



Rainbows Bereavement and Loss Support GB.

## The Impact of Rainbows

A Report from the Rainbows Evaluation,  
Research and Development Committee 2019.



Rainbows GB in 2019 is having a positive impact and is supporting current government recommendations and Ofsted guidelines in supporting young people who experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

## What is the Rainbows programme?

The Rainbows Bereavement and Loss Support GB programme was introduced to Great Britain in 1992. It is an intervention for young people of all ages and abilities which aims to foster emotional resilience following experiences of bereavement and loss. It offers age and developmentally appropriate peer support programmes. These are delivered by trained facilitators who are usually members of school staff.

There are four programmes;

- **Sunbeams** for Early Years and Key Stage One
- **Rainbows** for Year 2 and Key stage two (Rainbows is sub divided into three developmental groups where different booklets can be used for young people to record personal ideas and thoughts)
- **Spectrum** for Key Stages 3, 4, and 5
- **Sunrise** for Young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities)

To date, more than 1,400 schools in Great Britain have received training on the use of the programmes.

The programmes aim to provide a “safe space” where facilitators can support groups of young people in developing their understanding of loss, as well as building their emotional resilience, emotional regulation, self-esteem, self-efficacy, communication skills and confidence. The programme also emphasises the importance and role of peer support.

## Does the Rainbows programme work?

The Rainbows GB Trustees have recently formed an Evaluation, Research and Development committee with the aim of reviewing and analysing the impact of Rainbows interventions.

In 2011, Nicola Hutchings (Educational Psychologist) carried out an external evaluation of the Rainbows programmes. She found that accessing Rainbows had positive effects on young people's self-esteem, confidence and their ability to talk about their experience of loss with members of their families. This research can be viewed in full [here](#).

For this report the evaluation data provided by some schools in England and Wales participating in the Rainbows programmes in 2018-2019 has been analysed in order to provide a "snapshot" view of the Rainbows programmes during this time. Fifteen schools provided responses from the young people, from parents and carers, and from staff delivering Rainbows programmes, as well as class teachers not directly involved.

Schools were asked about the percentage of young people in their school who had experienced significant loss and/or bereavement. This ranged from 20% to 40% with the average being above 25%. Death and separation were the two most common reasons why young people had participated in the programme and most families had been approached directly by the school and offered access to Rainbows.

### Young People.

Using the following seven statements young people were asked how they felt after completing the programme. These were:

- I can talk about my feelings
- I can deal with my anger
- I can talk to people in my family
- I understand why my family changed
- I pay attention at school
- I know how to solve my problems
- I know some people care about me

Younger children coloured in balloons with a rating scale on 1 - 3 to indicate the extent to which this applies. They could indicate that Rainbows has helped them "just a little", "sometimes" or "a lot".

Older children used a tick chart rating scale 1 - 4 and could indicate that Rainbows has helped them "never", "almost never", "quite often" or "always".

### **Rainbows programmes had a positive impact across all 7 areas.**

Of 70 young people, 91% felt that Rainbows had helped them in all seven of the areas. The programme had helped "a lot" or at least "sometimes" in all seven areas for 85% of the Sunbeams group, and 83% and 72% of the Rainbows and Spectrum groups respectively. Only one young person (in the Spectrum group) felt Rainbows hadn't affected her positively.

### **Areas with the most positive impact**

All age groups said the Rainbows program had been particularly helpful in the following areas:

- "I know some people care about me"
- "I pay attention at school"
- "I understand why my family changed"
- "I can talk to people in my family"

## Comments from Children

"I can say all my feelings out loud; it doesn't matter what I say, I can talk about my Grandad" (Boy aged 11)

"I enjoyed Rainbows a lot, it helped me through my sadness and helped me to be happy" (Girl aged 10)

"Rainbows made me feel settled in and part of the group. It makes me feel that my Dad is still here - like he was before, even though I don't see him" (Girl aged 10)

"Rainbows is lovely, it's a happy room" (Boy aged 7)

"I have learnt to be more honest and have made new friends" (Boy aged 11)

## Why is this important?

- Young people's awareness of people in their lives who care about them is significant. Research literature indicates that this awareness has a significant role to play in developing emotional resilience following trauma such as bereavement and loss.
- Paying attention in school can be viewed as young people's perception of their ability to engage and participate in learning activities in school, their sense of personal agency and self-efficacy.
- Understanding at a cognitive and emotional level about the changes in family circumstances can remove some anxieties about these changes, and any concerns that young people sometimes have that they are in some way responsible for the changes.
- Being able to talk to family members about change has the potential for honest and open conversations which may strengthen these relationships.

## Parent and Carer perceptions:

Twenty-nine parents and carers completed a questionnaire which asked for comments about any changes they had seen in their child after they completed the Rainbows programme.

Every one of the parents and carers said they had seen improvements in their young people, especially in their self-esteem and confidence. In addition, they reported that communication within the family had improved, as well as social interactions and friendships. All the families said that they would recommend Rainbows to other families.

