



Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland

Final Report

Evaluation of the impact of *Holding the Space*: A training initiative by Action for Children

Part Two: Scottish Component

Final Report

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Executive Summary

This executive summary offers a brief version of the final report of part two the evaluation of Holding the Space, a training initiative developed by the Kite Project, as it was rolled out across Action for Children's residential children's homes in Scotland. The two, central research aims were:

- to explore the impact of the Holding the Space Training on the cultures of Action for Children's Scottish children's homes; and
- to identify aspects of the process of rolling out the training more widely that can inform future efforts to develop practices or programmes across the organisation.

The research employed a mixed methods design, with an emphasis on qualitative data and analysis in order to capture the nuance and complexity of changing cultures of children's homes. Data collection was carried out between March 2009 and December 2010.

Key findings from the Interim Report included that, within the training, Holding the Space was on track with its aims and objectives. Trainees were unanimously positive about the training and described transformative experiences and impacts on their practice. Bringing back these benefits to the full staff teams appeared to be gradual and challenging. The most significant challenge to meaningful implementation was identified as a lack of congruence - congruence in understanding the aims and substance of the training - between those who were directly involved in it and those who were not. This difference in understanding was seen as inevitable, given the deeply experiential nature of training.

The final stage of data collection included individual and focus group interviews with young people, staff and Unit Managers. It also included analysis of a two part emotionality questionnaire. The findings are as follows:

1. Young people were almost unanimously positive about their experiences of Council and of expressive arts exercises. Only one young person expressed that she did not like Council. The opportunity for expressing themselves, being listened to without interruption and getting help with how they were feeling were highlighted as important. Council was also seen as a place to resolve conflict, though this was not always successful. Those that described difficult experiences of unresolved conflicts in Council still held that it was better to express themselves, even when it was awkward afterward. Young people identified positive and negative impacts on their relationships with fellow young people, and positive or neutral impacts on their relationships with staff. Positive impacts included a stronger sense of closeness and trust.

2. While a few staff spoke of seeing positive potential right from the start, the more frequent response from staff about their initial views of Council and Holding the Space was one of scepticism. They spoke of it being ‘pushed’ by management, and some felt that a lack of recognition for already existing good practice was reflected in the early stages of bringing the training to Scotland. These early impressions, particularly if they were negative, clearly changed after whole staff teams experienced Council and other aspects of the training with the Kite Project trainers. They were unanimously positive about it, with some describing transformative experiences. Several staff were emphatic that they, as staff teams, would greatly benefit from more of this input. Deep listening was frequently highlighted as a key learning point, and increases in empathy, trust, emotional safety, respect, self-awareness, expression, connection and openness were all mentioned as impacts of the training experience. The irregularity of Council sessions was identified as the main obstacle to deriving more lasting benefits from the training. Some staff had little or no access to Council because in almost all units, only those who had gone through the full training facilitated Council sessions in the children’s homes. Staff’s perceptions about the impact of Holding the Space on their homes were mixed. Some claimed little or no impact, with any related changes being invisible or “not across the board.” Others cited positive impacts on their relationships with each other and with young people, and often this was linked with their experiences of deep listening.

3. Unit Managers had a very favourable view of the training and its potential. They expressed concern, however, that expectations were too high for what could be achieved by such a small number from their teams attending the training, especially given the considerable investment in the training. They also spoke of a sense that the existing practice in their homes had not been appreciated or understood, and that practice developments were sometimes wholly attributed to Holding the Space, when actually it was only a contributing factor. They also spoke of the experiential nature of the training, and the difficulty in bringing their teams (and themselves) along on the trainees’ “journey.” Despite these difficulties, Unit Managers were positive about the potential and actual impacts of the training on their homes. They cited the Unit Managers’ and full staff training sessions, facilitated by the Kite Project trainers, as pivotal in bringing about these benefits. Again, deep listening was the most frequently cited positive impact on staff teams. These claims were tempered both by comments that Holding the Space was not the only contributor to these improvements, and that these improvements were not consistently exhibited across all members of the staff group. The most obvious and significant impact identified was on the trainees. With only one exception, the Unit Managers were highly favourable about the development they witnessed.

4. Both staff and Unit Managers raised concerns about the impacts of the training diminishing or even disappearing without continued input and investment related to Holding the Space.

5. The results of the emotionality questionnaires reflected high levels of perceived support and openness amongst staff, with a statistically significant increase in support over the time that the training was being delivered. Young people’s questionnaires

reflected somewhat high levels of perceived support and moderate levels of perceived openness and aggression. No changes to these other scores over the evaluation period were statistically significant.

6. Four key themes have been identified across all of the data collected for this evaluation. The first is the experiential nature of training and the related struggle for organisational congruence. As previously stated, a lack of congruence amongst staff teams, trainees, managers and others in the organisation was identified as a central threat to the meaningful implementation of Holding the Space in the children's homes. Despite this experiential gap, it appears that there was an increase in related congruence as compared with levels at the time of the Interim Report, and this appeared to be directly related to the full team and Unit Managers' training that was facilitated by the Kite Project trainers. The second key theme relates to the central role of the Unit Manager in the culture of a home generally and in the implementation of the training specifically. A lack of clarity about their role in Council and in implementing Holding the Space more generally, as well as the significant challenges associated with developing a varied staff team, were identified as key issues affecting their ability to effectively support the implementation of the training. The third key theme identified Holding the Space and its components as providing potential and actual therapeutic containment. For staff to provide therapeutic containment for children, they too must experience containing processes. There is strong evidence, from the accounts of staff and young people, that such containing processes were experienced in Council and other Holding the Space activities (albeit infrequently). Many of the cited impacts on the cultures of the homes also contribute to a more therapeutically containing environment. The fourth theme addresses tensions between group care and individual approaches to care, highlighting Holding the Space's potential to tap into the core asset of the group in bringing about more therapeutic unit cultures.

7. The findings, then, indicate a much more modest and varied impact of the Holding the Space training on the children's homes in Scotland as compared with the Sunderland home that was the focus of the case study (and comprised the other part of this evaluation). Several differences in the way the training was carried out are likely to be contributing factors for the differences in the findings. Most of these differences are directly related to the challenge of spreading the training across the much wider geography of Scotland as compared with the relatively short distance between the Sunderland home and the Kite Project. Time is also a significant factor. When the Sunderland case study began, the staff team in that children's home had been working with the concepts of Holding the Space Training for five years; they had been experiencing Council as a whole team for at least four years; and they had been holding Council with the young people in the home for at least three years. When the training was rolled out to the other Sunderland local authority homes, a Unit Managers' steering group also started to regularly meet. One would therefore expect to see a much more significant impact on the Sunderland home than the Scottish homes at the time the evaluation took place.

8. There are inevitable challenges to be overcome in order to share and expand particular instances of good practice across the wider organisation. These challenges are often related to the difficulty of attempting to replicate the practice when, due to a myriad of factors, the context and conditions within which that practice evolved cannot be replicated. In regards to which elements are essential to the process of bringing Holding the Space to Scotland, it is clear that, due to the holistic, experiential nature of the training, whole staff teams require experiential access to elements of the training on a regular basis, facilitated by trainers with requisite skills and experience. Given the strong evidence of the powerful, transformative impact of Holding the Space in Sunderland, the vision of expanding those benefits to Scotland appears to be well informed. It was something worth pushing for. The process of making that vision manifest, however, would necessarily be different from the organic unfolding that occurred in Sunderland. In the Scottish part of the evaluation, the responses of staff, trainees, trainers and Unit Managers reflect a lack of clarity during the early stages as to the aims of bringing the training to Scotland or how those aims would be achieved. This was compounded by a perception, by some, that the quality of culture in the homes was not well understood or appreciated by those bringing in the change. The pace of this process was also experienced by many as too fast. Involving more active participation in building the vision and planning a process of implementation, alongside earlier whole team training sessions, would have taken more time but would likely have yielded a greater level of ownership of Council and other key elements of Holding the Space. This would have been particularly important for Unit Managers due to their central role in shaping unit culture and staff development.

9. In reflecting on the effort to roll out Holding the Space across Scotland, all of the points of learning contain a common theme: time. It became clear from the Interim Report that Holding the Space offers much more than information or techniques. It brings together knowledge, skills and 'use of self' in a manner that transforms the way practitioners *are* with young people. Holding the Space as 'a way of being' was the most frequently used phrase by trainers and trainees when discussing its meaning. Unit cultures cannot transform without concurrent transformation of the people within them and the organisation that holds them. This kind of deep change necessarily takes significant time.

Recommendations:

1. Continue investment in Holding the Space, both as a holistic training package and as a foundation for informing practice.
 - 1.1 Undertake vision-building processes with whole staff teams (and, in time, young people) about the aims of the work and the culture of the home, and the place of Holding the Space in meeting those aims.

1.2 Provide regular experiences of Council and other elements of Holding the Space Training, facilitated by those with requisite skills and experience, for whole staff teams.

