



“It’s OK To See The Counsellor”

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Evaluation Report, 22 May 2003**

SUPPORTED BY
MACE

“It’s OK To See The Counsellor”

NSPCC SCHOOLS’ COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT SERVICE: EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following are the main findings of an independent evaluation of the NSPCC Schools' Counselling and Support Service, commissioned by the NSPCC:

1. The initial preparation undertaken by NSPCC staff prior to the implementation of the Schools' Counselling and Support Service provided a good base for the subsequent success of the initiative.
2. The Service operates in the context of a positive and supportive ethos within the schools and within the Service itself. The counsellors have been successful in establishing effective working relationships with the staffs in their schools.
3. The professionalism and contribution of the counsellors to the pastoral work in their schools is valued by principals and teachers.
4. The Service has contributed effectively to enhancing the quality of pastoral provision in the schools involved in the Service.
5. The Service has been used by substantial numbers of children and young people. More than 4,000 children and young people have attended counselling sessions; more than 1,000 have taken part in small group or class sessions focusing on anger management, bereavement and bullying; and more than 400 have participated in small support groups for pupils who had been bullied.
6. The children and young people using the Service have a range of good experiences in terms of, for example, having access to the Service; being listened to and taken seriously in a safe environment by a caring and supportive adult; having time and opportunities to talk through issues important to them; the resolution of problems affecting them; and enhanced personal and social development.
7. The overall management of the Service by the NSPCC is effective.
8. The steering groups comprising NSPCC, external support and schools' personnel, made important management contributions in the early stages of the implementation of the Service.
9. There are good examples of external support personnel cooperating effectively with counsellors to support pupils and their parents.
10. Detailed record keeping and the supervision of the work of the counsellors are strong features of the Service.
11. Pupils, principals, teachers and parents value the independent nature of the service.
12. Children and young people value the confidential nature of the Service.
13. Parents, in general, welcome the fact that the Service is operating in the schools their children attend. Those interviewed, were deeply appreciative of the support that the Service had provided for them and their children.

14. The Service provides opportunities, additional to those provided by the schools, for child protection matters, including the disclosure of abuse, to be dealt with.
15. Principals, teachers and parents regard what the NSPCC provides as a high quality Service that has significant strengths and is beneficial to children and young people.
16. The provision of the Service has resulted in a range of positive outcomes for pupils, schools and the Service in general.
17. More consideration is required concerning the longer-term future of this Service and/or of the development of other models of counselling provision for implementation in schools in Northern Ireland, by the various partners and the Department of Education.
18. Issues to be addressed by the NSPCC, schools, and the external support agencies relate to, for example, aspects of the management of the Service, partnership, monitoring and evaluation and communication. *[See Appendix 1: Recommendations]*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Service

The NSPCC Schools' Counselling and Support Service (subsequently referred to as "the Service") commenced in September 2000 in schools in Northern Ireland as one element in a 5-strand approach designed to end cruelty to children. In order to prepare for this, the NSPCC appointed an Education Adviser in 1999. His brief was to implement the overall objective of promoting the development of safe, listening and responsive schools by establishing an independent school counselling service in identified primary, post-primary and special schools within two Education and Library Board (ELB) areas. During 1999, the newly-appointed Education Adviser visited the chief executives in all five ELBs, following which the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) and the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) agreed to participate in the initiative. The Education Adviser also met with the Minister for Education; the Education Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a number of individual members of that committee; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); and the general secretaries of all teaching unions. The result of this highly consultative process was endorsement for the initiative from all these bodies. This endorsement continues more than two years into the project and the links and levels of support established in those early days are a continuing feature of the Service.

1.2 Rationale for the Service

1.2.1 The following statement of the rationale for the Service is included in the NSPCC's protocol for schools:

“In order to achieve the NSPCC’s aim of ending cruelty, children and young people should have opportunities to talk to adults about worries and concerns in their lives and to disclose experiences of abuse. Since children spend approximately one third of their lives in school, it is in these settings that confidential counselling services should be available to them as they cope with the pressures of family and personal circumstances which may adversely affect their academic learning and social and personal development.”

1.2.2 This statement demonstrates the NSPCC's recognition of the link between the pastoral and academic dimensions of schooling. Thus, a primary purpose of counselling in schools is to help children and young people make progress in their learning.

1.2.3 Included in the wider rationale for the Service, is the fact that in Northern Ireland:

- a. 37% of the children and young people live in poverty;
- b. suicide has now overtaken road accidents as the main cause of death among young adults;
- c. 20% of children suffer from some form of mental illness, ranging from mild to severe;
- d. 26% of recorded rape victims are children;
- e. data relating to the issue of teenage health risk behaviours such as smoking, use of alcohol, illicit drugs and solvents generally points to increasing numbers of young people becoming involved in these activities.

[See Appendix 2 for references.]

1.2.4 A study in North and West Belfast found that drugs, exam pressures, relationships, family problems, unemployment, poverty, peer pressure and sexual orientation were putting young people under emotional strain. (Henry, P *“Someone to Talk to ... Someone to Listen”* 1999.). It is evident that these experiences are not limited to the children and young people of

North and West Belfast, nor are they limited to the less affluent and more deprived communities in Northern Ireland.

1.2.5 All of this confirms the rationale of the Service and the need for children and young people to have quick and easy access to independent and confidential counselling, if they are to deal effectively with their personal and social problems and make progress in their learning.

1.3 Aims of the Service

1.3.1 The stated aims of the Service are:

- a. to provide an independent, accessible and confidential counselling service in each of the designated schools, including a “drop-in” service as appropriate in each school;
- b. to contribute to the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programmes within schools;
- c. to provide consultation and advice to teaching staff and other professionals in respect of issues affecting young people in their care;
- d. to support school staff in the provision of advice and information to parents in respect of personal and parenting issues;
- e. to provide schools with advice, support and direct assistance in establishing peer support initiatives and school councils, as considered appropriate;
- f. to ensure that children have an active role to play; and
- g. to ensure that each young person has access to a counsellor to talk about his/her worries.

1.3.2 There are other subsidiary aims and objectives in relation to, for example, meeting the counselling needs of children and young people in formal education; helping to reduce alienation and exclusion from education; the empowerment of children and young people to cope with adverse socio-economic circumstances; and the provision of opportunities for children and young people to share personal information which would prevent and stop abuse.

1.4 Services Offered to Schools

The core function of the Service is counselling. Schools, in addition, are offered the opportunity to introduce, for example, a peer support programme, a school council, support for the schools implementing their PSHE programmes and a drop-in facility for pupils. To date, the up-take by schools in relation to peer support and school councils is relatively low.

1.5 Establishing the Service

1.5.1 In order to establish the Service, the NSPCC agreed to fund a 3-year pilot project in a limited number of schools in the SEELB and WELB areas at a total cost of c£1 million. Thus, at its inception, the Service was free of charge to the participating schools and implemented at no financial cost to the participating ELBs. The SEELB provided office accommodation at a nominal rent in Killard House, Newtownards, to house the administrative staff, the Education Adviser, the School Team Manager and the SEELB counselling team.

1.5.2 In the spring of 2000, a School Team Manager (subsequently referred to as the “Team Manager”) was appointed to work with the Education Adviser in:

- appointing counsellors;
- visiting the schools identified by the SEELB and the WELB to talk to principals and staffs and create a favourable climate for the successful implementation of the service;
- setting up and managing the Service; and
- establishing a representative steering group in each of the two participating ELBs.

They also organised a visit to the NSPCC's schools' counselling service in Wrexham to provide ELB officers and principals with an opportunity to see a schools' counselling service in action and to learn from it. Principals and teachers appreciate the early contribution of these two officers, in particular, their accessibility, commitment to the Service and schools, and high level of professionalism. They also value the on-going contribution of the Team Manager in terms of her professional skills and experience and her enthusiastic approach.

1.5.3 Prior to the implementation of the Service in schools, NSPCC personnel, principals and teachers worked cooperatively to agree implementation procedures and protocols. For example, it was agreed that primary school children could attend counselling sessions only with the prior approval of their parents, whereas secondary pupils could refer themselves without parental consent. Issues relating to, for example, potential conflict between the aims of a school and those of the Service, confidentiality, partnership and the involvement of parents were explored and agreement was reached. One important outcome of this consultative process, was the operational protocol that provided for consistency throughout the Service in relation to, for example, the roles and responsibilities of counsellors, the availability and accessibility of the Service, confidentiality, recording, the management of the service and complaints. At this stage, NSPCC personnel met with Boards of Governors and Parent/Teacher Associations in some schools, to seek their endorsement for the service; this was forthcoming in all cases. Meetings were also held and links were established with ELB personnel such as Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), Social Services managers, Social Workers and other interested parties.

1.5.4 It is evident that this early groundwork has been crucial to the success of the Service. Principals, teachers, ELB officers and Social Services personnel commented favourably on both the extent and the quality of the groundwork undertaken in creating trust and cooperation, allaying fears, establishing favourable working relationships, agreeing aims, clarifying roles and responsibilities and agreeing procedures and protocols. Principals and teachers, in particular, credit much of the subsequent success of the Service in their schools, to the extensive work done in the early stages of the initiative.

1.5.5 Initially, six counsellors were appointed, three for each ELB area. In appointing the counsellors, careful attention was paid to their professional backgrounds and experience as well as to their qualifications and personal attributes. Young people were involved in the selection process through, for example, their participation in role-play situations presented to candidates for the posts. The NSPCC saw strengths in forming a multi-disciplinary team; consequently, counsellors from teaching, social work and the youth service were appointed.

