



# **KILDARE YOUTH SERVICES COUNSELLING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2009**



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2009 was an active, productive year for the Kildare Youth Services Youth Work Ireland (KYS) Counselling Service. Some of the outcomes that the Counselling Service celebrates from the 2009 work include an overall increase in numbers of young people referred into the service across the county and more young people than ever before being exposed to and impacted by the work of the service in a variety of cross county events including the regional Comhairle na Nog 2009.

KYS has been working since 1994 at developing a community based, accessible, professional counselling service to meet the needs of young people and their families in County Kildare. To this end, KYS, in partnership with the Health Service Executive Dublin Mid-Leinster and with additional funding from the Family Support Agency and the South Western Regional Drug Task Force have worked to develop a tailor-made service focussing directly on the kinds of supports which young people, their families and other third parties, e.g., school, GP, youth workers have identified as being of need to young people between the ages of 11-25 in Co Kildare. A key to the popularity of the KYS Counselling Service is the fact that it is a free, community based youth service staffed by qualified and registered counsellors and offering a youth friendly and accessible environment to and with young people. Strong links exist to referral agents throughout the targeted communities.

In 2009 the service was able to broaden the range of activities provided in response to requests from the community. Some of these services included group work with post-primary school students and families across the county on such topics as 'Promoting Positive Mental Health' and 'Helping Young People Communicate Distress'. There was the continued facilitation of Step Teen parenting courses in Naas, Rathangan and Leixlip. The service also offered a number of presentations to groups of young people and referral agents highlighting the work of the service.

In total, the Counselling Service received 1700 telephone calls. These calls ranged from calls of enquiry about the service provided to direct referrals into the service. Calls were also taken by referrers regarding wait list positions and calls from external agents seeking partnership work. 7% of these 1700 calls were crisis calls<sup>1</sup>. A large number of calls and referrals were for suicide postvention in the wake of family or friends dying by suicide or calls from concerned parents or friends who feared that their young people were or would self harm. These callers were directed to other services as appropriate. Another trend seen in 2009 were the increasing numbers of referrals from outside the target area<sup>2</sup>. This increase underpins the necessity for enlarged service provision across the area of Kildare/West Wicklow. Residents of bordering counties to Kildare also attempted to refer into the service demonstrating that access issues are a difficulty in the Province as a whole.

As the recession continued to take hold in 2009 a number of people were referred into the service as an option over private counselling that they could not afford. 2009 also saw an increase in the numbers of 18-25 year old choosing counselling for their own personal development, once again an indication of the struggles that the young adults of the county are facing in the faltering economy. In 2009 the Counselling Service

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as calls that require immediate clinical intervention

<sup>2</sup> See Table 5, Appendix 1

continued to attempt to move with the times, and used technology in-house to greater effect and efficiency in the production and sending of the 2008 Annual Report and in general administration. Positively this helped us retain a steady eye on the utilisation of financial resources, as well as time management and environmental impact. Research and best practice guidelines continued to be important to the service as it involved itself in NUI, Galway research on the counsellor/client relationship. KYS looks forward to the outcome of the same in 2010.

- **Referrals and Presenting Issues:**

In 2009 the Counselling Service received 303<sup>3</sup> referrals into the service. 118 referrals were from people who had been made aware of the service by a third party: GP's (27%); Local Media (19%), HSE (18%) Schools (14%) and, significantly, from past clients (4%). In 2009, 191<sup>4</sup> young people, (57% Female, 43 % male) of predominately White Irish Origin (96%) accessed 7<sup>5</sup> locations across the county of Kildare to attend on average 8 session each. 77% of these young people were between the ages of 11 and 17. The remaining 23% were between the ages of 18 and 25. 139 of these young people were seen for the first time in 2009. Of the young people seen for counselling in the service, Concerned Family Members were the greatest number of referrers into the KYS Counselling Service (52%), followed by Young People Self Referring (15%), Schools (11%), Medical Services (9%), and External Agencies (9%).