1.3 Actively involve Unit Managers more centrally in the process of implementation of Holding the Space.

2. Ensure that on-going processes of containment are provided for Unit Managers, staff teams and young people.

2.1 Consider and explore, with staff teams, the relationship of Holding the Space to other models that inform practice

2.2 Utilise external consultancy in developing and maintaining the children's homes.

A fuller discussion of part two of the evaluation of Holding the Space Training (including more detail about the recommendations) can be found in the full final report, which follows.

Section One: Introduction and Methodology

The Safe and Secure project, part of the wider Action for Children services, is funded by a grant from the DCSF to improve and increase the accessibility of Action for Children's services for those children, young people and their families who have been affected by sexual abuse.

As part of their remit, Action for Children commission research which seeks to evaluate their services. Under this remit, the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) was asked to evaluate a training initiative started by the Kite project, a service within Action for Children that provides individual counselling and group work for young people who have been affected by sexual abuse. The training initiative is called 'Holding the Space' and the evaluation consisted of two parts. Part one is a case study of the local authority home which was the first to engage with the Kite Project and the first to receive the training as it developed into its current form of Holding the Space. Part two is an evaluation of the Holding the Space training as it has been rolled out to the residential children's services in Scotland.

This report addresses part two of the evaluation, and the first section will review its aims and objectives, briefly discuss the research design, summarise the history, content and process of Holding the Space and review the key findings of the Interim Report. Section Two will present the findings, Section Three will offer analysis and discussion of the findings, and the concluding section will offer related recommendations.

Research Aims

At the start of the evaluation, the research aims were as follows:

- To describe the environment of the homes undergoing the *Holding the Space* training prior to the training;
- To identify the content and process of the *Holding the Space* training;
- To evaluate and analyse the impact of the training on staff, young people and environment.

Early into the evaluation, another key aim was identified as highly relevant to the research, achievable within the current research design, and potentially of benefit to Action for Children. It involved exploring the process of rolling out an evidently successful set of practices in one part of the organisation (in this case, the Holding the Space training in Sunderland) to the wider organisation and identify key organisational learning points from this process.

This was discussed in a steering group meeting that took place in April 2009, and the following aim was added:

- to identify aspects of the process of rolling out the training more widely that can inform future efforts to develop practices or programmes across the organisation.

Research Methodology and Design

A mixed methods design, with an emphasis on qualitative data and analysis, was adopted in order to capture some of the nuances and complexities of cultural change within the children's homes. Study participants' perceptions about the training and its impact were the primary focus of the enquiry. More creative methods involving opportunities to communicate views via a virtual research environment (VRE) were included to give participants a higher degree of control over their contributions to the research. Quantitative elements included tracking indicators of unit functioning (e.g. numbers of incidents, sick leave) and a pre and post training emotionality questionnaire designed to assess aspects of emotional well-being. Data collection was carried out between March 2009 and December 2010. The following offers more detail about each form of data collection used in the study

- An online forum for all staff to share views and discuss impacts of training on their homes - from the start (part of the VRE);
- An online forum for trainees of Holding the Space to share views about the training and discuss their attempts to implement their learning in the children's homes - from the start (part of the VRE);
- A blog facility for trainees, staff and young people to individually (and semi-privately) share views about the impact of the training - from the start (part of the VRE);
- A programme utilising text messaging to ask young people brief questions about current feelings and views, collected over time (part of the VRE) - no young person engaged with this method;
- Receipt of staff views via e-mail (as an alternative to the VRE);
- Joint interview with Kite Project trainers of Holding the Space - March, 2009;
- Focus group interview with all three trainers of Holding the Space - February, 2010;
- Focus group interview with all trainees of Holding the Space - February, 2010;
- Focus group and individual interviews with staff and young people in Moray homes - November, 2010;
- Focus groups and individual interviews with staff and young people in Ayrshire home - November, 2010;
- Focus group interview with Unit Managers - November 2010;
- Focus groups and individual interviews with staff and young people in Lewis - December 2010;
- Focus group interview with Unit Managers - December 2010;
- Tracking of key indicators - anticipated to take place throughout period of data collection but abandoned (see below);

- Completion of emotionality questionnaire - summer 2009 & winter 2010.

Staff teams' engagement with the blog and staff forums on offer within the VRE was limited. E-mails were also accepted as a method for staff to share their views and this was taken up by some staff. No young person engaged with the VRE. Trainees of Holding the Space engaged more robustly with the blogs and forums, but consistency of engagement across the cohort was limited.

Around the end of the first year of Holding the Space training, a decision was taken by the research steering group to delay the final data collection and analysis until the end of the second year of training, as it was not anticipated that there had yet been adequate time for the impact of training on unit cultures to be discernable. Data collection was also extended to include additional focus groups with the trainers and trainee participants of Holding the Space after the first year of training to inform about the progress of the Scottish training so far. Focus group interviews with trainees and trainers lasted approximately 90 minutes and 75 minutes, respectively. There was also discussion about and a subsequent decision to abandon the tracking of identified indicators. This was also due to the unlikelihood of discernable impact, as well as difficulty in obtaining the data.

Due to personal preference or practical arrangement, some staff and young people engaged in individual interviews rather than focus groups during the final stage of data collection. A total of 12 individual and focus group interviews were carried out, and their duration ranged from approximately 13 minutes to 100 minutes. 48 staff questionnaires, 12 young person questionnaires and five younger children's questionnaires in total were completed, with statistical analysis discussed further in this report. Recordings of interviews were partially transcribed, with direct quotes transcribed verbatim. A content analysis was carried out on the qualitative data, with dominant themes identified and discussed further in this report.

History and Content of Holding the Space

The content of this section is primarily derived from the interview with the Kite Project trainers and reflects their account of (and views about) the development of the training. Please also see appendix 1 for a timeline of the development of the training.

Holding the Space developed organically out of an original effort to address the lack of young people in residential child care accessing the services provided by the Kite Project. In 2004, one of the two current Holding the Space trainers went to a residential children's home in Sunderland local authority to provide art activities that contained elements of therapeutic symbolism and expression. While the young people immediately engaged with and benefitted from the sessions, it was realised that this approach would not be sustainable over time. Bringing young people to the Kite was also attempted, but this was unsuccessful. The work was much more effective when done in the home, and this was deemed to be significant.

Shortly thereafter, the staff team from the same children's home began to attend weekly sessions at the Kite Project. During this process, it was decided that this was the better investment of resources in attempting to reach young people in residential child care. Not only did the work need to be done in the home, but staff needed support in developing and maintaining the kinds of relationships necessary for doing that work with young people.

In the sessions at the Kite, staff were offered a way of thinking more deeply about the young people. Rather than a didactic or otherwise passive method, staff learned through actively doing activities of creative arts, deep listening and, a bit further on in the process, Council. A significant component of the sessions included space for staff to explore and work through their own feelings about the young people, and they repeatedly commented on the importance of having a physically separate space in which to do this work.

Aspects of Rogerian theory and transpersonal therapy were woven into the early sessions, and Council was integrated approximately a year into the sessions at the Kite. Council was chosen based on its natural fit for working with young people (e.g. its democratic nature, its observance of ceremony, rites of passage and celebration, and its emphasis on listening). It also gave staff a vehicle for applying theoretical knowledge in practical ways with the young people. The trainers expressed anticipatory anxiety over bringing Council to the sessions, but the staff responded well. The sense of safety that had developed over that year was identified as central to staff engaging with Council.

It would be hard to imagine that the experiences and learning would not have impacted on staff's thinking and practice back in their unit, though at this early stage in the process, it appears that none of those involved in the process were particularly oriented towards assessing related outcomes. However, two key events that occurred around this time offer potential evidence of impact. The first is that the staff initiated their first Council session with the young people somewhat spontaneously. While there had been discussion about whether or when to hold Council with young people, no plan had been developed. The decision to hold a Council was made in response to an incident with a young person, and the young people engaged well with Council from the start.

The second key event that indicated a strong positive impact of the training was an Ofsted inspection in 2006. During this inspection, the lack of physical restraints was noted and queried. The training that staff were receiving at the Kite was cited as the reason. This event provided an impetus for the training to be developed into what has now become Holding the Space. It was made available to the other children's homes in Sunderland, and on September/October of 2007, five of the then eight units became involved. Training for the Sunderland homes involved:

- A minimum of 2 members of staff from each home to go through the training;
 - Staff were required to apply for spaces in the training, but before deciding whether or not to apply, each homes' staff team met with the trainers at the Kite for 90 minutes weekly, for ten weeks. This enabled staff to make an informed decision about whether to apply, and for the decision of selection to be similarly informed.
 - 22 staff applied and 12 staff were selected (there were a minimum of two per unit, but in some cases more).
- Regular sessions with whole staff teams occurred (at the time of data collection) once monthly for three hours. This was deemed necessary to support the implementation of the content of the training and to minimise resistance.

The training is now a structured course, formally accredited in England by the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE). It has five assessable units of learning. These are:

1. The Way of Council: A group-work model;
2. The core conditions of Carl Rogers;
3. The theoretical framework underpinning Rogerian person-centred therapy;
4. Creative arts as a therapeutic language;
5. Transpersonal therapy (configurations of the self).

In Sunderland, the training is delivered in:

- 3 semesters per year;
- 7 days per semester;
- 1 day at a time (usually a day per fortnight or more);
- 2 years of training;
- 42 days of training total.

