

**STORY LINKS**

**Evaluation report of Virtual School sponsored project on Isle of Wight 2018/2019**

**TRAINING**

Story Links intervention training was delivered on the Isle of Wight over 3 days in the autumn term 2018. (See separate evaluation summary for report of training.)

12 participants were registered prior to the training. 11 of these had places funded by the Virtual School (VS) on the understanding that participants undertook the intervention with at least one looked after child (LAC).

13 people started the course on day 1. All of these were female. (One participant attended unannounced, but did not attend day 2 or 3 and withdrew from the project). A second participant had to withdraw after day 1 due to increased leadership commitments. A third participant was from Social Care and was funded accordingly. That left 10 participants funded by VS. 8 of these were from primary schools, one from a secondary school and one from offsite provision.

9 people attended day 2 (8 funded by VS). The two VS-funded participants who missed day 2 had conversations between days 1 and 3 with the trainer. Both had started the intervention.

6 people attended day 3 (all 6 funded by VS). Four apologies due to ill health and one due to OFSTED were received from those who missed day 3 and they were offered the opportunity to attend day 3 in Havant in March 2019. This was not taken up – probably due to travel distance.

**EVALUATION**

3 people submitted pre- and post-intervention data by May 2019. This was insufficient to give a full picture of the interventions undertaken, so I contacted all 10 VS funded participants. One person had not had time to carry out the intervention, due to lots of family liaison work, being part time and about to go on maternity leave. I spoke with the remaining 9 VS funded participants by phone on 17 and 20 May.

**Interventions**

5 people completed at least one intervention for the full 10 weeks. One of these had delivered 5 interventions (3 of these in parallel). 2 people were on their second intervention. A further 2 people had started interventions, but there were obstacles to completing all 10 weeks. This gives a total of 7 people having started or completed an intervention with 13 children. **8 of these were LAC.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| School | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| A | **LAC** **girl year 2** | **LAC** **boy** | **LAC** **boy** | Non LAC girl | Non LAC boy year 5 |
| B | **LAC** **girl year 3** | **LAC** **to start June 19** |  |  |  |
| C | Non LAC boy age 5 | Non LAC girl with ASD, does not speak8 sessions so far | **LAC** **girl year 5****to start****Sept 19** |  |  |
| D | Non LAC boy year 5 | **LAC** **boy year 4****Started May 19** |  |  |  |
| E | **LAC****boy age 11** **(yr 7)** |  |  | KEY

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | 10 week intervention completed |
|  | 10 weeks not yet completed |
|  | Intervention planned for future date |
|  | No planned intervention |
| **Bold type** | **Looked after child (LAC) or adopted child** |

 |  |
| F | **LAC** **boy age 8****8 sessions so far** |  |  |  |  |
| G | **LAC** **boy age 8****6 sessions** **Instead of 10** |  |  |  |  |
| H | **Adopted girl age 6** **to start** **Sept 19** |  |  |  |  |
| I | To start with non LAC\* June 19 | \****plans for LAC year 5 girl were thwarted*** |  |  |  |
| J | No planned intervention\*\* | *\*\*Maternity leave* |  |  |  |

**Parents/carers**

All but two of the parents/carers were female. One was a grandmother. One family planned to alternate between mother and father, but the father attended 8 of the 10 sessions and the mother the other 2. There was a range of foster carers and birth parents attending, even when the child was in foster care.

The intervention that ended after 6 sessions came to an end because the birth mother got a job and could no longer attend. The one in which only 8 sessions had been completed to date faltered because of medical issues for the parent, but she is keen to complete the 10 weeks.

**How the sessions went?**

All the participants were pleased with how the sessions had gone. A couple mentioned it was tricky at first, because of carer anxiety or embarrassment, but this improved with time and familiarity with the process. One mentioned it was better than expected with unexpectedly good engagement by the parent and better behaviour from the child than expected when the parent had to leave.

The children were excited at having their parent/carer in school and taking part. They looked forward to the sessions and one person commented on the child’s buoyant and positive demeanour after the sessions.

The secondary school participant had to run the intervention alone, without a teaching assistant (TA). She also did the follow up reading with the child. The person who had run 5 interventions found greater success with the TA who knew and worked with the children already, because of the relationship. Stories flowed better.

One person mentioned how powerful the stories were, referring to the child’s emotions and the child (year 5) recognised he was talking about himself in the stories. This caused him to stop and reflect and opened up discussion with his father. Another person mentioned how the stories led to lots of conversation.

One child wanted to draw on the teacher’s pad of paper at the end of the session and this was the inspiration for the story the following week.

For the child who did not yet speak in school, the teacher used ‘bear’ cards for the feelings check in and the child wrote down her contribution to the story instead of speaking it out loud. The child adored the sessions and they meant a lot to her. A joke became a regular part of the story, which the child loved. She found it difficult to sit at the same table as her parent, as, in her mind, parents belong at home, not at school. She loved the characters.

One child brought a lot of violence into their stories, but the father was able to find less violent solutions. There was an issue with the mother not attending alternate sessions as promised and the child was aware of this.

Not all children read to an adult at home between sessions as prescribed as part of the intervention.

One person commented on how they noticed the ‘push/pull’ of attachment in the body language of the child and carer. By keeping boundaries and making the group safe, carers felt secure and supported.

**Target behaviour (as part of intervention – see Story Links website)**

Target behaviours included the following:

* Return to class in a calm way.
* Sit without disturbing others when on the carpet together.
* Focus when on carpet without distraction.
* Spend time reading to younger sibling.
* Put hand up rather than shout out in class.
* Use book to tell worries to an adult.
* Stay in class for letters and sounds.
* Speak four times a week to an adult – use voice rather than writing.