The young people presented for problems as common and significant as Problems in school or work (31%), Difficulties in relationships with others (33%), Changes in family structures<sup>6</sup> (41%), Anxiety (30%), Anger Issues (27%), Bereavement and loss (16%), Trauma and Abuse (12%) and clinical issues of Disordered Eating (3%) and Substance Misuse (8%)<sup>7</sup>. In terms of risk, 23%, or just under 1 in 4, presented as a mild risk to themselves through self harm. The average age of the client in the service in 2009 was 15<sup>8</sup>-an interesting exception being in the North of the County, namely Leixlip at aged 18- and was a full time student.

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<sup>3</sup> See Table 1

<sup>4</sup> See Table 3

<sup>5</sup> See Table 5

<sup>6</sup> Defined as Parental separation or newly created family structures, including fostering and children in state care

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for comprehensive service statistics. Issues are broken down into presenting issues and emerging issues for clients. More than one issues may be identified for clients

<sup>8</sup> See Table 6

- **KYS Counselling Service alignment to KYS Strategic Plan (2007 to 2012).**

As outlined in the KYS Strategic Plan (2007-2012), KYS has 8 guiding principles which inform all service activities and guide all service development. These guiding principles were applied to great effect within the Counselling Service in 2009 and helped the service continue to situate itself within the community, non statutory sector whilst adopting at all possible junctures an interagency approach. The principles are as follows:

- Voluntary basis of KYS
- Developmental Capacity of children and young people
- Families and Communities
- Social Equality and Social Inclusion
- Quality standards
- An Inter-agency approach
- Service Integration

In seeking to execute the principles KYS have five strategic plans for the years 2007 to 2012. The following section will outline each of these objectives, looking at how the KYS Counselling Service was informed by the overall KYS strategic Plan (2007-2012) in guiding the work practices.

### ***Strategic Objective #1: Support the Personal and Social Development of children and Young People in County Kildare:***

This objective concerns itself with the:

- a. Provision of informal educational opportunities for children, young people and their families
- b. Continued development of ways of identifying and reviewing the needs of children and young people on an ongoing basis
- c. Provision of a range of individual, family and group therapeutic opportunities for children, young people, parents and their families
- d. Identify, develop and promote appropriate youth work models

The Counselling Service sought to meet this first objective, and its outcome indicator of enhancing positive change in the self perception, life skills and inter-personal skills amongst children, young people and their families by participating in a KYS project through the:

- Provision of individual counselling
- Using KYS internal management structures to identify and review the needs of young people and their families
- Greater emphasis placed on helping triage young people where appropriate into youth work groups
- Provision of Step Teen Parenting Courses throughout the county

## **Provision of Individual Counselling<sup>9</sup>**

- 7 Counselling Centres<sup>10</sup> staffed by a total of 4.5 posts<sup>11</sup> providing a combined total of 1720 sessions during 2009.
- The multiple needs of a family and young person often dictated longer therapeutic engagement, over 20 sessions, where the work of counselling was about the stabilisation of the young person and their family under threat from issues such as substance abuse and/or other traumas. These client's difficulties often necessitated a multi agency approach to case management.
- A broad range of approaches were used with young people and families as counsellors' training and client consent allowed. These modalities included Drama/Art/Music Therapies; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; Person Centred counselling; Sand Tray Work, Creative Storytelling; Integrative and Humanistic approaches.
- Counsellors and administrators highlighted the needs of a young person and family at line management, peer supervision and clinical supervision levels to access additional resources.
- For 56% of the Counselling Service clients seen in 2009, counselling was being used to promote self esteem and/or develop capacities to deal with interpersonal relationship issues.
- The service in conjunction with schools around the county, e.g., Salesians in Celbridge and Patricians Secondary School, Newbridge, used session themes to offer workshops on peer support, bullying and mental health.
- Intra-agency work was emphasised in 2009 and referral pathways into appropriate groups were identified and used when possible with clients accessing both youth groups and counselling concurrently.
- These group work opportunities helped young people test out newly acquired skills adopted from counselling and applied in an applied social setting with the all important goal of reducing social isolation.

