



OUTREACH IN SCHOOLS

Bishop Harvey Family Service provides outreach services to schools and currently has three such projects in primary schools and in one secondary school. The Outreach Service is tailored to meet the needs of the individual school and can therefore take many forms.

A model that has been particularly successful involves Nurture Groups. These run for ten once-weekly sessions and are aimed at encouraging children to express their troubled feelings through play and conversation, with a view to helping them to learn more effectively and to feel more socially integrated. Through feedback from the other members of the group, the children are helped to become more aware of the emotional impact of their behaviour on others.

A regular time for discussion, liaison and observation is considered an essential part of the Outreach Service and is built into the structure from the start. This provides opportunities for potential referrals to be thought about with the therapist and usually occurs through the SENCo, in discussion with teachers. We try to involve parents in the process as much as possible; at a minimum getting their written consent but ideally, meeting with them before the group starts and when it finishes. In some cases we have regular telephone contact and further meetings during the term.

The groups comprise 4-5 children and reasons for referral include concerns over the child's behaviour, under-achievement or family situation. Sometimes the groups are made up of children from the same year group who may be struggling with different issues. For example, a recent Nurture Group comprised:

- a child learning to live with his parents' divorce and new contact arrangements with Dad;
- a child who pushed herself so hard in school that she was distraught if she got the smallest thing wrong;
- a child who was selectively mute in school;
- a child who was repeatedly in trouble because of his aggressive behaviour.

At other times, children are dealing with similar issues but in very different ways. For example, in one school, I ran a group with two sets of siblings. This consisted of two sisters whose father had died a few months previously. The elder one had become very parentified, adopting a pseudo-adult stance well beyond her years, while the younger had become quite anxious and withdrawn. Also in the group were two brothers who had 'lost' their father suddenly when their mother, escaping domestic violence, moved from Buenos Aires to London without any notice. The younger boy had regressed quite significantly while the elder brother had taken on an aggressive and dominating position. These two sets of siblings were very understanding of each other and were able to help each other think about different ways of relating. (Details have been altered to preserve confidentiality.)

When a group situation is not felt to be the appropriate intervention for a child, we work with the school to think how best to proceed. This might involve providing support/consultation to the class teacher or facilitating referral to CAMHS or another agency. In some cases the nurture group can be used as an extended assessment for children who may later move on to individual work either at BHFS or in CAMHS.

Most of the referred children benefit enormously from the Nurture Group, as evidenced by the feedback we obtain from teachers and parents. They show themselves very responsive to a psychodynamic perspective and leap at the opportunity of having an experience where the emphasis is on imaginative play and spontaneous interaction. Many of them have never had the opportunity to play freely and, in this sense, the group opens up a whole new area of possibility for their emotional development.

Other school-based work includes offering individual appointments to children/ adolescents, parents or families as well as talks or workshops for parents on a wide range of issues eg : “Understanding Your Child”; “Emotional Aspects of Learning”; “Making Friends”; “Peer and Sibling Relationships”; “Managing Challenging Behaviour”; “Adolescence”, etc.

We also offer input to teachers as part of Inset or in the form of consultation. Taking time out to reflect on difficult issues can seem impossible for teachers with heavy schedules. However informal contact snatched in brief moments during breaks times can provide an incredibly useful opportunity to talk about a particular child that is causing concern, share feedback on children currently in a group, think about potential referrals or think about a classroom dynamic that is particularly troubling. **As one head teacher said to one of my colleagues: “Every Inner London Primary School could do with a full-time Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist.”**

Lucy Alexander, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist

Feedback from Parents on Individual Counselling at School

(Names have been changed to preserve confidentiality)

Mahmud aged 10 Since starting individual counselling Mahmud’s relationship with his younger brother had improved and they were now able to enjoy playing together, without the need for adult intervention. Mahmud’s parents were also pleased with the progress he had made in making new friends in class and there were fewer reports of inappropriate behaviour in the playground.

Ciara aged 11 Mum reported that Ciara was not as anxious about attending school and that she had begun to make some new friends in her class.

Joe aged 9 Mum described a marked improvement in her relationship with Joe. She felt that she now had a greater understanding of his needs and this in turn had led to her ensuring she spent more quality time with him.

Adrian aged 6 Adrian’s parents and Class Teacher were very pleased with his progress, describing him as much more able to focus and concentrate on his school work.

Breda Lynch, Clinical Counsellor, Outreach Service

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