West Sussex Schools Peer Support programme: Peer Support in primary and secondary schools in West Sussex

Annual Report 2013/14

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Photo courtesy of West Sussex Schools Peer Support

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1. Introduction and Summary of Key Findings

In September 2013 Public Health and Wellbeing, West Sussex County Council commissioned the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) to deliver a one year extension to the training and support package delivered during the previous academic year (2012-13) to 25 West Sussex schools.

As in the previous year, the package was offered to primary and secondary schools across West Sussex to enable them to set up and run a buddying or peer mentoring project in their school. The package included training and ongoing support for two project coordinators per school and peer mentor/buddy training for a minimum of 20 students. This time the package was available to 20 schools and as before, the focus was on building resilience and supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of pupils.

Key findings

This report presents the main findings from the 2013-14 project. A report on the previous year is available to download from the MBF website at www.mandbf.org.

A summary of the key findings for 2013-14 is as follows:

- 37 staff members from 20 West Sussex schools (15 primary and 5 secondary, including one secondary special) received training, resources and ongoing support to set up and run a peer support project
- 463 pupils aged 7-17 from these 20 schools received training as peer mentors/buddies
- The most popular models of peer support introduced were playground buddying, needs based 1-1 matched support and reading support.
- The pupil issues most helped by peer support were friendships, behaviour and confidence.
- 100% of project coordinators stated that their peer support work enhanced their professional practice and had a positive impact on the overall ethos of the school
- Being a mentor had a significant impact on confidence.
- Mentees were significantly happier as a result of having a mentor.
2. The Role of Peer Support in Public Health and Wellbeing

National/local context and evidence base

National strategies and policy documents on mental health and emotional wellbeing consistently support the principle of intervening early in a person’s life, to build their self-esteem and resilience, in order to build the protective factors necessary for a mentally healthy later life¹ ²

This relates to evidence that around half of those people with existing mental health problems first experience symptoms of their illness by the age of 14. Good mental health can therefore help to mitigate against poor outcomes in the future and help children reach their full potential³

This focus on early intervention is most successful when undertaken in partnership. Thus, for example, schools, colleges and other learning settings (in conjunction with commissioners of mental health services) have a key role in promoting good mental health for all children and young people and in intervening early when problems become apparent⁴

Schools, in particular, have an important role to play in promoting emotional wellbeing and resilience with systematic reviews consistently suggesting that school-based health promotion programmes can bring about significant improvements in educational as well as health outcomes⁵

The adoption of models of peer support and befriending has been recommended for inclusion in ‘whole-school’ health promotion programmes⁶ ⁷. Indeed, improved social problem-solving and the development of positive peer relationships are among the outcomes with the strongest programme effects⁸

Peer mentoring (or buddying) can be defined as a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which the individual (mentor/buddy) voluntarily gives time to support and engage another (mentee). In some cases the relationship is developed at a time of transition in the mentee’s life and can last for a significant and sustained period of time⁹. However, at primary school level

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relatively short interactions and periods of support have been found to be effective and to promote positive outcomes.

Peer mentoring has been proven to have a positive impact on both mentors and mentees in terms of the facilitation of increased emotional and social skills, positive attitudes towards the self and others, more positive social behaviours, fewer conduct disorders, and lower levels of emotional distress. It has also been shown to improve the academic performance of participants and help to facilitate their engagement with learning.

In West Sussex, in a recent Lifestyle Survey, 19.8% of girls and 9.2% of boys in the 14-15 year age group reported feeling under stress on a regular basis with 25.4% of girls and 10.3% of boys, respectively, reporting low self-esteem.

West Sussex Public Health recognises the important role that schools play in the promotion of healthier lifestyles and has an established Healthy Schools programme for addressing the health and wellbeing of children and young people in West Sussex. Healthy School Status is the quality mark that schools may hold which indicates their commitment to promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Healthy Schools make a significant difference to the health and achievement of children and young people by promoting the links between health, behaviour and learning.

