

Hedgehogs Pilot Programme Evaluation Report Executive Summary

“Empowering children and families against sexual abuse”



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Executive summary

The Hedgehogs ('Porcospini') programme is a pilot education initiative aimed at preventing child sexual abuse, funded by the E.U. DAPHNE III programme¹. The lead partner in the pilot, Specchio Magico, an Italian-based organisation, conducts awareness campaigns against child abuse in schools and is keen to further develop its intervention framework. Specchio Magico's vision is the creation and development of a European good practice model for primary prevention in the field of child sexual abuse. It invited the United Kingdom to be part of the pilot, along with the Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain, to draw upon these countries' range of knowledge and experience.

Research suggests that approximately one in six young adults in the UK experienced sexual abuse as a child². Research conducted across Europe suggests this figure could be as much as one in five³. Of the 23,097 child sexual abuse victims reported to police in England and Wales in 2010-11, the majority (64%, 14,819) were aged between 11 and 17 years old. Over a fifth (22%, 4,973) had not yet started secondary school⁴. In the US, 64% of victims are aged less than 12 years old⁵, with children reported to be most vulnerable to sexual abuse when aged between 7 and 13 years old⁶. Research consistently demonstrates that in the majority of cases children are sexually abused by people they know; familiar and trusted adults⁷, contributing towards the low reporting rate of child sexual abuse. It is estimated that three quarters of children who are sexually abused do not tell anybody at the time⁸. This 'hidden' figure reflects key elements associated with child sexual abuse; secrecy, shame, guilt, fear, and often a feeling of complicity.

The Hedgehogs programme tangibly supports the remit of the Department for Education's National Action Plan for Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (2012). The plan recognises the need to intervene at an early stage to increase young people's awareness of the risks, enhance their resilience in case they find themselves in risky situations, and ensure they know who to turn to for advice and support. It also emphasises the role of schools in identifying signs of abuse, in addition to delivering 'age-appropriate information' to children⁹. The Hedgehogs programme was designed to address the elements of complicity, secrecy, shame, guilt, and fear, so children feel able to tell a trusted adult, know they will be listened to and can be protected. The focus was on educating children aged 9 to 11 years old; specified by Specchio Magico, who had run the programme successfully with children within that age bracket. The key objectives of the programme were to:

- 1) Build children's confidence in asking questions and seeking information
- 2) Enhance children's knowledge and understanding about their bodies
- 3) Equip children with the tools necessary to enable them to understand when a situation is potentially risky and what actions to take to protect themselves

¹ European Commission http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants/programmes/daphne/index_en.htm

² Cawson, Wattam, Brooker, & Kelly (2000).

³ Council of Europe (2010).

⁴ NSPCC (2012) http://www.nspcc.org.uk/news-and-views/media-centre/press-releases/2012/12-04-10-sixty-child-offences-a-day/sex-offences_wdn88682.html

⁵ US Department of Health and Human Services (1998).

⁶ Finkelhor (1994).

⁷ Grubin (1998).

⁸ Cawson et al. (2000).

⁹ Department for Education (2012).

- 4) Help children to develop critical awareness and build confidence so they feel able to trust appropriate adults and approach them to talk to and ask for help
- 5) Raise awareness about the programme and provide relevant information to adults (parents, carers and teaching staff) to enable them to support children's learning.

The UK partner to Specchio Magico was Southwark Council, who wanted to prioritise sexual and relationship education as part of a strategy to protect children and young people. Southwark Council, then, approached the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Helen Blackburn & Associates to assist in the development of the lesson materials and delivery of the lessons. Helen Blackburn's expertise lay in social and emotional learning in children and in drawing up lesson plans. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, as the only UK-wide charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of child sexual abuse, brought its experience of working with victims, families and offenders as well as delivering prevention messages to professionals, parents and children.

Three primary schools in Southwark participated in the pilot. The programme consisted of five lessons, with a Confidence Box present throughout, into which children could put questions for the facilitator to answer. The lessons focused on enhancing the children's awareness and understanding of how they can protect themselves from sexual abuse; encouraging them to consider issues of respecting others and themselves, positive and negative touch, body awareness and sharing concerns with a trusted adult.

Delivery of the lessons took place between February and May 2012. A facilitator from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation delivered the lessons, first to all Year 6 children (aged 10 to 11 years old) in all three schools, then to all Year 5 pupils (aged 9 to 10 years old) in the same schools. Lessons were delivered to classes of between 19 and 38 children; a total of 165 children. They ran on a weekly basis and each lasted two and a half to three hours.

A number of evaluation tools were developed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation to evaluate the pilot; including questionnaires (completed by the children, teaching staff, facilitator, and parents/carers), and feedback from meetings (with teaching staff and parents/carers). The results from these tools are below.