A steering group also meets every 4 to 6 weeks in Sunderland. This group is comprised of Unit Managers from all units involved in the training, the senior manager of the units, and the trainers from the Kite Project. Progress and problems are discussed in the meetings, informing the delivery of the training and the implementation efforts in the homes.

In 2008 the decision was made to roll out the Holding the Space training to staff in Action for Children's Scottish children's homes. The trainers met managers and some unit and depute managers from the homes, and this meeting was characterised as enthusiastic. In early 2009, the trainers met with each staff team, and some of the challenges to backfill, training budgets and staff ambivalence emerged. The trainers also noted having much less involvement in the selection process of trainees, which did not include the preparatory ten weeks of 90 minute sessions as in Sunderland. The trainers identified the potential for a misunderstanding of the commitment required for

the training to be successful, and linked this potential to the speed at which the process was taking place.

The delivery of the training in Scotland was different as well:

- 4 semesters per year;
- 5 days per semester;
- 5 sequential days in a block;
- 2 years of training;
- 40 days of training total.

One of the key challenges for rolling out the training to the children's homes in Scotland has been distance: between the trainers and the homes, and between the homes themselves. Resource and practical implications of this distance are significant and necessarily required a modified approach to that which was taken in Sunderland. Related challenges and potential impacts will be discussed in depth further in this report. It is important to note, here, that a potential benefit of one of the modifications was identified by the trainers. Scottish trainees' depth of reflection and sharing, and the speed of their growth and development was seen to be greater during the first semester of training. The trainers speculated that the intensity and emersion of the block approach (as opposed to the one day per week or fortnight) was a significant factor.

Description of Homes

In order to inform staff and young people of the research and the different possibilities for participation, the researcher visited all of the units in March, April and May of 2009. Arranging these meetings (and subsequent interviews) was challenging, given the busy pace of daily life in residential homes.

All of the homes were nicely furnished and decorated, and well kept. One was in the process of redecoration. Some of the visits took place over the Easter break, and were uncharacteristically quiet for children's homes. The staff and young people who were present during the visits were consistently polite, though most young people were disinclined to engage with the researcher. The staff appeared to manage a good balance between encouragement and respect for the young people's wishes in this regard. In most of the homes, staff and young people frequently used humour in their interactions, and this appeared to be a way of expressing warmth and/or smoothing more fractious exchanges.

Key Findings of Interim Report

The Interim Report covered the first year of the Holding the Space training in Scotland. It was based on the data collected from the VRE, data received from staff from e-mails, a focus group with the trainers, and a focus group with the trainees. Because the

training and its implementation appeared to be at a critical stage, a more comprehensive and analytic report than normal was provided in order to inform the second year of training and subsequent decisions regarding Holding the Space. This section offers a brief summary of the key findings.

There was clear evidence that, within the training, Holding the Space was on track with its aims and objectives. It clearly appeared to provide trainees with an effective way of thinking about their practice that included warmth, authenticity and relationship in addition to boundaries and behaviour.

Trainers described the trainees' response to the training as 'mixed', with overall significant progress noted as well as occasions of a lack of authentic engagement. The trainees were unanimously positive about the training, describing its deeply experiential nature. In discussing the impact on their practice, they spoke of moving away from focusing on (mis)behaviour towards seeing what was underlying that behaviour and responding accordingly.

There was also strong evidence that Holding the Space provided containment to the trainees, potentially enabling them to be more therapeutically containing in their own practice. Trainee participants appeared to have developed an enhanced ability to remain emotionally present and resilient.

In bringing the training back to the children's homes, the trainees were also unanimous in recounting significant challenges. All spoke of encountering resistance and all described guilt, frustration and self-doubt about not being able to more effectively implement what they were learning. Council was emphasised as the aspect of the training that held everything together, and descriptions of Council back in the homes ranged from "excellent" to "disastrous." Overall, Council sessions were described more positively than negatively.

The most significant challenge to meaningful implementation of the training identified in the Interim Report was a lack of congruence between those who were directly involved in the training, and those who were not. These two groups of people appeared to have very different understandings of the training and its purpose. This difference in understanding was seen as inevitable, given the deeply experiential nature of training and the fact that most of the staff did not have experiential access to it. Other factors contributing to difficulties in implementation involved communication difficulties early in the process of setting up the training, decisions related to training budgets, and difficulties with prioritising Council. Unit Managers were highlighted as having a pivotal role in bringing about greater levels of congruence, and the need for the Unit Managers' Steering Group was emphasised. Full staff training was also encouraged, and this had begun at the time the Interim Report was disseminated.

Finally, there was an overriding concern, expressed across all groups of participants, that the potential and actual benefits of Holding the Space could be lost without continued investment subsequent to the completion of the second year of training.

Section Two: Findings

The findings from this section are informed by the final stage of data collection, which included 12 individual and focus group interviews and 65 questionnaires (pre and post combined). They are organised as follows:

Young people's responses

- Experiences of and views about Council
- Impacts on relationships
- Other aspects of Holding the Space training

Staff's responses

- Experiences of and views about Council
- Things that have helped and things that have hindered
- Other aspects of Holding the Space training
- Impacts of the training

Unit Manager's responses

- General views of the training
- Things that have hindered
- Things that have helped
- Impacts of the training
- Looking forward

Comparisons of completed questionnaires

Young People's Responses

Ten young people participated in focus group interviews or one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. The amount of time the young people had resided in Action for Children homes ranged from two months to three years. All young people who participated in the study had experienced at least one Council, and almost all reported having participated in anywhere from one to 'a few' sessions. One young person reported far more experiences of council.

Experiences of and Views about Council

When asked very generally what they knew about Holding the Space, young people expressed uncertainty - with the exception of one focus group where three young people spoke with more familiarity about the training. When prompted, most young people across all interviews stated that they were aware of which of their staff attended the training, and a few mentioned that staff seemed to enjoy it. In all cases, young people very quickly made associations between Holding the Space and Council, and discussions about Council dominated the interviews.

Some young people were clearer than others about the rules or guidelines of council, though all had a sense that there were rules for the process. Responses ranged from vague references to respect and listening, to one interview where the young person was able to identify three. Across all of the interviews, all of the guidelines and ‘containers’ were mentioned at least once with the exception of ‘be spontaneous’. The container, ‘what’s said in Council stays in Council’, was mentioned the most frequently, with some young people connecting this with an ability to trust fellow participants in Council.

When asked for their opinions about Council, all but one respondent had very positive things to say. General evaluative responses ranged from ‘brilliant’ to ‘pretty awesome’ to ‘quite good’ to ‘pretty good’. Young people spoke of liking it or enjoying it, with one young person describing it being ‘between like and dislike’, depending on how well that particular Council went. A few young people spoke of fellow young people who did not take Council seriously and the awkwardness and frustration that this could cause.

As the respondents went into more detail about their views, the opportunity for self-expression without interruption (i.e. the talking stick) and the safety of confidentiality became dominant themes. Council was described as providing a calm, non-judgemental atmosphere and respondents spoke of it helping them to relax, be open and approach others with their problems. They also spoke of getting help with how they were feeling:

I feel weak when I approach people, but I can sit in council and...pour my heart out...It's more calm and relaxed and you get their full attention. You won't get someone else kicking off. (young person)

Out of all of the interviews, only one young person categorically stated she did not like them, describing them as ‘boring’. She indicated that she had never chosen to talk in Council and was clear that her reason for agreeing to be interviewed was to indicate that she did not like Council. She was the only young person who did not have share any positive views or experiences of council. She had very little to say about it, aside from not liking it.

When asked about the types of things discussed in Council, the two most frequent themes across the remaining interviews were resolving conflicts and talking about feelings. The young people were asked if they spoke about these things in the same way outside of Council, and all indicated that did not:

...there can be so many distractions, like a mobile phone going off or something like that. While in council, it's easier; nothing goes off, really. It's just so quiet. You get used to the atmosphere and it's quite easier speaking in Council instead of outside of Council. (young person)

Young people were asked whether people speak about different things or listen differently in Council than in other settings, and almost all young people answered in the affirmative. The most frequent reason cited was the absence of distractions; other reasons included the talking piece and references to the atmosphere of Council being

more serious, open, calm and positive. One young person discussed becoming much more aware, in Council, of how another young person felt; another referred to Council as the place where one can receive staff's full attention.

Impacts on Relationships

Young people were asked about the impacts of Council on their relationships, and their responses were mixed. In relation to fellow young people, they spoke of positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts included the resolution of conflict and a better understanding of the other. Negative impacts included the awkwardness that followed confrontational exchanges that did not resolve conflicts:

...I think you get to see people's true colours in Council, to be honest...I never thought [other young person] could be so malicious...(young person)

Because so many young people had spoken about the benefits of self-expression in Council, those that gave negative views were asked whether or not they felt it was better to express themselves, even when it was awkward afterward. All answered that it was. In one focus group discussion that addressed this question, one young person described the following:

It's more, it's like, therapeutic. (young person)

What do you mean by that? (Interviewer)

Like, if it's, when we're not closing it down...you could be having a really hard day...and it's really nice to come in and hear how other people really feel... (young person)

When asked about their relationships with staff, young people indicated that Council had a positive or neutral impact. Positive impacts included a stronger sense of trust and closeness. Similarly, when asked if Council had affected their relationships with the Holding the Space trainees, young people cited positive or no impacts. When discussing positive impacts, several young people referred to trainees as being easier to speak to or of being better listeners. At the same time, most of these young people appeared reticent about the possibility of implicit criticism and many added that they had good relationships with other staff as well.