One child chose their own behaviour target each week. This ‘being on report’ seemed to support the child and continued after the intervention.

On the whole, the children achieved the target number of points they set each week and tolerated the disappointment when they did not. In one school it was noticeable that the children achieved their targets better at the beginning and at the end of the intervention with a dip in the middle.

Some parents/carers were inconsistent about giving the promised reward for achieving the target number of points for the specific behaviour target. In one case, the child’s disappointment at not getting their reward came out in the story and the teacher was able to use this in discussion with the parent subsequently. Parental rewards did focus on activities together rather than material rewards.

**Impact on:**

1. **Child and child/school interaction**

All reported a positive impact on the child, including:

* Increased confidence and sense of self-worth. Willingness to share.
* The child now has something to look forward to and she feels she is contributing to a bigger thing.
* Boost to self-esteem – the child has recently started attending a story writing group as part of a competition – he volunteered.
* Fewer incidents at lunch time and social times. Child had managed to walk away when upset by something.
* Behaviour improved – there used to be incidents every day. There are still some incidents of ‘isolation’, but there are now days with no incidents. Things are a lot better.
* Progression in behaviour
1. **Child/carer interaction**

All reported a positive impact on the relationship between child and the carer who attended the sessions, including:

* Positive impact on child and mother. Mother saw what the child was doing and showed understanding, tuning into the child. He felt safe and that mother was hearing him.
* Positive impact on relationships between children and parents and increased confidence in parents, such as picking up on what came out of the stories. Some needed more support than others to achieve this.
* Improved behaviour at home (which had been the issue) and more open to talk about when things happen.
* More understanding of child.
* Huge positive for child and father. Father now listens more. At the start he was a bit ‘blokey’, but by the end there was less messing about and more listening.
* Improved interactions and relationship with birth mother
1. **Carer/school interaction**

All reported improved or continued good relationships with carer, including:

* Mother came into setting and engaged with the intervention, despite prior scepticism on part of staff. Improved relationship between mother and school
* Mother felt really supported and had new insights. She felt very secure and had honest chats. She was upset when the sessions came to an end, but has maintained informal contact. The relationship that was built was ‘priceless’
* Very close relationship with mother.
* Opened a window to what was happening at home.
* It was a huge commitment for the father to come in each week. He has continued to maintain good communication with the school and back them up.
* Positive impact on relationships between school and families.
* More regular talks with carer.
* Father has asked to come in again, so is coming in every 3 weeks.
* Mother felt included in what her child was doing and this had a knock on positive effect on interactions with child.
1. **Reading/literacy**

Some children were already able and fluent readers, so there was no discernible improvement, but others made progress, including:

* More confidence in reading out loud and to different people. Reading more to mother. (Increased confidence in reading was mentioned in relation to several children.)
* Reading at home and at school now.
* Age-appropriate comprehension
* Progression in reading scheme – went up a book band
* More adventurous vocabulary
* Since intervention, tested for dyslexia and appropriate support put in place, as it became apparent how child was underachieving. She is now improving her attainments and is more focused on learning.
1. **Emotional literacy**

All reported some impact on the child’s emotional literacy, including:

* Acceptance that mother had to leave. Previously child would have had a ‘melt-down’ about this. The improvement had generalised to parents evening as well, not just Story Links sessions.
* Child now has a larger range of emotions she can draw on.
* Getting on with peers a bit better. Seems more settled. He will come to find the ELSA when he needs to talk and get things off his chest. He seems a lot happier than at the start of the year.
* Progress in linking emotions and stories
* Relationship with peers slowly improving
* More willing to talk about things and now attending regular emotional literacy sessions
* The opportunity to start off with the metaphor in the story enabled the child to recognise emotions in himself, which had previously been very difficult for him. He will now ask for a conversation rather than acting out his emotions. He now shows not only recognition of emotions in himself, but also in others.

**Additional insights/reflections/future actions**

* All participants would recommend the intervention and training to other. One person mentioned it was a positive way of working closer with families.
* Those who had implemented Story Links would be happy to talk with other schools about their experiences.
* The secondary school participant pointed out how tricky it was for secondary schools to get the intervention up and running. She would recommend that SL was only appropriate for year 7 students at secondary school. (*NB the intervention is designed for primary aged children because of their developmental level and they are less likely to see through the metaphor.)*
* One participant reported that her experience of the intervention had highlighted the need to keep an eye on quiet girls, who often get overlooked in terms of extra support. Story Links had had a wider impact in school, in terms of system change, than the effects of a single intervention. Another participant also mentioned the intervention working at a wider level too.
* One participant wanted to emphasise that it was important to understand the underlying theory of the intervention, as well as the issues for the child. She said that the intervention was not one that could just be passed on to others (cascaded). She felt strongly that people need to attend the training in order to deliver the intervention appropriately. *(NB. This is in line with trainers’ beliefs and experience too.)*
* One person had not realised they could offer the intervention to non LAC, so I have noted the need to reinforce this in training, however, most people appreciated that they now had another tool in their tool box and some had already used the intervention for a range of issues, ages, genders and personal and family circumstances.
* Some children were going on to join a therapeutic story writing group. One LAC was going to do another Story Links intervention. One child was being considered for Lego Therapy in order to foster better peer interactions.
* Those who missed day 3 can attend day 3 on the next Isle of Wight training course, as there are some key messages to hear and benefit to be gleaned from the sharing of experiences.

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