1.5.6 At the time of this evaluation exercise, four of the five counsellors had been in post since March 2002, thus some were still establishing themselves in their roles and creating networks. The team of five counsellors comprises three teachers and two social workers; three have counselling qualifications. All of them, however, have had practical experience through teaching, youth work or social work in dealing and working with children and/or young people. Provision is made by the NSPCC for those without formal counselling qualifications to undertake appropriate training. The Education Adviser and the Team Manager have formal qualifications in counselling.

1.5.7 The counsellors, in addition to providing a counselling service and some of the additional services referred to at 1.4 above, have been involved in a wide range of other school-based activities, including circle time in primary schools, group bereavement counselling, anti-bullying initiatives, personal safety and anger management programmes, transition from primary school to post-primary school, friendship activities and creating a safe playground. *[See Appendix 3]* Their contribution to their respective schools is much valued. Principals and teachers comment very favourably on their high level of commitment; their pleasant dispositions; the good quality of their relationships with pupils, teachers and parents;

the sensitive caring and supportive manner in which they deal with the children and young people; and their professionalism. Some counsellors, on occasions, have contributed to courses organised by the ELBs and to NSPCC-based training activities.

1.5.8 Each primary school is allocated a half-day per week of counsellor time and one day is allocated to post-primary schools. The counsellors have sometimes found it possible, however, to allocate some additional time to schools where pupils' needs are more pronounced.

1.5.9 In addition to her management responsibilities in relation to schools and the team of counsellors, the Team Manager seeks to promote the Service by involvement in activities such as presentations to ELB in-service training courses, presentations to the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); contributing to conferences, seminars and committees outside of education; and participating in a range of NSPCC-based activities. These contributions are valued and contribute positively to raising the profile of the Service.

2.0 THE EVALUATION PROCESS

2.1 The 12 schools involved in the evaluation exercise, undertaken during the autumn term of 2002 and the spring term of 2003, were identified by the ELBs in consultation with the NSPCC. *[See Appendix 4]* They included five schools from the primary sector, four from the post-primary sector and three special schools. Although all three special schools have both primary and post-primary pupils, only provision for their post-primary pupils was evaluated. In addition, only pupils, teachers and parents who had used or had some contact with the Service, were interviewed.

2.2 The purpose of this evaluation was as follows:

- to evaluate the quality of the Service provided for schools and the impact and effectiveness of the work of the counsellors on the school communities with which they work;
- to identify the strengths and quality of the Service;
- to identify outcomes of the Service; and
- to identify areas for improving the Service.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The methodology employed included:

a. Interviews

Interviews were held between October 2002 and January 2003 in cooperation with the NSPCC, schools and external support agencies such as the Education Welfare Service and Social Services.

The evaluator conducted interviews with the following:

- 49 pupils (individually or in groups);
- 11 principals (individually);
- 16 teachers (individually or in pairs);
- 7 parents, six mothers and one father (individually);
- the five school counsellors, each on two occasions (individually);
- the two senior NSPCC managers (individually);
- the NSPCC Education Adviser and the Team Manager, (individually);
- 15 external support personnel from the ELBs, CCMS and Social Services (individually or in pairs); and
- a schools' inspector, Department of Education

[See Appendix 5 for a detailed breakdown of the interviews with the pupils.]

The evaluator also interviewed a principal, a teacher and an external counsellor in a school no longer linked to the Service.

While conducting the interviews, use was made of:

- aides-memoirs with principals; link teachers; post-primary pupils in mainstream schools; external support personnel such as ELB personnel and social workers; and NSPCC counsellors and managers. *[See Appendix 6]* They were designed to contain elements specific to the individual/group being interviewed, as well as common elements such as communication, referral procedures and confidentiality;
- sets of questions with pastoral and class teachers, pupils in primary and special schools, and parents *[See Appendix 6]*

In preparing the aides-memoirs and questions to be used when interviewing, consultations were held with NSPCC personnel to ensure that important aspects of management and key elements of the Service were evaluated.

b. Observation and scrutiny of documentation

In addition to the interviews, the following approaches were employed:

- observation of counsellors working in three different practical sessions with a total of 36 pupils;
- one visit to each of the steering group meetings; and
- a scrutiny of documentation provided by the NSPCC.

2.4 Presentation of the Findings

2.4.1 The findings of the evaluation exercise are presented as follows:

- The context in which the Service operates;
- The experiences of the children and young people of the Service;
- The management of the Service;
- Points for consideration by the managers of the Service
- Key elements of the Service
- Strengths and quality of the Service;
- Outcomes of the Service;
- Suggestions for improving the Service; and
- The future of the Service

2.4.2 Recommendations are made at appropriate places throughout the report and, in addition, points that merit further consideration by the NSPCC and other involved groups, are in bold italics.

2.4.3 2.4.3 During the period of the Northern Ireland evaluation exercise, the NSPCC National evaluation of the Service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in partnership with Keele University, was taking place. This exercise included a survey to ascertain the views and opinions of all pupils in the participating post-primary and special schools, whether or not they had used or were familiar with the Service; and a survey of the teachers in all of the schools in the NSPCC pilot exercise. The results of the survey in Northern Ireland, are contained in a report by W. Baginsky entitled “Counselling in Schools - a survey of the views of school staff and pupils in Northern Ireland”

3.0 THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE SERVICE OPERATES

3.1 Although the schools were nominated by their respective ELBs, all of them participate willingly in the Service and wish to continue to be a part of it. Thus, despite initial concerns and sometimes cynicism, on the part of a minority of teachers with regard to having such a Service in their schools, staffs generally have worked cooperatively with NSPCC managers and counsellors to make it an integral and essential part of their provision for their pupils.

3.2 Schools' Ethos and Pastoral Provision

3.2.1 The following context was apparent from the interviews and observations undertaken during the evaluation exercise and the visits to the schools:

a. Schools' Ethos

Each of the schools operates in the context of a positive ethos. This is evident from the observed good relationships; the relaxed atmosphere; the easy movement of pupils about the buildings; a climate of openness and mutual respect between the teachers and their pupils; and the value placed on pupils as individuals.

b. Pastoral Provision in Schools

All of the participating schools are aware of the critical importance of the pastoral dimension of their provision. They make considerable efforts to ensure that their pupils learn in a caring and supportive environment and are treated with respect; they encourage the pupils and promote their self-esteem; and they recognise the importance of the pastoral dimension in relation to the pupils' learning. Principals in all of the post-primary schools report that they have well-developed and effective pastoral systems designed to support their young people and to provide for the needs of those experiencing personal, social or other problems.

3.3 The Ethos of the Service

3.3.1 Teachers and pupils comment favourably on the ethos of the Service. They reported that the counsellors interact with teachers and pupils in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect; the counsellors have established very positive relationships at all levels in schools; pupils are dealt with sensitively. A teacher reports that the counsellor is sensitive and understanding; and another, that the Service operates in a context of mutual respect. Concerning the climate in which counselling takes place, pupils said:

- *"I feel very relaxed and comfortable"*;
- *"I can confide in the counsellor"*;
- *"I can talk to her just about anything."*
- *"I feel safe and very comfortable with the counsellor"*.

All of the pupils interviewed in the primary and special schools, reported that they felt safe when being counselled.

3.3.2 This, then, is the positive and supportive context in which the Service operates. Principals, teachers and counsellors confirm that the Service not only fits in well with the ethos and pastoral dimensions of the schools, but that it enhances and enriches them. One principal reported that the Service had strengthened the school's ethos; another reported that it had added to and enhanced the school's existing good practice and enriched the school's ethos.

3.3.3 The Service was never intended to operate independently from the existing pastoral provision in schools, nor to take away responsibility from teachers for the care, protection and

support of their pupils. It was, rather, intended to complement and enhance existing pastoral provision, support teachers in fulfilling their pastoral responsibilities and provide time and expertise for children and young people to talk and be listened to, by a caring adult. Principals and teachers report that this has been an important outcome of the Service in schools.

3.3.4 Observation of group-work sessions confirm, for example, the easy and relaxed atmosphere in which they take place; the sensitivity of the counsellors in dealing with pupils; good relationships between counsellors and pupils; and high levels of cooperation and mutual respect.

3.3.5 The counsellors are positive about the context in which they work. They reported that, for example:

- the Service fits in well with the school's ethos;
- they work in an atmosphere of freedom, trust and respect;
- counselling sessions are marked by empathy and respect, with children being relaxed and responding positively; and
- the Service, in their view, enhances the school's pastoral provision.

All of the counsellors are well accepted in their schools where they have established effective relationships with the pupils and teachers, and the work they do is much valued.

3.3.6 Thus, the positive and supportive context in which the Service operates and to which it contributes, is a strong feature of the initiative. Without it, the counsellors would be considerably less effective and the benefits to pupils would be diminished.

4.0 THE EXPERIENCES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE SERVICE

4.1 The Service is child-centred. Although schools, teachers, parents and families all benefit from what it does and offers, its primary focus is children and young people. Thus, in evaluating its effectiveness, it is important to determine how they experience the Service.

4.2 With regard to counselling, pupils who self-refer are usually seen during the next visit of the counsellor to the school (appointments for referrals by teachers may take longer, depending on the nature and urgency of the referral); sessions last no longer than one hour; pupils may attend one session or as many sessions as it takes to deal with the particular issue;

4.3 Since the Service commenced in September 2000, some 4,000 children and young people have attended counselling sessions during which issues such as bereavement, child health and behaviour, family difficulties and sectarian violence were raised.

[See Appendix 3.]