Working alongside West Sussex Healthy Schools a peer support programme was introduced in primary and secondary schools in West Sussex in November 2012 delivered by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. By the end of February 2014, a second cohort of staff and pupils had joined those from the 2012-13 academic year and a total of 83 staff within 45 schools in West Sussex had received training in peer support with almost 1000 pupils trained as Peer Mentors/Buddies.

This report summarises the findings of the second year of this peer support programme which aims to continue to build protective factors at a young age, by encouraging supportive and cooperative relationships and thereby reducing the likelihood of participants experiencing poorer health and social outcomes in the future.

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3. Working with staff at the schools

Initial contact with schools

Having decided to build on a successful first year by expanding the number of schools involved in peer support in West Sussex, the fully funded training and resource package was made available to a further 41 schools in early October 2013. The package included training in peer support for two project coordinators per school, free resources to support the setting up of a peer support project and an in-school training session for 20 or more pupils as peer mentors/buddies in each of the 20 schools.

Initial contact with the Headteacher or a nominated contact such as the year head or Healthy Schools lead was made by email or telephone. A leaflet giving an overview of the programme, and explaining the respective roles of the MBF and the school in committing to the programme was provided, and the Headteacher was asked to authorise by signing an expression of interest in participating in the programme.

As in the first year of the project, timescales in this second year of the project were tight with a need to recruit schools and get staff and pupil training underway within weeks to enable sufficient time for the peer support projects to be set up and run for long enough to undertake a worthwhile evaluation.

When initial take-up was slow the offer was extended in early November to a further 60 schools who were due to confirm their healthy school status and would be able to use the project to demonstrate their continued commitment to the healthy schools process. An invitation to participate was sent from both MBF and from WSCC Healthy Schools and as a result sufficient interest was generated to enable a first training date to be set for staff from 11 schools to attend on 20 November. A second training date was set for 4 December and staff from a further 7 schools attended this. Staff from the remaining two cohort schools received training at individual school coordinator training sessions in January 2014.

As in the previous year the majority of schools involved this year were primary - there were 15 primary schools and 5 secondary schools including one special school. A list of the participating schools is included in Appendix 1.

Project Co-ordinator training

Each of the 20 programme schools was invited to send two staff members to attend one of the two project coordinator training days held in Billingshurst in November and December 2013. Given the spread of schools involved, from East Grinstead to Worthing (north to south) and from Emsworth to Haywards Heath (west to east), finding a suitable venue for all 20 was difficult and some staff consequently had further to travel than others. Some schools were also unable
to identify two appropriate members of staff to attend or to spare two staff members on the day. There were also some absences on the day so all schools were offered further training options and these took place where requested along with the individual school coordinator training sessions in January 2014.

In total, 30 staff representing 18 schools attended a group coordinator training day while 7 staff from 3 schools attended a training session at their school making a total of 37 staff attending training rather than the 40 anticipated. This included one staff member from an infant school which subsequently withdrew from the programme after it was agreed that their Year 2 children would be too young to benefit from the programme.

Overall, 14 of the 20 project schools had two or more staff trained while the remaining six had one. A range of staff roles were represented on the training including Headteacher, Teacher, SENCo, Learning Mentor and a variety of Teaching Assistant positions.

**Baseline & training evaluation**

Prior to the start of each training day or session attendees were asked to complete an entry level evaluation questionnaire as a means of establishing some baseline data on a range of measures including their existing confidence, capacity and resources to run a peer support project, and their knowledge, understanding and overall experience in relation to peer support.

Overall experience of peer support across the group – and therefore knowledge and skills in relation to this – was quite low since just three (8%) of the 37 attendees had any previous experience of developing or managing a peer support project. Of these three, one was currently involved in running a project with fewer than 10 pupils, one with between 10-25 pupils and a third with a project involving up to 50 pupils.

For the majority of attendees therefore peer support was something they were looking to establish as a new initiative within their school and comments from staff suggested that they were on the lookout for new ideas and tools to support them in doing so.

