

Embedding ELSA - the Conferences in March 2011

In March 2011 two conferences were held to celebrate the achievement of TaMHS in developing ELSA work across Dorset. All ELSAs who had received training through the TaMHS project were invited to attend. They were able to bring with them a member of teaching staff from their school. This was seen as important in order to develop the understanding of teaching staff about the ELSA role, the quality of training that the ELSAs had received and the importance of good management and regular supervision to maintain the quality of their work. To encourage schools to send teaching staff, we offered to pay supply cover costs.

The programme for the day included a keynote address about the TaMHS project and the findings of our research, a short input on the Common Assessment Framework and a choice of two workshops from the following range:

- Supporting Children Through Parental Separation and Divorce
- Motivational Interviewing
- The Boxall Profile
- Examples of ELSA Work in Local Schools
- Changing Negative Thought Patterns
- Transactional Analysis
- Bereavement and Loss
- Therapeutic Story Writing

One hundred and forty people attended one or other of the conferences including 81% of the Dorset ELSAs. All elements of the day were very positively evaluated.

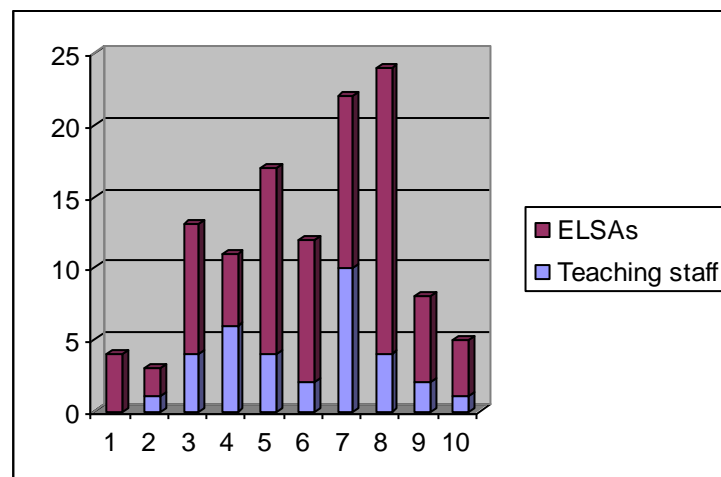
As part of the keynote address, participants were asked to consider the following:

- How well is ELSA embedded in your school?
- What barriers have you found?
- What are the next steps you need to take to improve the impact of ELSA?

The evaluation form asked them to reconsider these questions again and to rate the level at which ELSA work is currently embedded in their school on a 10 point scale. The teachers gave an average rating of 5.9 and the ELSAs an average rating of 6.1.

The range of scores is shown in Figure 15 below.

Figure 15. How well ELSA work is embedded in local schools



The indications are that there is great variation in the ability of schools to embed this work. This is only partly due to the length of time they have had trained ELSAs.

There are indications of a bi-modal distribution which is more evident in the teacher ratings than the ELSA ones. This implies that some schools see themselves as being at the early stages of embedding ELSA, averaging about 5, and some schools who feel that ELSA is well established, averaging 7-8.

We were interested to know what improvements needed to be in place to enable ELSA work to be more effective. There were clear issues that needed to be addressed, dependent on the level at which ELSA work was established. This helps to define what needs to be in place in schools to make this work effective.

First steps

At the lowest levels the key issues that needed to be addressed were managerial, focusing on senior leaders providing time for the support work to take place.

- *We are awaiting the go ahead to start ELSA. We've done all the planning but nothing yet has materialised. (- waiting game)*
- *Timetable it in*
- *Agreement on timetable and release of staff*
- *All planning and resources are prepared and we are just waiting for the headteacher to give us a time slot*
- *Management support, a base, money, time, recognition of the work we could do*

Getting started

Those giving ratings between 3-5 focused on some of the above, but also looked more at working with head teachers and managers to create processes for identifying which children were to be referred and clearly defined space to work.

- *Set up referral system. Meeting 28.3.11. Year Heads to make aware and get on board – I am confident that with support it will be well accepted.*
- *Communication with staff. Stronger link with line manager.*
- *Improving communications with SENCo / HT to ensure that the ELSA concept is embedded fully in practice & role is recognised as valuable resource/asset.*
- *Reorganise timetable and space.*
- *Communicating with the rest of the staff re ELSA work. Securing room to work in.*
- *Develop a more structured system.*
- *To establish a referral procedure / where ELSA fits into the tranche of interventions offered in school / establish a line management for the ELSA.*

Giving ELSA work recognition and priority

For those who had made a good start on getting ELSA established the greatest frustration was about other school issues being seen as having higher priority so that ELSA sessions could be cancelled, postponed or moved with very little notice. This has huge implications for the esteem of the children receiving this support.

- *Guaranteed timetabled ELSA time – not interrupted by having to cover classes.*
- *Time allocated for planning and preparation, not just delivery.*

- *Releasing students from some lessons before the end of year 9.*
- *Allow more time for ELSA TAs to plan – ensure staff are more widely aware of ELSA work.*
- *Space to work – quiet / private room, no interruptions.*
- *Establishing its importance with all staff (room / timetabling / appropriateness of intervention).*
- *Dedicated room / dedicated time to plan and evaluate / raised awareness of all staff.*
- *All staff need to be on board. Need proper room to work in – not corridors.*
- *Designated area is being used but is often interrupted.*

Continuing to improve communication and ensuring all staff members are aware of ELSA skills

In settings which rated themselves as having embedded ELSA well (7 or above) there were still difficulties with some members of staff not appreciating the level of training the ELSAs had received or the type of work they were doing. Some ELSAs have reported that some teachers had used withdrawal of ELSA time as a threatened sanction for inappropriate behaviour. The importance of providing easily accessible information for all staff and also for parents was identified as the next step by many teachers and ELSAs. It was interesting to see that ELSAs who rated higher levels of embedded work seemed more empowered and often expressed the next steps in terms of things that they could do themselves rather than having to rely on managers.

- *Highlight formal training and professional skills of our two ELSA TAs for all teachers to take advantage of.*
- *Raise profile further among the whole school community.*
- *Do a presentation to other staff explaining what we do.*
- *Raise profile within whole school by presenting work in assembly / whole staff meetings / governors meetings. Formalising adapted assessment and evaluation process to measure impact of work more accurately.*
- *Sharing our work with rest of staff to increase awareness and understanding.*
- *Members of staff quite supportive but some sceptical so need to be educated.*
- *To involve parents more.*
- *Awareness of staff – what the role of the ELSA is. More communication with parents.*
- *Sharing knowledge and support available with all parents, not just those receiving support.*
- *Advertising ELSA within school / a dedicated area for resources / ELSA notice board in staff room.*

Refining systems and continuing to develop skills

Schools rating 8 or above were often looking to continue building the skills and knowledge base of their ELSAs and were using ELSA experience to guide and refine their practice, e.g. in improving referral systems or grouping students for more effective interventions.

- *More forward planning re referral system. Pooling of resources within pyramid.*
- *To develop more / further training for ELSA (counselling?).*
- *Look at the groups we currently have timetabled and group these into better working groups.*
- *Evaluate children from initial input group, identify new or continuous pupils.*
- *Groups more manageable in terms of dynamics between students.*