

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE:	Education, Culture and Sport
DATE:	30 May 2013
DIRECTOR:	Gayle Gorman
TITLE OF REPORT:	Roots of Empathy
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS/13/039

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to bring to the attention of the committee the Roots of Empathy Programme that has been running in the Northfield area; the outcomes of an "Evaluation of the Roots of Empathy Programme by North Lanarkshire Psychological Service"; and to seek endorsement for the role out of the Roots of Empathy Programme in other City Council schools.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee

- a) Note the progress of the programme in Aberdeen to date.
- b) Note the positive evaluation of the programme in North Lanarkshire.
- c) Instruct officers to role the initiative out to further schools in Aberdeen in the St Machar and Torry ASGs.
- d) Instruct officers to identify a suitable budget source for the backfill costs.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Action for Children has successfully secured money from the Scottish Government which will cover the licence fee costs and initial training costs for the programme in 2013/14.

During 2011/12 and 2012/13 the programme has been delivered by trained practitioners employed by Action for Children and Aberdeen City Council. The Aberdeen City Council practitioners are staff within the City

Council's Childcare Service. To date, these staff have been delivering the programme within their allocated contractual hours.

To roll the programme out wider will require adequate resourcing to backfill proportions of the substantive posts of the practitioner while they are preparing for and delivering the programme.

The cost of staff hours for delivering the programme within each class is approximately £1000. This is based on 27 sessions x 2 hours x £18.50 (G12 hourly rate plus on-costs); 16 hours of training; plus travel expenses of £130. (Note: these costs are for Aberdeen City Council staff only. There are also currently 6 Action for Children staff which are funded through Action for Children.)

If the seven Aberdeen City Council practitioners were to deliver to 12 classes this would cost around £12,000 per annum.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Staffing Implications

Releasing the practitioners from their substantive rolls requires backfilling to ensure that the quality requirements of other aspects of the childcare service are not reduced.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 About Roots of Empathy

Founded in Canada in 1996, Roots of Empathy (ROE) is a classroom based, social and emotional programme. It aims to promote emotional competence and development of empathy in primary school children. The programme is delivered by a trained ROE instructor and consists of nine themes which are delivered across the school year.

The programme involves a baby and parent. The baby has a core role within the programme and is considered the 'teacher'. The instructor guides the class to observe and raise awareness of the baby's development, the relationship with their parent and subsequent attachment.

Action for Children, one of the UK's largest charities, is the 'Lead Agency' for Roots of Empathy in Scotland and has been successful in securing funding from the Scottish Government over the last 3 years to fund the training, mentoring and license fee costs for the roll out of the programme in Scotland.

In Aberdeen, the programme was first piloted in Northfield schools in the 2011/12 academic session as part of the Total Place project. The

programme in Aberdeen is a partnership initiative and is delivered by staff from both Aberdeen City Council and Action for Children. Initial feedback from the programme in Aberdeen was hugely positive, from the perspective of the school children; babies and parents; school teachers; and practitioners.

5.2 Evaluation of the Roots of Empathy programme in North Lanarkshire

Root of Empathy (RoE) has been delivered in North Lanarkshire Council areas in 2010. Research evaluation of RoE began in August 2011 with 795 participants including control groups.

The evaluation sought to assess impact of the programme on:

- Empathy
- Prosocial Behaviour
- Anger management/ aggression
- Wellbeing
- Class climate

The Executive Summary of the evaluation is attached at Appendix A.

In summary the following impacts were found:

- **Empathy** – overall a positive impact for the RoE pupils in cognitive empathy (distinction between self and another), and emotional empathy (feeling with another). The control group decreased during the assessment period on both cognitive empathy and emotional empathy.
- **Prosocial behaviour** – overall a positive impact on teacher rated prosocial behaviours was found with the RoE group increasing and the control group decreasing.
- **Anger Management/ Aggression** – overall a positive impact was found for RoE pupils who decreased in inhibition (turning emotion inward), compared to control pupils who increased during the evaluation period. The RoE pupils were also found to decrease in aggressive behaviours. There was also a positive impact for RoE pupils in total difficulties (sum of emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems), compared to control pupils who increased in their total difficulties.
- **Knowledge of Infant Development** – It was clear from the evaluation that RoE pupils had a greater understanding of infant development, particularly around the specific themes that are taught as part of the programme.
- **Recognition of Emotions** – it was clear that RoE pupils had a greater understanding of recognition of emotions, particularly around the specific teaching from the RoE lesson aims and outcomes.

