

PLACE2BE

About Place2Be - We provide access to emotional and therapeutic support and training within school communities, using tried and tested methods, backed by research. Our mission is to improve the mental wellbeing and prospects of children, their families and school communities in Scotland, England and Wales.

Place2Be welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to invest in school counselling services, creating 350 counsellor positions, ensuring that every secondary school has access to counselling services with availability to local primary and special schools. Providing one to one counselling will undoubtedly have a positive impact for a number of children and young people across our schools. However, at Place2Be we believe that to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of our young people, a whole school approach is required. This means providing support to:

- all students via a self-referral service, in addition to targeted one to one counselling;
- parents and carers; and
- school staff and providing capacity building professional learning opportunities.

In Wales, where one to one school-based counselling has been a statutory requirement since 2010, the Government recently announced that they would enable schools to support the broader mental health and well-being of learners through the Whole School Approach, which in turn will help to prevent other issues from developing or escalating, including mental health issues¹. This aligns with our policy that counselling alone is not sufficient to create the cultural change required to improve young people's wellbeing.

The Scottish Government has set a target for all 350 additional counsellors across Scotland's secondary schools to be in place by next September. We are concerned that this could give rise to counsellors without sufficient experience of working with children and young people being employed in these roles. Whilst talking therapy may be appropriate for young people in the later years of secondary school, our experience is that younger children - those facing the transition from primary to secondary school, and young people in the first years of secondary school - benefit from more creative therapies, including play and art therapy, to work through their own experiences.

Place2Be has provided school based mental health support for over 25 years, working in Scotland for 15 years. All of our school-based counsellors are accredited and have experience of working with children and young people. We recognise the challenges in recruiting counsellors with sufficient experience and have a range of professional qualifications for those interested in becoming children's counsellors.

We offer a conversion course for adult counsellors who want to develop a specialism in working with children and young people, providing a placement

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-01/together-for-mental-health-delivery-plan-2019-to-2022.pdf>

opportunity in a Place2Be partner school. This not only builds the capacity of the individual, and the number of children and young people we can work with in a school community, but more generally contributes to the development counselling workforce in Scotland. We have recently established a partnership with Abertay University to offer this Level 4 conversion course in Dundee.

There is a recognised shortage of courses for those wishing to become a child counsellor, or for fully qualified counsellors to develop their skills in this area. There is one play therapy course in Scotland, provided by With Kids in collaboration from Queen Margaret University College. In addition to the conversion course offered by Place2Be, Strathclyde University is the only other University (to our knowledge) offering a certificate in working with children and young people. More courses are needed to ensure that the 350 counsellors to be employed are sufficiently trained in this area.

To remove any potential barriers and allow more counsellors to take up this training, we would encourage the Scottish Government to examine the associated costs of these courses, by providing a subsidy or ensuring that students can benefit from Individual Training Account (ITA) from Skills Development Scotland.

We would also encourage the Scottish Government to look at flexible approaches to the implementation of counsellors, allowing local authorities to provide the appropriate provision to fit with local need. This might include capacity building for frontline education staff, including pupil support assistants as well as teaching staff.

Specific questions to be posed:

- What progress has been made towards the 350 additional counsellors in every secondary school by September 2020?
- What is the Scottish Government strategy to ensure that counselling conversion courses are available to adult counsellors, who wish to develop this specialism?
- Will the Scottish Government consider subsidies to encourage more students to undertake the conversion course, and/or look at eligibility for an ITA?