## **Facilitation of Step Teen Parenting Courses<sup>12</sup>:**

- In 2009, 65 parents and guardians attended three STEP Teen Parenting Courses in the North, Mid and South of the County.
- A further 14 were waiting for places on the same course in any given month.
- The Course helped parents recognise and acquire skills to manage the developmental needs of their young people. Through the course parents were able to identify when a young person's behaviour is typical or atypical of their age and developmental stage.
- The course helped parents/guardians access resources of support by recommending and, where applicable, referring into other agencies such as the CAMHS services or Drug and Alcohol Services such as HALO or ARAS.
- Some of the comments from parents who completed the course and offered evaluation and feedback included:

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 2 for Case Study

<sup>10</sup> Naas, Newbridge, Leixlip, Celbridge, Athy, The Curragh, Kildare Town

<sup>11</sup> 2009 saw significant staff shortages for 3 month periods in Celbridge, Leixlip, Athy, The Curragh, Kildare Town

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 2 for Case Study of Step Teen parenting course

*“Very informative, great tips and helpful information. The programme covered a good variety of material, comfortable and fun group. Easy to talk and good to know your opinions are important”*

*“[The facilitators] were very helpful and understanding. I would recommend the course to any or all of my friends. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I’m sad it had to end”.*

- Step Teen Courses in 2009 identified a need to target fathers for participation in courses and in spite of attempts at organising sessions for fathers specifically a relatively low level of interest was established. Continued work with this very important group will occur in 2010.
- Some of the important feedback that we received in 2009 and that we hope to progress in 2010 is that the course should be for a longer duration and that a Step Teen programme for teenagers to coincide with the parents course would be of great help.

## ***Strategic Objective #2 Strengthen the equality and social inclusion of children, young people, families and their communities***

KYS’s second strategic objective concerns itself with:

- a. Supporting children, young people and their families to express and challenge the inequalities and social exclusion they experience through KYS work
- b. Continuing to develop new and existing services for specific groups, using interagency approaches as appropriate.
- c. Increasing public awareness and accessibility of KYS and its services, particularly amongst young people, families and communities not currently involved with KYS.

The Counselling Service sought to meet this second objective, and its outcome indicator of measured inclusion, qualitatively experienced by children, young people and their families as a result of their participation in KYS services and activities, through the:

- **Production of free Take 5’s**
- **Distribution of Take 5’s in areas of easy access**
- **Use of research to guide advice offered in Take 5**
- **Topics used in Take 5 of social and emotional relevance to young people**

### **Production of Take 5:**

- Take 5’s are a collaborative method to test new ideas and implement action for change. The issues dealt with through Take 5 are chosen on the principal that what arises in the counselling room as a topic has relevance for groupings of people generally.

- In 2009 15000 copies of Take 5 were produced.
- Beginning in 2009, young people were surveyed on the Take 5 format and significantly inputted in areas for improvement

### **Distribution of Take 5's in areas of easy access**

- Take 5's were made available from schools; GP surgeries; statutory and non statutory agencies; youth organisations and groups; at conferences and presentations.
- Online development <http://www.kys.ie/counsellingnewsletters.htm>, where Take 5 editions are easily accessed

### **Topics used in Take 5 of social and emotional relevance to young people**

- The content of each Take 5 is guided by Gould et al.'s (2003)<sup>13</sup> work into what helps young people to be resilient and to maintain positive mental health. The Take 5's included information, advice and young people's own inputs on:
  - Social Competence, Social Problem Solving Skills and Interpersonal Effectiveness
  - Cognitive Skills and Decision Making
  - Sense of Purpose and Meaning
  - Autonomy and Independence
  - Emotion Regulation Skills and Managing Feelings
  - Hope and Optimism
- The three Editions were titled: "Getting On, Getting Along"; "Finding Solutions"; "Loitering with Intent".
- Each edition had a set goal of addressing an identified problem, e.g., How do I communicate assertively with the people around me?

