

## Building resilience in learners

### Sidmouth College

#### **Problem: What challenges do your school(s) have that need to be addressed?**

We know that absence, whether from school or from class, has a significant impact on pupil outcomes. Increasing numbers of pupils are using exit cards to ask for time out of lessons. The aim of this project is, therefore, to test whether interventions are effective in improving pupils' resilience so that they feel settled in the classroom and are ready to learn. This in turn should have a longer-term impact on a range of factors including pupil progress, behaviour and attendance.

#### **Innovation: How will the innovation help improve the problem you have identified and benefit teachers and learners?**

We will deliver a course that aims to improve pupil wellbeing and resilience to one group of Year 7 pupil selected based on their identified low attendance, achievement, poor behaviour and attitude to learning.

My Big Life is a six-week course based on cognitive behaviour therapy principles. Each session lasts for one hour per week and is delivered as a life skills lesson to a class of 25. The sessions aim to develop pupils' emotional wellbeing and provide them with strategies to cope with difficult emotions and situations. Pupils will be given a small card that summarises the techniques to use as a step before an exit card.

The application of these skills will be supported by a daily reflection journal, supported by trained staff, where pupils record any situations they faced, what strategies they employed and how they feel about the outcome. Over the period of the intervention pupils will have an increasing toolkit of strategies that they will be able to employ.

## Existing evidence: What evidence is there that this innovation will improve outcomes?

There is a well-documented link between pupil attendance and progress (Department for Education, 2015, 2016). This research seeks to find a way of improving pupils' ability to manage their emotions and remain in the classroom. If we know how to support pupils in managing themselves more effectively both teachers and learners benefit.

At a practical level, resilience describes the person that we feel sure will habitually respond to difficult situations with energy, purpose and resolve. In schools, teachers and governors are focused on how to develop resilience when it is otherwise lacking. Such questions arise on the basis of stimulating persistence and motivation that can be applied to school work (Mastens, 2001). Loss of resilience can happen either because a person becomes cognitively overwhelmed by cumulative happenings or because in coping they use up all of their mental and/or physical resources. "Pile-up" is often used to describe this situation, and Hobfoll et al. (2007) argues that "loss spirals" can occur where depleted resources prompt additional losses and resilient people or families cease to be so. Most treatments of resilience are concerned with equipping individuals with ways and means to counter stressors (Ungar, 2004).

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is widely recommended by national treatment guidelines (NICE) for problems such as anxiety and depression. However access to specialist CBT is typically limited to those with more severe and complex problems. An alternative is to deliver access to CBT principles in different ways. Living Life to the Full (LLTTF) is an evidence-based CBT approach, with a series of books using different styles of engagement and aimed at addressing different groups. It has been widely used by adults in community settings, the health service and also via charities across the UK, Ireland and Canada. Published research shows that a guided self-help approach to CBT using resources such as LLTTF can be effective when used with adults with long-term medically unexplained symptoms (Sharpe et al, 2011) and those with low mood and depression (Williams et al, 2013). A pilot study (McClay et al, 2015) and full RCT (submitted to the *British Journal of Psychiatry*) of the LLTTF adult classes confirms the course improves low and anxious mood in adults in an effective and cost-effective way (McClay et al, 2015).

The Living Life to the Full Young Person's (LLTTF-YP) course was funded by a Canadian charity (the Canadian Mental Health Association) with a co-production approach with young people. As part of the Character Education project, five schools looked at addressing wellbeing as a barrier

to character development. The evaluation of the project found that the LLTF-YP course was effective at improving self-reported wellbeing for pupils with initial low scores (Character Education in the East Devon Secondary School Partnership, 2016). The research did not gather information that would have allowed teachers to link this to wider pupil outcomes or research the link between resilience and attendance. We would seek to develop this initial finding by monitoring the wider educational factors; attendance, progress and behaviour. The Character Project data shows a clear improvement in wellbeing but did not link this to other measurable outcomes.

My Big Life is a refinement of the LLTF-YP course, shortened from eight to six sessions, and targeted at those with reduced concentration and reading abilities so as to focus on key skills and messages. Worksheets have been often shortened and made more visually attractive. The key message is that the choices we make can affect whether we live a small, or a Big Life.

**Research question or hypothesis: What effect will the intervention, implemented for how long, with which pupils, have on what outcomes?**

What effect will the 'My Big Life' course, delivered for one hour per week over six weeks, along with supported daily reflection, have on the wellbeing, attendance, progress and behaviour of year 7 pupils currently identified as having low attendance, low achievement, poor behaviour and poor attitude to learning?

In the intervention group when compared to the control group we would expect to see:

- an increase in pupil self-reported well-being (WEMWBS scores increase);
- an increase in percentage attendance;
- a decrease in the number and frequency of behaviour logs;
- a decrease in the number and frequency visits to Student Support;
- a decrease in use of exit cards in lessons;
- an improvement in progress across a range of subjects
- an improvement of pupils' attitude to independent learning which we be reflected in their reported homework effort grade;
- an improvement in their reported attitude to learning.

