

The Spark

The Spark is a highly respected charity, which has been delivering counselling services across Scotland for over 50 years. Our services include Relationship Counselling, Family Counselling and Counselling services for Children and Young People, delivered in local centres across Scotland. The Spark is a leading provider of school counselling, delivering services in over 40 schools across 7 local authority areas.

The Spark has a robust reputation in the specialist field of training Counsellors. The Spark is an SQA Centre delivering 3 qualifications at SQA credit rated at Level 11 (equivalent to Masters Level):

- Diploma in Relational Counselling
- Diploma in Supervision
- Diploma in Training Relational Counsellors

In addition, The Spark delivers the COSCA Certificate in Counselling Skills which is an entry level qualification for professional Counselling qualifications.

The Spark is currently delivering

- 3 COSCA Skills programmes with a new one starting in February 2020
- 2 Diploma in Relational Counselling Courses with a third starting in April 2020
- A Diploma in Training Relational Counsellors

1. The Spark Model of delivery

The Spark delivers school-based counselling services using a short term, evidence-based model. At The Spark we believe that counselling taking place in a school environment should be short term, solution focused interventions. Our service uses a number of evaluation tools and the school receives a report to show the impact of the counselling on the children.

The majority of The Spark's work is being delivered in Primary schools, which are using their Pupil Equity Funding to provide a counselling service for their pupils. The contracts with schools are managed by the Service Manager. The CYP Counsellors receive regular Clinical Supervision from The Spark Supervisors and they access additional support as required from The Spark's Clinical team when risk is identified. So, although the school have a service which is delivered by a Counsellor, they are not working in isolation as there is a team of Senior Clinicians supporting the service.

The Spark is receiving regular enquiries from new schools looking for counselling and we are already confirming additional contracts with schools for the next academic year. This is our third year of working at scale and the demand from schools is increasing year on year.

Supervision

Our experience shows that to ensure consistency and quality, all our Counsellors must have Supervision delivered by The Spark. When we started delivering school counselling at scale the Counsellors received supervision from their existing external Supervisors. The change to internal supervision ensured that all schools were experiencing a consistent service, working to the same model, and that The Spark had assurances that the service was meeting our quality standards.

Continuous Professional Development

Counsellors working for The Spark have the opportunity to undertake the Diploma in Relational Counselling and to further develop as Clinical Supervisors.

2. Funding streams to support training providers

Scottish students on a Postgraduate course can apply for a tuition fee loan if they are completing an eligible Postgraduate Diploma or Masters course at a publically funded institution in the UK.

Counsellors training with The Spark are not eligible to apply for a tuition fee loan. If you wish to train with The Spark, then you have to pay your own fees. From a diversity perspective, this means that the only people who can train with us as Counsellors are those who can afford to pay for their training.

To support diversity and increase the number of qualified Counsellors, The Spark offers the Diploma in Relational Counselling free of charge to staff who want to become Counsellors. However, this means that, as an already cash strapped charity, we are subsidising the training of Counsellors. There is gross inequality in the system where you can access a tuition fee loan to attend a university but you can't access it for an equivalent SQA credited rated qualification delivered in an SQA Centre.

The Spark's Diploma in Relational Counselling has three specialisms, training Counsellors to work with Intimate Relationships, Children and Young People, and Families.

As part of our training, The Spark provides all clinical supervision, a placement with The Spark, and employment opportunities on completion of the qualification.

As a national counselling agency, The Spark is committed to the delivery of professional counselling services and the Counsellors we train and employ deliver those services across Scotland. On this basis we have a vested interest in ensuring that the Counsellors we produce are of the highest quality.

Once Counsellors are qualified and employed by The Spark, there will be opportunities to access further training to become a Supervisor and/or to become a multidisciplinary Counsellor where you can work with couples, children and young people and families.

If the Scottish Government is committed to supporting mental health and the provision of counselling, there needs to be recognition that organisations like The Spark make a significant contribution in terms of the training and development of professional Counsellors and the delivery of quality counselling services. It is not just universities who train Counsellors.

We would urge the Scottish Government to identify a funding stream to support agencies like The Spark who train Counsellors, particularly the Counsellors needed to fulfil the government commitment to counselling within education, whether that is school, further education college or university. The other potential route which would have a positive impact would be to make a change which allows students training to Level 11 (Masters Level) as professional Counsellors to apply for a tuition fee loan in the same way that they can if they are attending a university.

3. The demand for Counsellors far exceeds the supply

The Spark has a team of CYP Counsellors dedicated to our existing school counselling delivery. We also utilise The Spark Counsellors who are multidisciplinary but mainly deliver our adult counselling services. This is an option we use if we have for example, long term sickness or short-term counselling contracts. However, we are in effect “robbing Peter to pay Paul” as our Adult services then suffer from a lack of capacity, increasing waiting lists in our local centres.

The Spark is currently recruiting for Counsellors to meet the current demand for our services. It has previously been difficult to identify suitably qualified, quality candidates and this is about to become more of an issue as the demand for counselling increases with the Scottish Government commitment to Counsellors in schools, FE Colleges and Universities. This will be further exacerbated if, for example, universities are able to pay their Counsellors at a much higher rate than the Third Sector. This is starting to happen in recruitment adverts for Counsellors.

Our experience so far of the work to be delivered through the Scottish Government commitment to school counselling varies across local authorities:

- Tenders for large local authorities wide contracts are starting to be procured
- We are receiving enquiries from local authorities where the schools clusters have the decision making power re engaging counselling providers
- We know of one local authority which has identified that there are insufficient Counsellors and is building a combined model of recruitment and training.

For the investment in school counselling to be successful there needs to be recognition that local authorities will not be able to just buy in services to cover their entire provision from September 2020. In our opinion, a staged approach is required:

1. Identify and purchase counselling / Counsellors where the supply of Counsellors exists
2. Identify gaps in provision
3. Work with training providers to train new Counsellors to be included as part of the counselling services being purchased.

4. Clinical Supervision

As mentioned earlier, Supervision is critical to maintaining a quality, consistent service. There has been a great deal of emphasis on the supply of Counsellors but little focus on Supervisors. Regardless of how each local authority decides to implement school counselling they need to take cognisance of how supervision is being provided to their service.

From our experience of establishing a counselling service, having a team of Counsellors who are accessing their own individual external Clinical Supervisor does not connect the supervision to the service delivery and does not ensure a consistent service. The Clinical Supervision needs to have some accountability to the service being delivered.

The Spark would recommend that Local Authorities either have a counselling service provider which has internal supervision included in their contract or they have a single supplier of clinical supervision across the authority.

5. Final Observations

The Spark is delighted that the Scottish Government has made the commitment to school Counselling. We have one chance to do this right: to provide our children and young people with essential counselling services. To achieve this, we need to work in partnership, and take account the learning and expertise of the agencies on the ground who are currently delivering professional counselling services.