4.4 All of the pupils interviewed were positive when commenting on their counselling experiences. It is apparent that they enjoy their counselling sessions where they have opportunities to talk and be listened to by a caring adult; be supported and helped with their problems; and, in some instances, to disclose abuse. Pupils commented on their counselling experiences:

- *“I feel I can tell her anything.”*
- *“I can talk about things in confidence”.*
- *“I am listened to and there is time to talk.”*
- *“I was well supported and well listened to.”*
- *“I trust the counsellor.”*
- *“I feel better about myself.”*
- *“The counselling service is helpful. It has given us confidence, not just in school but outside school.”*
- *“I have been helped with my problems. Things are better now – my behaviour.”*
- *“I think going to (the counsellor) is great and helpful he listens to my problems he also gives good advice.”*

Pupils in primary and special schools agreed that they would recommend the Service to their friends if they had problems; some had already done so.

4.5 These comments are consistent with those in the research exercise undertaken in June 2002 and reported in *“Schools Counselling Evaluation”*, Davina Kenny. In that report, the children and young people *“...found it easy to talk to the counsellor...”*; *“...felt happier and enjoyed school more...”*; and all of the pupils from one primary school included in the research exercise *“...would advise their friends to speak to the counsellor if they are worried”*.

4.6 It is encouraging that all of the pupils interviewed, for all their good experiences of the Service, were able to identify at least one teacher in their school to whom they could talk about their problems. This is indicative of the good quality of the pastoral provision in these schools.

- 4.7 Recurring themes during interviews with pupils were:
- the counsellors had time for them;
 - they could talk and were listened to; and
 - they were taken seriously.

It is evident that pupils value these important aspects of the Service. ***It is essential that these aspects remain strong features in any future expansion of the Service.***

4.8 One pupil, in referring to the gender of the counsellor, expressed the view that pupils should have access to either a male or a female counsellor. ***The NSPCC should consider this point in future, possibly when replacing a counsellor, for whatever reason, with one of the opposite sex.***

4.9 All of the parents interviewed reported that their children had had positive experiences through counselling. One mentioned that her child liked going to see the counsellor and, as a result, his confidence had increased; and another said: *“My child is treated with respect.”*

- 4.10 Pupils in contact with other aspects of the Service were equally positive about their experiences. For example:
- a. those who undertook training for peer support, reported that; they had a sense of satisfaction at having completed the training course; had improved their listening, communication and social skills; and were now in a better position to talk to and help young people. They expressed disappointment, however, that having done the training, a considerable amount of time had elapsed without the peer support programme being implemented in the school;
 - b the year 13 group of pupils who trained for buddying in one school reported that it helped them to understand year 8 problems better than teachers could;
 - c. the children who engaged in circle time, introduced into the school by the counsellor, revealed a good level of understanding of the purpose of circle time and the basic rules governing it. They participated willingly and effectively and adhered to the rules when role-playing a circle time activity; and
 - d. group activity work observed in two different schools demonstrated that the pupils experienced a relaxed and friendly atmosphere; the counsellors dealt with them in a sensitive manner; they were listened to and had opportunities to talk; and they were treated with the utmost respect.

4.11 The children and young people were positive about their experiences of the Service; there are no reports of negative or unhelpful experiences. These experiences contribute significantly to their personal and social development and equip them with self-confidence, enhanced self-esteem and skills to deal more competently and confidently with their problems or the issues that confront them in school or at home. ***Since children and young people are the primary focus of the Service, it is important that counsellors continue to ensure that they have positive and worthwhile experiences, regardless on the nature of their contact with the Service.***

[See Appendix 7: Case Studies]

5.0 THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SERVICE

5.1 The overall management of the Service is effective. The line management is well established, roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and lines of communication are good. Senior managers in the NSPCC support the Service and are interested in its on-going development; they promote the Service among senior managers in partnership organisations. They value and support the work of the members of the Service team and appreciate the involvement and contribution of the various support services and personnel.

5.2 The work of the counsellors is well managed by the Team Manager who has regular planned meetings with each ELB team and, less regularly, with the two teams. The Team Manager is also implements effectively the NSPCC's rigorous supervision procedures in relation to each counsellor. The absence of a manager in the WELB adversely affected the management of the Service in that area. The Team Manager made strenuous efforts to fill this gap in provision, thus keeping its potential negative effects to a minimum. This matter was resolved with the appointment of an area manager to commence work in January 2003. ***In the event of the Service being extended to other ELB areas, the NSPCC should make every effort to ensure the appointment of team managers appropriate to the size of the team and the geographical spread of the schools involved.***

5.3 External support personnel, in general, comment positively on the management of the Service. One external support person said: *"The management arrangements are very good – a model of good practice."* Others reported that it was a well-managed Service and the management structures were very good. Concern was expressed at the absence of a team manager in the WELB until January 2003.

5.4 The Steering Groups

5.4.1 Steering Groups were set up in each ELB area at the outset of the initiative. Each was established with clear terms of reference, aims and objectives and a stated rationale. The visit by members of both steering groups to the Service in Wrexham, which operated without a steering group, confirmed the wisdom of the approach adopted by the NSPCC in Northern Ireland.

5.4.2 Membership of the steering groups was representative of the NSPCC, schools, the respective ELBs, CCMS and social services. This served to promote the sense of partnership, as well as enlist the widest possible support for the newly-established Service. Representatives from the ELBs chair the meetings.

5.4.3 Principals, counsellors and external support personnel agree that the steering groups, in the early stages of the initiative, served a very useful and necessary purpose. They provided opportunities for reporting, communicating information, sharing ideas; establishing protocols; and dealing with problems. They also kept the members informed about the progress of the Service in the different schools and contributed well to the development of a partnership at that level. Principals and external support personnel described the steering groups at this stage as being *"Essential"*, *"Invaluable"*, *"Very useful"* and *"Necessary"*.

5.4.4 There is now, however, agreement among all the constituent members that the steering groups have served their purpose well, but change is required. In their view, the present sense of purpose in the groups does not fully relate to the ongoing management needs of the Service. There is considerable support for a change in the composition, purpose and functions of the steering groups. Most members would support their replacement by smaller representative, management groups designed to deal with, for example, future strategy, policy matters and management issues. In doing this, it would be important for all those involved in

the Service within each ELB to be kept informed of decisions and proposals for change and development within the Service which would emanate from the new management committees.

Recommendation 1: The NSPCC, in full agreement and cooperation with the constituent partners, should replace the existing steering groups with smaller, but representative, management groups, each with a clear brief in relation to strategy, policy, finance and the future growth and development of the Service.

5.5 Induction of Counsellors

5.5.1 After counsellors are appointed, they have a period of induction in relation to the NSPCC in general and the Service in particular. They report that the training provided is useful and supportive; the work-shadowing element is said to be particularly helpful. There is not, however, a formalised programme of induction. There are also gaps in relation to, for example, information given about the range of services provided for schools by the ELBs, and support services for children and young people in the local and wider communities. Training in relation to understanding, developing and implementing, for example, peer support programmes, school councils, PSHE programmes and circle time is also required, particularly for newly-appointed counsellors who have no previous experience of these activities. The induction training for the counsellors in the WELB team was adversely affected by absence of a manager in the WELB until January 2003.

5.5.2 There is now sufficient experience in the NSPCC team for a well-structured and relevant induction programme to be devised. It should take account of the points made at 5.5.1 above, as well as the particular needs of the counsellors who, not having a professional background in education, need to learn and be informed, for example, about ELB structures, provision and the names of key personnel, and the culture of schools.

Recommendation 2: The NSPCC should review its induction training programme for counsellors to provide for consistency and to ensure that they are equipped to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

5.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

A. Monitoring and Evaluation Of the Service

5.6.1 Monitoring and evaluation of the Service, in general, and of the work of the counsellors in particular, is effective. It takes a variety of forms including audits of practice undertaken by the Area Children's Service Manager. Furthermore, the Team Manager:

- implements comprehensive and rigorous supervision procedures;
- meets regularly with the counsellors;
- meets bi-annually in each school with the principal and the counsellor; and
- produces annual written reports of the Service.

These are effective in enabling the NSPCC to make judgements about the quality and effectiveness of the Service in general, and in bringing about any particular necessary improvements.

B. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Work of the Service in Schools

5.6.2 The work of the Service in schools is monitored and evaluated using, for example:

- a range of reports written by counsellors and the Team Manager; these reports tend to be descriptive rather than evaluative;
- evaluations written by pupils on completing their programme of counselling;
- regular informal meetings which the counsellors have with principals, teachers and pupils.

5.6.3 A student from the University of Ulster has completed two small-scale research evaluations of the peer support provision in one post-primary school, and of counselling provision in three schools in the WELB.

5.6.4 Although these approaches serve a useful purpose, the Service is now in a position to adopt a more rigorous and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation in order to provide for a firmer statistical base, greater objectivity and to make it easier for the Service to determine outcomes. It is recognised that evaluating the success and outcomes of one-to-one counselling is difficult, but it is not impossible. The NSPCC should see this as a challenge and investigate and implement more structured approaches to evaluation in this core area of its provision.

5.6.5 In seeking to improve its approaches to monitoring and evaluating the Service, those involved in its management should ensure that these approaches do not become a bureaucratic burden for counsellors and schools, diverting them from supporting and helping children and young people.

Recommendation 3: The NSPCC should devise more systematic and rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluation of the Service to ensure a firmer statistical base, objectivity and easier identification of outcomes.

C. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Work of the Service by Schools

5.6.6 None of the schools visited has formal procedures for monitoring and evaluation of the effects and outcomes of the Service. They depend mainly on the reports presented to the steering groups; regular, but informal, meetings with the counsellor; and the bi-annual meetings of the principal with the counsellor and the Team Manager. Some principals are of the view that more formal approaches are not required, as they would simply add to the bureaucratic tasks of the school. Although the principals and teachers interviewed were well informed about the work of the Service in their respective schools and were able to identify its strengths and weakness, some were less confident when asked to identify clear outcomes for the pupils, teachers and the school. It is important that subjective anecdotal comment is balanced and complemented by a system of more formal and objective evaluation.