Objective 1: to 'build children's confidence in asking questions and seeking information'

The facilitator played a key role in helping to achieve Objective 1, creating a safe environment in which the children felt they could ask questions and talk about the subject matter with adults. Evidence of children's confidence in asking questions particularly started to arise during lesson 2, where puberty was discussed. The children appeared more relaxed and grew in confidence as the programme continued. By lessons 4 and 5, the children from both year groups continued to ask a lot of questions, and many participated freely in in-depth and honest discussions about situations they were unsure or worried about. Feedback indicates achievement of Objective 1, with children becoming more inquisitive both in school and at home. Children seemed to benefit from using the Confidence Box, particularly the Year 6 children, who tended to use the Box more; the younger children were more likely to ask the facilitator questions directly.

Objective 2: to 'enhance children's knowledge and understanding about their bodies'

Essential in achieving this objective was lesson 2. Teaching staff expressed surprise at the range of understanding and prior knowledge children generally had about puberty, and the sources of this information. However, although children knew a lot of words they did not always know their real meaning (e.g. the words 'gay' and 'rape'), and the facilitator spent time addressing and correcting inaccurate beliefs. Children bonded with the facilitator much quicker than expected, making delivery of lesson 2 easier because children were generally already confident enough to discuss the topic. Understanding appeared to improve, and children's behaviour both inside and outside the classroom improved in a number of cases.

For example, a member of teaching staff from one school commented that Year 5 pupils were “*gaining respect for each other and others in regard to differences*”. However, lesson 2 was not long enough to cover everything; two schools brought forward their own sex education classes to answer more of the children’s questions and enhance learning, and one of these schools also planned to further address the issue of gender and sexuality.

Lesson 3 aimed to enhance children’s understanding about their bodies in terms of ‘positive touch’ and ‘negative touch’, and evidence of learning was demonstrated with Year 6 pupils, as teaching staff observed they were “*more aware of touching in the playground playing tag*”. This lesson would benefit from more time, as the facilitator was unsure whether children fully understood the difference between ‘positive touch’ and ‘negative touch’. Of note, the school where children appeared to have grasped concepts to a greater degree, was the school where teaching staff were engaged with the programme for a greater amount of time. The evidence collected indicates achievement of Objective 2. The inaccurate beliefs and knowledge children already hold suggests a need for this topic to be covered at these ages. Allowances need to be made for Year 5 pupils as they took a little longer to grasp concepts, although feedback indicated that the younger children’s understanding did improve with a greater amount of teaching staff engagement with the programme.

Objective 3: to ‘equip children with the tools necessary to enable them to understand when a situation is potentially risky and what actions to take to protect themselves’

The numerous scenarios that children worked through seemed to enhance learning in relation to this objective. Year 6 children appeared to grasp concepts more quickly than the younger age group; they also seemed much more open to discussing topics with each other. Year 5 pupils took a little longer to understand, requiring more background information than the older children. In their workbooks, children from both year groups demonstrated understanding of how to act in a risky situation, for example by drawing a cartoon sketch. There was still, however, some lack of understanding amongst a few children at the end of the programme with regards to identifying risky situations. Evidence indicates that Objective 3 was achieved with a large number of children. However, a tactful approach by the facilitator was required, as some scenarios evoked challenging questions from the children. Additional work was also necessary by the schools to focus on individuals who did not fully comprehend by the end of the programme. One school did not achieve this objective with their Year 5 group as well as the other schools did; the lack of engagement of staff during the lessons appeared to have an impact on the children’s desire to learn.

Objective 4: to ‘help children to develop critical awareness and build confidence so they feel able to trust appropriate adults and approach them to talk to and ask for help’

Evaluation of the section of Objective 3, ‘understand when a situation is potentially risky’ also covered the first part of Objective 4; ‘help children to develop critical awareness’. Therefore, evaluation of Objective 4 focused on the second half, to ‘help children to...build confidence so they feel able to trust appropriate adults and approach them to talk to and ask for help’. The scenarios all encouraged the children to talk to an appropriate, trusted adult if something happened that they were unsure about. Learning was put into practice by children from two of the three schools. In one example, when travelling home on the bus one day, two Year 6 children noticed a child from Year 2 standing at the bus stop with an adult female they did not recognise. They were not happy with the situation, got off the bus, ran to find an adult they trusted, and requested help. Although it is difficult to measure whether all children who attended Hedgehogs lessons would feel confident enough to approach a trusted adult for help in a real-life situation, the above example, along with others, reflects the impact the programme had. Evidence from Objective 1 also suggests a large number of children felt increased confidence in talking to trusted adults. On the whole, Objective 4 was achieved; however, cause for concern was that some children’s home circumstances appeared to prevent them from feeling able to identify an appropriate adult they could confide in, something that schools were responsible for following up.