As demonstrated in Figure 1, at the outset 19% and 27% of staff respectively rated their confidence to run a peer mentoring project and ability to evidence outcomes as good or excellent. Meanwhile, almost half indicated they lacked capacity in terms of time available to run a scheme while 42% indicated they lacked the resources (tools) to do so. Similarly, almost two thirds indicated a lack of overall skills, knowledge and experience in relation to peer support.
However, when these questions were repeated at the endpoint evaluation stage in June 2014 there was evidence of significant improvements in five of the six areas of perceived competence as indicated in Figure 2. This suggests that their involvement with the programme between November 2013 and June 2014 had a major impact on their confidence and overall skills and knowledge and that their perceived capacity, resources and overall experience in relation to running a peer support had significantly improved.

Attendees were asked at the outset what they hoped to achieve by introducing a peer support scheme at their school. Their responses included:

1. to engage the pupils to support each other
2. to encourage positive relationship and social skills
3. to resolve issues in the playground and cloakroom.
4. to support emotional well being and reduce barriers to learning.

Their responses also indicated they hoped pupils would benefit from a peer support scheme in the following ways:

1. to feel confident in dealing with issues that arise
2. to develop strategies to support one another
3. to develop more independence and responsibility

However, before commencing the programme, when asked to rate their knowledge and understanding in relation to key aspects of setting up a peer support project at their school, overall just 15% rated their knowledge and understanding as good or excellent (see Figure 3).

Post training responses, however, suggested a very significant increase in their knowledge and understanding as a result of attending training with 93% now rating their knowledge as good or excellent (see Figure 4).
During the training day attendees were provided with leaflets and a DVD to promote peer support to parents and pupils along with an MBF toolkit containing guidance and all the resources needed to set up and run a peer support project.

 Asked whether the training day had met their expectations 100% responded that it had. Here are some of the comments received:

 "Really impressive, informative and entertaining"

 "Very dynamic delivery, lots of passion and enthusiasm, hope can have an impact myself!"

 "Well presented - good information packs provided"

 "Looking forward to starting the programme"

 "I feel very motivated - thank you"

 "Thank you - a highly valuable day!"

 Participants were also asked which aspects of the training day they found particularly useful. These are some of their comments:

 - **Background to the scheme and hoped outcomes to understand the context**
 - **Having the opportunity to think through how the programme could run specifically within our school**
 - **Looking at example models of different types of peer support**
 - **Mind maps - having the opportunity to discuss with other members of staff what we are going to do**
 - **Being able to communicate with a work colleague about this without interruptions**
 - **Case studies and DVD footage**
• *Love the folder and paperwork so can study more thoroughly*

Finally, attendees were invited to suggest ways in which the training day could have been improved. Some suggested more information prior to the event would have been useful, and others would have liked opportunities for more interaction with colleagues.

This feedback will be useful in informing planning for year 3 and arrangements are already in hand to provide a more detailed briefing on the benefits and potential outcomes of peer support, particularly for those attending the project coordinator training.

The inclusion of DVD footage to demonstrate peer support in action – new for this year - was well received although some staff would have welcomed specific examples based in primary schools and to have seen a better gender balance in relation to the peer mentors. While both the secondary and the female bias are representative of peer support nationally these points have been noted as needing attention in future.
4. Working with Pupils

**Deciding who should be peer supporters**

All project schools were invited at the outset to consider which pupils they would like trained as peer mentors/buddies and a range of dates were provided from which they were asked to select a training date for pupils at their school. Some schools had very clear ideas about which pupils to involve and why, and in these cases pupil training was able to take place shortly after the coordinator training. Other schools needed more time to firm up their choices and in some cases put in place procedures and systems prior to commencing.

In most cases school readiness determined the pupil training timetable but inevitably, given the number of entirely new projects and the timescales involved, some schools found themselves agreeing pupil training dates earlier than they would have liked. This is reflected in some of the later feedback on the programme and may have had an impact on some schools’ overall progress in taking the project forward.