Recommendation 4: The Schools' Counselling and Support Team should work with schools to help them devise more formal and systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluation that ensure greater objectivity and identification of outcomes and, if possible, not add significantly to their bureaucratic burden.

5.7 Communication

5.7.1 Schools and external support agencies, on the whole, report positively on the good quality and effectiveness of the communication dimension of the Service. They comment favourably on the ease of access to, and quick response from, Service personnel; their willingness to listen and take on board suggestions and ideas put to them; and their readiness to deal quickly with problems that arise. Principals said that communication was "*Excellent*"; "*Very effective*"; and that there was "*Absolutely no difficulty at all*" with regard to communication. The counsellors keep schools well informed about developments within the Service.

5.7.2 Information notice boards, posters, leaflets and counsellors' visits to classrooms and inputs to school assemblies contribute effectively to communication with children and young people.

5.7.3 There is, however, scope for improvement in communication, particularly with regard to feedback from counsellors to school staffs. Teachers in particular, expressed the view that,

taking account of the confidential nature of the service and the pressures of time on the counsellors, they would appreciate more feedback. Two heads-of-year in one post-primary school reported that, having little or no on-going contact with the counsellor, they and their head-of-year colleagues would appreciate occasional meetings with the counsellor to identify, for example, common issues arising through counselling and to explore ways in which they might be able to help in resolving issues and problems.

5.7.4 There is also scope for improvement in communication within partnership organisations. It is evident from the interviews, that members of the steering groups at senior levels within their organisations, do not always communicate effectively with their junior colleagues who work in schools, about the operation of the Service in schools and the expectations, roles and responsibilities of personnel within partnership organisations in relation to the Service. On occasions, this has led to some confusion and misunderstandings in schools between the Service counsellors and professionals from these organisations. Collaborative working at this level is, thereby, impeded.

Recommendation 5: In its Service Level Agreements with schools, the NSPCC should include the scheduling of meetings of counsellors with key pastoral teachers designed to provide them with feedback and to enlist their help and support.

Recommendation 6: Senior members of partnership organisations should ensure that their colleagues who work in schools understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to working in partnership with the counsellors, and that they are kept fully informed about the workings of the Service and the decisions of the management groups that affect them.

5.8 Record Keeping

5.8.1 Record keeping is a strong feature of the work of the counsellors. Each maintains detailed and comprehensive records in relation to, for example, schools, interviews with pupils, one-off consultations and individual pupils being counselled; every counselling session is documented. An interesting and important feature of the Service is that records are shared with the children and young people. Thus, there is nothing recorded about them of which they are not aware.

5.8.2 The counsellors also maintain records of partnership agreements with schools, contracts, referrals, casework and contacts of any description with parents and external support agencies. Counsellors report that cumulative records kept on work with children and young people, are particularly effective. All records are scrutinised by the Team Manager during supervision sessions. Some counsellors commented that, although the approach to record keeping in the Service is detailed and comprehensive, it can also be arduous and time consuming. ***The NSPCC should make sure that all such detailed record keeping serves a useful purpose to ensure that they are not placing an unnecessary bureaucratic burden on the counsellors.***

5.8.3 There is no evidence that the schools keep records of any substance in relation to the provision of the Service. The compilation of more detailed records would assist schools and the counsellors in the process of monitoring and evaluation.

[See 5.6 above.]

5.9 Staff and Professional Development

5.9.1 Managers encourage counsellors to attend relevant training courses provided by the NSPCC and other organisations in order to increase their levels of professional competence and to acquire and develop new skills. The counsellors have attended a good range of relevant

courses on topics such as stress management, group work, child protection, circle time, supervisory skills and record keeping. Professional training being undertaken by some includes counselling accreditation and professional qualification training in social work. The counsellors appreciate the encouragement and support they receive from the NSPCC with regard to their professional development. They also speak highly of the on-going support and encouragement provided by the Team Manager.

5.9.2 It was noted in 1.5.6 above that only three of the counsellors have formal counselling qualifications. Professional training in counselling is essential for those without formal qualifications. ***These counsellors should be required by the NSPCC to undertake this training as soon as possible following their appointment.***

5.9.3 Opportunities for staff development are provided through team meetings and other planned sessions. Team members are, thus, able to discuss issues and agree common approaches with regard to, for example, keeping running records, child protection procedures and approaches to ensuring safe practice. There is, however, a continuing need for more structured staff development to ensure that the counsellors are able to respond competently and confidently to requests from schools for developments in areas other than counselling. [See 5.5.1 above.]

5.9.4 This report raises management issues in relation to, for example, induction, monitoring and evaluation and confidentiality that will require a programme of staff development to enable Service managers and counsellors to explore and respond to them.

Recommendation 7: The NSPCC should put in place a programme of staff and professional development to ensure that the counsellors' confidence and professional competence in their roles are enhanced.

5.10 Accommodation and Resources

5.10.1 In most of the schools, the counsellors use rooms that are easily accessible to pupils. In terms of suitability, they range from adequate to very good; the best provision is a dedicated room that is pleasantly decorated and furnished. ***Schools should recognise the importance of the standard of accommodation in creating a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere for counselling, and where counsellors are able to store their resources rather than having to carry them to and from the schools.***

5.10.2 The counsellors use a good range of suitable resources that include commercial materials, NSPCC publications and much good material that they have produced themselves. Some of them report, however, that there is a continuing need for more practical resources to facilitate their interactive work with pupils during counselling sessions.

6.0 POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE MANAGERS OF THE SERVICE

6.1 During the evaluation exercise, principals were asked the extent to which the aims of the Service (See 1.3 above) were being achieved in their schools. Most reported that good progress was being made in this area; one principal said, *“The NSPCC are realising their aims in our school”*. A small number of principals indicated that more had still to be done to achieve aims c. and d. at 1.3.1 above; and little had been done in any school in relation to aim d. ***The NSPCC should review the aims for the Service to ensure that they are still appropriate.***

6.2 In addition to individual counselling, counsellors may become involved in a range of other activities [See 1.4 and 1.5.7 above]. With the time they have in each school being limited [See 1.5.8 above], ***the NSPCC should ensure that too much is not expected or demanded of counsellors. It is also important that the time the counsellors give to these activities does not reduce significantly the time available for, or the quality of, the counselling which is the core element of the Service.***

6.3 The changes in counselling staff since the commencement of the Service have been disruptive for the schools particularly in the WELB. They have impacted negatively on provision to the schools and the continuity of support offered to pupils in counselling situations. Although principals in the schools affected accept that this situation is not the fault of the NSPCC, there is concern that the gap between one counsellor resigning and another being appointed is sometimes prolonged, thus affecting adversely the continuity and quality of provision. ***The NSPCC needs to address this issue to prevent schools from having prolonged periods of time without the services of a counsellor. Consideration should be given to creating a small pool of part-time counsellors willing to “fill the gap”.***

7.0 KEY ELEMENTS OF THE SERVICE

Discussions with NSPCC personnel, together with a scrutiny of papers, protocols and evaluation reports relating to the Service, indicated that the following are key elements of the Service.

7.1 Accessibility to the Service in Schools

7.1.1 Pupils access the Service in a variety of ways including through their parents establishing contacts with the counsellor; by self-referral; by being referred to the counsellor by a teacher; or by visiting the drop-in facility.

7.1.2 In each of the primary schools visited, the Service is accessible for pupils in years 4-7; in some schools, younger pupils also have access. In all of the post-primary schools visited, the Service is accessible to all pupils; in the special schools the Service is accessible to older primary school pupils and to all post-primary pupils. In nearly all instances, pupils reported that the counsellor was very accessible; was easy to get to; and the Service was very accessible. Only one pupil reported difficulty in meeting with the counsellor due to a teacher's refusal to release him/her from class.

7.1.3 Teachers were similarly of the view that, apart from the constraints imposed by the counsellors' being in schools for a limited time each week, access to the Service for pupils was satisfactory. There were no reports from teachers of pupils having difficulty in accessing the Service.

7.1.4 None of the parents interviewed experienced any difficulties in accessing the Service. They reported that access was not a problem; it was very easy; and that counsellors responded very quickly to their requests for a meeting in sharp contrast to other support services that they had attempted to use.

7.2 Independence

7.2.1 The NSPCC is strongly of the view that an independent service that provides schools with counsellors who are not members of the teaching staff, has many benefits for schools and pupils. The reports from pupils, teachers and principals confirm this.

7.2.2 The pupils interviewed emphasised that they preferred talking to an external counsellor. One pupil said: *"It is better to have an outsider as a counsellor. I would not tell a teacher what I told the counsellor."* Others reported that they would find it difficult and uncomfortable to talk to teachers about the issues they discussed with the counsellor; some felt that teachers would tell other teachers or parents about what they had said; and others commented that they found it easier to talk to a "stranger", but one in whom they had confidence and could trust.

7.2.3 All of the teachers and principals also supported the notion of counsellors who are not members of the school staff. They saw this as a strength of the Service and welcomed the fact that, in addition to taking some pressure off the teaching staff, it also provided more time for pupils to talk, and be listened to, by a caring adult. It also brought specialist skills and experience to the counselling situation and a helpful degree of independence and objectivity. Some teachers were of the view that an independent counsellor who, not being a member of the school staff with its implicit pressures, was more likely to adhere to the rules of confidentiality.