Objective 5: to 'raise awareness about the programme and provide relevant information to the adults (parents, carers and teaching staff) to enable them to support children's learning'

This objective was only partly achieved. Pre- and post-programme meetings were arranged with the parents and carers of children in each school, providing the opportunity for the adults to learn about the programme, but many did not attend the meetings. The schools varied in the amount of communication they had with parents and carers about the meetings, which was reflected in the number who attended. Parents and carers were given the option to withdraw their children from the Hedgehogs lessons, but none took this opportunity. Generally, parents and carers felt they had been provided with enough information to enable them to support their children's learning. They reported being able to answer children's questions and a few said they learned things about puberty too.

Pre-programme briefing meetings of teaching staff were held, so they understood the programme objectives and their roles. A post-programme evaluation meeting was also held, during which staff provided a wealth of positive feedback regarding their own learning. They described the programme as having given them a tool, and in doing so 'bridged the gap' between the school's child protection designated person and the rest of the staff. Knowledge gained from the programme empowered staff to discuss this topic area and others with the children. A significant contributing factor towards teaching staff's knowledge gain and subsequent confidence can be attributed to the facilitator's approachability and involvement of staff. Other adults with a vested interest in the programme were school Governors and the local Diocese, from whom no problems were reported by the schools participating in the pilot. It is unknown whether schools that decided not to participate faced resistance from Governors, teaching staff, or parents/carers.

Overall programme effectiveness

The overall positive feedback indicates the Hedgehogs programme could benefit primary schools in a number of ways. All teaching staff who provided feedback said they would be happy to be involved again. The large majority of the children, when asked whether they thought other children should do the programme, said 'Yes'. In deciding whether the programme could be continued, consideration of several factors (e.g. curriculum, sustainability) is necessary. As well as literacy, the Hedgehogs programme supported seven of the 14 primary school curriculum subjects; the programme and curriculum appeared mutually complementary of each other. The programme also linked in with at least three of the four SMSC (spiritual/moral/social/cultural) issues that Ofsted¹⁰ looks for evidence of in primary schools. The programme tended to complement rather than duplicate existing school practices, and it appeared that, without the programme, there would be large gaps in children's learning.

Programme continuation and sustainability – factors for consideration

Should schools become involved with the programme in the future, they would need to recognise that the more time they can dedicate to the programme, the more effective the outcomes are likely to be. This would also mean commitment after delivery of the five lessons, to continue the good practice and learning from the programme. Ideally, a framework would be created and made available to schools so that they know what they can do to ensure sustainability. This framework would include running several follow-up lessons with the children as a means of embedding learning, and creating and maintaining a safe environment in the schools, so children feel comfortable talking to any member of staff about sensitive matters. An extended framework would also be required for other primary schools

¹⁰ Office for Standards in Education: a government body set up in 1993 to inspect and assess the educational standards of schools and colleges in England and Wales.

keen to run the programme, informing them of the time, resources, and actions necessary to achieve maximum effectiveness.

If the programme were continued, schools would likely explore the viability of delivering the programme themselves, for financial reasons. The view of teaching staff at the schools was that the programme would be better taught by an external facilitator, providing several reasons why it would be “*difficult to provide the same programme as effectively ‘in-house’*”. The Department for Education’s National Action Plan for Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (2012) recognised that this type of education will not necessarily always be delivered by the teachers themselves; that “the voluntary sector has a key role in providing children with information about related risks and how to keep themselves safe” (p.12), and that such organisations have experience of going into schools and undertaking preventative work. Sion Humphreys, Policy Advisor for the National Association of Headteachers, highlights the value of involving external organisations in such programmes; “Schools have long recognised the need and value of working in partnership with external organisations. This is particularly important in areas of provision where expertise does not necessarily lie with teachers. Working with such bodies not only enriches learning but offers a powerful opportunity for teachers to broaden their knowledge and understanding. This has been particularly important in schools’ teaching of PSHE. It is a source of concern and regret that partnership working is becoming increasingly difficult as a consequence of the current marginalisation of PSHE (at a time when the need for it is more acute than ever) and the funding pressures that many third sector organisations are facing. The impact of the Hedgehogs pilot is clear evidence of the value of carefully planned collaboration”.