The choice of which year group to involve rested with schools and while the pros and cons related to this choice were discussed at the coordinator training sessions, primary schools were initially advised of the sustainability benefits of working with year 5 pupils. In addition to the relative maturity of year 5 pupils within the school, these included having trained pupils able to continue into year 6 with the possibility of involving them in training sessions for new peer mentors/buddies the following year.

**Peer Mentor/Buddy training**

Training sessions for pupils as peer mentors or buddies commenced in schools on 29 November and all 20 in-school sessions were completed prior to the Spring half term break on 14 February.
As in the previous year, most of the training sessions were 2-3 hour morning sessions to fit in with individual school timetables.

In all, 463 pupils against a target of 400 joined the programme and attended a peer mentor/buddying training session. Of these, 79% were from the primary sector with the remaining 21% being secondary/secondary special school pupils.

Of these primary sector pupils, a majority of peer supporters (57%) were drawn from year 5, with 13 of the 15 primary schools involving at least some year 5 pupils, resulting in Year 5 pupils making up 45% of the whole project cohort.

Roughly equal numbers (16%) of primary peer supporters were then drawn from years 4 and 6, with the remainder being largely year 3 pupils.

At secondary level, year 8 peer supporters were the most prevalent accounting for 44% of secondary pupils trained, with year 10 the next most popular at 21%. In fact, 3 of the 5 secondary schools involved at least some year 8 & year 10 pupils as peer supporters. The year group breakdown was as shown in Figure 5.

When recruiting pupils as peer supporters schools for the most part adopted one of two patterns, either involving just one or at most two year groups, or otherwise drawing pupils from across the school.

Most of the 15 primary schools focused on just one or two year groups, but 3 of the primary schools involved pupils across three or more years. In the secondary sector 3 of the 5 schools focused on just one year group, while the remaining two schools involved a spread of pupils across 4 or more years.
This range to some extent reflected the selection process used by schools when deciding who to involve as peer supporters. Given that the training was available to up to 30 pupils, some schools elected to involve a whole year group (and in the case of one very small school – the smallest school in West Sussex – 3 whole year groups!) to attend training with decisions on selection to follow. Others opened it up to volunteers with an application process either before or after training and some adopted both application and selection processes.

**Baseline and training evaluation**

All pupils completed evaluation forms prior to and immediately following their training session.

In most cases the baseline evaluation form was completed immediately prior to the training session. Where this was not feasible or when a school particularly wanted to deliver the baseline form separately it was completed a day or so before the training day.

An analysis of the baseline evaluations indicated that 60% of those attending the peer support training were female. This suggested that the number of male peer supporters was marginally up on the previous year though the proportions were still largely consistent with the usual approximately two-thirds female, one-third male split which remains surprisingly consistent in mentoring and volunteering schemes and generally holds regardless of age or project.

A very simple form with smiley faces was used for the training evaluation given that almost 80% of pupils were primary age and some were as young as eight. Following the training 93% of pupils said they had a good understanding of peer mentoring, compared with 21% prior to training, and 97% reported feeling more confident about being a peer mentor after the training.
5. Finding the Right Approach

**Mid-term project updates and school visits**

In early March and just a few weeks after the final pupil training session all schools were contacted and asked to complete a short project update form on progress with their project. At the same time project coordinators were offered a 1-1 meeting at their school to review progress and pick up any issues. By mid May 15 of the 20 schools had submitted reports and 13 coordinators had taken up the offer of a review meeting.

At the start of the summer term all schools were also encouraged to complete Appendices 1 and 2 from their toolkits (Needs analysis and action plan and Statement of aims, outcomes and indicators respectively) to provide more detail about their individual projects.

**Models, locations and logistics**

From these updates and subsequent conversations with schools it was apparent that most schools now had projects up and running and there were some real success stories coming through.

Initial feedback from most schools was positive and already providing evidence of benefits from involvement with the programme. For example:

"The training went well, with lots of positive feedback from the students."

"The increased status that came with all the training, lanyards and materials really helped elevate the role and increase the children’s self esteem. Many aspects of the training helped the children think about their role and also increased their confidence in dealing with situations."