### **2010 Plans for Take 5**

- 2009-2010 Topics include Dealing with Death and Loss; How to help when concerned about someone's substance use; and How Bullying really operates.
- Podcasts of Take 5's to download

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<sup>13</sup> Gould MS, Greenberg T, Velting DM, Shaffer D. Youth suicide risk and preventive interventions: a review of the past 10 years .J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2003 Apr;42(4):386-405.

### ***Strategic Objective #3: Support children and Young people to positively promote their rights.***

KYS's third strategic objective concerns itself with:

- a. Strengthening the voice and active participation of children and young people in KYS, their communities and society.
- b. Informing and educating children and young people of their rights and entitlements.
- c. Supporting children and young people to identify, name and challenge their experiences of prejudice, discrimination and inequality.

The Counselling Service sought to meet this third objective, and its outcome indicator of the measured increase in knowledge of children and young people of their rights and entitlements as well as their capacity to promote the same, through:

- **Bring young people more into processes of Take 5 via feedback**
- **The service's participation in the Comhairle na Nog 2009**

#### **Bring Young People More into Process of Take 5 via feedback**

- In 2009 Take 5's final drafts were brought to youth groups in KYS projects for feedback via action methods research model.
- Action methods research methods used a systematic, cyclical method of planning, taking action, observing, evaluating (including self-evaluation) and critical reflecting prior to planning the next cycle.
- By bringing the Take 5 drafts into groups the counsellors were able to help themselves, the youth workers and the young people critically reflect on the theme or 'problem' in historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which helped make sense of the issue outside of the self.
- Bringing drafts to groups helped de-stigmatise the counselling process for those who could otherwise benefit from the same as issues in sessions were same as issues on street.
- In 2009 KYS youth groups could see themselves credited in mass media for their involvement in the production of a Take 5, which supported the young people's self efficacy and was a positive influence for others.

#### **Counselling Service and Comhairle na Nog 2009**

- Counsellor facilitated a group of 20 young people to explore and detail their demands for the provision of mental health services in and out of school and petition the government for more resources for the same. Young people attended sessions like this throughout the year because of personal connections to issues being raised or because of concerns over a family member with a significant mental health difficulty, including substance misuse.
- These important sessions were part of the overall strategy of de-stigmatising counselling and placing mental and physical health on a par.
- These session helped young people to recognise when either themselves or another young person was at risk of poor mental health and how to help combat the same.

- The same work was done in school based presentations throughout the year and over 200 young people in Newbridge, Celbridge, Rathangan and Monasterevin attended presentations by the service.
- Transitioning students, particularly those moving from primary to secondary school and from secondary school on, were identified as groups who could benefit from knowledge of the service to identify supports during these potentially challenging years.
- A key piece during all these presentations, as indeed is emphasised from a referrers first point of contact with the service, is the voluntary nature of attendance for counselling. Helping young people make informed consent to attend sessions is central to our work.

***Strategic Objective #4: At Local, Regional and National Levels, advocate for social change in favour of children, young people, their families and communities.***

KYS's fourth strategic objective concerns itself with:

- a. Challenging negative social attitudes and behaviours towards children and young people.
- b. Developing positive working relationships with agencies and groups and representing KYS in relevant fora.
- c. Developing processes to strengthen the evidence base to KYS's advocacy work, with particular focus on addressing the need for more youth and community facilities.
- d. Strengthening the capacity of KYS and its participants to influence policy related to children, young people, their families and communities and youth.
- e. Developing consistent KYS policy messages and a related promotional strategy.

