

# 2024

# PRIMARY

# PUPIL FOCUS

# GROUPS

East Ayrshire  
School  
Counselling  
Service

The Exchange



# Overview

In November 2024, the School Counselling Coordinator met with focus groups of children from a sample of schools across the local authority.

The age of pupils in the focus groups ranged from P4-P7. In some schools the School Counselling Coordinator met with pupils who had attended sessions with the Exchange and sought direct feedback about their experiences. In other schools they met with wellbeing champions, some of whom had not attended wellbeing sessions with the Exchange. The focus of the discussions in these groups was around general wellbeing supports within their school and on what “good mental health support” looked like to them.

This document includes a summary of discussions held within the focus groups. All notes from the discussions were passed on to participating schools and will be used as part of service improvement. The school counselling coordinator will communicate with pupil focus groups to let them know of any changes made to the service in response to the feedback they gave.

# Focus Groups with children who have attended wellbeing sessions with the Exchange

In total, the School Counselling Coordinator met with 7 focus groups where the children had attended wellbeing session with the Exchange and were happy to provide feedback on their experience. Some of the children were happy to speak in front of a group, whilst others preferred to speak to the School Counselling Coordinator on a 1-1 basis.

1/ Tell me about your wellbeing sessions with the Exchange. What happens during your sessions?

- We play games, talk about emotions. Sometimes she brings playdough.

2/ Did you understand what would happen at your sessions before you went along?

- Someone phoned my Mum and my Mum talked to me
- I didn't even know I was going
- My Mum talked to me about it but I didn't really understand what would happen.
- I wasn't sure why I was going or what I was going to - no information was given before hand.
- My Mum had a phonecall. No information leaflet was shared.
- The DHT talked to me about what was going to happen.
- No one spoke to me about it but they sent emails to my Mum.
- I was given websites to look at until I seen the counsellor - this helped.
- I didn't understand what I was going to - it would be helpful if a teacher talked to me about it first.

3/ What do you like most about your sessions with the Exchange?

- Talking to her (counsellor) The way she explains things. She is very understanding.
- I like that I get to write and draw - show her how I feel. It's a bit easier than talking. I like when she brings play dough.
- I like getting time out of class
- I like we can chat things through.
- He always starts the session with a fun game so I don't feel nervous.
- She(counsellor) reassured me it's better to speak about things.
- Making a potion with glitter about my feelings
- Drawing - it is easier than talking about feelings
- I have someone to talk to. Before I didn't have anyone to talk to.
- I like how she (counsellor) is so honest. I understand her and I feel comfortable with her.
- The activities help me with how I'm feeling.
- It is confidential - I know she (counsellor) won't tell other people what I'm saying unless I'm in danger.
- She (counsellor) is easy to talk to, she listens and understands.
- It built my confidence up.
- Donna (Counsellor) gives me a rough idea of what we are going to do each week. She is friendly and funny.
- I like that she always asks me what I would like to do.
- I love the bear cards and the feelings cards
- I like how they ask you hidden questions. They are good at asking questions without it being scary.

4/ Do you think attending the sessions has helped to improve your wellbeing?

- Yes. It helps with my sleeping, my emotions and I am given strategies to help me cope.
- Yes it helped me to talk about my feelings with my Mum and Dad. It helped me to not keep things to myself.
- Yes. I learned it's ok to talk about your feelings. It's a safe space and no one else knows what you are talking about.
- It's helping me to be calm
- It's helping me a lot. Before I was going home crying to my Mum.
- My problems would get a lot worse if I didn't speak to her (counsellor). I can be really honest with her.
- Yes, I can cope with my feelings better. I'm feeling happier since I started my sessions. When someone calls me names it builds up and builds up until I get really sad or angry. Talking to someone helps me clear these feelings.
- It helped with my confidence in school – particularly when talking in front of other people.
- Yes – I was able to talk about my Nana's death. It gave me strategies to help cope and talk about it.
- I learned how to calm down, how to slow my heart, things that calm me down. We shared strategies for coping.
- Yes. When I found out my Papa had died, she said it was ok to cry, shout and express my feelings.
- My Gran passed away. She taught me not to worry about my Gran looking down on me. I was worrying about what I was doing and if my Gran could always see me."