## Method: Include sample, design, measures, intervention, process evaluation, and analysis

### Sample

Year 7 pupils will be selected based on their identified low attendance, achievement, poor behaviour and attitude to learning. Data will be taken from each school's SIMs to calculate Big 5 scores (see below). The highest scoring 50 pupils in the year group of each school will form the sample.

### Calculation of Big 5 scores

In this method the highest number implies lowest resilience score. All items are standardised to give a score out of 10, giving a maximum total score out of 50.

Data Item	Recorded Data	Standardising to 10 point range	Weighting	Project Comparison
Attendance	% for each pupil	+Difference from 100% multiplied by range ratio	20%	Average % change against control group.
Classwork	1-4 for each subject	(Sum total for all subjects/no of subjects)* Ratio (to get to 10)	20%	Average change against control group
Homework	1-4 for each subject	(Sum total for all subjects/no of subjects)* Ratio (to get to 10)	20%	Average change against control group
C-Points	Integer – year total	Total * to ten adjustment	20%	Average decrease against control group
Progress	Above, On, Below	(Below = 3, On = 2, Above = 1 Total for each subject/no of subjects)* Ratio (to get to 10)	20%	Average increase above control group

### Consent

The parents/guardians of the pupils selected for the project will be informed of the project and given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the evaluation.

**Characteristics of the schools:**

Of the six schools taking part in the research Sidmouth and Clyst Vale are county maintained, and the rest are academies. All of the schools are in small, rural towns and the demographic of pupils is broadly similar. The schools have broadly average, or slightly below average, numbers of disadvantaged learners and pupils with Special Educational Needs.

School	Overall absence for 2015-2016	P8 score 2016
Sidmouth College	4.4	0.02
Honiton Community College	4.9	-0.33
Clyst Vale Community College	6.4	-0.15
The Kings School	4.4	0.14
Axe Valley	5.6	-0.35
Holyrood Academy	4.8	0.58

**Allocation to groups**

The pupils are being selected as a high need group for this type of intervention.

In all of the individual schools the pupils will have their Big 5 score calculated, pupils will be ranked and the top 50 scoring pupils will be alternately allocated to either the intervention or control group. This ensures an even spread of most high need pupils across the two groups:

**Cohort 1:** Intervention group: My Big Life for six sessions and daily reflection journal (25 pupils)

**Cohort 2:** Control group: No intervention, usual lessons (25 pupils)

**Measures**

Data will be taken pre- and post-intervention. With the exception of the WEBWMS all data will be taken from existing school records.

Pupil data

The data will be collected at the same point in each school using the school specific system (SIMS). The pre-intervention data is the reported data for the spring term, the post intervention data will be taken from the data point in the summer term before the summer holidays. The pupil

data to be collected is:

- percentage attendance;
- number of concern or behaviour logs drawn from individual school central system (SIMS);
- previous reported homework grade;
- previous reported attitude to learning grade, taken from teacher report;
- most recent reported progress;
- frequency in use of pupil support;
- frequency in use of exit card in the previous month (log book).

There is some variation on how these measures are reported across the six schools but we will ensure that this variation is documented at the analysis stage. As a set of measures the reporting of behaviour logs, homework and attitude to learning are subjective; teachers have different expectations and therefore may award lower or higher grades depending on their personal standards. The reporting of progress is equally problematic, since the removal of nationally standardised levels means that teachers are using their own systems of measuring progress. This is a relative measure and may indicate that the pupil is better engaged in their lessons but cannot be used draw any direct conclusions.

### Wellbeing

All participants will complete the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEBWMS). WEBWMS is a self-evaluation questionnaire that creates a wellbeing score. In this scale, pupils respond to 14 positively worded items relating to feeling and functioning aspects of wellbeing on a 5 point scale (1 = none of the time, 5 = all of the time). This is then totalled to give a score. Scores are considered to be healthy above 40, while scoring below 40 may be an indicator of low mood or poor wellbeing.

The wellbeing self-evaluation will be taken two weeks into the school term so that the pupils are reflecting on a period of school term rather than holiday. The post intervention WEBWMS will be carried out two weeks after the intervention stops.

We will also track key groups; gender, SEND and disadvantage, to see if there is any significant difference between these groups.

## **Intervention**

### Training and resources

Within each school there will be:

- a project lead with responsibility for the overall project;
- a programme delivery teacher who will run the six sessions;
- a trained TA or support staff who will have daily contact with the intervention group to support the reflective journal.

These staff will receive one day of training from Dr Chris Williams. This will include a full lesson-by-lesson resource pack, including an opportunity to use the worksheets and techniques, and consider how they might be used in practice. Two additional tools (a reminder credit card to carry plus diary record of use of the tools) are also available.

The six sessions have a number of linked worksheets to encourage pupils to practice the skills learned (eight in total). These are summarised in the My Big Life worksheet they are encouraged to turn to whenever they become upset. This asks two questions: "What's been going on?" and "How did it affect you?" This then leads to a third "action" section where the young person describes how they respond – promoted by four short- and eight longer-term resources they can use to improve how they feel.