7.2.4 A member of an external support agency, however, expressed the view that this model of implementation was flawed, in that it had the potential to remove from teachers their responsibility for caring for and supporting their pupils. The teachers and principals

interviewed, although recognising this point, felt strongly that an independent counselling service was “*As well as ...*” rather than “*Instead of ...*” the school’s responsibility in pastoral care. They also saw it as a support for both teachers and pupils, and as bringing additional skills and experience to their schools. Principals were confident that the teachers in their schools continued to care for their pupils, meeting the needs of the vast majority, either personally or through their existing pastoral provision. It was reported by principals and teachers that teachers often did not have the time, or the skills and training to deal with the small, but increasing, number of pupils who required more prolonged and specialist support and help. It should be remembered that this evaluation exercise included only pupils who were using the Service. There are other children and young people in schools who would prefer to talk to a teacher whom they know and in whom they have confidence and trust rather than a stranger. Thus, it will always be a bonus for a school to have one or more teachers with counselling skills and with some time available to provide for pupils in need. ***It is important, therefore, that the counsellors and schools recognise this potential limitation of the independent model and endeavour to promote the involvement of teachers and to provide training that would improve their pastoral skills in terms of, for example, listening, supporting and encouraging.***

7.3 Confidentiality

7.3.1 The NSPCC regards confidentiality as being important to children and young people and sees it as a crucial enabling factor for counsellors in building trusting relationships with the pupils. In the operational protocol for the Service, which has been distributed to all participating schools, confidentiality is defined as follows: **“Any issue discussed will be regarded as confidential and this will not be breached unless the information indicates that serious harm has befallen or is likely to befall that young person or any other person”**.

7.3.2 Counsellors take time to explain to pupils, the meaning and implications of confidentiality and when it might have to be broken, prior to the commencement of counselling. Pupils also complete and sign a counselling agreement along with the counsellor, acknowledging their understanding of these matters. The pupils interviewed demonstrated their good understanding of what was meant by confidentiality. They all agree with and are confident that the counselling they receive is confidential. They said:

- “*I like this.*” (the fact that it is confidential);
- “*I like it being confidential.*”;
- “*I would not talk to the counsellor if he told others.*”

Other pupils reported that they were very content with the confidential nature; of the Service; were happy that it was confidential; would not like what they said to the counsellor, talked being about.

The pupils understood that some things could not be kept confidential; this did not present them with a problem.

7.3.3 The NSPCC, right from the outset of the project, made their position on confidentiality absolutely clear to schools, ELBs and other support agencies. Although the principals and most of the others interviewed accept, and often agree with, the NSPCC’s stated position, there continues to be some uncertainty and dissatisfaction with it. A small minority of teachers are concerned that pupils might be saying things about them and some would like more feed-back from the counsellor. These teachers said that they did not wish to know the details of what pupils confide in counsellors but, rather, for example, the fact that they have used the drop-in facility or have been for individual counselling. External support personnel expressed concerns that the Service’s approach to confidentiality meant that they

were not always aware that children or young people already in the care of their particular agency were having counselling in school. Thus, as one put it, their *“jigsaw was incomplete”*.

7.3.4 Although all of the parents interviewed are content with the NSPCC’s approach to confidentiality, one parent of a young person attending a special school said that she would want to be told if her child had personal problems with which she, as her parent, might be able to help.

7.3.5 As this is a Service for children and young people, due account is taken of their views. With regard to confidentiality, they are strongly in favour of the way it now operates. It is important, however, to take account of the genuine concerns expressed by other interested and caring professionals.

Recommendation 8: The NSPCC should review its definition of confidentiality and explore ways of ensuring that:

- a. the concerns expressed about confidentiality are given serious consideration;***
- b. its partners understand fully its approach to this important dimension of the Service; and***
- c. the counsellors make available to parents and their partners in the Service, the fullest possible information in the best interests of the children and young people.***

7.4 Partnership

7.4.1 From the beginning of this initiative, it was the intention of the NSPCC that, in the best interests of children and young people, it should be implemented in partnership with both schools and school support agencies. Consequently, much of the early preparatory work of the NSPCC’s Education Adviser and Team Manager was directed towards this end. The inclusion of representatives from both schools and those external support agencies on the steering groups demonstrated their commitment to partnership.

A. With Schools

7.4.2 The counsellors, realising the value and importance of working together with schools, have worked hard to develop effective partnerships with them. The principals in all but one of the schools visited commented favourably on their partnership arrangements with the NSPCC. They report, for example, that an effective partnership has developed; that they have a good working relationship with the Service personnel; and that a very strong and evident partnership has developed. Principals said: *“I feel strongly that it is a partnership.”*; *“This (partnership) has worked very successfully.”*; and *“Excellent!”* The accessibility and responsiveness of the counsellors, and the fact that they visited, for example, school functions such as parents’ evenings and musical evenings, have contributed considerably to the development of strong partnerships. The only negative comment came from a principal who had found it difficult to establish an effective partnership because the school had had three different counsellors due to staff changes, and only limited access to the support of a team manager.

B. With External Support Agencies

7.4.3 There is a more varied picture of partnership in the context of practical and effective working relationships between the NSPCC team members and personnel from the external support agencies. Counsellors, principals and the various representatives of the external support agencies expressed some discontent with the current situation. It is evident from the interviews that personnel in all of the support agencies value the notion of partnership and want it to work, but have not found it easy.

7.4.4 The members of the schools' team have made considerable effort to develop effective partnerships with colleagues from support agencies. There are examples of the counsellors working cooperatively and effectively with the Education Welfare Service and/or social workers, to provide the necessary support for individual children and young people. On occasions, however, a lack of effective partnership has adversely affected the children and young people. It is evident that the partnership element of the Service has not developed as well as was intended. Reasons for this include the following:

- a. the shared views on partnership at the steering group level, have not always been passed on to, and talked through with, support agency officers working in schools. Consequently, it is not surprising that these officers were sometimes unaware, not only of their partnership roles and responsibilities in respect of the Service, but of the existence of the Service;
- b. the turnover in NSPCC personnel since the Service commenced;
- c. the heavy work loads of the personnel in external support services;
- d. the structure of the social services which does not provide for a dedicated social worker in a school; and, in some cases,
- e. concerns among external support personnel that the work of the counsellors duplicated their work.

7.4.5 There is considerable room for improvement in this area. It is essential that the various partners, possibly through the newly-formed management groups, re-visit this important and critical area, agree what they mean by "partnership" and devise practical and workable strategies to implement more effective partnership arrangements at school and local levels. Partnership is a two-way process and should be recognised as such by all concerned.

7.4.6 Two senior officers from external support agencies felt that organisations such as theirs, needed to include reference to their partnership with the Service in their organisations' corporate plans, otherwise there would be only limited progress in achieving meaningful partnership. ***Senior NSPCC managers should pursue this matter with senior managers of external support agencies.***

7.4.7 Protocols and formal agreements may help, but partnership can only be truly effective where there is accountability and willingness on the part of all those involved as partners at whatever level, to make it work.

Recommendation 9: The management group in each ELB should revisit the issue of partnership in order to:

- a. *agree what they mean by partnership; and*
- b. *devise strategies for implementing effective partnership at school and local levels.*

Recommendation 10: The NSPCC should ensure that they have formal partnership agreements with all their schools which include arrangements for at least two meetings each year of school pastoral staff, the NSPCC counsellor and the relevant external support personnel.

Recommendation 11: The NSPCC should make a formal partnership agreement with each of their external support partners to reflect the need for the meetings in recommendation 10 above.

7.5 The Involvement of Parents

7.5.1 The NSPCC recognises the vital part that parents have to play if children and young people are to receive the level of support required to meet their needs. Thus, from the outset, it was the NSPCC's intention that the parents should be informed about the Service and that, where appropriate, they should be involved. All of the schools report that they have informed their parents about the Service through, for example, letters, information sheets, parents' nights and open nights in school; counsellors have also visited parent groups. This appears to have been successful as the parents interviewed were all aware of the Service in their respective schools prior to their children becoming involved.

7.5.2 Schools report that the general response of parents to the Service is positive and supportive. Some have expressed to principals their appreciation and delight that the Service was available to their children. In a number of instances, parents themselves have referred their children to the counsellor and there are instances of parents having used the Service for themselves. The parents interviewed valued the service highly. They said, for example:

- *"It is a great Service".*
- *"It is a good Service. It is very professional."*
- *"My experience has been one of being a non-believer (in counselling) to total belief."*

7.5.3 The negative responses expressed by only two or three parents, centred on their concerns that the Service was provided by the NSPCC, which they perceived as being the "cruelty" organisation. Schools reported, however, that these concerns disappeared once the pastoral and preventative nature of the Service was explained.

7.5.4 The parents interviewed expressed their deep appreciation for the support that the Service had been to them. One mother commented, for example, that she felt supported and was listened to and treated with respect; another, that a weight had been taken off her shoulders and the worry was gone; and a father reported that the pressure had been taken off him and life at home was much easier since his son started going to see the counsellor.

7.5.5 Parents have also made use of the Service in other ways. Since it began, more than 500 telephone contacts had been made, the majority by parents; other professionals, clergymen and children have also made contacts in this way. Although bullying was the most frequently raised matter, contacts were also made because of parents and others feeling disempowered, not being listened to and not knowing where to go for help and advice in the education and health services.

