The issues covered have helped increase my confidence of working with vulnerable young people by introducing innovative ways of engaging with them and supporting them.*
- *I feel I have a better understanding now; the use of games/puppets is a great tool to use.*
- *I feel now as though the penny has dropped and my last two years work has come together and makes sense – in turn boosting my confidence in my work knowledge.*
- *Although fairly confident before, this has given me the courage to speak up to the teachers and talk about the impact EL has on children's learning.*
- *This more than anything has provided the support and enabled me not to feel alone, the ongoing support is important. Along with the resources and shared knowledge.*
- *I'm fortunate to have received/undertaken good CPD opportunities during my career in schools, but this has been probably the best ever and has given me renewed professional confidence and motivation to try new ideas/approaches.*

3. The usefulness of the course

Participants were asked to rate on a 5 point scale the value of the training in terms of:

- a) how well it enabled the development of their skills;
- b) the usefulness of the materials and handouts provided;
- c) the impact of practical activities and discussion during the course;
- d) the quality of the presentation and delivery.

Their responses are shown in Figures 9a - d below

Figure 9a. Developing skills

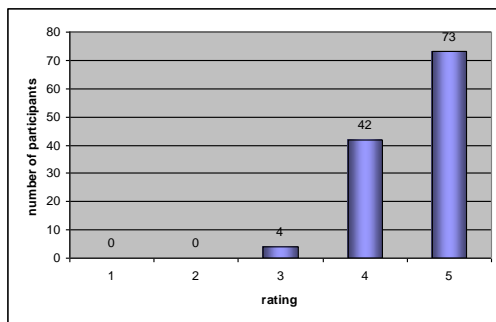


Figure 9c. Practical activities and discussion

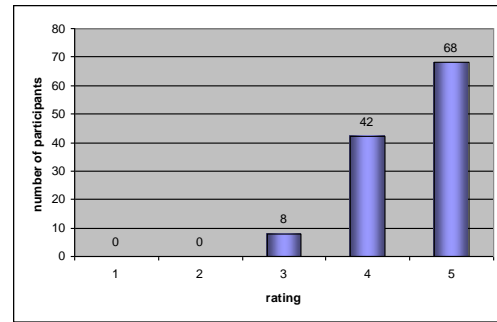


Figure 9b. The materials and handouts

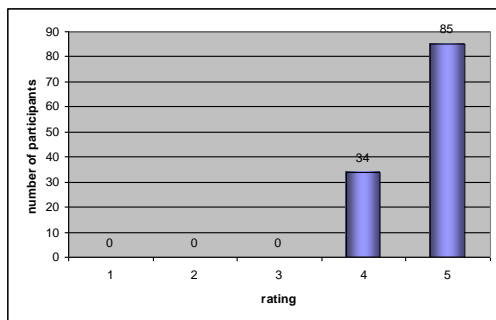
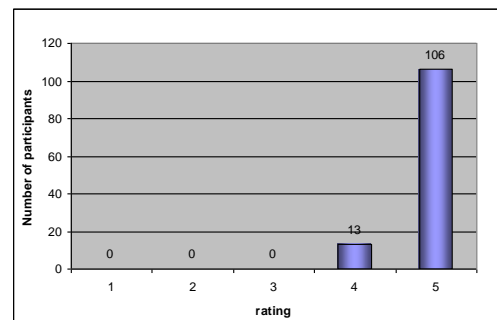


Figure 9d. The quality of the delivery



4. Impact on working practices

Participants were asked to identify if their working practices had changed during the course. 107 of the ELSAs were able to point to ways in which the course had changed the way they worked.