Project leads will also have a planning and development meeting to ensure parity and quality.

No other staff will be trained as this could potentially influence the control group.

### Implementation of intervention

Pupils in the intervention group will receive a one-hour My Big Life session each week for six weeks. Each session will be delivered as a life skills lesson to a class of 25 with the trained teacher leading the sessions. These lessons will take place at different times in the six schools, but will be delivered during the lesson when the pupils would normally be in a PSHE lesson.

During these sessions pupils cover:

1. understanding your feelings;
2. how to get a Big Life (choosing to face fears and feel better);
3. how to think in a Big Life way;

4. overcoming problems;
5. building inner confidence;
6. staying strong when you feel angry (anger and irritability).

Each session builds on the previous session, building a list of clearly defined skills and resources that can be used to respond to anxious, stressful or annoying situations.

This includes five short-term strategies (designed to replace 'exit cards'), together with eight longer-term skills they can use to understand their feelings, build confidence, face fears and respond differently to problems and upsetting thoughts. Finally they will also learn a form of relaxation/meditation called Tension Control Training. Together these strategies are aimed at pupils who struggle when facing an emotionally charged or difficult situation. The My Big Life response sheet is designed to provide pupils with an alternative response when they feel anxious, upset or annoyed, using CBT strategies to remain in the classroom. Pupils will record in their reflective journal and diary sheet tick list why they used their card.

#### Follow-up support and monitoring of delivery

Project leads will be contacted weekly to ensure that the intervention is going as planned, through both email and phone calls.

All staff will be made aware on the project training day, of the project timeline and key milestones. Project leads are keeping a narrative of the details of how the project is running to ensure that we can report on any unexpected issues. It will be part of the role of the project lead to quality assure both the teaching of the programme and the daily monitoring of the face it cards.

#### **Ethics**

##### *Consent*

The parents/guardians of the pupils selected for the project will be informed of the project and given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the evaluation.

##### *Confidentiality*

Reporting of all pupil data will be anonymised.

#### **Process evaluation**

We will interview six pupils: two each from the top, middle and bottom of the pre-intervention

ranking. This will be included in the final report to enrich and provide pupil voice on the data.

Pupils in the intervention group will be asked:

- Have you learnt anything that helps you to keep going when things are hard?
- Has your resilience changed in the last term?
- Have any parts of the project helped you?
- Have any parts of the project helped you with your behaviour in the classroom?
- Do you think that this project has changed your resilience? How?
- Did the daily reflection help you?

We will also ask the control group:

- Have you learnt anything that helps you to keep going when things are hard?
- Has your resilience changed in the last term?

Staff delivering the programme, staff supporting the intervention group, and project leads will also be interviewed. They will be asked questions such as:

- How did you support the intervention group?
- How often did you meet?
- What did you discuss?

### **Data analysis**

Each school will analyse its own data and produce an evaluation. This will identify where changes in attendance, attitude to learning and progress may be linked to wellbeing scores.

We will use statistical tests on Excel to answer the following:

- Do intervention group pupils with low WEMWBS scores show an increase in scores when compared to the control group?
- Has attendance risen in the intervention group compared to the control group?

- Where there is an increase in WEMWBS scores is there an increase in attendance and a reduction in Big 5 score?
- Has the intervention group Big 5 score reduced compared to the control group?
- Is there any pattern in groups of similar pupils; gender, disadvantaged, SEND and EAL?

**Conclusion: What will happen if your innovation improves outcomes, or not?  
What are the limitations of your evaluation?**

If we find that My Big Life has a significant, positive effect on the wellbeing and resilience (as measured through the outlined academic data) of the intervention group when compared to the control group, we would seek to scale up the study as a random controlled trial. If the effect is purely on wellbeing with no significant effect on the resilience measures we will continue to use My Big Life as an intervention tool to support our pupils' emotional wellbeing.

**Potential limitations**

Evaluation of this type of intervention is complex with measurement of behavioural change varying widely in terms of significance and timescale. Some pupils may take longer to employ the strategies they have learnt or may employ them without recognising that they are doing so. Pupils' emotional literacy may improve significantly through the intervention, this may affect how they self-report in the WEBWMS survey, as they may have a better understanding of their own emotional state. They may then score themselves lower as a result of this better understanding.

Reporting of pupil attitude to learning and homework may vary widely between teachers, with different systems in the six schools. Numbers of behaviour logs tend to increase at certain times of the day and term; this is affected by staff workload and capacity to complete a log. As the pupils are ranked for each individual school this reduces the impact of this variation.

In order to limit the diffusion of treatment to the control group we will limit the information about the research within the school. WEBWMS will be performed with the whole year group so that the control group cannot identify themselves as such, this will reduce demoralisation for the control group. Limited staff training and information regarding the project will limit equalisation though staff compensation with the control group

**Communication**

We will produce a report of the key findings which will be published on the Research Schools Network website. Findings will be shared in education conferences in the south west through both South West TSA and Jurassic Coast TSA.

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