Other Aspects of Holding the Space Training

When asked their views on any of the other aspects of the Holding the Space training, several young people mentioned drawing or the "arty" sessions they had done. Positive views included the ability to express themselves and their feelings through the drawing, and being able to symbolise their feelings. None of the young people expressed negative

views about the creative expression sessions. One young person also spoke of guided visualisation and was very positive about this as well.

Staff's Responses

16 staff participated in focus group interviews or one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. All were aware of the Holding the Space training. None, however, had read the Sunderland Case Study and few were aware of it. None had read the Interim Report and very few had seen the Holding the Space DVD. Similar to the young people, staff quickly made associations between Holding the Space training and Council, and discussions about Council dominated their interviews as well.

Experiences of and Views about Council

Staff were asked about their initial impressions of Council. Some staff spoke of seeing the potential benefits for young people right from the start, though concerns were raised about the resources devoted to it and the impact on other's training opportunities. The most frequent response, however, was one of scepticism. Some were sceptical but curious, while others spoke of resistance.

I heard staff talk. They were very positive, but when you're looking from the outside in, and think, 'ahh, I'm not so sure about this.' I suppose I was open minded...sceptical but open minded. (staff)

In all focus group interviews, staff spoke of Council (and the training as a whole) as being "sold" to them, "pushed", or "forced" by management, and a few described it as seeming "new agey" or "hippy." Participants across more than one region also spoke of what they perceived as implied criticism. They expressed a sense that they were somehow being compared to the state of the Sunderland home when its staff embarked on the training, and yet the difficulties their homes were experiencing were not comparable. Staff highlighted a lack of recognition of the good practice that was already taking place.

These initial and early impressions of Council, particularly if they were negative, clearly changed after staff experienced Council (and other aspects of the Holding the Space training) with the Kite Project Trainers.

It was quite anxious because you didn't know what you were getting yourself in for, initially, but it actually turned out to be, for me, personally...a positive enough experience. Just taking part in Council side of things and feeling free to contribute or not contribute, as you felt, it wasn't like, the pressures to have to say something if you didn't want to say something. And I appreciate that. And I appreciate the empowerment of doing the Council. (staff)

All staff spoke positively about the training with the Kite Project Trainers. Most responses included an improved understanding of Holding the Space, and most referred to enjoying it.

I was pleasantly surprised, 'cause I was a sceptic I must admit. I think I saw myself in a new light, really...it brought out a lot of stuff I had locked away years and years ago. And that in itself was kinda good. It was good...I felt really quite good and positive after that. And in fact I was hoping we were going to do another one. (staff)

Several respondents were emphatic that they, as staff teams, would greatly benefit from more of this kind of input.

When asked about the types of things discussed in Council (whether with the Kite Project Trainers or otherwise), expression of (or coming to terms with) emotions was the most frequent response. Other topics discussed included issues of bullying, exploring hopes and making sense of things more generally.

When respondents spoke of the benefits of Council, they most frequently referred to a deepening of people's understanding of one another, and this appeared to be strongly connected to the deep listening afforded by the space Council provided. Indeed, deep listening was also frequently highlighted as a key learning point from the training. Many respondents made more general comments about seeing young people deriving benefits from Council as well. Increases in empathy, trust, emotional safety, respect, self-awareness, expression, connection and openness were all mentioned, and all can be linked to this deepening understanding. A couple of respondents spoke of Council eliciting the views of fellow members of staff who usually did not speak up in regular meetings. The benefit of having time and space to think more deeply about things was also mentioned.

What Council creates is trust in the process. It's about allowing people to feel safe...Safe to talk, even about being pissed off, without it being conflict...It's deep respect...it's about it's okay to feel uncomfortable and not feel pressure to talk if you don't want to talk. (staff)

I think in the normal settings, a discussion about an incident that's happened on shift, people will be interrupting each other. But in Council, with the talking piece, you get listened to more. And that is a good thing. You know the person's finishing before...it give you a chance to think before you jump into it. (staff in different focus group)

Negative feedback about Council included a perception of being pushed or pressured by management to participate and the irregularity of Council sessions.

That's actually the frustration...it's not only feeling left out but the frustration that it's not going fast enough because you can actually see that it's got the benefit to give... (staff)

Also mentioned in the above except is a feeling of being left out, and this (or a feeling of missing out) was highlighted by a couple of respondents. Finally, negative experiences of Council when young people did not take it seriously were mentioned on a couple of occasions, with one respondent referring to it as a “shambles.”

Things that have Helped and Things that have Hindered

Staff were asked whether there were things that helped them bring aspects of the Holding the Space training into the home and/or reap the most benefit from it. Resoundingly, they referred to the staff training with the Kite Project Trainers. The enthusiasm of trainees was also mentioned.

Staff were also asked whether there were things that hindered their homes in gaining the most out of the Holding the Space Training, and by far the most frequent response was the lack of regularity of Council sessions. Some spoke of the challenge of prioritising it as much as they felt they should, and some spoke of the guilt the trainees felt about there not being more Council sessions. It became clear that in all but one of the homes, only the trainees facilitate Council sessions. Due to shift patterns, in some cases there were staff who had few or no opportunities to experience Council. Those who had been in Council with their trainee colleagues spoke of not having the confidence to facilitate Council themselves. Some even stated they would not be allowed to facilitate a Council without the training. This prevented the more spontaneous use of Council, as trainees were not always available when a young person requested Council or when it may have been a useful response to events. Some respondents also spoke of the lack of regularity as hindering trust:

The irregularity of the Councils. If you had them more often...[it would] build more trust and that.../

// I don't know that the trust thing is completely down to Council. I think there's quite a lot of trust issues...There's basically people that you know that you can trust, and there's people you know you can't. I don't know if that can be resolved by Council...unless it was more regular and with all the members of staff or more of the large group. (different member of staff from the same focus group)

Other Aspects of Holding the Space Training

When asked their views on any of the other aspects of the Holding the Space training, deep listening and the expressive art exercises were both mentioned. Feedback was almost wholly positive about both, with some participants speaking of their perspectives being powerfully transformed by their related learning and experiences. One respondent spoke of her frustration at not being able to express herself through drawing, but emphasised the benefits of this approach for others.

Impacts of the Training

When asked about perceived impact of Holding the Space Training on their homes, staff gave mixed views. Some stated they did not think there had been any impacts. A few of these went on to modify their answer, either by stating the changes were invisible, difficult to discern or “not across the board.”

The most frequent impact that was identified related to deep listening. Both the related training and the experiences of deep listening in Council were cited as strongly impactful, and many felt that they listened to each other and the young people more deeply as a result. Other impacts mentioned included an increase of openness between some staff, a closer bond between staff that helped them to cope with difficult periods, better understanding between fellow staff members and young people, and an improved awareness of self and other. The one negative impact that was identified was frustration and misunderstandings between trainees and staff who had not been through the training.

Unit Managers' Responses

General Views of the Training

All of the Unit Managers were interviewed in focus group interviews. Similarly to the staff's latter views, the Unit Managers, in general, had a favourable view of the training and its potential. Several identified the experiential nature of the learning, likening it to a journey:

We quickly found that the training clearly had a great impact on the trainees, those who were at the training. And clearly looking at it as experiential training, where they went with that was something I suspect that none of the trainees had experienced before.../

/...The two went on a journey and the rest of the staff felt slightly left behind.../ (Unit Manager, same focus group)

/...that notion of two people going on a journey and the others being left at base came/ (Unit Manager, same focus group)

/that's what happened; these people went on a journey. I see [names of trainees] at times, you know they can struggle with their peers...[names of trainees] have been on that journey and it is absolutely evident in their work practice every day. You can see the difference in them. (Unit Managers within the same focus group)

[from the other focus group]:

I kept hearing about what an emotional experience it was. I felt quite uncomfortable and I didn't know where all this was coming from/

/they're at a different stage/

/...until you saw how, when you did do the deeper sort of stuff, listening and hearing, until you experienced that, I couldn't have imagined that. (Unit Managers within the other focus group)

Early into the process of training, the Unit Managers spoke of being concerned that expectations were too high for what could be achieved by such a small number from their staff teams attending the training. They highlighted the varying levels of skills, experience and qualifications of their staff teams (some of which can be limited). There were concerns about it being “too big of an ask” for trainees to come back and train or implement their learning in ways that would meaningfully affect the cultures of their homes. This was particularly difficult for the home whose sole trainee was not actually located within the home.

The Unit Managers expressed awareness that the level of investment in rolling out this training to the Scottish homes was significant, perhaps on a level not seen before. Some of the respondents questioned whether the value gained from the homes was proportionate to the amount of investment put in. This was related, in part, to the above-mentioned concern about the feasibility of two trainees being able to bring back that training in ways that the whole unit could share the benefit.

