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Abstract

This study explores the impact of a school based voluntary sector mental health service on child clients, their parents and teachers and the school system.

Children and parents living in areas of socio-economic deprivation in the inner city often experience multiple risk factors for emotional, behavioural and mental health problems which are manifest in the school environment. The Place2Be is an exemplar of a systemic counselling service for children in primary schools. Six school based therapists and six head teachers were interviewed and material analysed using a grounded theory qualitative analysis. A co-operative inquiry group was established to support, guide and critique this study. Two children were interviewed with their parents and therapists in a qualitative case study. The phenomena of the “hard to reach” child and parent is examined and practise suggestions of engagement are explored,

The study suggests that sensitive, emphatic tenacious attempts to engage with children, their parents and school staff can ameliorate children emotional difficulties and offer early intervention to prevent escalation of psychological difficulties and disengagement from education.

A school based counselling service can offer intensive, multi-component and multi-level therapeutic strategies to children, and offer consistent therapeutic attention. The study suggests that all children benefit from a therapeutic service which is targeted and universal and open to the whole school population.

Children at risk of exclusion need therapeutic attention to help manage their emotional states and conduct in the classroom and playground.

Reflexivity is employed throughout this study to provide an emotional journey which reflects the experience and contribution of the research participants.

Key Words.

School based mental health. The Place2Be. Children’s risk and resilience. “Hard to reach” children and families. Children in the inner city.