

Putting the Community First

BARNET
LONDON BOROUGH

Restorative Approaches in Primary Schools

An Evaluation of the Project Co-ordinated by
The Barnet Youth Offending Service



Summary

In 2004 The Barnet Youth Offending Service (BYOS) introduced the restorative approaches initiative within Barnet primary schools. The number of schools receiving restorative approaches (RA) training has increased over time and in 2008, in keeping with the Youth Justice Boards' 'key elements of quality service development', the decision was made to conduct an evaluation of the extent to which the project's aims have been achieved.

The RA trained schools reduced fixed term exclusions by just over half (51%) while fixed term exclusions in non RA trained schools increased by just over two thirds (65%).

Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered for the purpose of this evaluation.

Qualitative data relating to the aims of the RA initiative was collected from the schools that had received Restorative Approaches training. A staff representative from each school completed a questionnaire via a structured interview carried out by an independent researcher.

This information was gathered in an attempt to measure their perceptions relating to the extent to which since receiving the RA input:

- there had been a reduction in the number of incidents involving bullying, inter-personal conflict and victimisation;
- staff and pupils' perception of how victimisation is handled within the schools had improved;
- there had been an increase in staff's confidence in dealing with challenging situations;
- there had been an increase in pupils' responsibility for their actions and behaviour.
- additional information was gathered relating to the general atmosphere of the schools and any perceived changes in the levels of calm and safety.

Quantitative data was also gathered in an attempt to measure the extent to which the main aim of the RA initiative, to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions, had been achieved. The Local Authority figures for the rate of fixed term exclusions

for the schools that had, and had not, received the RA input were analysed and compared for this purpose.

A consideration of the results revealed that to a large extent, the main aims of the RA Initiative have been achieved. The staff representative's responses suggest that there has been a significant increase in staff's confidence in, and actual ability to manage conflict and incidents of victimisation and pupils taking responsibility for their actions. These improvements imply that there has been significant changes in both the staff and pupils' management of conflict and bullying. Consideration of the data also indicates that there has been an increase in the positivity, calmness and safety within many of the schools involved with the RA project.

The information relating to the amount of fixed term exclusions pre and post RA input reveal that there has also been significant reductions in the number of fixed term exclusions within the schools trained in RA and a marked increase in the number of fixed term exclusions within the schools who have not been trained. The RA trained schools reduced by just over half (51%) while increasing by just over two thirds 65% within the non RA trained schools.

These results imply that there has been a wider influence of these changes and that several of the aims of the project have been achieved. Overall the results indicate that the aims of reducing the number of fixed term exclusions, to improve staff perceptions of how victimisation is

handled, to increase staff confidence in dealing with challenging situations and to increase pupils' responsibility for their actions and behaviour have been achieved. It is also suggested that the input may have improved the atmosphere and perceived level of calmness and safety within the schools suggesting a more positive environment for both staff and pupils.

The benefits of being involved in the Restorative Approach suggest a reduction in risk factors such as exclusion from school and an increase in protective factors such as an increased ability to take responsibility, problem solve and an increase in self esteem and mental well being.

The RA initiative is in its early stages of development and the findings of the evaluation imply that the service is very effective.

The implications of these findings are discussed in more detail in the following report. Recommendations for improvements to the existing study and any future evaluations are also outlined.

The benefits of being involved in the Restorative Approach suggest a reduction in risk factors such as exclusion from school

Introduction

In consideration of the influence of environmental factors associated with the development of conduct disorder and delinquency, an ongoing aim of the BYOS support to young people is to reduce the prevalent risk factors associated with the development of child and adolescent conduct disorder and delinquency/offending behaviour. These include, risk factors such as truancy, exclusion from school and peer pressure (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Therefore, one of the targets of the BYOS is to develop provisions to support mainstream schools through the Restorative Approaches input.

The Restorative Approaches Programme incorporates strategies that teachers and pupils can use for conflict resolution

Excluded young people are more likely to get involved in crime: nearly two thirds of young offenders of school age who are sentenced in court have been excluded from school or truant significantly. Children excluded from school tend to be those who have exhibited ongoing conduct problems and because of this tend to have poor relationships with teachers and often become viewed as 'trouble makers'. These children also tend to receive less encouragement and support and more criticism and disciplinary action (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; cited in Webster-Stratton, 1994).

Caroline Webster Stratton, an international expert on the development of interventions to reduce conduct problems in children (selected by U.S Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention as an exemplary best practice program) advocates approaches that, in addition to supporting parents, also support teachers and pupils. She also reported that 50% of the conduct disordered children with whom she had worked had been excluded from three or more classes by the time they reached the second grade (eight years of age) (Webster-Stratton, 1994).

Numerous research studies that have been subjected to numerous randomized control evaluations have evidenced excellent effectiveness of support programs that utilise child/pupil social skills and problem solving approaches to reduce conduct problems of children in primary schools

(Webster Stratton, 2003). The Restorative Approaches Programme incorporates strategies that teachers and pupils can use for conflict resolution; thus, promoting the development of social skills and problem solving abilities in primary school children.

The research shows that the introduction of any social skills and problem solving curriculum is likely to decrease negative behaviour and peer aggression and disruptive behaviours in the classroom (Webster Stratton, 1994). Moreover, that any program that promotes the social, emotional and academic competence in children is likely to increase pupils:

Social skills

Understanding of feelings (empathy)

Academic engagement and co-operation with teachers

The Restorative Approaches initiative is a project run within schools that pupils and teachers can use to promote their management of bullying and conflict within school and therefore aims to support and develop these competencies in the pupils that it engages. A main aim therefore, is to demonstrate a reduction in the risk factors that increase the likelihood of a young person offending.

