

## **The ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) Project**

York introduced the ELSA programme, initially in a small number of schools (2 secondaries and 6 primaries). ELSA is an evidence-based 5-day programme of training for Teaching Assistants, delivered by Educational Psychologists with support from colleagues in the Education Development Service and Specialist Teaching Service.

The course covers a range of areas of mental health needs which can create barriers to learning:

- Emotional Literacy,
- Self-esteem,
- Active Listening and Communication,
- Solution-focused Conversations,
- Autism,
- Attachment,
- Understanding Anger,
- Loss and Bereavement,
- Therapeutic Stories,
- Silver SEAL,
- Social Skills and Friendship Groups,
- Circles of Friends

Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHWs) and Educational Psychologists provided regular (half termly) consultation to ELSAs for the duration of the TaMHS project.

The TaMHS Steering Group was set up as a subgroup of the York Social Emotional Wellbeing Group (SEWG) and the ELSA initiative was embedded in the comprehensive review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Strategy for 2011-14, as part of the 'Early Intervention and Primary Care' element (p.9 onwards). More recently it has been highlighted in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013 and will be included in the refreshed CAMHS Strategy 2013-16.

The ELSA programme has trained 109 ELSAs in 42 schools across York since 2010. Amongst many other things one of the aims of the programme was the hope that the ELSA might be the person who noticed when a child or young person had a problem with their emotional or mental wellbeing.

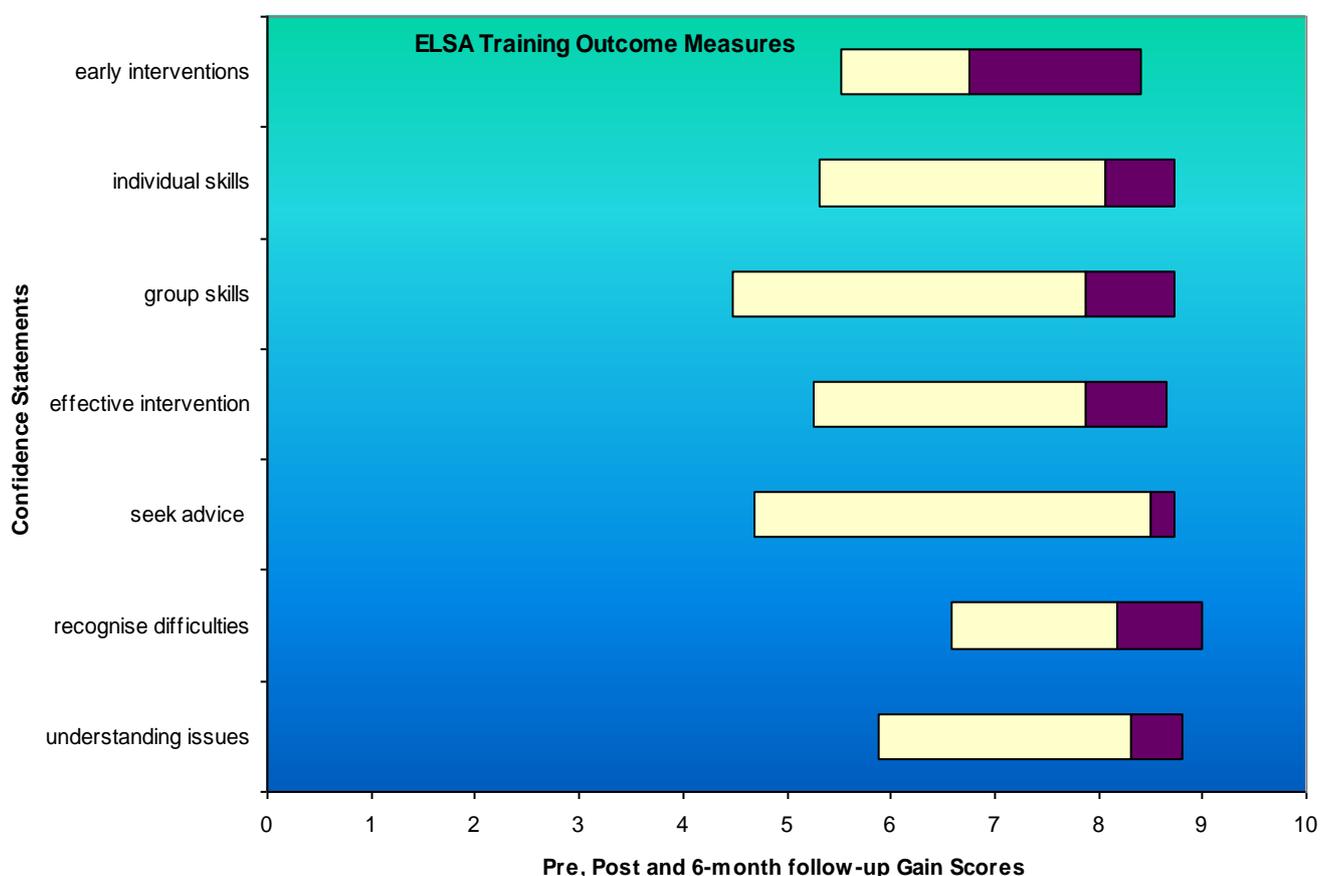
## Quantitative Evaluation of ELSA work:

The programme has proved successful. It was subjected to a comprehensive evaluation which demonstrated a very positive impact. Teaching Assistants were given questionnaires to complete before training, after training and with further follow-up 6 months into their role as an ELSA.

The results demonstrated a large positive shift in the confidence and competence of ELSAs dealing with emotional issues. And, many had shared their skills with others and now felt more able to notice and identify children and young people who might be vulnerable.

The top three items, showing the biggest overall gains, were:

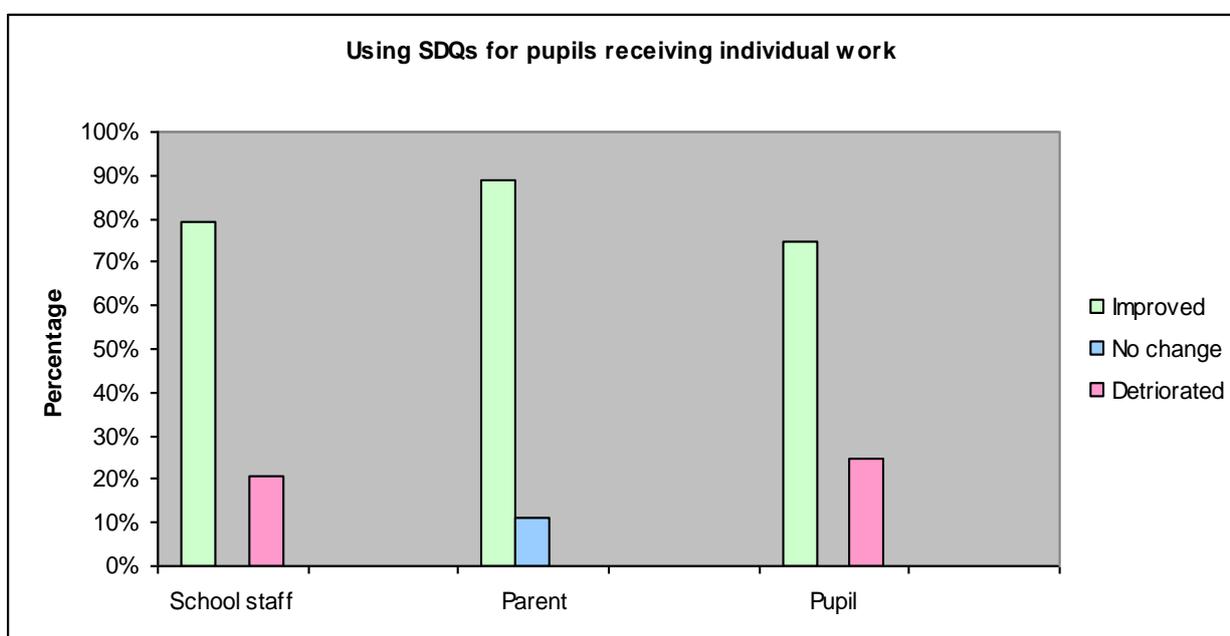
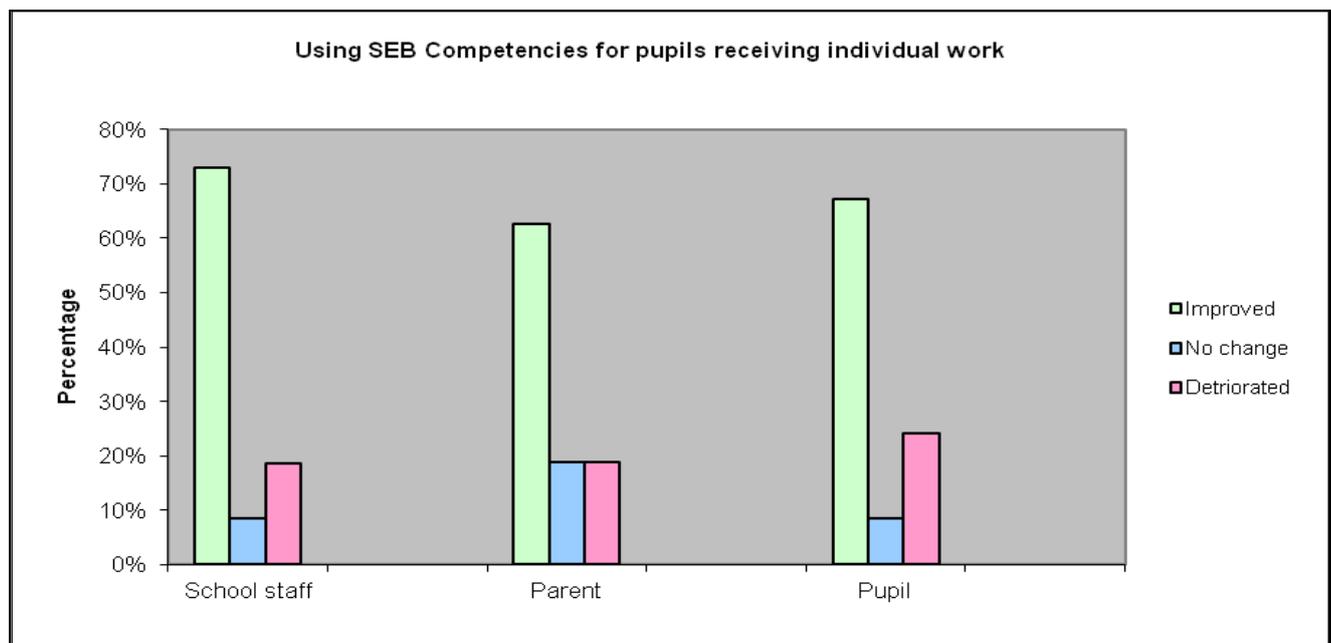
- Item 3 – ‘I know where to seek information, advice and support on Emotional Health and Well-being (EHWB) issues’
- Item 5 – ‘I have the skills to run effective groups to develop EHWB’
- Item 6 – ‘I have the skills to work with individual pupils experiencing difficulties relating to EHWB, in a 1-to-1 context’.



Data on pupil progress was triangulated from staff, parents and pupils, using the York Social Emotional and Behavioural (SEB) Competencies Profile. For the most complex cases the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was also used.

For all interventions, both individual and group work, improvements were reported by staff, parents and pupils.