Things that have Hindered

Unit Managers identified several things that hindered their efforts to maximise the benefits of the training in their homes. Most spoke of a sense that the existing practice in their homes had not been appreciated or understood, and that this training was being brought in to somehow “sort out” their cultures. A few spoke of their significant progress in developing practice and the surrounding culture prior to the implementation of the training.

...you get a bit concerned when you maybe have a group manager that'll pick up and there isn't any [incidents] and that's because of Holding the Space. No, it's not because of that... Holding the Space is not a magical wand...the culture in the unit is down to the manager who is leading from the front, people leading on the ground and staff involved. Holding the Space is part but not the whole answer. The culture is already there...Holding the Space [went] into it, it's enhanced what we're already trying to achieve...

...All the hard work, Holding the Space is part of that hard work but there's other things as well...all that hard work for them to come in and say we'll get this sorted out with Holding the Space. Wow. That's a statement in itself. (Unit Managers within the same focus group)

Interview respondents also spoke of the pressure that they felt to find a way to implement the training, and some spoke of guilt at not succeeding. All spoke of the early part of the process as feeling rushed. Due to the experiential nature of the training, they spoke of not having adequate understanding, both of the substance of the training and of their expected role in implementing it in their homes. Anxieties about how they should role model good practice during council were also cited. Some spoke of a lack of consultation at this early stage as well, and there was discussion of steering groups to which they were not invited. Miscommunication or misunderstanding about the costs and the impacts on their training budgets were also cited by a few as having a counterproductive effect early in the process.

Things that have Helped

The training event for managers, facilitated by the Kite Project Trainers, was cited as helpful by the Unit Managers. This event helped them to better understand the training itself and their respective roles in supporting its implementation back in their homes. Respondents were especially emphatic about the benefits gained from the full staff training events with the trainers from Sunderland.

When people have used it and they've seen or experienced something that was backing up what they were told.../

/...If we hadn't had that week set up, we would be nowhere because we were really floundering [for reasons cited that were very specific to that unit]. That week really helped: cleared a lot of the cobwebs and the myths. It would have been good to have had that again, maybe three months down the line just to sort of refresh, because we do feel that we've missed out. (Unit Managers from the same focus group)

These respondents spoke of the advanced skills and enthusiasm of the Kite Project Trainers and the experience of seeing surprising responses from their staff and young

people - responses that were surprising due to high levels of openness and insights from some whom they had previously experienced as more closed or cynical.

...And I felt that was when we did turn a corner at that point, where the staff then got a better understanding. Because they were taken away from the project and the distractions there, and taken into a venue where the focus was very much just on Holding the Space. And that was the best thing for the staff group because I saw a change, a definite shift at that point with the staff. Because it's difficult when you've just got two people who are leading on the whole Councils and what have you. (Unit Manager)

All of the training events were also viewed by Unit Managers as examples of Action for Children providing positive responses to their feedback.

Impacts of the Training

Despite the clear difficulties highlighted by the respondents, they were positive about potential and actual impacts of the training. They were clear that it is difficult to quantify these impacts or even separate them out as being solely a result of the Holding the Space Training. They were also clear that the degree of impact varied such that, for some staff or young people, it may be minimal. Conversely, for others it was much more significant. This, then, made it difficult to make any claims about the unit culture as a whole.

The most obvious and significant impact cited was the impact on the trainees. With only one exception, the Unit Managers were favourable about the development they witnessed:

You can see it in their confidence to deal with difficult issues. It's nice to see them showing that side...you did see an improvement...

...certainly I've seen two practitioners who are more confident. And I think more emotionally understanding in their practice. That's not to say they weren't good before. So for me there's been a consolidation. The pieces of work that they have done and continue to do have been positive. (Unit Managers in the same focus group)

The most frequently cited impact on the larger staff group was related to the training on deep listening. Unit Managers could identify an improvement, at least some of the time and with some of their staff, in the depth with which staff listened to young people. There was also a sense that some of the young people, some of the time, felt more listened to. Other cited impacts included increased openness, empathy and understanding, and interventions that occurred earlier in the process of young people beginning to struggle behaviourally. These claims were tempered both by comments that Holding the Space was not the only contributor to these improvements, and that

these improvements were not necessarily consistently exhibited across all of the staff group.

One other impact discussed by the Unit Managers related to the Care Commission. Improvements in Care Commission reports had come about prior to the training being rolled out in Scotland, and had been offered as evidence of improvements that had come about independently of Holding the Space. A few of the Unit Managers had found it difficult to convey some of the aspects of the training in a way that inspectors found convincing, with one inspector jumping to conclusions and making mildly disparaging remarks about it. However, over time both inspectors were described as shifting their views and beginning to see the benefits of Holding the Space. A dedicated space for Councils in one unit, and direct accounts from young people who had had positive experiences of Council in another, were cited as key factors in bringing about this shift.

Looking Forward

Concerns were raised, both in Unit Managers' interviews and staff interviews, about the effects of the training diminishing and disappearing ('petering out'). The reasons for this were twofold: one, because of the changes to the economic context within which Action for Children now has to operate, some anticipated that the training may not continue; and two, the potential and actual loss of those staff who have gone through the training.

The current practice of only trainees holding Council was highlighted by the Unit Managers as well, and this was seen as a key obstacle for reaping more significant benefits from this training investment. The Unit Managers themselves did not express confidence, without more training, to effectively hold Council, nor did they expect this from their staff.

What we've got, I think, is two staff who are more competent [at the elements related to Holding the Space Training], who are coming at things in a different way from an emotional angle and understanding, and are more confident. What we've not got is any staff who have gone through the notion of being trainers and therefore we cannot expect them to do that. So we're still in the same position that we were in the beginning, and I think unless that's addressed, I do not think that this will progress.../

/...They need to see someone else coming along...unless there is some kind of structure, the real practical sense of this will fold...

You can't take part in an experiential training without experiencing it. So unless we have the whole team going through that experience...I think it will falter ...the initial notion compared to a whole team being involved in experiential training...because of the fluidity of staff teams, then I'm not convinced that even continuing on [with sending two more members of staff on training] will answer the question of the team culture.../

/'...It's about how we progress where there's councils afoot without people from training there. People need the confidence to do that. [names of trainees] are just at the stage where they're comfortable taking councils on their own. (Unit Managers all from the same focus group)

Comparison of Completed Questionnaires

On two separate occasions, all staff and young people were asked to fill out an emotionality questionnaire based on the MOOS scale: once in the summer of 2009 and then in winter 2010. The MOOS scale is a verified method for determining aspects of emotional wellbeing in a particular environment. An additional measure on aggression was put into the young person's version. An abbreviated version of the questionnaire was devised for younger children or young people whose reading age was such that the young person's questionnaire was deemed inappropriate. Staff in the units assessed which questionnaires went to which young people.

In the first round in 2009, 33 staff members returned questionnaires (Rowanlea = 1; Hillcrest = 6 ; Culbin Road = 11; Land Street = 7; Not known = 8). Six young people completed a questionnaire and three younger children also completed their questionnaire. It was not apparent which residential homes these young children stayed in (this part of the questionnaire was left blank).

In the second round in 2010, 15 staff members returned questionnaires (Rowanlea = 6; Hillcrest =3; Culbin Road =3; Land Street = 3). Six young people completed a questionnaire (Rowanlea = 1; Hillcrest = 1; Land Street = 4), and two younger children completed their questionnaire (Rowanlea = 1; Hillcrest = 1).

Given the varying the number of questionnaires from the four residential homes, the lack of information about the residential home on a number of questionnaires, and the small numbers from individual residential homes, the questionnaires were analysed in two groups: staff and young people. The very small number of questionnaires returned by younger children means that these questionnaires cannot be compared. What can be discerned from them is that, at the time of completion, some of the younger children's responses reflected feeling supported, open and okay in themselves, whereas others reflected the opposite.

Analysis of questionnaires include descriptive statistics, and the non-parametric Mann Whitney U Test was used to determine if differences existed between Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 for the issues of Support and Openness for both staff and young people (YP's), and for Aggression for young people. There were different numbers of questions relating to Support and Openness in the staff members' questionnaire and the young peoples' questionnaire, and a percentage has been calculated for direct comparison.

<i>Staff</i>	Sample	Mean	Per cent	S.D	Median	Z score	p value
Quest 1	33	10.45	87.1%	1.77	11.00	-2.56	.010
Quest 2	15	11.50	95.8%	0.82	12.00		
<i>YP's</i>							
Quest 1	6	7.58	75.8%	2.32	7.75	-.327	.744
Quest 2	6	8.08	80.80%	1.20	8.00		

It can be seen from Table 1 that staff members reflected experiencing a high degree of support, that this increased between Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2, and that this was statistically significant. The young people reflected experiencing a slightly lower level of support than staff and support also increased between the two questionnaires, but this was not statistically significant.