## Comments made by Parents and Carers about Rainbows:

"You have helped her to come to terms with the losses she has experienced"

"It has helped him with his relationship with his step mother"

"It has helped him to be more settled and happy"

"Rainbows gave her a safe space to come to terms with her grief"

"He's a much more confident boy and beginning to articulate his feelings"

"I truly wish there had been something like this for me when I was at school"

"Rainbows is amazing and (I) am so thankful for that help my son got"

"and to know it's OK to feel how she feels"

"He is full of life and eager to take on new challenges"

"his emotional improvement could not have been possible without Rainbows"

"She has made friends and is much more upbeat and positive"

## Coordinator and facilitator perceptions:

All of the twenty two members of staff who organised and delivered Rainbow programmes said they were satisfied with the outcomes of the programme. They felt they had been well prepared to deliver the sessions, and that the programme had addressed individual's experiences of loss (bereavement and separation) well.

Facilitators and Coordinators told us that all the young people taking part had developed their abilities to express and share their feelings and had developed in terms of their self-esteem and confidence, stating that over 90% of their young people had made progress in developing their communication skills and their ability to show compassion to each other.

## Some Comments made by Coordinators and Facilitators:

"We are delighted to have this invaluable tool to support our pastoral care"

"I love the way the children grow in confidence week after week"

"There has been nothing but positive feedback from parents, teachers and children"

## Class teacher perceptions:

89% of the 23 class teachers we asked, rated the impact of Rainbows as “Excellent”, identified with improvements that young people had made which they had directly observed in class. These class teachers were not directly involved in the running of the programmes.

The most common improvement class teachers saw was in young people’s self-esteem and confidence, which was followed by academic performance and classroom participation.

Staff also commented on improvements in communication, social interaction, attentiveness, anger management, physical health and well-being, homework and absenteeism.

## Summary.

**The Rainbows programme is effective and working well in schools throughout the UK.**

91% of young people of all ages who have participated in the Rainbows told us it was helpful. One young person in the Spectrum group, said in some respects it was not helpful. This may be because this young person required more specialist and intensive support. Rainbows may have a role in helping identify this small group of young people who require more support.

Parents and carers consistently spoke about the positive impact of Rainbows and all said they would recommend the programme to other families. They felt that Rainbows had helped their young people develop self-esteem and confidence, communication skills and social interaction and friendships.

All the coordinators and facilitators spoke of the positive impact on young people, their satisfaction with the training and support they had received and held the view that individual losses had been addressed during the sessions. They reported that in their view all young people had developed skills in talking about their feelings and in their sense of self-esteem and confidence. Over 90% of young people were also felt to have made progress in their communication skills and their ability to show compassion to each other.

89% of class teachers rated the impact of Rainbows as Excellent and commented on observed positive changes in young people's self-esteem and confidence, academic performance and levels of classroom participation.

The personal comments speak uniformly of a positive impact and are the real voices in this evaluation.

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## Why is the Rainbows Programme important and needed?

Rainbows GB provides a successful intervention which can be described as providing **Psychological First Aid (WHO World Health Organisation 2014)**

Psychological First Aid principles are characterised by creating a space where people can;

- “Feel safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful”
- “Have access to social, physical and emotional support”
- “Regain a sense of control by being able to help themselves”

Several recent government documents highlight the growing recognition of the importance of young people’s Mental Health and Wellbeing, their needs and the role that schools can play in supporting these young people.

**The Mental Health of Children and Young people in England 2017 (NHS)**, survey talks about an increase in emotional disorders and a widespread perception that young people are more troubled than in previous generations. It also recognises the role of “Adverse Life Events” such as parental separation.

It also speaks of “Adverse Childhood Experiences” such as loss or separation and the importance of schools in “helping pupils to access evidence based early support and interventions”. This early intervention has a role in “equipping pupils to be resilient so that they can manage the normal stress of life effectively”

**Promoting Children and Young people’s Emotional Health and Well-being, (Public Health England 2015)** states that it is “Widely recognised that children’s emotional health and wellbeing influences their cognitive development and learning as well as their physical and social health and their mental wellbeing in adulthood”

It also says that in an average class of thirty 15 year olds it is likely that 10 will have witnessed parental separation and one will have experienced the death of a parent.

## Social and emotional well-being in primary and secondary schools, 2008

National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines recommend that teachers and practitioners in schools should be offered training and support in developing children's social emotional and psychological wellbeing.

The recent Ofsted 2019 School Inspection handbook guidance introduces a new judgment (a parameter on which a school is assessed) of Personal Development which states that new inspections will be looking at what the school is doing to provide a curriculum which "extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational". This includes ways in which the school "supports learners to develop their character - including their resilience, confidence and independence - and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy".

We would argue that the Rainbows GB programme has a significant role in supporting schools in all the aims recommended in all these recent government documents. The Rainbows GB programme also has a role in supporting schools in their collection of evidence for the new Ofsted judgement in Personal Development.

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