5/ Did attending the sessions help you cope better at school? Home? With friends?

- I'm more excited to go to school because I can express my feelings better."
- It has helped me to talk to teachers. Ashleigh has given me strategies.
- It helps me cope in school. I cope better at home too – I used to cry. When I've seen Ashleigh I feel in a better mood. I feel like something is being done to help me with my feelings.

6/ What could be even better about the sessions?

- I would like to see the counsellor for much longer so I can build up trust
- Longer time
- That the sessions lasted longer
- Bring fidgets with them
- If they gave you something to keep
- At the moment I'm part of a group, it would be better if I got to see her 1-1.
- I would like to be able to walk/run around whilst doing an activity or talking.
- I didn't like that the sessions were held in an open area in the school. It wasn't confidential, people kept walking past and it was noisy.
- I didn't know where I was going. The teacher didn't know where I was meant to go either. I felt nervous when I didn't know where the counsellor was going to be.
- I didn't feel like the strategies were enough to help me cope with some of the big things going on in my life.
- It would be helpful if they popped into class so I knew who she was before I went to the session.

7/ After attending counselling sessions, did the Exchange help your family and/or school to further support your wellbeing?

- Yes, every 3rd week she phones my Mum and this helps me.
- He gave me a worry box to share with my teacher so she knew when I was struggling – this helped me cope even when Lee was gone.
- They shared coping strategies with my Mum.
- Ashleigh shared some strategies with my parents.
- My teacher had some good strategies last year but I'm not sure my teacher this year does

# MHWP Focus Groups

*In total, the School Counselling Coordinator met with 9 focus groups where the children were happy to talk about general MHWP supports within their school and wider community. Some of the children in these groups remained on at the end to speak more about their experience of school counselling.*

*1/ What do you think the main challenges facing children and young people right now are with regards to Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHWP)?*

- Friendships, fall outs, fitting in*
- Bullying*
- School Work. Trying to stay focused in class*
- Not being able to find someone you can properly talk to. "I don't like talking to my Mum and Dad."*
- Experiences at home and trying to balance this with school. It can be difficult to concentrate in class when you are stressed due to situations at home.*
- Worrying about coming to school - transition periods such as in the car in the morning are tricky.*
- Struggling with maths and literacy and I'm scared to ask for help.*
- Scared to talk to someone in case they tell others*
- Bodies changing and body image (P7 girls)*
- Sudden death in the family*
- Parents splitting up. Arguments at home - coming to school worrying about it.*

*2/ Tell me about some of the supports that are available in your school to help with MHWP?*

- Fidget toys/sensory toys*
- Time out with a friend*
- Awesome Area - you can have quiet time by yourself*
- Classroom Assistant - she is someone I can talk to. I trust her the most.*
- Calm corners in each class.*
- Speaking to a teacher*
- Wellbeing Room*
- Bubble and belly breathing*
- Regulation station*
- Weighted teddy*
- Surveys - GMWP - if you feel down the HT or DHT will come and check in with you.*
- Courtyard - quiet part of the playground with a member of staff there you can go there if you are feeling overwhelmed*
- Hub - if you are feeling overwhelmed in class you can go there.*
- Ear defenders*
- Movement breaks*
- Clickers cards - Check in*

*3/ What else do you think could help with your wellbeing?*

- I like going out with my friends*
- The teachers speaking more clearly - sometimes I don't understand them.*
- More quiet rooms in school*
- Seeing my counsellor more - she tries lots of different things to help me.*
- Being able to doodle to help to calm us down*
- It should be easier to talk to teachers*
- I would like a check in with school staff*