7.5.6 Thus, the involvement of parents is a strong feature of the Service.

7.6 Ensuring Safe Practice

The counsellors are aware of the need for safe practice when counselling children and young people and take proper precautions to achieve this. All but two of the rooms in schools used for counselling have visual access and most are situated close to occupied classrooms or offices. Teachers always know when one of their children has left the classroom for counselling. In the counselling situation, there is no physical contact between the counsellor and the pupils and, in cases where a counsellor feels uneasy with a particular pupil, other safety measures such as leaving the door open, are employed. ***The NSPCC should include a section on ensuring safe practice in the operational protocol, thus making sure that all of the partners are aware of its importance and, where necessary, of their responsibility to have proper safety measures in place.***

7.7 Child Protection

7.7.1 The NSPCC, as the only voluntary agency with statutory responsibility for child protection, considers it to be of paramount importance. In addition to the measures taken by the counsellors to ensure safe practice (*See 7.6.1 above*), paragraph 11 of the operational protocol explains clearly that:

- a. the Service will adhere to the pastoral care guidance provided by the educational bodies in the province and the practice and procedures adopted by Area Child Protection Committees and Child Protection Panels; and
- b. counsellors observe the referral and reporting procedures of these agencies.

This good practice is well recognised and accepted by the schools involved with the service.

7.7.2 Since the commencement of the Service in 1999, 185 pupils from primary, post-primary and special schools have disclosed abuse to counsellors. (Please note that under NSPCC's protocol and DENU 99/10 bullying is listed as a form of child protection; therefore this figure includes disclosures about bullying). The counsellors have followed correctly the recognised procedures, thus ensuring that these children have received the best possible help and support. This has been a very positive outcome of the Service for the children and young people concerned.

8.0 STRENGTHS AND QUALITY OF THE SERVICE

8.1 Strengths of the Service

8.1.1 This is a Service with considerable strengths. During the course of the interviews, principals, teachers, counsellors and external support personnel, identified a large number of strengths. They include the following, some of which have already been referred to in other sections of this report:

- the effectiveness of the management of the Service in general;
- the good quality of the leadership provided by the managers;
- the high quality and professionalism of the NSPCC staff;
- the effective working and personal relationships that the counsellors have established with principals, teachers, pupils and the parents;
- the child-centred nature of the Service;
- its contribution to enhancing pastoral provision in schools;
- the external, independent and confidential nature of the Service;
- its accessibility to children and young people;
- the responsiveness of the Service;
- its provision for children and young people who are often experiencing serious difficulties, of time and opportunities to be listened to, and to talk to an empathetic and caring adult; and
- it makes a difference in schools and in the lives of children and young people.

8.1.2 It is important to ensure that these strengths feature in any future development of the Service.

8.2 The Quality of the Service to Schools

8.2.1 What, then, is the overall quality of the Service to schools? During the course of the evaluation exercise, the principals and teachers were asked to rate the quality of the Service as they experienced it in their schools, using the following criteria:

- 1 = Significant strengths
- 2 = Strengths outweigh the weaknesses
- 3 = Weaknesses outweigh the strengths
- 4 = Significant weaknesses

8.2.2 Principals and teachers responded as follows:

a. Principals

The eleven principals interviewed rated the quality of the Service to their schools as follows:

- eight rated it as 1;
- one rated it as 2;
- one rated it as 1 > 2; and
- one rated it as 2 > 1.

b. Teachers

The 16 teachers interviewed rated the quality of the Service to their schools as follows:

- 12 rated it as 1;
- three rated it as 2; and
- one rated it as 2 > 1.

8.2.3 These ratings indicate clearly that principals and teachers consider the Service, as they experience it, to be of a high quality.

8.2.4 Interviewees were positive in their comments about the quality of the Service. They said:

a. Principals and Teachers

- *“This is a valuable Service to us.”*
- *“A valuable Service for the school and our children.”*
- *“There is significant value-added for the school.”*
- *“I find it a very good Service.”*
- *“I think it is a really good Service.”*

b. Pupils:

- *“The actual Service is excellent.”*
- *“The Service itself is very good.”*

Others reported that it was a very good and helpful Service.

c. Parents:

- *“It’s a great Service.”*
- *“It’s a good Service. It is very professional. It is well run.”*

d. External Support Personnel

- *“This is a very good Service.”*
- *“This is a very important and useful Service to schools.”*
- *“I want the project to continue.”*
- *“It provides a valuable service” (for schools and children);*
- *“Absolutely invaluable.”*

They also commented on the good quality and high level of professionalism of the counsellors.

8.2.5 It is interesting to note that there were no negative comments from any source about the quality of the Service in the schools.

8.2.6 This, then, is a high quality Service to schools and is highly regarded and valued by those who use it. ***It is important that the NSPCC ensures, particularly in the context of an expansion, that:***

- a. proper account is taken of the suggestions for improvement; and***
- b. the high quality of the Service in schools is maintained and, where possible, improved.***

9.0 OUTCOMES

9.1 It is important to note that it is difficult to say with absolute assurance that changes in pupils' behaviour, attitudes, responsiveness or feelings of well-being are the direct result of the counselling they have received. Other positive influences, for example, in the home, school, youth club or within their friendship groups, may also have contributed to these changes. Thus, there is a degree of subjectivity at 9.5 and 9.6 below.

9.2 At the outset, the NSPCC stated the following as its intended outcomes for the Service:

- a. Through the identification and meeting of needs, to prevent emotional, behavioural and social problems from becoming entrenched.
- b. To contribute to an overall positive culture in schools by enhancing the emotional, behavioural and social stability of particular pupils.
- c. In collaboration with other relevant support professionals, to improve the effectiveness of transition arrangements from primary to secondary sectors and to reduce the adverse effects of transition on children.
- d. To develop services which assist in providing more in-school solutions to reduce, for example, suspensions, exclusions and referral to other support agencies.
- e. To enable children and young people to feel confident in seeking individual help on a voluntary basis.
- f. To provide children and young people with the opportunity and choice of accessing a range of support services through peer support, mentoring and professional counselling.

9.3 In the absence of relevant performance indicators or clearly stated objectives for these intended outcomes, it is not possible to determine with any degree of accuracy whether and to what extent, these intended outcomes have been realised.

9.4 When interviewed, principals, teachers and counsellors, external support personnel and senior managers in the NSPCC were asked to comment on outcomes. Some were unwilling to do so as they had insufficient knowledge of the Service as it operates in schools. Most of the others were hesitant in their responses because they did not have the means of determining with accuracy what, in fact, was a direct outcome of the Service. Some were also reluctant to give credit only to the Service for an observed change in a child's behaviour or attitude, pointing out that there were possibly other positive influences at work, contributing to the change.

9.5 Principals, however, provided the following as examples of positive outcomes for individual pupils attending the counsellor:

- improved attendance and behaviour;
- coping better with bereavement following the death of a parent;
- more control of feelings following anger management sessions with a counsellor;
- assistance in dealing with her parent following a pupil's disclosure of her pregnancy to the counsellor; and
- increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

The importance for individual pupils of outcomes such as these should not be underestimated. Pupils interviewed were most appreciative for the help that they had received from counselling and the benefits that had accrued to them in personal and social terms.

9.6 Pupils reported that they felt more confident, had enhanced self-esteem and now felt safe in school. They said:

- *“I feel more confident.”*
- *“I get good advice.”*
- *“I have more confidence.”*
- *“It makes you aware that you are not the only one with problems.”*

9.7 Principals and teachers also reported outcomes in terms of, for example, the fact that suspensions had ceased since the commencement of the Service; quality support for the school; and an acceptance of the Service to the extent that it was “OK” for pupils to see the counsellor.

9.8 On the basis of interviews and observations, the following are positive and important outcomes of the Service as a whole:

- a. the use made of the Service by more than 4,000 children and young people demonstrates clearly the need for a counselling service in schools;
- b. more than 200 children and young people have been helped in relation to child protection matters;
- c. the quality of the ethos and pastoral provision in schools has been enhanced;
- d. best practice in the Service demonstrates that voluntary and statutory agencies can work cooperatively and effectively with schools to enhance the quality of the support and provision for children and young people in need;
- e. a credible and effective approach to implementing and delivering counselling services to schools has been established;
- f. some schools in the pilot group are now better equipped to deal with issues such as bullying, relationships and sex education due to the work of the counsellors with staff;
- g. pupils who completed peer support training are now better skilled to help and support their peers;
- h. the overall quality of the Service provided is such that no school has withdrawn from the Service, in spite of the difficulties experienced by some in the WELB;
- i. the effectiveness and credibility of the Service has resulted in requests from other schools for access to it; and
- j. the success and acceptance of the Service is such that it was extended in September 2002 to include a new cohort of seven post-primary schools in the WELB and, at the same time, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) introduced the Service to a cluster of 15 primary schools in North Belfast. These initiatives are funded by the respective ELBs.

9.9 Although these are outcomes of which the NSPCC can be justly pleased, it is important that proper account is taken of the points made at 9.3 and 9.4 above.

[See Recommendations 3 and 4 above.]

10.0 IMPROVING THE SERVICE

10.1 Suggestions for improving the Service came from all of the groups interviewed. The pupils had very little to offer, most of them being content with what was in place. The other groups made considerable mention of matters already dealt with in this report; for example, monitoring and evaluation [*See 5.6 above*], communication [*See 5.7 above*] and partnership arrangements [*See 7.4 above*].

10.2 The following suggestions for improvement of the Service were also made:

a. Time

Teachers and principals were strongly of the view that the counsellors required more time in schools to enable them to, for example, interact more effectively with pupils individually and in the classrooms, meet more regularly with pastoral teachers and contribute to school-based staff development to share their skills and expertise.

b. Parents

It was suggested that the contribution and involvement of parents could be improved by:

- promoting the Service more effectively to parents;
- providing counselling for parents;
- the provision of parent workshops with a view to exploring parenting and other issues; and
- developing a family-based approach within the Service.