The Counselling Service sought to meet this fourth objective, and its outcome indicator of the extent to which youth and community issues, as promoted by KYS, are reflected in the local public policy plans through:

- **Extensive advocacy work**
- **Promotion of positive mental health**
- **Counselling Service representation on regional and National Sub Groups**

**The role of the Counselling Service in advocacy:**

- Extensive Advocacy work was done in 2009 by the counsellors through active communication with referrers, most often parents or guardians, schools, GP's and at other case management meetings with third parties, e.g., social work department.
- Advocacy work involved lobbying those in power- 'parents', 'school' etc and helping young people do the same for themselves.

## **Promotion of positive mental health**

- In May 2009 (in Kilcock, Maynooth and Celbridge) and again in October 2009 (Maynooth) the Service played active roles in the organisation, facilitation of presentations and workshops and provision of onsite counselling support to parents and young as part of the North Kildare Interagency response to tragic deaths that had occurred of young people over the proceeding 18 months.
- 250 parents attended 3 Parents supports night.
- Over 120 attended Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention Seminar on Saturday 10th October, on the occasion of World Mental Health Day.
- These important interagency events had national coverage and were a measure in helping to role out the National Plan for Suicide Prevention (Reach Out)
- At a local level these sessions helped bereaved communities find an outlet for their shared sadness and concern about the safety of their young people and how to help effect change.

## **Counselling Service on regional and National Sub Groups**

- Team members took up positions in Regional Policy Groups and Local Service Providers Network and continued to advocate and support services like HALO for the provision of substance treatment services to Under 18's in the county.

## ***Strategic Plan #5: Strengthen KYS's organisational management and development to ensure effective delivery of the plan.***

KYS's fifth strategic objective concerns itself with:

- a. Implementing management and financial systems and procedures in line with legal and best practice requirements.
- b. Developing a fundraising strategy to maximise the benefits and outcomes to children, young people, their families, communities, KYS volunteers, and staff from their participation in KYS.
- c. Developing and implementing a human resources management and training strategy, reflecting quality standards and identifying staffing and volunteering requirements and supports to KYS to 2012.
- d. Developing and implementing a premises strategy.
- e. Continuing to develop and implement an internal communications strategy.
- f. Examining and implementing models to enhance the nature and extent of cross KYS service working practices

The Counselling Service sought to meet this fifth objective, and its outcome indicator of the measured extent to which Board, staff and volunteers consider that they have human and operational systems and procedures equal to delivering a quality service through:

- **Introduction of a pilot system of counselling**
- **Introduction of CORE as management audit tool**
- **Management and premises strategies**

## **Pilot System of Counselling**

- The pilot system was created as a strategy for addressing waiting times for prospective clients.
- Executed in 2009, the pilot involved a three person decision making therapy team in Celbridge.
- The pilot involved the introduction of new procedures, including telephone assessments, which aided in time saving on clients not ready or willing to engage in counselling but who may have been referred into the service via third party.
- The Pilot helped identify at the pre-engagement level what other services were involved with young person to being about immediate linkage and cross agency work.
- The pilot helped counsellors distribute caseloads of short, medium and long term clients across the assessment team as counsellors were assessment versus primary counsellors in a first session.
- The 2010 Annual Report to highlight outcomes of same and issues that emerged as part of the pilot process

## **Introduction of CORE as management and clinical audit tool**

- In 2009 CORE was introduced as a tool in the service to validate client progress in counselling by gathering practice based evidence.
- The tool had general widespread acceptance both by counsellors and clients and helped address client issues as well as risk management for issues such as self harm or suicide.
- The tool is also useful for clients and staff in self appraisal and is an asset in supervision sessions in helping the management system monitor both the caseloads of individual therapists and the entire service, including looking at different client groups trends.