Aims and Objectives of the RA Input to Barnet Primary Schools

Project aims

1. To reduce number of incidents involving bullying, inter-personal conflicts and victimisation in the primary schools selected
2. To reduce the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions from within the selected primary schools in the Borough of Barnet
3. To reduce the number of unauthorised absences in targeted schools
4. To improve staff and pupil perception of how victimisation is handled in schools
5. To increase staff confidence in dealing with challenging situations
6. To increase pupil responsibility for their actions and behaviours.

Project objectives

1. To provide training to school staff on various aspects of the Restorative Approach.
2. To assist staff in running INSET sessions in schools.
3. To run conferences/mediation in schools when required.
4. To provide information about training peer mediators to staff so that they are able to run courses for pupils.

Target group

The pupils in the following schools:

- Barnet Hill Primary School
- Barnfield Community Primary School
- Bell Lane Primary School
- Brunswick Park Community Primary School
- Childs Hill Primary School
- Clitterhouse Primary School
- Colindale Community Primary School
- Coppetts Wood Primary School
- Edgware Community Junior School
- Manorside Primary School
- Martin Junior Primary School
- Northside School
- Summerside Primary School
- The Hyde Primary School
- Wessex Gardens Primary School
- Whittingshill School
- Woodcroft Primary School

In keeping with the Youth Justice Boards' 'key elements of quality service development' the decision was made to evaluate the support offered to the schools involved in the project in an attempt to gain valuable information about their experience and perspective regarding the extent to which the main aims of the project have been achieved.

Therefore, In March 2008 we asked a representative of the teaching staff of each school that had been involved in the RA input to give feedback about their experience of the influence of utilising the Restorative Approach.

The following report summarises and evaluates the feedback/responses received from the schools involved in the Restorative Approaches Initiative and the extent to which the main aims of the provision have been achieved, along with recommendations for any future monitoring and evaluations of it.

The Restorative Approaches initiative is a project run within primary and secondary schools that pupils and teachers can use to promote their management of bullying and conflict within school and therefore aims to support and develop these competencies in the pupils that it engages.

Summary and evaluation of the feedback

Inclusion criteria:

Only the primary schools who had received Restorative Approaches training (Total 17) were asked for feedback and completed the questionnaire. This was an attempt to avoid gaining feedback from the secondary schools who had only recently received training. Of the 17 schools asked to respond 17 completed the interview yielding a 100% response rate.

Data collection:

Qualitative

The respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire via an interview over the phone. To increase the reliability and validity of the responses the interviewer was not known to 100% of the respondents interviewed. The interviewer read out a standard explanation to all respondents explaining that she was an 'independent researcher that has been commissioned by Mari Martin to evaluate the project's effectiveness'. The purpose of gathering the data was explained and they were informed that their responses would be amalgamated within a report and would remain anonymous. They were also informed that they should stop the interviewer at any point in the interview should they have any queries about what is being asked and that they could contact Mari Martin for any future feedback about the evaluation (for more detail, please see introductory paragraph incorporated into the questionnaire in appendix, pg 18).

The questionnaire was developed as an instrument to gather information relating to the aims of the RA provision. Mainly, the school representative's perspective of the influence that using the Restorative

Approaches has had on: the staff's handling of bullying and conflict within school; staff's level of confidence in dealing with challenging situations; the pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions; the degree to which the school environment seems more or less calm, safe and positive. The respondents were also asked to identify any other influences that they felt that the RA input had on the school. Local Authority figures for the rate of fixed term exclusions for the schools that had, and had not, received the RA input were also analysed and compared.

The questionnaire incorporates a total of 7 questions; questions 1-6 offer a choice of five possible responses. The remaining question is open ended and asks respondents to comment on any other influences of the RA input that they had noticed/experienced that they had not been asked about in the previous questions. For more detailed information about the questions incorporated in the questionnaire please see the appendix (pg 18).

More specifically, the questions were designed to gather information about the staff's perception regarding the extent to which:

- the staff's handling of bullying and conflict within school (see question 1 in questionnaire)
- staff's level of confidence in dealing with challenging situations (see question 2 in questionnaire)
- the pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions (see question 3 in questionnaire)
- the degree to which the school environment seems more or less calm (see question 4 in questionnaire)

Of the 17 schools asked to respond 17 completed the interview yielding a 100% response rate.

- the degree to which the school environment seems more or less safe (see question 5 in questionnaire)
- the degree to which the school environment seems more or less positive (see question 6 in questionnaire)
- any other influences that they felt that the RA input had on the school (see question 7 in questionnaire).

Quantitative Data collected

The Local Authority figures for the rate of fixed term exclusions for the schools that had, and had not, received the RA input were also analysed and compared. The inclusion criteria for these figures were to only include primary schools and only those that had been trained before 2005/6. This was an attempt to ensure that the figures (exclusion rates) included represented schools that had been trained early enough to have had adequate opportunity to implement/integrate the techniques and thinking into everyday practice.

Summary of the feedback from the schools

Of the 17 schools asked to respond 17 of these completed the interview yielding a 100% response rate. Of these, there was a 100% response rate for questions 1 – 6 and 35% response rate for question 7.