Suggestions for improvements from the parents interviewed included more initial and on-going contact between the counsellor and parents whose primary-aged children were being counselled.

10.3 Other interesting suggestions for improving the Service included:

- the provision of a drop-in facility in primary schools;
- the moving of counsellors to different schools after a period of, say, three years to ensure they did not become “cosy” and to take account of the gender issue mentioned at 4.7 above;
- the development of a web site which pupils, teachers and parents could access;
- the provision of a confidential help line for pupils;
- extending the Service to include the Youth Service; and
- access to counselling for pupils during school holidays, especially the long summer break.

10.4 The NSPCC and the partnership agencies are committed to improvement in quality within their respective organisations. It is important, therefore, that they take due account of these suggestions for improvement if the quality of the Service to children and young people, schools and parents is to continue to improve.

11.0 THE FUTURE OF THE SERVICE

11.1 A recurrent theme during interviews with principals, teachers and external support personnel was their concern about the future of the Service. Principals in primary schools in particular, are very concerned that the quality of their schools' pastoral provision will deteriorate should funding not be made available to continue with the services of a counsellor. The strong view is that, not only should a Service such as this one continue in the existing schools, but also that it should be extended to include other schools. In due course, all schools in Northern Ireland should have access to counselling provision.

11.2 At present, no school has a strategy in place to ensure that counselling provision in some form will continue beyond the pilot stage; most schools have not even thought about it. Principals, particularly in primary schools, frequently reported that their limited school budget was the main obstacle to maintaining a counselling service. Thus, it is likely that most, if not all, schools currently benefiting from the Service will have difficulty in maintaining such provision, unless additional funding for counselling is made available by the DE and/or the ELBs. This would be a retrograde step. It would lead to a reduction in the provision for vulnerable children and young people and would have a resulting negative effect on their learning.

11.3 It is evident that the NSPCC, a voluntary organisation, is not in the position to continue the Service indefinitely. Thus, other means of funding must be sought. Most of those interviewed recognise that funding for counselling is not the sole responsibility of any one organisation or body, but rather, it will take a cooperative effort on the part of the DE, the ELBs and schools themselves, if future funding is to be secured. Some suggested that this is an area where the Social Services, in the context of prevention, should contribute towards funding a counselling and support service in schools.

11.4 Interviewees expressed the view that children and young people are more likely to make progress in their learning if they are at ease with themselves and with others and experience growing self-confidence and self-esteem. Since counselling contributes significantly to this area of personal and social development, they felt that the DE had a particular responsibility for ensuring that adequate funding is available for schools to provide it.

11.5 Those interviewed from schools and the partnership services, recognised that the cost of implementing the model represented by the Schools' Counselling and Support Service in all schools in the province would be prohibitive. Thus, there is a need for other models of implementation to be explored. There was considerable agreement among principals that a model, which grouped primary, post-primary and special schools in a locality or larger geographical area, to share the services of a counsellor, should be explored.

Recommendation 12: Senior managers in the NSPCC should collaborate with partnership organisations, the newly-constituted management groups and the DE to explore all possible means of funding in order to ensure that schools have access to a counselling service beyond the life of the Service currently provided by the NSPCC.

12.0 CONCLUSION

12.1 The Schools' Counselling and Support Service is well organised and managed effectively. It is implemented by caring and professional people who have children and young people at the centre of all that they do. It is much valued by schools, pupils and parents and its support for these groups is recognised by personnel from partnership organisations. It is evident from this report that, in providing a high quality service for schools, it enhances pastoral provision, supports principals and teachers and brings substantial benefits to the children and young people who use it.

12.2 It is also evident from this report that there is scope for improvement in the Service. There are matters to be addressed in the areas of induction for counsellors, monitoring and evaluation, communication, partnership, confidentiality, staff development and funding. It is important that the NSPCC, partnership agencies and the schools work collaboratively to address these and other matters raised in the report, taking account of the suggestions for improvement with a view to improving further the quality of both the Service provided to schools and the schools' pastoral provision for children and young people. Much has to be done to secure counselling provision for all those children and young people who need it, in schools throughout the province.

W J Burnison
March 2003

APPENDIX 1: Recommendations

Recommendation 1: [See page 15]

The NSPCC, in full agreement and cooperation with the constituent partners, should replace the existing steering groups with smaller, but representative, management groups, each with a clear brief in relation to strategy, policy, finance and the future growth and development of the Service.

Recommendation 2: [See page 15]

The NSPCC should review its induction training programme for counsellors to provide for consistency and to ensure that they are equipped to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 3: [See page 16]

The NSPCC should devise more systematic and rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluation of the Service to ensure a firmer statistical base, objectivity and easier identification of outcomes.

Recommendation 4: [See page 16]

The Schools' Counselling and Support Team should work with schools to help them devise more formal and systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluation that ensure greater objectivity and identification of outcomes and, if possible, not add significantly to their bureaucratic burden.

Recommendation 5: [See page 17]

In its Service Level Agreements with schools, the NSPCC should include the scheduling of meetings of counsellors with key pastoral teachers designed to provide them with feedback and to enlist their help and support.

Recommendation 6: [See page 17]

Senior members of partnership organisations should ensure that their colleagues who work in schools understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to working in partnership with the counsellors, and that they are kept fully informed about the workings of the Service and the decisions of the management groups that affect them.

Recommendation 7: [See page 18]

The NSPCC should put in place a programme of staff and professional development to ensure that the counsellors' confidence and professional competence in their roles are enhanced.

Recommendation 8: [See page 22]

The NSPCC should review its definition of confidentiality and explore ways of ensuring that:

- a. the concerns expressed about confidentiality are given serious consideration;***
- b. its partners understand fully its approach to this important dimension of the Service; and***
- c. the counsellors make available to parents and their partners in the Service, the fullest possible information in the best interests of the children and young people.***

Recommendation 9: [See page 23]

The management group in each ELB should revisit the issue of partnership in order to:

- a. agree what they mean by partnership; and***
- b. devise strategies for implementing effective partnership at school and local levels.***

Recommendation 10: [See page 23]

The NSPCC should ensure that they have formal partnership agreements with all their schools, which include arrangements for at least two meetings each year of school pastoral staff, the NSPCC counsellor and the relevant external support personnel.

Recommendation 11: [See page 23]

The NSPCC should make a formal partnership agreement with each of their external support partners to reflect the need for the meetings in recommendation 10 above.

Recommendation 12: [See page 31]

Senior managers in the NSPCC should collaborate with partnership organisations, the newly-constituted management groups and the DE to explore all possible means of funding in order to ensure that schools have access to a counselling service beyond the life of the Service currently provided by the NSPCC.

APPENDIX 2: References

- a. *“Poverty is a War Against Children”, Save the Children Fund, 1995*
- b. *Henry P: “Someone to Talk toSomeone to Listen”, 1999*
- c. *“A Review of Child and Mental Health Services in the EHSSB Area”, Eastern Health and Social Services Board 1999.*
- d. *Quoted in NSPCC reports.*
- e. *“The Health Behaviour of Children in Northern Ireland: A Report on the World Health Organisation Survey, 1997/98: Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, 1999..*

APPENDIX 3: Information in Relation to the Use of the Service

1. Individual Counselling

The following indicates the range of issues dealt within individual counselling sessions and the number of pupils raising such issues.

<i>ISSUE</i>	<i>NUMBER OF PUPILS</i>
• Bereavement	387
• Bullying	857
• Child health and behaviour	111
• Child protection issues	236
• Examination-related stress	540
• Family difficulties	1173
• Phobias	108
• Relationships	39
• Sectarian violence	127
• Young carers	108
	Total = 4047

It should be noted that the child protection figures include 185 disclosures of child abuse.

2. Group Sessions

a. There have been approximately 100 support groups, each comprising 3-6 pupils who have been bullied.

b. During the academic year 2002/03, counsellors worked with small groups comprising 4-6 pupils to classes of up to 28 pupils. The following issues were dealt with:

- Anger management x 30 sessions involving 300+ pupils;
- Bereavement x 50 sessions involving 240 pupils;
- Anti-bullying x 60 sessions involving 60 children.

APPENDIX 4: Names of Participating Schools

A. SEELB

- St Columbanus' College, Bangor
- Killard House Special School, Newtownards
- Ballymagee PS, Bangor
- Castle Gardens PS, Newtownards
- St Comgall's PS, Bangor

B. WELB

- Enniskillen HS
- Omagh HS
- Sacred Heart College, Omagh
- Erne Special School, Enniskillen
- Heatherbank Special School, Omagh
- Christ The King PS, Omagh
- Gibson PS, Omagh

APPENDIX 5: Detailed Breakdown of Interviews with Pupils

The following are the details of the interviews carried out by the evaluator with pupils during the exercise:

a. Primary School Interviews

- 4 pupils from primary schools interviewed individually (Years 5 and 6)
- 22 pupils from a primary school interviewed in five groups of 3, 3, 4, 6, 6 (Years 5-7)

b. Special School Interviews

- 6 pupils from special schools (Years 8-12) interviewed individually
- 2 pupils from a special school interviewed together (Year 8)

c. Post-Primary School Interviews

- 4 pupils from post-primary schools interviewed individually (Years 11-13)
- 11 pupils from post-primary schools interviewed in groups of 3, 4, 4 (Years 10, 11 and 13)

There were 12 boys and 14 girls from primary schools; 4 boys and 4 girls from special schools and 1 boy and 14 girls from post-primary schools. Total = 49 (17 boys and 32 girls).

