

The West Midlands Peer Support Network

This is a group of schools where Netta Cartwright, the director of Peer Support Works (www.peersupportworks.co.uk) has set up co-counselling peer support based on the Re-evaluation Counselling model (www.rc.org) The main participants in the network are Wolstanton High School, Newcastle -under Lyme, Longton High School, Stoke-on-Trent , Rising Brook Sports College Stafford, Wilnecote High School, Tamworth and Hagley Park Sports College, Rugeley. Other schools active in the network are:

Belgrave High School, Tamworth;
Berkswich Primary School, Stafford;
Birches Head High School, Stoke- On-Trent;
Castle Church Primary School, Stafford
Oldfield Hall Middle School, Uttoxeter;
Park Special School, Tamworth
Queen Elizabeth Mercian School, Tamworth
The Rawlett High School, Tamworth,
Walton High School, Stafford;

In each school students and staff have been trained to set up and run their own peer-support service which are usually introduced as part of anti-bullying and stress management strategies. Students are taught co-counselling with the focus on: listening skills; handling emotions; working in pairs; confidentiality; self esteem games; leading and using a support group; supervision; and an understanding of sexism, racism, ageism and disability harassment.

They then operate peer-support systems in the form of older buddies for younger students; support groups; drop-in-counselling sessions run by peer-counsellors; and co-counselling clubs.

Peer-counselling in this context is when students who have learnt co-counselling, counsel one-way students who have not. Co-counselling is when students who have learnt take turns to counsel each other. Students are supervised by teachers who have been taught the same model. Schoolteachers sometimes set up their own support groups.

Students are taught that should any serious disclosure (eg sexual abuse) be made the student or teacher-counsellor would be bound by the Children Act to refer on the material to their supervisor. Peer-supporters are taught to make this clear at the onset with any students to whom they offer support or counselling.

The student training is the equivalent of 5 days and teacher training is a forty-hour course, although has been shortened depending on the institution's requirements. Workshops and support groups are included where students and

teachers from several schools attend and co-counsel with each other for example the YVPP West Midlands workshop on February 1st 2007 in Stafford.