"We were delighted with it all and very pleased that the children…. left a good impression."

"When we call a Peer Mentor meeting to discuss issues ALL of the Mentors happily attend and want to speak up and share their experiences – it has been extremely positive in this way as the pupils have embraced and relished the fact that they have been chosen."

"We have a display with all of their names and days on it. There has been an assembly too to explain to the children exactly what Peer Mentoring is all about."

"As staff we are, as the year has progressed, able to recognise those children who will be good candidates for Mentors next year – these children would not necessarily be those who would be selected to be prefects, but those who understand how it feels to experience emotional /friendship difficulties at school."

"We feel that the lanyards are a very important element to make the children visible and to show the importance that as a school we put on the scheme."
Models of peer support

Schools had begun to introduce a range of models and mechanisms of peer support, with most focusing on one particular model e.g. playground or 1-1 matches, although some were using a mix of two or three activities e.g. drop-in supported by 1-1 matches. Project reports indicated that three main models of peer support were being used: playground support (including drop-in, friendship hut), needs based matched 1-1 support and reading support.

The first of these, playground support usually involves buddies or peer supporters being on duty at break or lunchtime on a rota basis in a designated area such as the playground, library or other dedicated space. Support is provided on an ad hoc unmatched basis when a pupil approaches with a problem or when a situation is identified as needing addressing. For example:

"Peer mentors are on a rota and out and about on the Playground and in the Friendship Huts during lunch time play."

"Everything is going beautifully, the children have been very responsive to the programme and we have children 'on duty' at each breaktime. The children are clearly visible on the playground with the lanyards, they wear them all day when it's their turn to be on duty. They are in teams for each day of the week."

The second frequently used model is needs based matched 1-1 support and involves usually weekly peer support sessions of around 30 minutes involving trained peer supporters matched with pupils who have either requested support or have been identified by school staff as likely to benefit from peer support.

This model was used at both primary and secondary level and examples of projects included sixth formers providing 1-1 matched support weekly for pupils across Years 7 to
10, while at primary level buddies from across Years 2-6 provided 1-1 matched support to pupils across all school years based on individual needs identified by staff.

Finally, reading support can be offered either on a matched or ad hoc basis and is organised as a regular 20-30 minute session within the school timetable or used as one of a range of activities available to pupils as an alternative to play during break or lunchtime in a library or other drop-in facility. For example:

"Matches between vulnerable year 3 children and reliable year 5 children who have had similar experiences are working well. The project is fitting in well with our school ethos and actively promoting our mission statement ‘caring for each other and learning together’.”

One primary school meanwhile has taken reading support to a whole new level as their whole school approach involves peer supporters leading a half hour reading session involving all pupils on roll every Friday afternoon.

**Logistics and other issues**

Despite all the positive feedback, some schools were clearly struggling with logistics and others with staffing issues and at least 4 schools had encountered significant problems as a result of which they had yet to commence their peer support project. Even some of those that had got things underway had experienced glitches often as a result of conflicting priorities.

Examples of some of the comments received from schools are as follows:

"It has taken time to organise how best to use the Peer Mentors. The Playground has been identified as an issue that would benefit from Peer Support. There are a number of support schemes in place and it was making sure we made the best use of our Peer Mentors and then re look at all the interventions for next year”.

"very hard for Yr 6 to be fully operational over the next 3 weeks due to SATS practice and final tests. We imagine project relaunching properly after SATS”.

"Due to other commitments this year the Peer Mentoring programme has been delayed but now as we are three weeks into the project there has definitely been a positive effect and we will continue to improve and extend the project.”

By June however most had managed to address any issues and 15 of the 20 schools had a well established pattern of peer support activities.

These would either be daily breaktime and/or lunchtime sessions usually in the playground and mostly on a rota basis or weekly meetings in set locations such as the library, classroom or hall with time allocations of between 20 and 45 minutes per session.
6. Endpoint Evaluation for Co-ordinators

In June 2014 project coordinators were asked to reflect on what had been achieved during the year and to provide feedback on their projects both verbally at network meetings set up to enable project coordinators to share experiences and through endpoint questionnaires.