APPENDIX 6: Sample of Aides-Memoirs and Questions Used for Interviews

1. QUESTIONS FOR SpS and PS PUPILS

School:

Number of Pupils: Boys: Girls:

Year in School:

1. If you had a problem in school, to whom would you talk?
2. How did you find out about the counselling service?
3. How did you get in touch with the counsellor?
4. Why do you go to the counsellor instead of a teacher?
5. Who does the counsellor tell anyone about your problems?
6. Do you feel safe when visiting the counsellor?
7. How has the counsellor helped you with your problems?
8. What other teachers in your school help pupils who have problems?
9. How do you feel after you have spoken to the counsellor?
10. Would you advise a friend with problems to go and talk to the counsellor? Why?
11. Would you rather have a teacher or a person who is not a teacher as a counsellor? Why?
12. Other comments?

2. SS PUPILS' AIDE-MEMOIRE

School:

Number of Pupils:

Boys:

Girls:

Year Group/s:

1. Background Information
 - Number of pupils interviewed:
 - Length of time involved in counselling service:
2. Ethos [Relationships/valued/respect/support]
3. Experiences
4. Organisation
 - Publicity
 - Accessibility
 - Referral
 - Time available for talking to counsellor
 - Problems contacting the counsellor
 - Confidentiality
 - External Counsellor or teacher counsellor
 - Available support from other support personnel
5. Strengths and Weaknesses
6. Benefits
7. Concerns
8. Suggestions for Improvement
9. Other Comments?

3. QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

School:

Position:

1. In what way are you involved in the project?
2. What are your overall views of the project?
3. Views on external counsellor provision
4. To what extent does this take away responsibility from teachers?
5. How accessible is the programme to pupils?
6. What are your views of the confidential nature of the counselling?
7. How effective are the channels of communication?
8. How do parents view/use the counselling programme?
9. What are the benefits for the pupils / school?
10. What outcomes, if any, are apparent?
11. What concerns do you have about the programme?
12. How might the programme be improved?
13. What are the strengths/weaknesses of this model/future implementation?
14. How do you rate the quality of the service provided? [4-point scale]
15. Other comments / summary points

4. QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. School year of your child:
2. How did you find out about the counselling service?
3. What contacts have you had with the school in relation to the counselling service?
4. What contacts, if any, have you had with the counsellor?
5. How easy was it for you to contact the counsellor?
6. In what ways has the programme been supportive of:
 - a. you as a parent?
 - b. your child?
7. In what ways has your child benefited from the counselling programme?
8. What benefits, if any, have there been for your family?
9. What difficulties, if any, have you encountered in relation to the counselling service?
10. In what ways might the counselling service in the school be improved?
11. Would you recommend this service to other parents? Why/Why not?
12. Other comments?

5. MANAGERS' AIDE-MEMOIRE

1. Name of Manager: _____
2. Position of Responsibility: _____
3. Qualifications
4. Genesis of Programme:
5. Aims of the Programme:
6. Statement of Values
7. Roles and Responsibilities
8. Financial arrangements / cost of implementation
9. Identification of ELBs / schools
10. Recruitment and selection of staff:
11. Induction/training for staff
12. Supervision procedures
13. Resources for counsellors
14. Information to schools
15. Partnership agreements (How drawn up/negotiated/effectiveness etc)
16. Response from schools (Initial/continuing)
17. Review meetings in schools/meetings with principals
18. Establishing links with other support agencies
19. Response from support agencies
20. Contribution of support agencies
21. Steering committees
22. Area meetings
23. Communication
24. Monitoring/evaluation
25. Benefits (pupils/staff/schools/families /other)
26. Overall strengths/weaknesses

27. Overall outcomes
28. Concerns
29. Suggestions for improvement/development
30. Possible exit strategy for schools / education
31. Other Comments?

6. COUNSELLORS' AIDE-MEMOIRE

1. Name of counsellor: _____
2. Schools visited:
3. Counselling qualifications / studying and other qualifications:
4. Previous counselling experience/working with children:
5. Previous experience with regard to peer support/school council/PSHE + NSPCC support provided in these areas:
6. NSPCC professional development:
7. Programme induction/training:
8. Nature/scope of continuing NSPCC support:
9. Roles and responsibilities
10. Accountability
11. Team Meetings
12. Communication at management level
13. Supervision/management of work:
14. Resources Provided:
15. Problems in relation to management of the programme:
16. Problems encountered in setting up the programme in schools:
17. Record Keeping
18. Range of Activities Undertaken in Schools:
19. Number of pupils requesting/going for counselling:
20. Level of acceptance in schools
21. Response in schools
22. Problems encountered in schools:
23. Review of progress/meetings/annual report
24. Child Protection Matters
25. Steering Group

26. Benefits
27. Overall strengths/weaknesses of the programme
28. Overall outcomes of the programme
29. Concerns
30. Suggestions for improvement/development
31. Possible exit strategy for schools / education
32. Other Comments?

7. EXTERNAL SUPPORT PERSONNEL AIDE-MEMOIRE

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. Length of time involved with the programme:
4. Role/responsibility:
5. Overall views on the project
6. Benefits of the programme [Pupils / school / other]
7. Strengths / weaknesses
8. Concerns
9. Management arrangements (including communication)
10. The Steering Group
11. Partnerships / Contribution of your particular service
12. Overall outcomes
13. Suggestions for improvement/development
14. Exit strategy / future funding
15. Issues to be addressed
16. Other comments?

APPENDIX 7: CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Anger Management

A young person aged 16 years, self-referred requesting help with his anger problem. Friends were telling him, that the anger problem was out of control. He found that fistfights were common and meeting strangers meant finding reasons to dislike them. Friendships were suffering and other young people would do things to see what kind of reaction they could get from him.

The young person met with the NSPCC school counsellor for four sessions. They worked together looking at anger triggers, physical reactions to anger, sign posts, calming techniques, self-esteem and assertiveness without anger.

The young person worked hard, applied what was learned, and saw a dramatic change in relationships. Several incidents occurred which would have resulted in violence in the past but were handled differently as a result of the anger work. The young person said one thing he learned was that it was OK to walk away when angry.

Case Study 2: Bullying

Jackie is ten years old and she lives with her family in a small market town. She is an intelligent girl who has always done well at school, received good school reports, and participated in a variety of social clubs.

Her parents moved home. This move necessitated Jackie moving schools. The new school was much larger and was considered one of the best 'academic institutions' in the county.

At first Jackie appeared to be settling in well, then she started complaining about tummy pains and headaches. She asked her mum how ill she would have to be to get off school for a long time. This alerted Jackie's parents who immediately approached the school. The headmaster, while stating his school 'didn't have a bullying problem', suggested Jackie meet with the school counsellor, to – in the Headmasters words - "get to the bottom of this". Jackie's parents were keen that she should have the opportunity to speak to someone who was independent from the school setting. Jackie began meeting with the NSPCC counsellor attached to the school. After two sessions, Jackie disclosed to the counsellor that she was being bullied in school by a group of girls in her class. The counsellor reassured Jackie that she was not to blame and praised her for having the courage to speak out.

In consultation with Jackie, the counsellor agreed what would happen next. A commitment was made to Jackie that she would be consulted at every point of the process and kept informed by the NSPCC counsellor. The counsellor reported the incident as agreed in the Schools' Counselling Services Protocol. Jackie was empowered in the situation and she was supported as she integrated into her class group. The parents were given advice as to how best they could help Jackie. The school was challenged to put into place a realistic whole-school Anti-Bullying Policy. This included, training for teachers, information dissemination to parents and child friendly literature for the pupils. The counsellor was also able to run a series of inclusive anti-bullying workshops within school, involving both victims and bullies.

Eighteen months on, Jackie is a happier child and is preparing to move up to the Junior High School. Having an independent counsellor in school made a difference to Jackie's life.

Case Study 3: Circle time

The counsellor had been working in a primary school since August 2000. The previous principal had left and following one of the regular meetings with the new principal the idea of starting circle time with a group was initially discussed.

The principal had previous experience of the use of circle time and liked its approach in terms of the active involvement of all the pupils involved in the group, and as being another mechanism for listening to children and young people. The principal thought this initiative sat particularly well with the NSPCC's aim of 'Creating safe, listening and responsive Schools'.

It was quickly agreed that the counsellor would work with the current year 5 class because of the number of difficulties that were occurring there. Three parents from this class had already spoken to the Counsellor about issues of friendship, bullying and communication breakdown.

The following arrangements were made:

- presentation to the class teacher about the potential benefits of circle time, how it could be used and introduced into the classroom;
- presentation to the pupils concerning what their part would be, emphasising it was an opportunity for all pupils to have their problems aired in a caring and supportive environment;
- due to the size of the class, (35 pupils) the counsellor could only work with half the class at each session;
- the principal was keen to introduce circle time to the whole school. The NSPCC initiative was therefore seen as a trial until the SEELB were in a position to provide circle time training to the whole staff;
- either the class teacher or a classroom assistant would assist the counsellor in each session.

Work Plan:

- eight sessions were offered in total;
- these sessions were designed to enhance self-esteem by pupil participation, by developing positive relationships through discussion of common problems that occurred, finding workable solutions to these problems and finally helping young people to develop empathy;

- a set of rules was drawn up by the pupils. They were written up and hung on the class wall. There also existed a set of phrases which reminded the pupils what the hopes and expectations of circle time were;
- the sessions involved a mixture of fun time with warm up exercises used. The pupils however also had the opportunity to discuss more complex matters that were causing them concern. Sometimes we used role-play to examine problem areas more closely.

Findings

The feedback from the pupils involved, on the whole, was extremely positive. They said their listening as well as communication skills had improved. Pupils were trying to show more respect towards their peers. One common theme was that pupils felt better prepared to solve their own problems. The class teacher noticed a change in the classroom in that pupils were quicker to settle and generally more co-operative.