## **Management and premises strategies**

- In 2009 reflexive practice and progressing the organisations strategic plan was helped by centralising the strategic plan through our planned activities.
- The Strategic Plan framed the work at a line management supervision and team meeting level.
- All activities conducted on behalf of the service looked towards adhering to one of the strategic points at a conscious level.
- Parallel processes of supporting the personal and social development of staff through the provision of in-house training at team days by staff and for staff and encouraging the Continuous Professional Development of the team<sup>14</sup>.
- In 2009 the Counselling Service acknowledged the training needs of staff for dealing with child protection issues and crisis calls and scenarios,

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<sup>14</sup> Training was accessed in the following: EMDR Level 1 and 2 Child and Adolescent (Trauma Therapy); ASIST Suicide Prevention training; Reality Choice Theory; Psychodrama; Drama therapy; Children First HSE; Occupational First Aid; Solution Focused Brief Therapy; Antonio DeMello Mindfulness; Creative Therapy and Bereavement (Irish Hospice Foundation); Art Therapy and Bereavement (Irish Hospice Foundation); Susie Orbach and Eating Disorders; Pauline Beegan (Attachment); Substance Misuse; Sociodrama

including and importantly counselling administration staff by facilitating the attendance at ASIST training.

- 2009 saw the counselling service execute a premises strategy in the north of the county that could support family and group work, reflecting the space and practice safety needs of the counsellors.

## APPENDIX 1

**Table 1: Referrals to the KYS Counselling Service 2009**

Castledermot	Athy	Celbridge	Curragh	Kildare	Leixlip	Maynooth	Naas	Newbridge	Monasterevin	Rathangan
2	24	64	15	27	24	3	80	51	3	10

**Table 2: Comparison Breakdown by year 2005-2008**

	Athy	Celbridge	Curragh	Kildare	Leixlip	Maynooth	Naas	Newbridge	Monasterevin	Rathangan
2005	26	49	17	26	14	n/a	50	38		
2006	40	53	13	29	16	17	54	33		
2007	45	60	29	19	20	11	76	50		
2008	30	50	15	30	28	13	68	46	7	7

**Table 3: Total number of young people seen 2009  
CORE figures**

Male 11-17	Female 11-17	Total
72	77	149
Male 18-25	Female 18-25	
15	30	45

**Table 4: Age range of New clients seen in Service**

	2008	2009
11	4	7
12	11	9
13	16	11
14	18	24
15	14	24
16	11	11
17	13	20
18	7	8
19	3	4
20	3	3
21	6	6
22	2	7
23	3	3
24	2	1
25	1	1

<b>Total clients:</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>139</b>
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**Table 5: Requests for counselling outside the target areas**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Allenwood	1	3
Ballitore	1	1
Ballymore Eustace	1	3
Baltinglass	2	1
Blessington	3	-
Broadford	-	2
Calverstown	1	-
Carbury	3	3
Clane	5	4
Coill Dubh	1	3
Donadea	3	4
Derrinturn	-	1
Dunlavin	0	1
Enfield	2	4
Kilcock	6	-
Kilcullen	1	2
kildangan	4	1
Kilmeague	4	1
Longwood	1	-
Newcastle	-	1
Narraghmore	1	1
Nurney	1	1
Portlaoise	2	1
Prosperous	4	7
Rathcoffey	2	1
Rathmore	2	-
Robertstown	4	3
Stradbally	1	1
Summerhill	2	1
Straffan	2	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>52</b>

**Table 6: Average Time on Waiting List by Area in Months**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Athy</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>4.8</b>
<b>Celbridge</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>Curragh</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Kildare</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Monasterevin</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Naas</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Newbridge</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>4.8</b>
<b>Rathangan</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Leixlip</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>

## Appendix 2

### Case Study 1: Interagency Co-operation

Jack had been a long term client of the counselling service, attending over a 2 year period initially, with follow-up counselling a year later.

He requested to reengage with [me] again and his name was placed on the waiting-list. As is the case with a number of young adults the service works with, his circumstances had changed since we had last spoken 1 year previously.

The job that had given him routine, financial independence and self-esteem had been cut as his employer looked to lower costs.