<i>Staff</i>	Sample	Mean	Per cent	S.D	Median	Z score	p value
Quest 1	33	9.05	75.4%	2.28	9.50	-.034	.973
Quest 2	15	9.37	78.1%	1.37	9.00		
<i>YP's</i>							
Quest 1	6	5.50	55.0%	1.52	5.50	-1.209	.266
Quest 2	6	6.75	67.5%	1.64	8.00		

Table 2 shows that staff members reflected experiencing a high degree of openness and that this increased slightly between Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2, though it was not statistically significant. The young people reflected experiencing a lower degree of openness and this also increased between the two questionnaires. Again this was not statistically significant, although in this case, statistical significance is affected by the low sample size.

Table 3 Difference Between Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 for Aggression							
YP's	Sample	Mean	Per cent	S.D	Median	Z score	p value
Quest 1	6	5.08	56.4%	2.48	4.50	-.806	.420
Quest 2	6	3.91	43.4%	1.43	3.75		

In this final table, young people's responses reflect a degree of aggression in their residential units, and this reduced between Questionnaire 1 and 2. This was not statistically significant, however, although statistical significance is affected by the low sample size.

Section Three: Analysis and Discussion

Many of the key themes identified in the literature review (prior to commencing data collection) bear relevance to the data collected across the whole study. Strong evidence has emerged that Holding the Space is a potential and actual good fit with residential practice that is informed by understanding of the lifespace (Keenan, 2002; Smith, 2005), opportunity-led work (Ward, 2002, 2008), developing and maintaining therapeutic relationships (Garfat, 2003; Mann, 2003) and the importance of rhythms and rituals (Fulcher, 2003; Krueger, 1994; Maier, 1981) in providing healing, developmental care for children and young people. Some of the challenges of making this potential manifest will be discussed in sections below.

Strong support for self-awareness and use of self (Garfat, 1998; Ricks, 2001) are identified in the literature as essential for practitioner development. These appear to be some of the clearest strengths of the training. Rogers' three core conditions for facilitative practice - intrapersonal congruence, acceptance and empathy (Thorne, 1992) all appear to have been enhanced by practitioners' experiences of Holding the Space. Evidence for this is especially strong in relation to trainees, but there is also moderate evidence for the staff who did not attend the full training and even for the young people. It is likely that the infrequency of Council in the homes affected the strength of the evidence in the case of staff and young people.

The remainder of this section offers an analysis of the data. It discusses the data in more depth and draws together other relevant elements of the literature review, the Interim Report and the themes from the data presented in this report. It is organised using the following themes:

- experiential nature of training and the struggle for congruence;
- central role of the Unit Manager;
- therapeutic containment and Holding the Space;
- tensions between group care and individualised approaches to care.

Experiential Nature of Training and the Struggle for Congruence

As highlighted in the Interim Report, Holding the Space Training is deeply experiential, making it impossible for the trainees simply share information or techniques with their teams. A lack of congruence amongst staff teams, trainees, managers and others in the organisation was identified as a central threat to the meaningful implementation of Holding the Space in the children's homes.

Trainees' fledgling skills, knowledge and confidence, for the most part, do not appear to have developed to the level necessary to replicate similar types of experiences in their homes, at least to the same degree or consistency as those experienced in training. This

was generally seen as reasonable by those who participated in the evaluation. Trainees also faced the competing demands of the day to day running of the residential homes, whereas the week long training blocks were dedicated, protected environments for all of the elements of Holding the Space.

Despite this experiential gap, it appears that there was an increase in congruence in understanding of the training as compared with the levels indicated at the time of the Interim Report. There were far fewer references to Council or Holding the Space simply as techniques, and feedback from the focus groups and interviews reflected understandings more congruent with those of the trainees and trainers. In the final stage of the evaluation, participants also appeared to have a greater understanding of the experiential nature of the training, particularly the Unit Managers. Respondents in the interviews also appeared to have a higher level of investment in gleaning the benefits from training, though this did vary across the staff groups.

The Holding the Space training sessions conducted by the Kite Project Trainers with whole teams appears to have been pivotal in bringing about this greater level of congruence amongst the teams, especially since the vast majority of staff had neither read the Interim Report or Sunderland Final Report, nor had they seen the Holding the Space DVD. This makes clear sense; if the basis of the training is experiential then shared experiences amongst whole teams would have the greatest likelihood of more congruent understandings and meaningful implementation.

Central Role of the Unit Manager

What can be achieved by managers is largely dependent upon their staff. Managers play an essential part in shaping both the culture and the approach to work in their homes (Hicks, 2008, p. 249).

Increasingly, research and theory have emphasised the central importance of the Unit Manager in residential child care settings (Davidson, 2010; Hicks, 2008; Hicks et al., 2009; Ward, 2009; Whitaker et al., 1998). As highlighted in the Interim Report, the Unit Managers' therapeutic orientation and involved leadership is a critical factor in the development of good care cultures (Department of Health, 1998). The unit manager is also key in "ensuring congruence between the messages sent by management to workers, and the subsequent actions of the management" (Davidson, 2010, p. 410). Care cultures and congruence are both of primary relevance to the research questions in this evaluation.

In a large-scale study investigating the process of management in children's homes in England (Hicks, 2008; Hicks, Gibbs, Weatherly, & Byford, 2009), the way the manager fulfils the role was found to be vitally important in relation to the outcomes experienced by the young people. Several issues were identified that strengthened or weakened the way managers approached their work, and these are highly relevant to understanding the progress achieved in implementing Holding the Space in the Scottish Homes.

The first of these issues was clarity of role. A clear sense of and confidence in one's role as the Unit Manager was identified as a prerequisite for bringing about effective working strategies (Hicks, 2008). While this issue is applied more generally to the overall functioning of the Unit Manager, it offers insight into some of the struggles experienced by the homes in gleaning the maximum benefit from the training. In the interviews, Unit Managers expressed a lack of clarity during the early stages of Holding the Space, both related to the training itself and their role in implementing it. Confusion about what Action for Children was hoping to accomplish with such a weighty investment and whether this was achievable with the current approach to training appeared to cause anxieties and tensions. Their use of a journey metaphor is telling; they were clearly aware that something significant was happening, but because they had neither been involved in planning for the journey, nor had experienced the journey itself during the early stages, they appeared to feel at a loss for how to bring along their staff teams.

A subtle and perhaps more powerful manifestation of this lack of clarity involved managers' participation in Council. Some Unit Managers spoke of discomfort and/or ambivalence over what and how much they should share in Council. Hicks et al. (2009) highlight the necessity of Unit Managers having "an intensive and intimate insight into day-to-day practice and the ability to act as a role model," though during the early stages of the training, the managers did not have an intimate understanding of the practices associated with Holding the Space. Interestingly, a small number of staff spoke of desiring more Council sessions in which their manager participated.

The absence of hierarchy and sometimes deeper level of sharing in Council necessarily requires a different understanding of one's role (in this case, as a Unit Manager) when in Council. On one level, the formal roles of 'staff', 'young people', and 'manager' are temporarily reduced or eliminated in that protected space. On another level, however, all participants remain cognisant of these roles and some managers (across both focus groups) expressed a feeling of pressure and/or confusion over how to model good participation in Council. It is likely that staff had similar anxieties when in Council, particularly if their Unit Manager conveyed ambivalence either through their participation in or avoidance of Council. Yet, one of the strongest accounts of the power of Council came from a young person describing how much she loved Council and how honoured she felt when staff (trainees of Holding the Space) shared more personal or emotional parts of themselves within it.

A second issue identified by the research into management in children's homes involved the creation and maintenance of the staff team (Hicks, 2008). Hicks highlights the pressure faced by Unit Managers to guard against poor or abusive practice and ensure a minimum good-enough care when working with a team of individuals who have varied levels of qualification, experience, motivation and talent for the work. Such a degree of variation is not seen in many other qualifying professions. The Unit Managers in the Holding the Space evaluation were distinctly aware of this pressure. Because the high level of input and skill required for holding Council or other activities related to the training, the challenge of gleaning the benefits across such varied teams is considerable.

Therapeutic Containment and Holding the Space

Therapeutic containment can be thought of as the primary task of residential child care (Ward, 1995a; Woodhead, 1999). In this sense, it does not mean simply ‘keeping a lid on things’, which is a common misperception of the term. Rather, therapeutic containment is about providing an environment that contains the unbearable, unmanageable, uncontainable experiences and emotions that young people bring to care, helping them to learn to make sense of and manage them in less destructive ways. It is about making the uncontainable/unmanageable containable and manageable. This is done by providing safe boundaries, predictability, rhythms, routines, meaningful activities and a physical environment that is nurturing and meets needs. Most importantly, therapeutic containment is provided by key relationships and the network of relationships that help to hold children and young people through their difficulties.

From a containment perspective, children must feel safe, respected and understood in order to begin to make sense of and work through the pain that underlies their behaviour. This parallels strongly with Rogerian notion that “human beings become increasingly trustworthy once they feel at a deep level that their subjective experience is both respected and progressively understood” (Thorne, 1992, p. 26). For practitioners to provide therapeutic containment for young people, they too must experience containing processes in their workplace. As stated in the Interim Report, there is strong evidence that the Holding the Space training provides the kind of containing processes that enable practitioners to make sense of and manage their own emotions and those absorbed from the young people with whom they work such that they can convey this deep sense of respect and understanding. Evidence from the final stage of data collection also supports this, as many of the accounts of staff and young people strongly reflect experiences of containment in Council and/or other Holding the Space activities. Many of the identified impacts on the cultures of the homes also contribute to a more therapeutically containing environment. The skill and experience of the facilitator(s) appears to have a strong correlation with the degree of containment experienced by the participants, and this is not surprising.