Endpoint responses were received from coordinators at 14 of the 20 schools participating in the programme (12 primary schools and 2 secondary schools).

**Peer support models**

Coordinators were initially asked which model or models of peer support they had introduced in their schools following training. Their responses are shown at Figure 6.

Playground support was easily the most popular model of peer support, and was adopted by more than 70% of programmes - perhaps not surprising given the proportion of primary versus secondary schools involved in the programme. The majority of mentors trained were Key Stage 2 pupils (excepting the Bramber Buddies from Bramber First School who were all year 3 pupils) and some schools then focused on them providing support to Key Stage 1 pupils. This seemed to work particularly well and younger children for the most part appreciated the attention and support of an older child in the school.

At some schools, however, mentors were asked to offer support to pupils in both key stages, or were given the option of choosing one key stage over another. This generally still worked well in those cases where mentors were at least a year above those being offered support and some mentors were comfortable offering support even to peers of around the same age.

However, it was clear from feedback that offering support to peers of the same age was not without its challenges. In such cases, some mentors reported receiving negative comments from same age peers who appeared to question their position or attempt to ridicule them. This may have been particularly prevalent in those projects where mentors were selected by staff rather than through a more open process and schools encountering these issues will need to review their approach to ensure that the process works for both mentors and mentees.
A clear second option adopted by over 40% of schools was 1-1 matching. This model appeared to work well for both primary and secondary project schools this year, and in secondary schools took the form of needs-based 1-1 support often addressing academic as well as emotional issues.

At primary level 1-1 matching was a popular means of providing reading support and at least one school found peer supported reading sessions involving mentors to be a useful part of their strategy to address shortcomings in reading ability identified by Ofsted. Another primary school also used a needs-based format for the project with pupil needs across all year groups identified by staff and addressed through peer support sessions again.

Other models used were very much supplementary to the main model adopted although one particularly innovative project aimed to create a “more harmonious, less threatening and more peaceful playground” by providing two drop-in Friendship Huts for pupils (one each for Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2), operated by mentors and supported by a staff member. As this project was run exclusively during the lunchtime period it

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond their control, five schools (two primary, two secondary and one secondary special school) were unable to take the project beyond the initial pupil training stage and so did not contribute to the end evaluation. This was due to a mixture of staff sickness and staff leaving the school or their time being reallocated within the school to alternative priorities. By training two staff members per school the project sought to mitigate against circumstances such as this and therefore this is clearly an area requiring further attention in the future.
**Issues addressed**

Project Coordinators were also asked to identify which issues the project had helped them to address and pupils supporting each other came top of the list with all coordinators identifying this as a key aspect of their project.

Other responses confirmed that schools then found the programme most helpful in addressing friendship issues (92.9%), in resolving conflict without adult intervention (71.4%) and addressing behaviour issues (64.3%).

![Figure 7](image)

These are all aspects of the project focusing on interpersonal and relationship issues and coordinators clearly felt that peer support was effective in helping schools manage these often complex and undoubtedly time consuming aspects of school life. As a result, coordinators also felt peer support helped improve the quality of playtimes (42.9%) and helped promoting core school values. Again, in response to this question, reading support was mentioned while at least one primary school was involving mentors in working with pupils with dyslexia therefore helping to support special needs.

**Benefits for Mentors and Mentees**

Coordinators were then asked to identify how mentors and mentees had benefitted from their involvement in the project.

The three main benefits for mentors identified by coordinators were increases in self-confidence and improvements in self-esteem and relationships and all coordinators agreed that the most marked benefit for mentors was increased self-confidence as indicated in Figure 8.
For mentees, coordinators responses were more spread but most felt that mentees benefitted most from improved relationships. Other main benefits identified for mentees were increases in self-confidence, improved self-esteem and enhanced emotional resilience.

Additional benefits and unexpected outcomes

Project coordinators were asked about any additional benefits they had seen and about any unexpected outcomes from the peer support programme.

