

An exploration of the change experienced by children and their families who are involved in moving from mainstream school into a therapeutic setting

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The damaging effects and negative outcomes for students who are excluded from school are well documented in educational literature. Societally, it is often the young people who are excluded from school who come at a great cost to support later in life due to antisocial behaviour, as well as a loss in terms of their unrealised potential. There is limited research that explores parents' and students' perspectives on the exclusion process, and their experiences of alternative provisions and whether these have proven helpful in solving their children's behaviours.

A new model for supporting families who have experienced exclusion from school has been proposed, with little research being done on the outcomes for families so far. This research highlights pupil and parent experience in this new alternative provision, as well as suggested changes highlighted by them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the histories/events that have led to children and parents attending the therapeutic alternative provision?
2. What are the experiences of parents and students leading up to and whilst attending the therapeutic alternative provision?
3. What are the perceptions of change reported by children and parents having experienced a managed move to a therapeutic alternative provision?
4. What did participants think allowed for change to take place?
5. What do parents and children perceive to be the strengths and limitations of the therapeutic alternative provision?

DESIGN



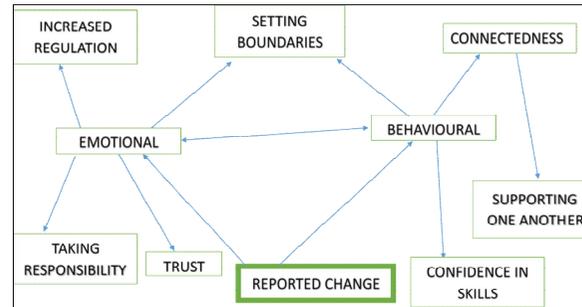
PARTICIPANTS

6 parents and 3 students attending the alternative therapeutic provision from local authorities all over London.
*There were 2 sets of parent-child dyads within the sample.

RESULTS

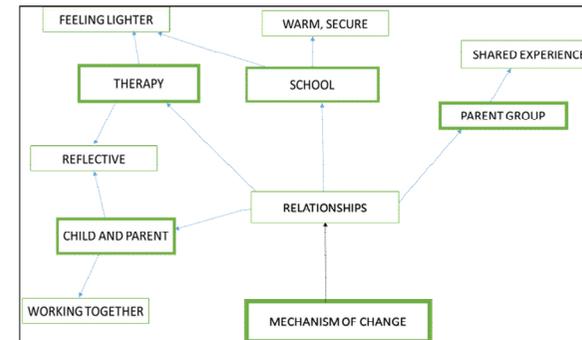
Thematic maps are below with direct quotations from interviews with participants to support each theme.

"Um, by me talking to her, having therapy sessions here as well, has made her realise that she can't... in society people are not going to accept her the way she is."



"I feel more positively about myself nowadays, um, I... I make a mistake in my work, in a way, I don't just really blame myself, I just take it as it is and move on - so to speak.... So just accept: okay, that... I made a mistake there and I'm going to move on, and I learn from it?"

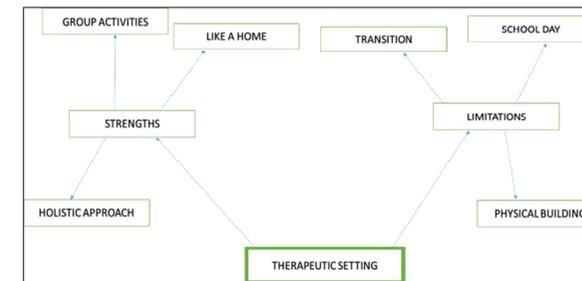
"...because we work together, we do therapy sessions and we have meetings together, so we both talk on, how we both used to feel and how we feel and what we want, so you know, it's like, we are looking forward as well, not just today, we are looking forward now."



"Here, when I am coming here, it's like a home"

"Well you join in more activities, you can always like ask to play and you're not like sitting out every time, cause you think people will judge you Like, if you haven't got good football skills you can just join in..."

"Um, I would just recommend the school to anyone that's having any problems, because as I say, you know, it's all here, I mean before they wanted to send me off to parenting classes.....and when they offered me this and I knew we were getting fair I said well, that's, that's even better still, because it's not just about me, it's about XXXX as well."



"I, I think one of the things that I found particularly helpful here is actually being around other people and seeing how they actually deal with their situations..."

FINDINGS

- All participants reported histories of difficulty with themes of 'loss' and 'instability' being prevalent across the sample. There were risk factors present in all family histories that have been reported in previous research on students excluded from school (Arnold, Yeomans & Simpson 2009).
- Parents reported experiences of feeling alone and isolated in the face of extreme behavioural difficulties before attending the therapeutic alternative provision (McDonald & Thomas 2003).
- There was reported behavioural and emotional change for all parents and two students in the sample interviewed. One student reported that he did not feel much had changed. The themes of the change are reported in thematic map 1.
- Parents and students were able to use the school as a 'secure base' from which to work through difficulties and rely on other families for support through this time (Bowlby, 1988).
- Parents and students were asked about what they thought allowed for the change reported to occur. These themes are reported in thematic map 2, with the central theme of relationships spanning the data set.
- Strengths were listed as having group activities that allowed for parents and students to connect and problem solve together. The holistic approach adopted by the setting was valued by participants, where academics as well as emotional and social functioning were dealt with from a family systems perspective.
- Reported limitations of the setting were the lack of clarity around transition, as many parents and students were unsure of what the next steps were for them in terms of reintegration into mainstream. Parents also mentioned that would've liked to have a longer school day with more time for academics. The absence of a playground or an open space for students to run around in at break times was also a theme arising when asked about limitations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EP PRACTICE

- Potential role for EP's for looking at behavioural problems from a family systems perspective. Parents and students interviewed in this school found this support helpful.
- EP's have the skills to implement principles of containment and holding in settings where there are a high level of exclusions, and to model and promote these at a systemic level (McLoughlin, 2010).
- With the new SEND reforms and the emphasis on tackling mental health in schools, EP's are in a position to reach families who are in need and to highlight the link between behaviour and mental health.
- EP's are able to promote a more inclusive ethos in schools, and take a preventative stance to exclusion by tackling misconceptions at a systemic level.