The influence on staff's handling of bullying and conflict

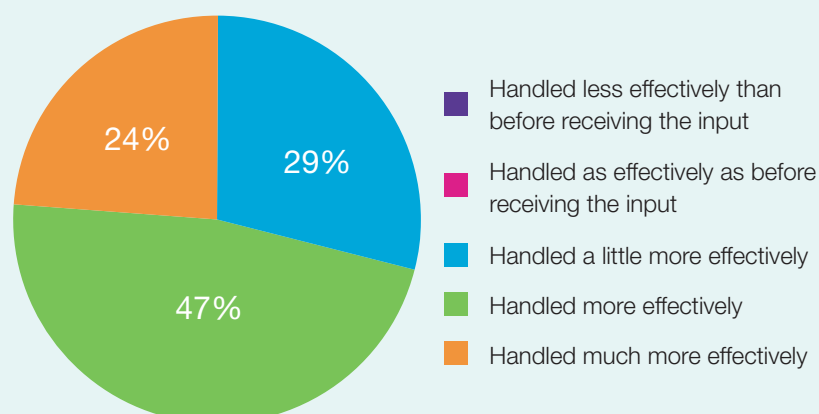
Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the handling of bullying and conflict by staff has been influenced following the school's involvement with the RA input by choosing one of the following responses: handled less effectively than before receiving the input, handled as effectively as before receiving the input, handled a little more effectively, handled more effectively, and handled much more effectively.

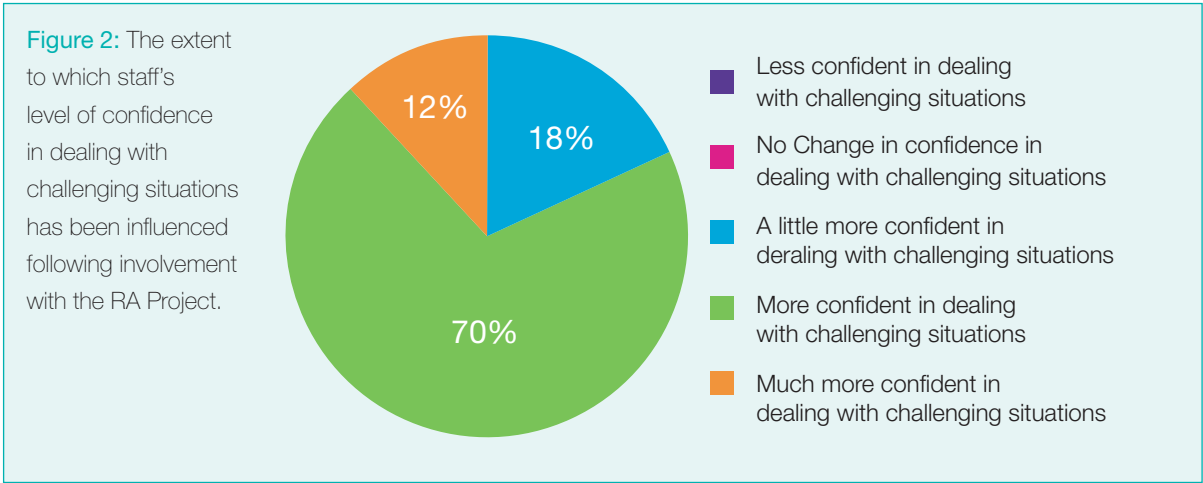
All (100%) respondents reported that they were more able to handle bullying and conflict effectively following the school's involvement with the RA Project. Of these, 47% of respondents reported that they felt that following the school's involvement with the RA Project, staff handled bullying and conflict more effectively, as is shown in figure 1. 29% reported that bullying and conflict were handled a little more effectively and 24% reported that it was handled much more effectively. No respondents reported that bullying and conflict were handled less effectively or as effectively as before receiving the input.

The influence on staff's level of confidence in dealing with challenging situations

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which staff's level of confidence

Figure 1: The extent to which the handling of bullying and conflict by staff has been influenced following the school's involvement with the RA input.





in dealing with challenging situations has been influenced following involvement with the RA Project by choosing one of the following responses: less confident in dealing with challenging situations, no change in confidence in dealing with challenging situations, a little more confident in dealing with challenging situations, and much more confident in dealing with challenging situations.

All (100%) respondents reported that their level of confidence in dealing with challenging situations increased following the school's involvement with the RA Project. Of these, 70% of respondents reported that staff were more confident in dealing with challenging situations following involvement with the RA Project, as is shown in figure 2. 18% reported that staff were a little more confident in dealing with challenging situations and 12% felt much more confident in dealing with challenging

situations. No respondents reported that they felt less confident or that there was no change in confidence in dealing with challenging situations.

The influence on pupils' ability to take responsibility for their actions behaviour

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions/behaviour has increased following involvement with the RA Project by choosing one of the following responses: less able/willing to take responsibility for their actions, no more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions, a little more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions, more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions, and much more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions.