Benefits and unexpected outcomes identified by primary school staff included:

“I have noticed some very unselfish behaviours, where children are really thinking of others sometimes sacrificing their own playtimes.”

“The staff have remarked on the playground and playtimes being happier and children are much calmer. There have been less notes in the “Worry Box” and less friendship issues at playtime.”

“Children have enjoyed the quiet games in the relaxation boxes and have valued the opportunity to do something quietly with Playground Mentor support if they want it.”

“We take part in ......a Country Dancing Festival each year, as a whole school, and children have to practice the dances with partners. It was really easy for us to ask the children to work with their Reading Buddies and they were happy to do this. They worked really well together and it cut out all of the arguments of who would work with who – previously the sessions have been quite disrupted at the beginning because of this. As a consequence the sessions were more fun, more successful in terms of learning and far easier to run. The atmosphere was much happier and children’s relationships
with their buddies were furthered. As a staff we did not expect this added benefit of Reading Buddies!"

"It was a good decision to train both Year 5 and 6 so that when Year 6 leave we have some experienced Peer Mentors to carry on the role and to help train other Mentors next September."

"I have found that if the children are given external training and a high profile within the school they respond to the role with far more commitment and enthusiasm."

Benefits and unexpected outcomes identified by secondary school staff included:

"A willingness from mentors to help and support other students at any time (including lessons and break time)."

"Using student mentors has a huge impact on other students who require support. They feel supported by those who have been there and know the problems they are facing. It is highly valued by all."

**Impact on Staff and School**

Finally, Coordinators were asked about the extent to which their involvement with the project had impacted on their own confidence and professional practice and on the school as a whole. Responses from the 14 coordinators who completed the questionnaire are shown in Figure 9.

![Graph showing responses](image)

The impact in each case was overwhelmingly positive with 12 of the 14 Coordinators agreeing that their confidence had increased, and all 14 agreeing or agreeing strongly that the project had both enhanced their own professional practice and had a positive impact on the overall ethos of the school.
7. Endpoint Evaluation for Mentors and Mentees

In June 2014 project coordinators were asked to invite mentors and as many mentees as could be identified to provide feedback on their experience of the project.

A total of 207 mentors from 14 schools (12 primary schools and two secondary schools) completed and returned feedback forms representing 45% of mentors who had received training.

As can be seen from Figure 10 the majority of mentors who provided feedback were from years 5 and 6 accounting for 67.7% of responses. This is reasonably representative given that 58% of all mentors initially trained were from Years 5 and 6.

Mentors were asked to identify from a range of options what they had helped other pupils with and their replies are summarised in Figure 11.

As can be seen, friendships was the main area of support identified, followed by behaviour and confidence, responses largely consistent with those of coordinators.
Mentors were also asked what they liked most about being a mentor.

Here is a selection of their responses:

"That I’m helping other children and getting to know them and look out for them,” Y5

"Seeing a younger child learn and listen to me as if I was an adult,” Y6

"Helping others so they have a better life,” Y6

"Knowing you are doing a good thing and helping others,” Y6

"I really liked to be able to help someone who was struggling at school. I gave them some tips and told them a little about how I felt. They liked it that I had felt the same when I started.” Y8

"I managed to get the mentee to get to school on time,” Y9

"I could help a year 7 who was finding it hard to settle in… He seems much better now and has now made some new friends. He is coming to school more,” Y9

"Helping build her confidence in maths and seeing a visible change in her confidence,” Y12
Both mentors and mentees were asked to indicate on a scale of 0-10 how they felt both before and after being involved in the programme. In the case of mentors, they were asked to rate their confidence level before and after being a mentor.

**Figure 12**

How confident did you feel before you were a Peer Mentor/Buddy? (0 = Not very confident 10 = Very confident)

**Figure 13**

How confident do you feel now as a result of being a Peer Mentor/Buddy? (0 = Not very confident 10 = Very confident)
As indicated in Figure 12, confidence levels for mentors before they were a mentor ranged across all points 0 - 10 with around 35% selecting points 8-10, and 15% feeling confident enough to rate themselves as 10.