While he looked at plans to go back to education or find alternative work, he found his motivation and energy were low. Some of the depressive symptoms he'd worked on previously were re-emerging. Renewed dependency on home led to greater family tensions and he spent as much time avoiding his parents as he could.

Late night on-line activity led him to sleeping in late which meant that his parents were usually at work when he got up.

He came back to counselling with the intention of getting his routine back on track and trying to make sense of his relationships with family and friends.

As with a considerable number of young people attending the service, Jack and his family were linked in with the local health centre.

The psychologist from the health centre contacted me in relation to Jack. A consultation meeting at the health centre identified the potential benefit of Jack attending a programme in Dialectical and Behavioural Therapy (DBT).

The psychologist asked if I would consider taking the role of support worker, providing an hour a week to review with Jack, his experience of the DBT group and of trying the skills out in his everyday life.

Each participant of the programme is assigned a key support worker, and the support workers meet for an hour each week to discuss client progress, course content and the challenges faced.

The 24 week programme over 3 modules is designed to help participants regulate their emotions and reality-test their thoughts, tolerate distress, come to a greater acceptance of experience and practice mindful awareness (a form of meditation).

Jack agreed to participate.

From the outset, Jack's commitment varied depending on how personally relevant he felt a given week's topic was to his life. Finding work just prior to the start of the programme was a boost, but also something he had to work around.

Some days it seemed to make more sense to Jack, and even on days when he found that there was no major learning, he held out hope that there was still something to get from the programme.

Difficult experiences occurred, Jack seemed to handle them differently. I felt with the programme he built on what he already knew, he reflected calmly on experiences. He re-established old friendships and started going out with a girl he had known for years.

Reports from the group facilitators and from mental health workers in contact with the family all pointed in the direction of some progress being made.

Towards the end of the 24 weeks, Jack said that he could more clearly see how his behaviour impacted on others. He decided to apologise to some people he felt he had offended and he expressed a determination to treat others fairly.

As a counsellor, I learned a lot over the period. I learned about a form of therapy, DBT.

I participated in an interdisciplinary team, with a psychologist, occupational therapist, community psychiatric nurses and other therapists.

I learned how a young person I'd worked with found his way through a structured programme which he found ways to apply to his life.

### **Case Study 2: Individual Counselling**

Stephanie, a 15 year old second year student, was referred to us by her school. It was noted that there was a marked deterioration in her behaviour and grades over a short period of time. Stephanie's first year in secondary school was trouble free with above average grades. Stephanie had been suspended twice in the last two months.

Stephanie arrived with her mother and father at the first session. She was very angry with the school. Her mother was a very vocal woman who spoke over her and had a list of all her negative behaviours. Stephanie did not try to defend herself and withdrew from the conversation.

Over the first few sessions, through the use of cognitive behavioural therapy we separated the person from the behaviour and examined what she was doing to create the situation in school. Her behaviour consisted of shouting at teachers and throwing things about when she got angry. The natural consequences of this behaviour – detention, notes home, suspension – merely served to increase her frustration with the situation. Stephanie had been so absorbed in believing that the teachers were out to get her that she did not realise that the only person who was suffering was herself.

We then started to focus on Stephanie the person and all her wonderful attributes of which there were many. A bright young girl with lots of friends who knew what she wanted to do when she left school, she could easily 'play the game' in school if she put her mind to it.

As a result of using motivational techniques, Stephanie expressed the desire to change her behaviour in school over the next couple of weeks. She tried to control her temper but was still clashing with two teachers. It was agreed that I would meet with her form teacher to see if anything could be worked out to assist the process. The meeting with the form teacher was very beneficial as she immediately contacted the teachers concerned who gave her space to modify her behaviour and time to catch up with her studies. Things improved dramatically in school and continue to do so.