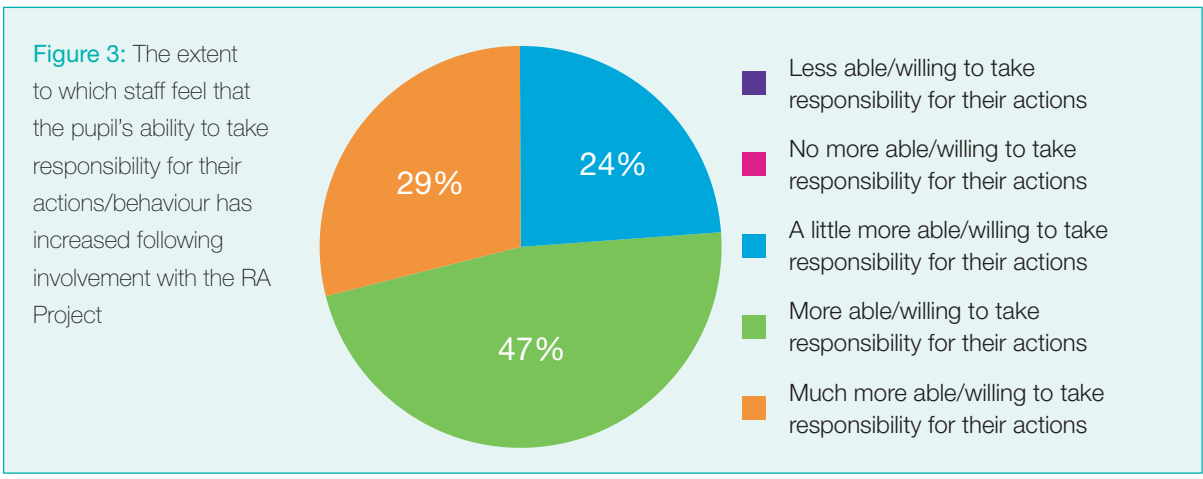
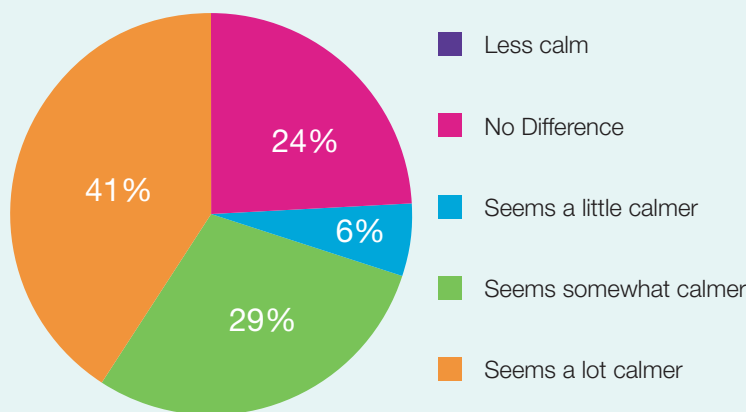


Figure 4: The extent to which the atmosphere within the school has been any more or less calm following involvement with the RA Project.



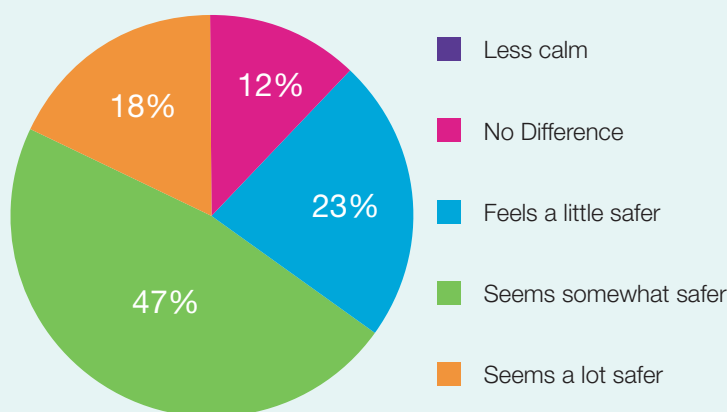
All (100%) respondents reported that there has been an increase in pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions following the school's involvement with the RA Project. Of these, 47% of respondents reported that the pupils were more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions following involvement with the RA Project, as is shown in figure 3. 29% reported that pupils were much more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions and 24% of respondents felt that pupils were a little more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions. No respondents reported that the pupils were less able/willing or no more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions following involvement with the RA Project.

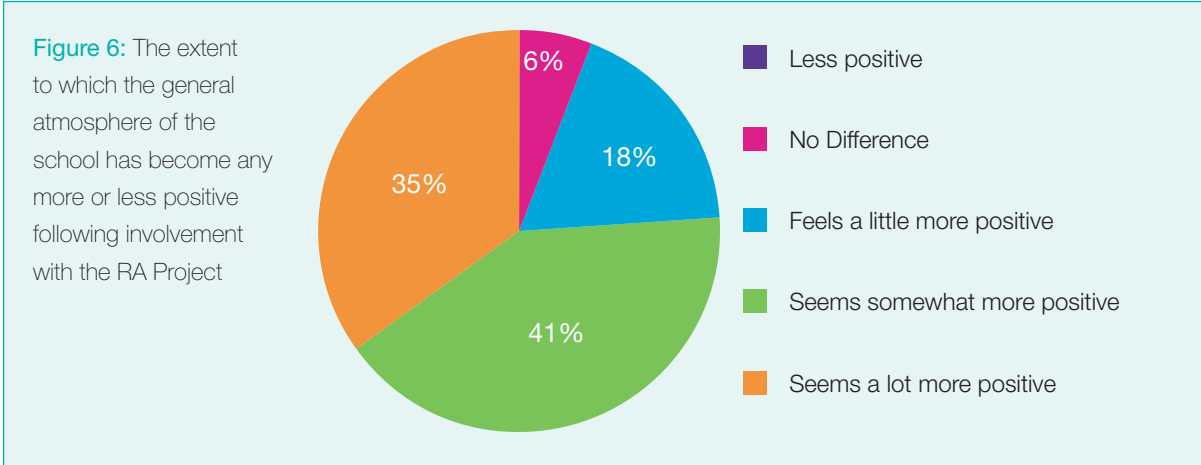
The influence on the atmosphere of the schools. Any more, or less, calm since receiving the input

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the atmosphere within the school has been any more or less calm following involvement with the RA Project by choosing one of the following responses: less calm, no difference, seems a little calmer, seems somewhat calmer, and seems a lot calmer.

76% of respondents reported that there was a calmer atmosphere within the school following the school's involvement with the RA Project. Of these, 41% of respondents reported that the atmosphere within school seems a lot calmer following the RA Project, as is shown in figure 4. 29% of respondents reported that the atmosphere within the school seems somewhat calmer

Figure 5: The extent to which the school has been a more or less safer environment to work in following involvement with the RA Project





and 6% felt that the atmosphere seems a little calmer. 24% of respondents felt that there was no difference in the degree to which the atmosphere within the school was calmer following the RA Project. No respondents reported that the atmosphere within the school had been less calm following involvement with the RA Project.