Confidence levels as reported by mentors however appear to have increased significantly after being a mentor, as shown in Figure 13. While confidence levels for some were still low this time almost 87% selected points 8-10, while 45.4% now felt confident enough to rate themselves as 10. Being a mentor clearly had a significant impact on confidence.

Meanwhile, very similar questions were asked of the 69 mentees who completed and returned their feedback forms. As can be seen in Figure 14 responses were received from children in reception through to year 10, with the greatest number of responses (22.4%) received from year 3 pupils.

Although the feedback forms used took account of the age of respondents and used smiley faces to provide an additional visual cue it was apparent that feedback from some of the youngest children had to be gathered verbally by adults or older peers who then completed forms on their behalf. Nevertheless, it was clear that in most cases tremendous efforts had been made to record exactly what was said thus ensuring as accurate a response as possible.

Mentees then were asked to rate how they felt before and after having a mentor from 0= Not very happy, through 5=I felt OK to 10=I feel very happy.
As can be seen from Figure 15, before having a mentor the most popular choice was 5 as chosen by 22.7% of mentees, while 25.3% rated themselves at 8-10 on the happiness scale and 13.3% rated themselves at 10.

After having a mentor these happiness self ratings increased significantly with 77.4% of mentees rating themselves at 8-10 and 40% rating themselves at 10.

Consequently, having a mentor appears to have significantly increased mentees’ happiness levels (see Figure 16).
8. Learning Points & Recommendations

Based on self report evaluations from project coordinators, mentors and mentees there are significant benefits to participants and many positive outcomes to be gained from introducing peer support into schools. There are, however, a few key elements that need attention at the outset to try to ensure the best possible experience for participants.

It might be expected that there would be huge demand from schools for an effectively free (fully funded by WSCC) training programme for staff and pupils, with resources and support included. However, the level and speed of take-up from both cohorts (2012/13 and 2013/14) underlined the extent to which schools have many and various conflicting priorities. Some schools already had a peer support project in place and others felt it was not a priority for them. Others were focusing on impending Ofsted visits or managing organisational changes or simply cited too many initiatives.

While it is recognised that more can be done to highlight the benefits of peer support for emotional health and wellbeing it is recommended, nevertheless that sufficient time be allowed for senior staff to consider introducing a project, and for planning and making staff available for training. Because of this it is further recommended that commitment to introducing peer support be made in every case either by the headteacher or a member of the senior management team.

A second key consideration relates to the staff nominated to run peer support on behalf of the school and the potential impact of staff movement on the success of projects. It is recommended, therefore, that at least one of the two staff members attending the coordinator training be a permanent and if possible full-time member of the staff team.

Finally, with any project issues in relation to the speed and ease of gathering monitoring data are paramount and it is recommended that online mechanisms are utilised whenever possible and that a framework for data collection is put in place at the outset.
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Maggie South, Health Improvement Specialist (Healthy Schools)
Neil Johnson, Programme Manager, Emotional Wellbeing, Children & Families Team
10. Appendices

Appendix 1

Participating Schools

Primary Schools
Bramber First School, Worthing
Eastbrook Primary Academy, Southwick
Laburnum Grove Junior School, Bognor Regis
London Meed Primary School, Burgess Hill
Manor Field Primary School, Burgess Hill
North Lancing Primary School, Lancing
Orchards Middle School, Worthing
Plaistow & Kirdford Primary School, Billingshurst
Sheddingdean Community Primary School, Burgess Hill
Shipley CE Primary School, Horsham
St Augustine’s CE Primary School, Haywards Heath
St John’s Catholic Primary School, Horsham
St Wilfred’s Catholic Primary School, Burgess Hill
Swiss Gardens Primary School, Shoreham-by-Sea
Westbourne Primary School, Chichester

Secondary Schools
Angmering School, Littlehampton
Chatsmore Catholic High School, Worthing
Sackville High School, East Grinstead
St Phillip Howard Catholic School, Chichester

Special Schools
Manor Green College, Crawley