The conclusion of the evaluation includes the following:

“when implemented within a Scottish Local Authority context, RoE was found to have a positive impact on pupils taking part in the programme compared to pupils in the control group.”

“Overall data showed RoE pupils to increase in empathy (cognitive and emotional) and prosocial behaviour compared to control pupils who decreased on these outcomes. RoE pupils decreased in inhibition and total difficulties and control pupils increased on these outcomes. Video observations showed an increase in empathetic behaviours and a decrease in aggressive behaviours.”

It is noted that this recent evaluation supports and builds on previous research of the RoE programme.

5.3 Current Position in Aberdeen

Now in its second year in Aberdeen, the programme is being delivered in 10 classes in the following Northfield schools:

Name of School	Class	Class
Heathryburn School	P3	P3/4
Bramble Brae School	P3	P2
Holy Family RC School	P2/3	
Manor Park School	P3	
Muirfield School	P3	
Quarryhill School	P3	
Westpark School	P3	P2/3

The annual programme will culminate in a Baby Celebration Event in June 2013, during which all of the participating babies and parents will participate in a celebration event at which some of the participating school children will talk about their wishes for the future of the babies.

Looking forward, it is planned to extend the programme to other areas in the city. Although there are currently only 13 trained instructors in the city, it may be possible for these instructors to deliver the programme to more than one class (if resource can be secured to backfill the time from their substantive posts.) In addition to this, while there are no additional training spaces allocated to Aberdeen City Council staff for this year, if, due to drop outs from other Local Authorities, additional training spaces become available, these will be offered to Aberdeen City Council staff.

It is recommended that in 2013/14 the programme covers all new P3 classes within the Northfield ASG (except those classes which have already received the programme in P2); and additional P3 classes within Primary Schools in the Torry and St Machar ASGs. It is planned that the programme is extended to cover 18 classes throughout the city (6 delivered by Action for Children staff and 12 by Aberdeen City Council staff).

6. IMPACT

Corporate – This report relates to ‘Aberdeen – the Smarter City’

- We will work with our partners to seek to reduce the levels of inequality in the city.
- We will enhance the physical and emotional wellbeing of all our citizens by offering support and activities which promote independence, resilience, confidence and self-esteem.
- We will provide a high quality education service within our schools and communities which will improve attainment and life chances of our children and young people to achieve their full potential in education, employment or training.
- Working with our third, public and private sector partners, we will provide opportunities for lifelong learning which will develop knowledge, skills and attributes of our citizens to enable them to meet the changing demands of the 21st century.
- We will aim to have a workforce across the city which has the skills and knowledge to sustain, grow and diversify the cultural economy.
- We aspire to be recognised as a City of Culture, a place of excellence for culture and arts by promoting Aberdeen as a cultural centre hosting high quality and diverse cultural events for the whole community and beyond.
- We will embrace the distinctive pride the people of Aberdeen take in their city and work with them to enhance the sense of well-being here, building strong communities which look out for, and look after one another.

This report also relates to the Combined Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement as follows:

- Protecting children and vulnerable adults
- People of all ages take an active part in their own learning to achieve their full potential Learning and training is appropriate and accessible to learner’s needs
- Children and young people access positive learning environments and develop their skills, confidence and self esteem to the fullest potential
- Children, young people and their families/carers are involved in decisions that affect them. Their voices heard and they play an active and responsible role in their communities

- Educational attainment in Aberdeen is continuously sustained and improved
- School leavers enter positive destination of employment, training or further and higher education with a focus on and support for young people who require More Choices and More Chances
- Children and young people actively participate in their communities and have optimum involvement in decision making
- All children, young people and their families have access to high quality services when required and services provide timely, proportionate and appropriate response that meeting the needs of children and young people within Getting it Right for Every Child, (GIRFEC) requirements
- Improve the quality of life in our most deprived areas
- Our public services are consistently high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs

Public - This report may be of interest to members of the public with primary school age children.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Potential risks of the programme are considered and addressed through regular team meetings.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Gail Woodcock
Service Manager Sport & Communities
gwoodcock@aberdeencity.gov.uk
01224 522732