It is also important to note that containment is not static; it is not something that is achieved before moving onto the next thing. “The complexity of the task of containment is great, given the scale, range and pace of issues arising in everyday life in residential treatment” (Ward, 1995a, p. 29). The consistency of Council and expressive arts activities in Sunderland (for staff and for young people) can be understood as providing on-going processes of containment. Conversely, it is likely that the struggle to hold consistent Councils will have interfered with an on-going sense of containment for staff and young people in the homes in Scotland.

Notions of containment also offer further clarity about the centrality of the Unit Manager. A key role for good managers as identified in the above mentioned study on care home management was identified as containment.

Clearly, this meant that containment of anxiety, apprehension and resistance to change formed a large part of what they [the Unit Managers] had to manage both with and for the staff and residents (Hicks, 2008, p. 244).

For managers to fulfil this role, they also need robustly containing processes to help them manage and make sense of the complexities and anxieties associated with practice (Steckley, 2010a; Ward, 1995a). In relation to the Holding the Space Training, significant anxieties have already been identified: Unit Managers' own lack of experiential understanding of the training, doubts about their ability to achieve a reasonable return on the investment of the training (for various reasons), lack of clarity about their own role in the process of implementation, anxieties about participation (and role modelling) in Council, varying levels of staff experience and qualification, and perception of the potential for the achievements of themselves and their staff teams to be overlooked and subsumed within the training.

Ruch (2005) emphasises the importance of a multifaceted approach to providing containment, one involving policies, practices and forums which offer clarity, enable workers to manage the emotional aspects of practice and help workers to make sense of the more complex or contentious areas of practice. The strong, positive impact of the Unit Managers' training and the full staff training, then, is brought into sharper relief by understanding how containing these training sessions appear to have been - for staff and especially for unit managers. From the participant interviews, there is strong evidence that anxieties were reduced and clarity enhanced: many of the participants appeared to make more sense of the training itself, as well as aspects of their own practice.

Tensions Between Group Care and Individualised Approaches to Care

Adults' historic fear of young people coming together as a group (Emond, 2002) was also identified in the Interim Report as a potential difficulty in implementing the Holding the Space training across the Scottish homes. There is some evidence of anxieties or ambivalence about the group-work nature of Council from some of the respondents in the evaluation, particularly related to a perception that young people would not or did not engage meaningfully.

The aforementioned study of residential child care management also highlights tensions between the group and individuals within it as affecting unit cultures and outcomes for young people:

... The relative merits of providing highly individualized forms of care from within-group settings needs to be assessed. Findings showed that one-to-one working was used as a means of preventing disharmony developing in the group of young people. In some instances, this became established as a way of managing a negative culture... Effective work entails balancing the needs of the individual without fragmenting the group - that is to say, groups must be regarded as a core asset (Hicks, Gibbs, Weatherly, & Byford, 2009, pp. 841-842).

Evidence from the interviews with young people, however, demonstrates the potential of Council to tap into the core asset of the group. Holding the Space training also appears to have increased the trainees' understanding of the potential of the group, as well as their skills and confidence to utilise it. For those practitioners who have had much more limited experiences of Holding the Space and Council, their reticence is understandable. Their identification of the potential of Council, despite their limited experiences, can be seen as promising.

Section Four: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter will pull together elements of the Interim Report, and the findings and discussion of this report to address the central research aims for this study:

- to explore the impact of the Holding the Space Training on the cultures of Action for Children's Scottish children's homes; and
- to identify aspects of the process of rolling out the training more widely that can inform future efforts to develop practices or programmes across the organisation.

This section will then conclude with related recommendations.

Impact of Holding the Space Training

The Interim Report identified evidence of significant impact on participants in the training, but less impact on the cultures of the Scottish Homes. The data collected in the final stage of the study offers similar evidence, though there appears to be an increase in congruence across trainees, fellow staff members and Unit Managers in their understanding of key elements of the training. Staff and Unit Managers did observe a positive, sometimes significant impact on those who participated in the full training. Additionally, some of the young people identified aspects of the trainees' conduct or practice that was consistent with the perceptions of the adults interviewed in the study. Participants were unanimous in identifying these impacts as positive.

The Sunderland component of this evaluation (Stevens, 2010) provided clear evidence for the efficacy of the training in significantly contributing to a large, positive cultural shift in one home. Evidence from the Scottish component of this evaluation supports more modest claims. With only one exception, young people were highly positive about their experiences of Council and expressive arts sessions. They identified positive or neutral impacts on their relationships with staff and both positive and negative impacts on their relationships with fellow young people. Staff and managers identified the training content related to deep listening as having a strong impact on their thinking and the way they listened to each other and to young people. Experiences of Council were identified as increasing openness and closeness amongst staff, and Unit Managers identified increases in empathy, understanding and proactive interventions when young people were struggling. All of these observations were tempered with statements that these impacts were variable across staff and time, and that there were other factors (besides the Holding the Space training) that contributed to these identified developments. Negative impacts were raised with less frequency, but did appear significant. They included anxieties and pressures related to implementation and frustrations/misunderstandings between trainees and those who had not gone through the full training. No participant indicated they felt there had been a significant, discernible shift in the culture of their children's home. At the same time, there was a

general sense that staff and Unit Managers were aware that the training did have potential to have a greater impact.

The results of the emotionality questionnaires reflected high levels of perceived support and openness amongst staff, with a statistically significant increase in support over the time that the training was being delivered. It is not possible to discern the degree to which this increase is attributable to the Holding the Space Training. Young people's questionnaires reflected somewhat high levels of perceived support and moderate levels of perceived openness and aggression. No changes to these other scores over the evaluation period were statistically significant.

The findings, then, indicate a much more modest and varied impact of the Holding the Space training on the children's homes in Scotland as compared with the Sunderland home that was the focus of the case study. Several differences in the way the training was carried out are likely to be contributing factors for the differences in the findings. Most of these differences are directly related to the challenge of spreading the training across the much wider geography of Scotland as compared with the relatively short distance between the Sunderland home and the Kite Project. Time is also a significant factor. When the Sunderland case study began, the staff team in that children's home had been working with the concepts of Holding the Space Training for five years; they had been experiencing Council as a whole team for at least four years; and they had been holding Council with the young people in the home for at least three years. When the training was rolled out to the other Sunderland local authority homes, a Unit Managers' steering group also started to regularly meet. One would therefore expect to see a much more significant impact on the Sunderland home than the Scottish homes at the time the evaluation took place.

Learning from the Process of Rolling out the Training Across Scotland

There are challenges to be overcome in order to share and expand particular instances of good practice across the wider organisation. These challenges are often related to the difficulty of attempting to replicate a set practices when, due to a myriad of factors, the context and conditions within which these practices evolved cannot be replicated. One key question, then, is which contextual elements or conditions are essential to maintain the integrity of the practice, and which can be modified or shed? A second key question is what are the essential processes related to effective implementation?

In regards to which elements are essential to maintaining the integrity of Holding the Space, it is clear that, due to the holistic, experiential nature of the training, whole staff teams require experiential access to elements of the training on a regular basis, facilitated by trainers with requisite skills and experience. The early stages of what came to be Holding the Space in Sunderland evolved organically. Whole staff teams were held through the process of training by skilled, experienced trainers. The staff and trainers were the drivers for the changes that were occurring; they owned the

implementation of learning in the children's home. There is no evidence that it was experienced as being 'pushed' by management.

Given the strong evidence of the powerful, transformative impact of Holding the Space in Sunderland, the vision of expanding those benefits to Scotland appears to be well informed. It was something worth pushing for. The process of making that vision manifest, however, would necessarily be different from the organic unfolding that occurred in Sunderland.

The second question, then, addresses how such a vision can be made manifest when it does not originate with those who must make it happen? Paton and McCalman highlight the importance of converting people to a vision through involving them in the process from the outset:

Through active participation you accomplish two things. You gain commitment and ownership of the change process by all: those experiencing the change will not need to be pushed and they will begin to drive change themselves (2008, p. 382).

In the Scottish part of the evaluation, the responses of staff, trainees, trainers and Unit Managers reflect a lack of clarity during the early stages as to the aims of bringing the training to Scotland or how those aims would be achieved. This was compounded by a perception, by some, that the quality of culture in the homes was not well understood or appreciated by those bringing in the change. The pace of this process was also experienced by many as too fast. Involving more active participation in building the vision and planning a process of implementation, alongside earlier whole team training sessions, would have taken more time but would likely have yielded a greater level of ownership of Council and other key elements of Holding the Space. This would have been particularly important for Unit Managers due to their central role in shaping unit culture and staff development.