We then looked at possible reasons why out of the blue, Stephanie started reacting to those in authority. By examining patterns with the significant people in her life, she came to see that she was reacting to her relationship with her mother, a domineering woman who did not consider Stephanie's opinions at all in her dealings with her. She felt she treated her as she would a child of a much younger age and as a result of her perceived dominance, she was unable to have any cohesive verbal interaction with her at home. Instead Stephanie acted out with those in authority in the school setting.

We invited Stephanie's mum in for a couple of sessions and applied some of the techniques used in the Step Teen programme. We identified how similar Stephanie and her mum were when angry and explored other non-confrontational ways of communicating. We also focused more on Stephanie's attributes and allowed her wriggle room to grow and learn. Curfews were renegotiated and Stephanie was given more responsibility. The relationship between mother and daughter improved noticeably thereafter.

Stephanie is now back in the driving seat in her life and enjoying a much better relationship with her mother, getting more freedom and responsibility. She finished counselling after fourteen sessions.

### **Case Study 3: STEP/TEEN Parenting Programme: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting**

As part of our ongoing commitment to providing a quality service to young people in the Kildare area, the counselling team also continued to provide parenting courses designed specifically at parents of teenagers. One such course was delivered in the Library in Rathanagan at the request of Mary Behan, Community Worker with Kildare County Council and Eleanor Appleby, Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator with Ardscoil Rath Iomgháinín.

The objective of this course was to invite up to sixteen parents to take part in the Step Teen programme in which they may gain knowledge and awareness in how they relate to their teenagers along with implementing new learning's to enhance and enrich these relationships.

The Step Teen Course, in line with its original delivery aims, was also seen as an opportunity to offer further support to families of young people who currently engage in the service along with targeting the wider community and highlighting the counselling service.

The relevant topics which are covered on the course include:

- Understanding yourself and your Teenager,
- Changing your Response to your Teen,
- Communicating Respect and Encouragement,
- Encouraging Cooperation and Solving Problems,
- Using Consequences to Build Responsibility,
- Practicing Skills of dealing with the challenges of your teenager.

The programme was facilitated by two counsellors to sixteen parents, one evening a week, over a seven week period and as with one-to-one counselling, the service was free of charge.

In advance of each session, parents were provided with the chapter of the workbook for discussion. They then had the opportunity to review and discuss the material and had open discussions on their experience of their teens and their relationship with them.

A DVD highlighting the principles of each chapter was shown which addresses common issues that parents experience with their teens.

This also provided parents with an opening to discuss their challenges and self reflect on their own experience.

As mentioned, the programme allows for enhancing awareness of the Kildare Youth Service Counselling Service and education about some of the issues that young people bring to counselling.

The programme, which is skills based, directly addresses the core skills necessary in the task of teenage parenting. The Step Teen ethos aspires to equal respect, equal dignity and equal human worth for both parents and teens. This is in line with preferred working practices with the Kildare Youth Service Counselling Service and the KYS Strategic Plan.

Evaluation of the course concluded a number of things:

- The course may have been more beneficial if both parents were able to attend as the course recognises the importance of parents collaboratively implementing skills.
- Follow up sessions would have been beneficial to assess if parents were maintaining the skills which they had learned.
- Involvement of the teens at the onset of the course would have heightened their awareness to the fact that their parents were engaging in such a course which in itself may have contributed to an enhancement of the relationship.

Having worked with parents of teenagers in the counselling setting we have recognised the need for parenting support. At the time of writing, a waiting-list has been set up for future STEP teen programmes to be delivered to other areas in the county. This is largely due to former participants recommending the programme to their families and friends.

We understand that further review and development of the parenting programme will be of benefit to us and future participants. This represents a cost-effective – innovative might be a better word - way of supporting people in their challenging role as parents of teenagers.

For further information relating to the Parenting course and the counselling service please contact us on 045-856968 or text to 085-783006. Information relating to other KYS services is available on [www.kys.ie](http://www.kys.ie)



**Figure 1: Participants and Counsellors at the 2009 STEP Teen Parenting Course in Rathangan**