These changes were to do with:

Better understanding of the child's emotional needs

- *The section on anger was very informative. Gave me a clearer understanding of not just what words in anger mean but to recognise physical changes, etc.*
- *It has made me spend more time listening to pupils, and understanding that there is always a reason behind the behaviour.*
- *I am looking more holistically at the child's situation and allowing the child to partner me in developing strategies.*
- *I have a much better understanding of Aspergers and a better insight into why certain children react the way they do.*
- *Conscious that I am making an effort to always put yourself in the child's situation.*
- *It has highlighted what goes on (or could go on) behind anger/sadness etc. and I am more tolerant towards students with behavioural issues.*

More reflective practice and careful consideration of the appropriate adult response

- *It has made me think more before I react and I am more aware of why a child is saying/doing certain things.*
- *I am far more aware of the messages that I am giving off especially when it comes to body language – I fold my arms far less now. I am also a much better listener now too.*
- *It has given me the chance to reflect on my practice and has given me the knowledge to take a different approach with certain situations.*
- *Made me more aware of the needs of the quieter children, ones who are not obviously in need. Has slowed down my reactions to incidents and made me ask questions about why an incident has occurred.*
- *Think a lot more about each individual child and evaluate my responses to their behaviour.*
- *I now pay greater attention to my tone of voice and body language.*
- *Much more aware of my responses and reactions to pupils' behaviours – really think about what I say in response to their comments/questions – always thinking of things I'd like to try out!*
- *Made me evaluate my whole practice.*

Improved range of interventions

- *It gives you a vast toolbox of techniques to dip in and gives you confidence that there is no right way, just many paths to achieve the outcome you wish.*
- *Have already discussed with other TAs some ideas I found useful and have had a go using puppets which is working well.*
- *It has given me some new useful resources and reminded me of some I haven't used for a while.*
- *I have already been using some of the things that I have learned in my nurture group, specifically teaching children about body language.*

- *I have greater awareness of different strategies to use when working with children – especially the benefits of de-personalising issues.*
- *I have already tried using puppets (something I wouldn't have felt confident using) and loved the stories – social and therapeutic.*
- *The books we have been provided with are excellent – I have already used some of the worksheets with the children.*
- *... listening, clarifying, strategies, sharing, solutions ... to name a few.*
- *I have already used strategies learnt on this course and feel that I have actually achieved some good results.*
- *Started using the new skills straight after the first course. They have had a positive impact with the child I work with. Given me fresh ideas.*
- *Ideas on how to build on self esteem has really helped with one specific child.*
- *I tend to think about different strategies to use now, rather than just trying one way.*
- *This has been very interesting and has given me new ideas and resources to use, some I have already used and others to use in the future.*
- *It has given me lots of practical ideas, underpinned by theory.*

Improved confidence in managing situations and interactions

- *It has made me confident in ways I deal with issues.*
- *...certainly – improved my confidence.*
- *I feel more confident to deal with and give advice to other staff, especially about behaviour problems.*
- *Able to communicate with teachers better. Have a better understanding of children's feelings/actions/behaviour and has made me look at my own feelings when supporting children.*
- *Yes – eg., am working more confidently with puppets. Have been delivering Silver Seal but feel more confident to develop own resources ideas now.*
- *...can now explain to other members of staff why I work in the way I do.*
- *More understanding and confidence with 1:1 sessions.*
- *It has made me listen to the child more and think what may be behind the behaviour. Be more open with the teacher, explain my thinking.*

Next Steps for ELSA training

The Locality Manager for the East Dorset Locality was so impressed by the reports of ELSA work in the schools in her area that she asked if the Locality could fund another course in the area to try to encourage more schools to take up this opportunity. During the Spring Term 2011 a new course was run for schools in Christchurch and East Dorset, attended by 23 participants. This represents 9 schools who are new to ELSA and 5 who wanted to increase their numbers of ELSAs.

The schools joining the ELSA project were:

- Three Legged Cross First School
- Verwood First School
- Oakhurst First School
- Parley First School
- St James' First School, Gaunt's Common
- Rushcombe First School
- Lockyers Middle School
- Twynham School
- The Philip Green Memorial School

During 2011-12 money from the Early Intervention Grant will be used to enable the County Psychological Service to continue to provide supervision for our existing ELSAs and to offer at least one more training course. There has also been an enquiry from a school partnership about ways in which it might be possible for them to continue to fund ELSA courses.

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