Additional factors requiring consideration should the programme be implemented in the future includes incorporating additional aspects to bolster its effectiveness, such as incorporating content about Internet Safety and ‘Sexting’. In addition, consideration should be given to enhancing parents’ and carers’ learning - through the provision of Internet Safety sessions and ‘Parents Protect!’ seminars (child sexual abuse prevention awareness sessions designed for the Home Office) - as well as improving attendance at meetings. Future facilitators and teaching staff involved with the programme would also need to be aware of the range of subject areas (e.g. domestic violence, gangs) and type of incidents they may need to deal with. Other factors that can impact on programme delivery require consideration, including group size and composition (religions and cultures, special educational needs and disabilities, gender ratio).

Despite initial reservations held by teaching staff regarding the younger age group receiving the programme, that it might ‘steal children’s innocence’, staff reported that it was in fact on the whole more thought provoking for the Year 5 children, and the facilitator recognised this age group’s particular vulnerability to becoming victims of sexual abuse. Findings indicate that Year 5 children did benefit from the programme; they are vulnerable enough at this age to require input, yet are also generally advanced enough in their critical and reflective thinking to understand the subject matter. Schools would need to dedicate additional time with this age group, with teaching staff allowing sufficient time for reflection after each Hedgehogs lesson, running follow-up lessons, and providing one-to-one support as necessary, to enhance understanding.

Conclusions and recommendations

The feedback received from the Hedgehogs programme can go some way to demonstrate the positive impact it had on children’s learning, awareness, and relationships with adults. Now that these 165 children have been equipped with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves, and with their parents’, carers’ and teaching staff’s enhanced knowledge of the subject area and increased willingness to talk to the children about this, children should be better protected. Should the programme be delivered nationally, or indeed internationally,

across all primary schools, the potential impact on children's safety and the reduction of child sexual abuse could be substantial. Recommendations summarised below aim to ensure increased achievement of the programme's objectives should the programme be implemented again in the future.

- Ensure all teaching staff involved understand the programme's objectives and their roles in achieving these, through a pre-programme briefing meeting and time set aside before each lesson.
- Allow additional time during or after the puberty lesson for the facilitator or teaching staff to answer children's questions, and address and correct inaccurate beliefs.
- Consider the maximum number of children to have in one group, as the larger groups had a noticeable impact on the facilitator's ability to engage and teach.
- Schools to consider bringing their own sex education classes forward to occur soon after the Hedgehogs' puberty lesson, to answer children's questions and enhance learning.
- Allow additional time for the younger age group to complete some tasks, as they generally did not seem to grasp concepts as much or as quickly as the Year 6 children. Teaching staff engagement, both during and outside the lessons, can improve the younger children's understanding.
- Teaching staff will need to spend time one-to-one with individual children who do not understand some aspects of the programme, to ensure understanding is enabled. If an issue arises in relation to a specific child, teaching staff may also need to communicate with the child's parent or carer.
- Develop a minimum level of communication required of schools in terms of contacting parents and carers about the programme and related meetings.
- Facilitators external to the school should ideally deliver the lessons to achieve greater effectiveness.
- Develop a training agenda for facilitator(s), which would include selection of the right type of person to deliver the lessons; someone with a sound child protection knowledge who children can bond quickly with, and who can take a tactful approach in dealing with children's questions and issues.
- Ensure the same person delivers all five lessons in a school to achieve continuity.
- Develop a framework that schools would follow to ensure embedding of learning and sustainability of the effects of the programme.
- Develop a framework for other schools to follow who are considering running the programme, so they understand what time, resources, and actions are necessary to achieve maximum effectiveness.
- Instead of ending the programme abruptly at the end of lesson 5, children could be signposted to relevant organisations such as Childline, and an area in the classroom dedicated to the Hedgehogs programme, that would include the Confidence Box.
- Schools to keep people with a vested interest in the school, such as Governors and the local Diocese, informed of the programme.
- Make information available to parents and carers unable to attend the pre-programme meeting to alleviate anxieties, using means that do not exclude those lacking literacy skills.
- Incorporate additional related aspects into the programme to bolster its effectiveness, including:
 - Delivering content about Internet Safety and 'Sexting' to the children;
 - Facilitating Internet Safety sessions for the parents and carers;
 - Delivering Parents Protect! child sexual abuse prevention awareness seminars with parents and carers of children involved in the programme, tailored to also provide relevant information about the programme and delivered after completion of the programme to enhance knowledge and capabilities to support and protect their children.

- Ensure parents and carers are made aware of the impact that children's access to such a range of information sources can have on their understanding and beliefs.
- Develop evaluation tools to enable tangible demonstration of the children's learning (e.g. pre- and post-programme test of children's knowledge).
- Consider whether the name 'Hedgehogs' is appropriate for this programme.

All of the above can ensure improvement of an already well-received programme, with the potential to contribute to the prevention of child sexual abuse.



Working to Protect Children



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