Any more, or less, positive since receiving the input

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the general atmosphere of the school has become any more or less positive following involvement with the RA Project by choosing one of the following responses: less positive, no difference, feels a little more positive, seems somewhat more positive, and seems a lot more positive.

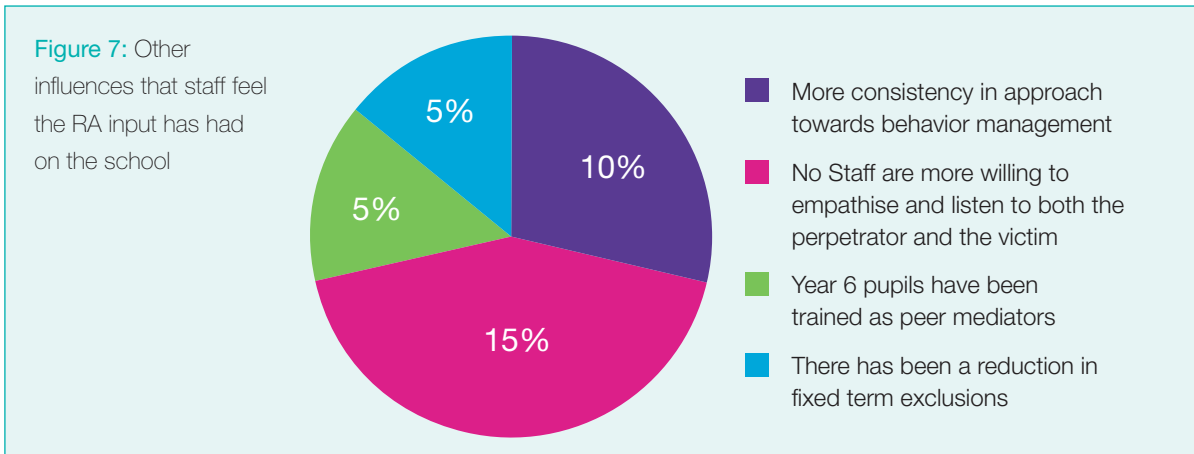
94% of respondents reported that the atmosphere of the school has become more positive following involvement with the RA Project. Of these, 35% of respondents reported that the general atmosphere of the school seems a lot more positive following involvement with the RA project, as is shown in figure 6. 41% of respondents reported that the atmosphere seems somewhat more positive and 18% felt that the atmosphere feels a little more positive. 6% of respondents reported that there was no difference in the general atmosphere of the school following involvement with the RA Project. No respondents reported that the general atmosphere of the school has become less positive following involvement with the RA Project.

Any more, or less, safe since receiving the input

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the school has been a more or less safer environment to work in following involvement with the RA Project by choosing one of the following responses: less safe, no difference, feels a little safer, seems somewhat safer, and seems a lot safer.

88% of respondents reported that their school has become a safer environment to work in following involvement with the RA Project. Of these, 47% of respondents reported that the school seems a somewhat safer environment to work in following involvement with the RA Project, as is shown in figure 5. 23% reported that the school feels a little safer and 18% felt that the school seems a lot safer. 12% of respondents reported that there was no difference in how safe the school was, following involvement with the RA Project. No respondents reported that they feel that the school has been less safe following involvement with the RA Project.

88% of respondents reported that their school has become a safer environment to work in following involvement with the RA Project.



Any other influences that receiving the input has had on the school

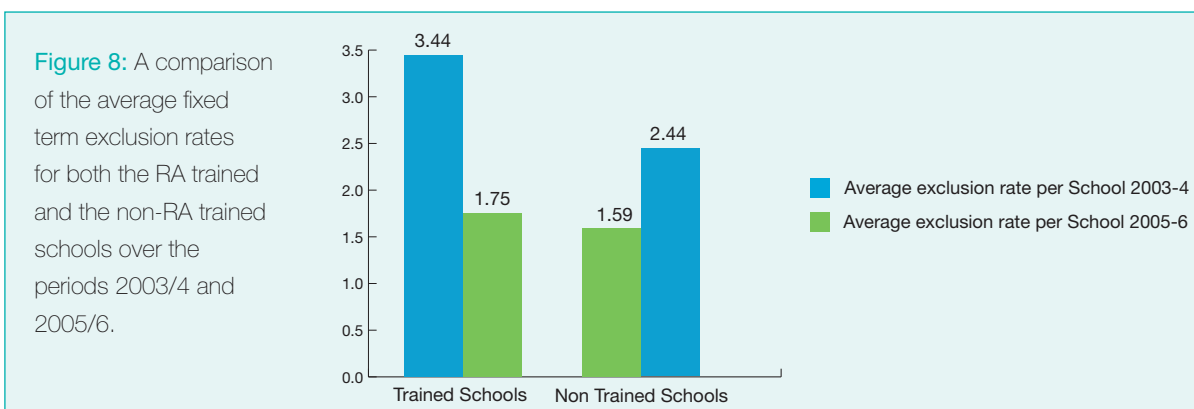
Respondents were asked if they felt that there were any other influences that the RA input has had on the school that the questionnaire had not asked them about.

35% of respondents answered question 7. 15% of respondents felt that following the training, staff are more willing to empathise and listen to both the perpetrator and the victim. 10% of respondents reported that following the RA input there is more consistency among staff in their approach towards behaviour management. 5% reported that following the training there had been a reduction in fixed term exclusions and another 5% reported that year 6 pupils have been trained as peer mediators.