- For group work: 72% of staff, 65% of parents and 62% of pupils showed improvements in perceptions of Emotional Health and Well-being (EHWB) for the targeted pupils.
- For individual work 73% of staff, 63% of parents and 67% of pupils showed improvements in perceptions of EHWB for targeted pupils
- For more complex individual work 79% of staff, 89% of parents and 75% of pupils showed improved scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for targeted pupils



Cost effectiveness case-studies were undertaken. The cost of TaMHS/ELSA interventions for a specific pupil ranged from £157 (individual support) to £371 (extended group and individual work). Most schools anticipated that without TaMHS involvement, further input would have been required from outside agencies, incurring additional costs. For one of the cases the anticipated outcome was a short-term placement in the York Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) so the costs *without* TaMHS support potentially had an upper range of £3,000+.

Referrals to CAMHS increased over the duration of TaMHS, but Primary Mental Health Workers felt that this was because they had better links with schools to facilitate swift referrals, which were appropriate and had robust documentation.

### **Qualitative evaluation of ELSA work, including anecdotal quotes about the ELSAs:**

OFSTED Report published 16.12.10 (p.7) reads: *'Pastoral care is good ... A team of well-trained teachers and support staff provide particularly effective care for the most vulnerable pupils. The 'Targeted, Adolescent and Mental Health' (TaMHS) support programme is a real asset in developing pupils' social and emotional skills, consequently enabling them to be successful learners.*

Staff: (ELSA is) ... *"An extremely effective and excellent use of money."* (Y6 teacher)

*"It has given the more vulnerable children more confidence and has built up their resilience in dealing with situations, which would otherwise have caused them unhappiness. It is lovely to see the children using the coping strategies they have been taught."*(Headteacher)

Parent: *"X has really enjoyed the sessions and talked positively about them. He seems to be able to accept praise more readily and is more aware of his and other people's emotions."*

Pupil: *"I started getting worried about things about 1 year ago but ever since Mrs X started helping me it's been a lot better. I've done lots of strategies to help me calm down like the firework method where I think about a firework, so there is the trigger which gets me worried then the fuse when I get even more worried then BANG! in which I sort of break down but I've managed to stop it every time on the trigger. I have also done a method where there is a bag with six or seven marbles which represent my worries and every time I take out a marble it means 1 worry gone away."* (Primary pupil)

## **The current situation**

Following the success of the TaMHS pilot project, the ELSA programme has been rolled out across the Local Authority as part of a 'mainstreaming strategy'. Although the government funding finished in April 2011, York chose to invest money from the Early Intervention Grant to sustain the ELSA project in 2011-12 and 2012-13, and York is now part of the national ELSA Network and has its own website run by one of the ELSAs.

The funding has enabled the Educational Psychology (EP) Service to deliver the course with 'host' schools providing the venue, hence it continued to be part of the Universal CAMHS Strategy. The ELSA initiative is coordinated by the Senior Educational Psychologist, with all members of the EP Team contributing to the course, alongside colleagues from School Improvement and the Specialist Teaching Team. We are proud of the fact that we have trained 109 ELSAs in 42 schools across York since 2010. Many schools have more than one ELSA, indeed one primary school has 12 ELSAs and another federated primary/special primary school has 10 ELSAs.

Educational Psychologists have continued to offer ELSAs termly supervision in geographically-organised groups within their school patches. Subsequent evaluations of ELSA courses at Westfield, Hob Moor, Carr Juniors, Hempland and Clifton With Rawcliffe have been very positive. Overall 99 % of the ratings given for achieving the course learning outcomes have been 'good' or 'excellent'. Competence and confidence questionnaires continue to show positive shifts pre and post training. Demand for places on the courses continues to be high. Yearsley Grove Primary School is hosting the current ELSA programme (Spring 2013).

The Educational Psychology Service hopes that funding will remain in place to continue training and supervising ELSAs across the city.