

Title

Using the Friends for Life CBT Programme to target pupils vulnerable to transition to secondary school

What did we ask? (Research Questions)

Will the Friends for Life programme help to reduce anxiety in the children and young people chosen?

Following involvement with the Friends for Life programme, what is the impact on the enhanced transition programme for the target pupils?

What is the evidence base?

Poverty can be defined and measured in various ways. Within this local context, a disproportionate representation of children and young people live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 1 and 2. This equates to 42% of primary aged children residing in these deciles. The relationship between poverty, attainment and achievement is well characterised across Scottish education, and within West Dunbartonshire evidence suggests an equality gap remains between the most and least deprived.

It is within the National context described that the work undertaken within the St Peter the Apostle Learning Community has been set. The secondary school and its 6 associated primary schools, include council wards with the highest levels of deprivation of the whole WDC area. A positive consequence of this has been the high levels of funding which the learning community has received through PEF. While the funding has been directed at the schools individually, the strong learning community identity has led to discussions as to how to support children at the point of transition to secondary.

Evidence has highlighted the particular vulnerability of pupils at this time and data from within the learning community had shown how a small but nonetheless significant number of pupils found the transition to secondary more difficult than expected. This information came from number of secondary school Joint Assessment Team (JAT) referrals for S1 pupils and exclusion rates in this specific secondary school, who were also identified as being disproportionately higher in SIMD 1+2.

Discussions within the local learning community hypothesised reasons for difficulties with the transition and included reference to anxiety, learning issues and family circumstances. While these reasons may have been accurate, in view of the clear Scottish Government directive on targeting evidence based interventions, there was consensus of the need to conduct a needs analysis of the pupils just starting their final year of primary school.

The learning community made the decision to use part of their PEF to buy additional support from the Psychological Service in the form of 1FTE Educational Psychologist to work with the schools on this project.

What did we do?

Through a needs analysis where Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) (pupil, teacher, parent), Stirling Wellbeing Scales (pupil), and other data (attendance, SIMD, attainment) was gathered of the cohort of pupils in their P7 year of school, it was agreed with each school that an intervention to target those anxious pupils in the cohort would be best placed, as there was a clear cohort of pupils who identified with high SDQ/Stirling Wellbeing scores. Through further discussions with each school to identify the specific difficulties these pupils faced, it was clear that there was a clear pattern of anxiety and that this would prove to be a barrier to a successful transition to secondary school. The majority of these pupils were in SIMD 1 or 2 (72%), however higher SIMD's were not excluded from being in the target groups.

The Friends for Life Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach was chosen as the core intervention of the project. This approach contains key concepts and strategies that are aimed at increasing confidence and building resilience, which it was felt would be crucial to a successful transition for this group of targeted pupils.

Two EP's responsible for co-delivering the program initially delivered training to teachers on an introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and the Friends program.

Ongoing coaching on the CBT elements within the program was provided throughout the 10 sessions to reinforce the elements of CBT that were being focused on.

The Spence Anxiety Scale was gathered pre and post-intervention, with teacher, pupil, and parent feedback also gathered to investigate any impact.

The pupils then created workshops on five of the main learning points and presented this to the rest of their P7 class in a carousel activity designed to share the learning.

The Friends pupils were then invited up for a half day to the secondary school to have an extra tour of the school and to play team building games in order to try to reduce further anxieties around transition.

Qualitative information was gathered from each pupil at the end of this half day to find out how they felt at this point about their transition.

What have we found?

Spence Anxiety Scale

Improvements are demonstrated by a decrease in ratings over time on the Spence Anxiety Scale, with all of the subscales showing a decrease in mean score with the exception of Physical Injury Fears. The decreases did not reach statistical significance.

Focus Groups

Overall the children were very positive about the Friends program and enjoyed discussing transition to high school with others and the extra visits included within the group. Elements that would be changed included more visits to the high school, and to change the worksheets to make them more interesting and exciting. Pupils indicated they used the breathing exercises and the red/green thoughts from the Friends materials, and reported an increased confidence after being part of the transition group.

This adds to the positive Spence Anxiety score trends in indicating that the Friends for Life program has helped to reduce anxiety and increase confidence in the target pupils.

Impact - Parent Feedback

Parents were given questionnaires to complete at parent feedback sessions, however the response rate was low from parents.

From the responses given, parents indicated they felt their child was calmer, not as frustrated, and they were excited to share their learning with their parents. Parents stated they felt their child would still require additional support to settle into S1, and additional visits to the secondary school would help while still in primary.

Impact – Staff Feedback

Staff reported increased confidence and an increased willingness to persevere when faced with a challenge after the Friends group. They also reported that for those children who engaged well with the program, they noticed a positive impact on their social emotional interactions with peers.

What do we plan to do next?

The focus for Year 2 will include;

- Disseminate findings of research with the 6 primaries and secondary school.
- Data will continue to be gathered on the current cohort of P7 pupils as they transition into S1.
- Data will also be gathered on the 2018/2019 P7 cohort in order to provide a needs analysis on this cohort to allow for future interventions to be decided.
- The EPS will develop a bespoke CBT program alongside teaching staff, with a specific focus on transition that will be developed alongside the learning community. This arose through feedback from class teachers and the EP's involved who identified that a more specific program targeting transition was required.
- The EPS will continue to plan training for all staff in the learning community across each school.
- Further engage parents with the transition process and transition group by meeting with them prior to group and following completion of the group.

References

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