Fixed term exclusion rates of primary schools that have had Restorative Approach input and schools that have not had any input between 2003 and 2006

Total RA trained schools=16
Total non RA trained=32

Figure 8 displays the average fixed term exclusion rates for the schools that had received RA input and those schools that did not over the periods 2003 to 2006. The average exclusion rate per the RA trained schools in 2003/4 was 3.44 and this figure dropped 51% (1.75) in 2005/6 post RA training. The average exclusion rate per non RA trained schools in 2003/4 was 1.59 and increased significantly in 2005/6 to 2.44 indicating a marked increase of 65%. These results reveal that over the period 2003 to 2006 the average fixed term exclusion rates for the RA trained schools reduced by just over half (51%) while increasing by just over two thirds 65% within the non RA trained schools.



Discussion and evaluation

The responses relating to this question reveal that all (100%) of the schools surveyed feel that their confidence in dealing with challenging situations has increased, to varying degrees, since they received the RA input.

The influence on staff's handling of bullying and conflict

It is evident from the responses outlined that all the schools involved in the RA training, to varying degrees, feel that they are managing bullying and pupil conflict within their school more effectively since receiving the RA input. As there are no figures relating to the actual number of incidences of bullying and conflict for the schools involved in the training, it is not possible to establish more precisely the degree to which the project's aim of reducing the incidents of bullying have been realised. However, if staff are more able to manage bullying and conflict among their pupils, this is likely to have a positive impact on the pupils' behaviour as conduct problems are likely to decrease if adults model consistent boundaries and appropriate ways of dealing with conflict situations (Webster Stratton 2003).

The influence of the RA input on staff's level of confidence in dealing with challenging situations

The responses relating to this question reveal that all (100%) of the schools surveyed feel that their confidence in dealing with challenging situations has increased, to varying degrees, since they received the RA input. The fact that none (0%) of the respondents reported that they were 'as' or 'less' confident supports the finding that they all benefited from the RA input in this respect. These results suggest that the projects aim of increasing the school staff's confidence in dealing with challenging situations has been achieved.

If we consider the fact that the majority of respondents (70%) chose, 'more confident' to represent the extent to which staff seem more confident in managing and

did not consider themselves as 'much more confident' and 18% of respondents indicated that they were only 'a little more confident' there is still room for improvement in terms of developing staff's confidence in dealing with challenging situations. However, this may happen over time as the staff gain more experience of using the RA techniques and thinking. These varying degrees of confidence would be expected regardless of any effectiveness of the training and its implications as other variables such as personality and self-esteem have an influence on an individual's perception of self.

As the measurements used rely on the perception of staff representatives and not every member of staff who has been trained in RA these are only direct measures of the representative's experience of increased confidence. In order to establish a clearer picture of the extent to which there have been real improvements in all the staff involved in the RA training and implementation it would be necessary to interview all the staff from each school involved in the project.

The influence on pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions/behaviour

It is evident from the responses from the schools involved in RA that since receiving this input they (100%) have seen a significant increase in their pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions. This and the fact that over three quarters (73%) reported that their pupils were 'more' or 'much more' able to take responsibility and none of the respondents reported that there had been 'no' increase clearly shows that, from the school staff's perspective, the project's aim of increasing the pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions has been achieved. However, considering the

responses indicating that in some schools (24%) pupils' were reported as only a 'little more able/willing to take responsibility' there is still room for improvement.

Considering the data gathering methods it is difficult to establish the extent to which these perceived increases in pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions are a reflection of actual increases. The measures of the degree to which the pupil's are taking more responsibility are crude and leave room for misunderstanding. For example, one respondent reporting 'a lot more able' may actually be reporting the same degree of observed change as a respondent who choose a 'little more able' to take responsibility'. A more reliable way of measuring the extent of change in the pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions would be to set up a system where the pupil's behaviour is systematically recorded over the year. Monitoring sheets could also be designed for this purpose and figures relating to frequency of the desired behaviour could be gathered and later examined. Despite this, these results are very promising as it is unlikely that the school staff would report such developments in pupil functioning if there wasn't some indication of this.

The influence that any changes since receiving the RA input has had on the atmosphere of the schools targeted

The majority (94%) of respondents reported that the atmosphere of the school has become more positive following involvement with the RA Project. Only a minority (6%) reported that there was no change in the positivity of the school since receiving RA input. This is supported by the respondents reports that their schools feel safer (88%) and calmer (76%) since receiving the RA input. Only a small minority of the school's interviewed reported no change in the perceived safety (12%) and calmness (24%) of their school.

These reports that the majority of the schools targeted are feeling safer, calmer and more positive environments in general are likely to have been influenced by the reported benefits relating to staff's confidence in, and their ability to manage challenging behaviour along with the increases in pupil's ability to take responsibility; thus helping to create a decrease in any potential anxiety created by incidences of conflict situations and any perceptions that these may not be managed effectively and an associated increase in safety and positivity within the schools targeted. Therefore, these general improvements in atmosphere support the evidence for the improvements in staff's confidence in, and ability to manage challenging behaviour offering further evidence of the project's aims having been achieved. However, considering the few who did not report any changes these benefits were not experienced by all the schools targeted.

However, there are many other variables that could have influenced these changes in the atmosphere of the school. Yet these very high increases in positivity, safety and calmness since receiving the RA input suggest that this input has been influential to these changes. If it was mainly other factors influencing these high levels of change it would be more likely to remain consistent over time. A more reliable way of measuring the extent to which the RA input is influential in creating these changes would be to examine pre and post perceptions of all the staff and pupils from the schools involved. It would be of use to measure the pupil's perceptions of any change in atmosphere as these could be compared to the staff's perceptions.

