

“Outstanding and Sustainable Practice”

The Care Inspectorate’s joint inspection of Children and Young People in West Dunbartonshire Community Planning area took place between August and October 2016, and covered the full range of partners providing services for children, young people and families. These partners are West Dunbartonshire Council, National Health Service, Greater Glasgow & Clyde Health Service, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, including professionals such as health visitors, school nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers, police officers and the voluntary sector workers. They also met 103 children and young people and 39 parents and carers, in order to hear from them about their experiences of services. From this comprehensive investigation, the Inspectorate team identified 3 examples of good practice. The first of these was Seasons for Growth. Under the title of “Effective Change Management”, the team reported: “While many schools across Scotland run Seasons for Growth groups, the programme in West Dunbartonshire is led strategically, well embedded in primary and secondary schools, and is delivered in other settings. The inspection team viewed it as a model of outstanding and sustainable practice.” (Care Inspectorate (2017), Services for Children & Young People in West Dunbartonshire, p37).

The report recognised the significant impact on the wellbeing of children and young people who participated in a Seasons group. Choose Life has dedicated funding to Seasons for the past ten years, and this has been a key factor in developing an authority-wide, sustainable model of service delivery. The funding enables us to have journals free of charge for all groups. It also employs a small time allocation from a Senior Educational Psychologist to train and support Companions, maintain fidelity to the programme, and chair the Action group which oversees ongoing development. In addition, the Inspectorate identified the support of strategic leaders through the mental health and wellbeing strategy group as critical factors in the success.

However, we know that within the strategic and sustainable plan, it is the group-by-group dedication and determination of individual Companions and managers in schools and elsewhere that makes it happen for our children. Everyone has to overcome barriers and challenges to run groups, particularly at this time of diminishing resources and increasing demands. It is particularly gratifying that the Care Inspectorate recognised the effectiveness of Seasons at this time.

Finally, the Care Inspectorate report expressed the view that further research into the impact of Seasons on raising attainment was merited, as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Seasons has always been an evidence-based programme, and we would welcome joining a new research initiative.



Reminders



Siblings reminder: In general, we recommend that siblings (and, under some circumstances, close family members such as cousins) do not participate in the same Seasons group. This is because everyone experiences grief in a unique way, even if the physical loss is the same. Each individual needs the opportunity to explore this in the group, without the possible conflict arising from a different viewpoint. Additionally, family members sometimes take or are given specific roles, such as looking out for a younger sibling. If this dynamic continues in a group, it might prevent individuals exploring and finding ways to cope with their own grief fully.



Fischy reminder: Fischy Music has provided "Songs for Life" CDs free for every participant in groups using Fischy Music. Companions should give each participant a CD at the start of the programme; encourage them to listen to it in their own time; and use selected songs from the CD in the group. CDs can be collected along with journals. At the end of the group Companions are asked to have participants complete a short questionnaire about how they used the CD, which are to be returned to Fischy, directly or via Alison Gardner.

Materials reminder: We have now used up all of our 2nd edition stock, and all groups will now use 3rd edition journals and manuals. As Choose Life pays for these resources, it is easy to forget that every participant journal costs £13, and every manual costs £40. Please only collect journals for the exact number of participants in your group, and return any unused journals to Psychological Services. Companions can ask for a copy of the pupil journal for the level of group they are running, so that they can plan each session, demonstrate pages to the pupils etc. However, these journals should be re-used each time, rather than a new one being requested for the Companion for each group. In the last newsletter, we featured an article on storage of Seasons materials, which makes it easier to use resources efficiently.

Companion reminder: Accompanying pupils through a Seasons Programme is emotionally demanding for Companions. We know that dealing with others' loss can trigger things in our own loss history. At difficult times in our own lives, we are all more vulnerable emotionally. I've therefore been heartened that a number of Companions have told their schools' Seasons organiser that they are currently not available to run a group, though they are keen to return to the Companion role when they have taken time to attend to their own needs. These schools have continued to run groups, either using a second school Companion, or a Floating Companion. It is important that we care for our own wellbeing and the wellbeing of staff, as they are our greatest resource in promoting the wellbeing of children and young people.

We use lots of metaphors with the children and young people in Seasons. Here is another one: air cabin crew remind us before every flight to 'fit your own oxygen mask before attempting to help others.' This can be a useful metaphor to help us maintain compassion and resilience for the good of ourselves and others.

Reconnector Dates:
Thursday 4th May 2017 1.30 – 2.30 pm

Contact details:

If you have any comments or questions about Seasons for Growth, please contact Alison Gardner, Senior Educational Psychologist,
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