Another important question is raised by the Scottish experience of rolling out the Holding the Space Training. The project appears to be highly dependent on the skills, experience and possibly the personal qualities of a couple of dynamic and committed individuals within the organisation. Indeed, this has appeared to be a stumbling block, as it has become clear that the training is not simply a model that can be packaged and distributed. The personal, relational element is its strength and its disadvantage. The concern, raised by Unit Managers, about the potential and actual loss of investment when trainees leave Action for Children is also relevant. The question, then, is how can Action for Children achieve a more durable impact for their significant investment in bringing Holding the Space to Scotland - one that is not dependent on a handful of individuals? The answer is complex, as it is essentially about the process of bringing about cultural change. The previous insights, however, about the necessity of whole team experience and the central role of the Unit Manager also apply here. As Unit Managers and staff teams become clearer and more confident about the aims and methods of Holding the Space - through building on their experiences of it over time -

their ownership of it will likely grow and their reliance on the Sunderland trainers or the trainees of the full training will likely diminish. There is already modest evidence for this from the overriding positive response to and increased congruence resulting from the training sessions with whole staff teams. In addition, the surprisingly positive and candid responses witnessed during full staff training sessions may reveal untapped potential within staff teams. Perhaps some staff have the desire and capacity to practice in more deeply therapeutic ways under facilitating conditions. All of this points to the importance of aiming for a ‘tipping point’ or critical mass at which levels of investment can reduce from implementation to maintenance.

In reflecting on the effort to roll out Holding the Space across Scotland, all of the points of learning contain a common theme: time. It became clear from the Interim Report that Holding the Space offers much more than information or techniques. It brings together knowledge, skills and ‘use of self’ in a manner that transforms the way practitioners *are* with young people. Holding the Space as “a way of being” was the most frequently used phrase by trainers and trainees when discussing its meaning. Unit cultures cannot transform without concurrent transformation of the people within them and the organisation that holds them. This kind of deep change necessarily takes significant time and investment.

Recommendations

1. Continue investment in Holding the Space, both as a holistic training package and as a foundation for informing practice

The modest impact on cultures of the Scottish homes should not be seen as a failure but as a reflection of the lengthy process necessary for such a substantial aim. The evidence from both parts of the Holding the Space Evaluation clearly establishes potential and actual benefits to young people and staff. Based on the data from the evaluations, the following is recommended in order that Action for Children and its Scottish Children’s Homes reap the benefits of the initial, weighty investment:

1.1 Undertake vision-building processes with whole staff teams (and, in time, young people) about the aims of the work and the culture of the home, and the place of Holding the Space in meeting those aims.

A shared understanding and ownership of Holding the Space and its place in the wider activities and developments of the home appears to be emerging, but is fragile and requires support. Without stronger related congruence, both within homes and across levels of the organisation, it will be difficult or impossible for the values, skills, knowledge and ways of being offered by the training to have a meaningful impact on the cultures of Scottish children’s homes. Vision-building should not be seen as a one-off exercise; commitment to on-going development should be demonstrated at all levels. This vision must be facilitated by leaders within the home and organisation, but it also must be collectively constructed

and owned by the teams in each home. As a result, clarity will be necessary about what is essential and required and what is not, so that diversity (of vision and its manifestation) can develop where appropriate and necessary. It would also be of benefit for other staff members to visit Sunderland to enable them to envisage how the components of Holding the Space might develop within their own children's homes.

1.2 Provide regular experiences of Council and other elements of Holding the Space Training, facilitated by those with requisite skills and experience, for whole staff teams.

In addition to a shared vision, shared experiences of Holding the Space are necessary for staff teams to collectively own it. As this collective experience, ownership and vision grows, it is more likely that the trainees' capacity to manifest the benefits of their training will become significantly stronger (reducing, over time, the need for the Kite Project Trainers coming up from Sunderland). Other 'culture carriers' will also likely emerge from this process.

1.3 Actively involve Unit Managers more centrally in the process of implementation of Holding the Space.

A Unit Managers' steering group should be a priority, as well as further training for Unit Managers as a group. It is vital that Unit Managers have confidence and clarity about the elements of Holding the Space and how they are leading its implementation in their homes. Visits to Sunderland are also highly recommended for Unit Managers.

2. Ensure that on-going processes of containment are provided for Unit Managers, staff teams and young people.

The containing properties of Holding the Space have been clearly established across both evaluations. It should not be solely relied upon for providing containment. Staff meetings, group supervision, individual supervision and staff development days should all be tailored to enable staff to do the feeling and thinking work that enables reflective practice. Rules, routines, activities and relationships should be discussed and evaluated for their contribution to creating therapeutically containing environments for young people. Holding the Space cannot compensate, on its own, for otherwise uncontained environments.

2.1 Consider and explore, with staff teams, the relationship of Holding the Space to other models that inform practice

There is a difficult balance to be achieved between jumping from one good model to the next, with no depth or meaningful impact, and developing an overriding focus on one model, with other, necessary ways of understanding practice being eclipsed. Given the significant investment made in Holding the Space, current

focus on its implementation is warranted. However, it would be useful to create spaces for staff to explore how it fits in with other models of understanding and practice that they have encountered (formal and informal). This would also address the perception, held by some, of overriding credit given to Holding the Space.

2.2 Utilise external consultancy in developing and maintaining the children's homes.

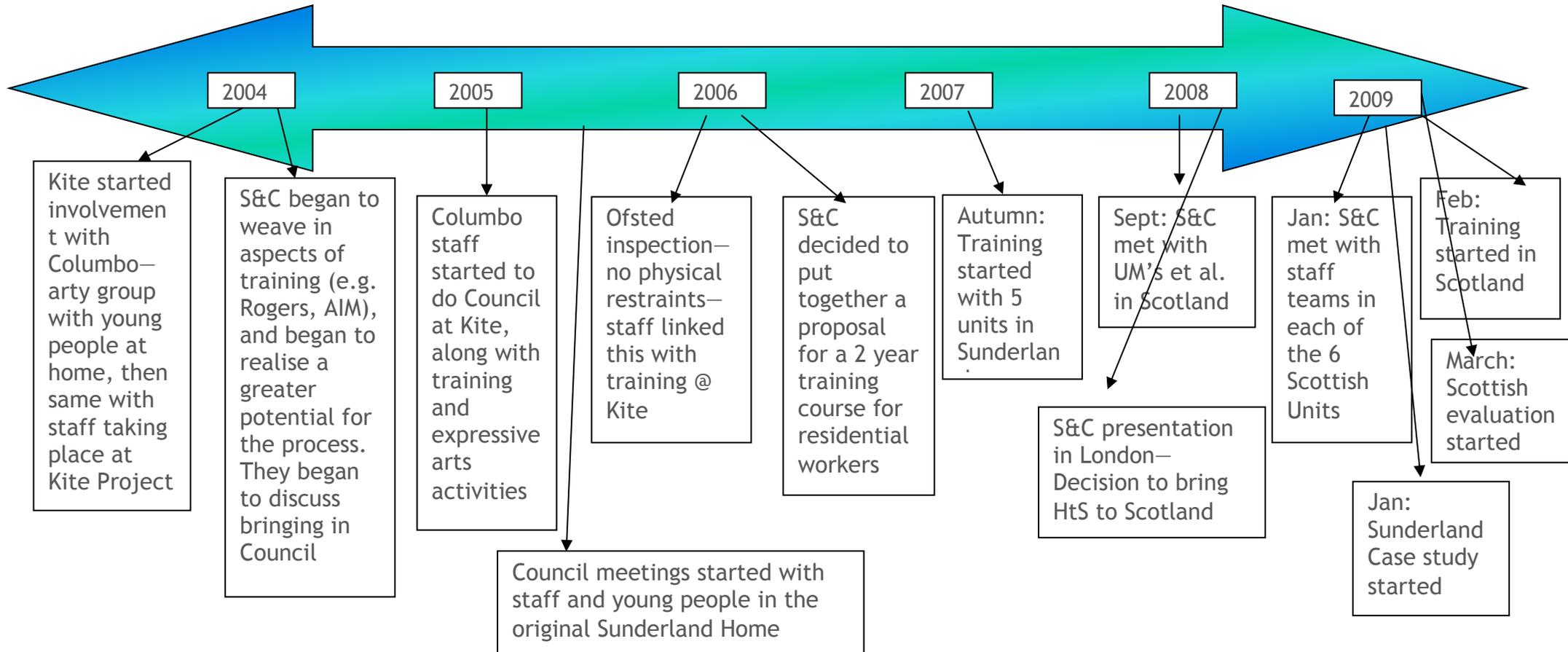
External consultancy has been highlighted as an important factor in creating good unit cultures (Kendrick, 2003) and providing containment (Steckley, 2010a; Ward, 1995b). It was also highlighted as significant in the evaluation of the Sunderland home (Stevens, 2010). The involvement of the Sunderland trainers can be seen as a form of semi-external consultancy. Other forms of consultancy, whether focused on particular issues faced by a resident, or on team or organisational dynamics, can have a ventilating effect in helping teams and organisations to reflect, adjust their perspective, and modify or develop their thinking and practice.

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Holding the Space Timeline



About CELCIS

CELCIS is the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. We do so by providing a focal point for the sharing of knowledge and the development of best practice, by providing a wide range of services to improve the skills of those working with looked after children, and by placing the interests of children at the heart of our work.

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