These influences are also likely to have a positive impact on the pupil's levels of attendance as they are more likely to want to attend and engage with a school that feels safe, calm and positive. Thus increasing the likelihood of achieving the RA's aim of increasing attendance.

The majority (94%) of respondents reported that the atmosphere of the school has become more positive following involvement with the RA Project.

These results reveal that over the period 2003 to 2006 the average fixed term exclusion rates for the RA trained schools reduced by just over half (51%) while increasing by just over two thirds 65% with the non RA trained schools over the same period.

A more reliable measure of attendance is to monitor and gather attendance figures for pupil's from the school's targeted over the periods relevant to the evaluation. Unfortunately, these figures were not available for this report.

Any other influences that receiving the input has had on the school

Just over a third (35%) of the schools targeted reported that they had experienced other benefits through their engagement with the RA input. These include:

- Staff being more willing to empathise and listen to both the perpetrator and the victim
- An increased consistency among staff in their approach towards behaviour management
- A reduction in fixed term exclusions
- Year 6 pupils have been trained as peer mediators.

The influence of the RA input on the rate of fixed term exclusions

A comparison of the overall fixed term exclusion rates for primary schools who have received Restorative Approaches input and those who have not

These results reveal that over the period 2003 to 2006 the average fixed term exclusion rates for the RA trained schools reduced by just over half (51%) while increasing by just over two thirds 65% within the non RA trained schools over the same period.

The figures relating to the average fixed term exclusion rates per school for those trained in RA for both 2003/4 (pre-RA input) and 2005/6 (post RA input) reveal a significant decrease from an average number of 3.44 exclusions per school in 2003/4 to 1.75 per school in 2005/6 (a reduction of 51%). These results clearly indicate a significant reduction in the fixed term exclusion rates of the schools targeted since they have been

trained and are utilising the RA techniques. Therefore, suggesting that the RA input has influenced this reduction in the fixed term exclusion rates.

Over the same period, the average fixed term exclusion rates of the primary schools that have not received any RA input show a significant increase from an average number of 1.59 per school in 2003/4 to 2.44 per school in 2005/6 indicating an increase of 65%.

The fact that there is no decrease in the exclusion rates for the schools that were not trained supports the position that it is the influence of the RA input that has influenced the decrease in the average number of fixed term exclusions within the schools trained in RA.

Considering these results it is clear that the exclusion rates of the primary schools targeted by the RA project have significantly reduced since these schools have received RA input/training. If we consider the fact that the exclusion rates significantly decreased within the schools that received RA input after training and that as the average exclusion rates per RA trained schools decreased the average fixed term exclusion rates per non RA trained schools increased that the RA input has had a significant impact on reducing exclusion rates regardless of any differences in rates before RA training.

These reductions in exclusions for the RA trained schools suggests that the project's aim of reducing fixed term exclusion rates has been achieved. While the figures for permanent exclusions where not available for use in this report it seems reasonable to assume that as fixed term exclusions decrease so should permanent exclusions as these typically follow a number of fixed term exclusions.

Other factors that might have influenced change

The staff and pupils' management of conflict and bullying are likely to have reduced the rate of exclusions in pupils of the schools targeted. Therefore, the reductions in exclusion rates also lend support to the perceptions of the school staff that they are more able to manage the pupil's challenging behaviour which has had a positive impact on the pupils' overall behaviour. Additionally, the pupils from the schools involved in the RA input are developing their social skills and problem solving skills which may have increased their pro-social behaviour which has resulted in less fixed term exclusions.

If this is the case then it is also likely that there has been an increase in protective factors for these pupils in terms of improved behaviour and attendance as there has been a clear reduction in the risk factors such as exclusion from school. If these pupils are taking more responsibility and their behaviour is improving this is likely to have a positive impact on their relationships within school which is likely to improve their self esteem. So these results may also indicate that the project's aim of increasing the pupils' self esteem may also have been achieved. However, this is only assumed and any reliable measure of this should use a more direct and standardised measure of self esteem pre and post input.

The respondents' reports of other benefits achieved from being involved in the RA suggest that further project aims may have been achieved such as raising children's self esteem and improving their ability to deal with problems as they arise. This is evidenced by the report that some pupils are being trained as peer mediators as this is very likely to improve their confidence and self esteem as well as develop their ability to deal with problems as they arise.

The other benefits reported such as staff being more willing to empathise and listen to perpetrators as well as victims and that they are more consistent in their approach to managing behaviour suggest a shift in the staff's attitude and behaviour towards pupils who engage in bullying and conflict. It is likely that these shifts have had a significant influence on the pupils' behaviour such as the increase in ability to take responsibility and on levels of general compliance and therefore the significant reduction in pupil's fixed term exclusions. Therefore, it seems that the staff's involvement in RA has had a positive impact on their approach to, and management of, pupils with conduct difficulties and that this has had a positive influence on the pupils behaviour and that these factors combined have created a more positive atmosphere within the schools targeted.

The staff and pupils' management of conflict and bullying are likely to have reduced the rate of fixed term exclusions in pupils of the schools targeted.

Conclusion

The school staff's perspectives of the benefits of being involved in the RA program and the significant reductions in fixed term exclusions within these schools indicate, to a large extent, that the main aims of the provision have been achieved.

The reported increase in the positivity, calmness and safety of the schools involved with the RA project and the significant reductions in fixed term exclusions imply that there has been a wider influence of these changes.

The feedback discussed reveals a significant increase in staff's confidence in, and actual ability to manage conflict and bullying incidents along with an increase in the pupils capacity to take responsibility for their actions. These improvements imply that there has been significant changes in both the staff and pupil's management of conflict and bullying. The reported increase in the positivity, calmness and safety of the schools involved with the RA project and the significant reductions in fixed term exclusions imply that there has been a wider influence of these changes. Moreover, several of the aims of the project have been achieved. More specifically, the aims of reducing the number of fixed term exclusions, to improve staff perceptions of how victimisation is handled, to increase staff confidence in dealing with challenging situations and to increase pupils responsibility for their actions and behaviour have been achieved.

Considering the fact that the initiative is in it's early stages of development, to have achieved these aims to the extent discussed is impressive and implies that the service is very effective. Additionally, it is clear from the information gathered from the schools involved in RA that they are very satisfied with the service.

The suggested indirect benefits experienced by the staff and pupils who have been involved in the Restorative Approaches initiative such as raising children's self esteem and improving their ability to deal with problems as they arise indicate that the main objectives of the provision have also been achieved; More specifically, the promotion of mental wellbeing of children, and to raise children's self esteem and improve their ability to deal with problems as they arise.

All the benefits of being involved in the RA initiative suggest a reduction in risk

Factors such as exclusion from school and peer pressure, evidenced by reduced exclusion rates and shifts in culture such as improved behaviour and pupil's being trained as peer mediators. They also imply an increase in protective factors such as the increased ability to take responsibility, problem solve, an increase in self esteem and mental well being.

Recommendations for future evaluations

Despite the positive outcomes discussed and the fact that the RA input to Barnet schools seems to be achieving most of it's aims and objectives the introduction of more reliable measures of the relevant information should produce an increased understanding of the extent to which these objectives have been achieved and a clearer picture of what may be improved.

Any future evaluations of the Restorative Approaches Project may include

- The introduction of monitoring sheets and the use of both pre and post qualitative (staff perceptions) measures will offer a more reliable measure of any reduction in the number of incidents involving bullying, interpersonal conflicts and victimisation in the schools involved in RA should introduce.
- To obtain all the school exclusion figures for any evaluation and comparison as this will offer a more direct measure of any actual reduction in the number of permanent as well as fixed term exclusions.
- The design, and implementation, of questionnaires to measure pupil's perceptions of improvements will offer a more reliable measure of their perspectives relating to any changes of how school staff manage victimisation and bullying within the schools targeted.
- The implementation of a more direct and well validated standardised measurement of child functioning such as The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire pre and post intervention to be completed by school and parents. This measure of changes in the child's overall functioning and behaviour will offer information about the extent to which the aims and objectives relating to the pupils functioning have been achieved.
- In order to establish the reasons why some schools reported no change relating to some of the project's aims it would be useful to develop measures such as questionnaires to examine possible reasons for this.
- A standardised inventory to measure self esteem is a reliable and direct measure of any changes in pupils' self esteem. This could be administered pre and post RA intervention to measure any changes within the schools about to be trained.

Michelle Moore (CPsychol)

April 2008

References:

Campbell & Ewing, 1990; cited in Webster-Stratton, 1994; retrieved from www.incredibleyears.com

Webster-Stratton, 1994; retrieved from www.incredibleyears.com

Webster Stratton, 2003; retrieved from www.incredibleyears.com

Factors such as exclusion from school and peer pressure, evidenced by reduced exclusion rates and shifts in culture such as improved behaviour and pupil's being trained as peer mediators.

RA Input feedback questionnaire

Hello my name is..... As you may be aware from Mari Martin’s recent correspondence, I am contacting you to ask you to answer a few questions. This will only take 2 to 3 minutes and your feedback will be completely confidential. I am an independent researcher commissioned by the RA Project to evaluate its effectiveness. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather data from all the schools that have received RA input and to evaluate it. On completion of this a report will be produced. The answers you give will remain completely anonymous as I do not indicate which school completed which questionnaire. Do you have any questions before we start?

1: As a result of your school's involvement with the RA Project how do you feel that the staffs handling of bullying and conflict has been influenced?	
Handled less effectively than before receiving the input	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handled as effectively as before receiving the input	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handled a little more effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handled more effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handled much more effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>
2: As a result of your school's involvement with the RA Project how do you feel that the staff's level of confidence in dealing with challenging situations has been influenced?	
Less confident in dealing with challenging situations	<input type="checkbox"/>
No change in confidence in dealing with challenging situations	<input type="checkbox"/>
A little more confident in dealing with challenging situations	<input type="checkbox"/>
More confident in dealing with challenging situations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Much more confident in dealing with challenging situations	<input type="checkbox"/>
3: As a result of your school's involvement with the RA Project to what extent do you feel that the pupil's ability to take responsibility for their actions/behaviour has increased?	
Less able/willing to take responsibility for their actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
No more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
A little more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
More able/willing to take responsibility for their actions	<input type="checkbox"/>

Much more able/willing to take responsibility for their actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
4: Since your school has been involved with the RA Project do you feel the atmosphere within school has been any more or less calm?	
Less calm	<input type="checkbox"/>
No difference	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems a little calmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems somewhat calmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems a lot calmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
5: Since your school has been involved with the RA Project to what extent do you feel that the school has been a more or less safer environment to work in?	
Less safe	<input type="checkbox"/>
No difference	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feels a little safer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems somewhat safer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems a lot safer	<input type="checkbox"/>
6: Since your school has been involved with the RA Project has the general atmosphere of the school become any more or less positive?	
Less positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
No difference	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feels a little more positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems somewhat more positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seems a lot more positive	<input type="checkbox"/>
7: Are there any other influences that you feel the RA input has had on the school that we have not asked you about? If so please comment below:	

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions if you have any queries about this evaluation please feel free to ask now.

