Girls (and Boys) as Human Rights Defenders:
The importance of peer support

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Abstract

This article shows that there is evidence of the importance of peer support as a process whereby both girls and boys can help each other to promote human rights and contribute to greater participation of young people in society. In this way, peer support is pivotal to promoting culture change in schools. The accepted ideology underpinning peer support is that it is part of altruistic human nature and happens informally. Structured interventions like the case studies in this article have the purpose of facilitating peer support so that it happens more easily, reliably and effectively. Formal peer support can achieve wide aims and research indicates that one of its benefits is reducing bullying behaviour. Another is systemic change brought about by the promotion of a co-operative culture where students take on increasing social responsibility. The paper examines some of the benefits and difficulties of running peer support programmes with reference to the case studies and then concludes by highlighting the importance of peer support as a national and worldwide movement promoting young people's citizenship, participation and defence of human rights.

1.   Introduction

Peer-support can help both girls and boys deal with, and prevent, abuse of young people's rights and can thus be used as part of schools' strategies against bullying. It improves relationships between peers and enables people to reach their full potential. By using their power effectively, pupils take responsibility for themselves in schools, colleges, communities, and workplaces.

Although there is a tendency for more girls than boys to become peer supporters, children from both sexes do use and benefit from the services that they provide. Boys and girls are targeted by sexist assumptions and behaviour in different ways. They are all damaged by it, but girls are the main victims. Therefore, for their lives to be improved, girls' power and potential need to be fully realised by themselves, by boys and adults and the awareness of both girls and boys needs to be raised so that they can become equal participants in society alongside women and men. Peer support plays an important role in the movement towards this participation agenda. It can provide a vehicle for girls and boys to defend young people's rights, prevent bullying and

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contribute to sustained and meaningful decision making in schools. In this way peer support is pivotal to changing the culture of schools.

This article provides evidence of the importance of peer support for both girls and boys as they work together towards this aim in their schools.[1] It begins with eight case studies that are later analysed alongside some of the existing literature and research.

2.   Case Studies

The majority of the case studies in this article use the Re-evaluation Co-Counselling model of peer support (RC), developed by Harvey Jackins.[2] The RC movement and its offshoot Co-Counselling International[3] have developed worldwide peer counselling networks beyond the sphere of professional counselling. In the 1950s, Jackins and his associates experimented with taking turns as counsellor and client. They discovered that ordinary people exchanging attention in this way could help each other recover from even the most severe and prolonged hurtful experiences in life.[4] By practising co-counselling, people 'learn how to re-discover their natural ability to give and get good attention from one another through basic listening skills. These skills are then used on a structured basis whereby, through mutual consent, people of all ages and backgrounds assist one another in co-counselling sessions to 'discharge' [emotions] confidentially and free themselves from the damaging effects of old hurts'. [5] Six of the case studies specifically applied these RC ideas and practice in the form of peer support, as a long-term initiative aimed at reducing the abuse of young people's rights in schools, and promoting the participation agenda.

All the case studies were chosen to illustrate a range of peer support programmes in a variety of school settings, age groups and ethnic participants. They exhibit a number of key strengths sustained over many years. Case study one, Walton High School, pioneered peer support in the 1980s and is an example of a programme being continuously sustained for 25 years. The second case study, Longton High School, exemplifies how a programme was adapted to reflect the ethnic diversity of the school. Case study three, Hagley Park Sports College, illustrates how continuity of the programme was managed with a changeover to a new teacher supervisor after the previous one left the school. Six schools in Tamworth are featured in the fourth case study that shows how the RC model can be adapted differently for each school. Case study five, Castlechurch Primary school, shows the advantages of monitoring a befriending programme. The sixth case study, Walton Hall Community School, features peer supporters in a special school who became active participants in the running of the programme and subsequently in broader decision making in the school. Case study seven features peer supporters from Yeading Junior

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[1] Girls generally outnumber boys as both users and providers of peer education. Boys, however, also benefit from peer support. Perhaps the gender conditioning of girls predisposes them more readily to the work whereas the socialisation of boys tends to steer them away. Maybe for similar reasons teachers choose girls for training rather than boys. Whatever the reasons, it is a hurdle yet to be overcome, but in the meantime girls are taking advantage of peer support to champion their rights in schools.

[2] The International Re-evaluation Counseling Communities, available at http://www.rc.org. Last access 23 October 2010.

[3] Co-Counselling International (CCI). See http://www.co-counselling.org.uk. Last access 23 October 2010.

[4] K. Kauffman and C. New, *Co-Counselling: The Theory and Practice of Re-evaluation Counselling* (Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004).

[5] N. Cartwright, 'Combating Bullying in School: The role of peer helpers' in H. Cowie and S. Sharp (ed.), *Peer Counselling in Schools: A Time to Listen* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1996), p.101.

School, where 78% of the children speak English as a second language. Volunteers were trained as 'buddies', befrienders and peer mediators to take responsibility for the management of the programme. The final case study is an example of peer supporters as educators in an extensive sex education programme, APAUSE, which developed from a research project.

2.1 Case Study One, Walton High School, Staffordshire: an example of long-term commitment to peer counselling as an anti-bullying strategy[6]

Walton High School has been committed to peer support since 1985 and was the first school in the UK to initiate an organised system. It is a large comprehensive school in a county town with a mostly middle class and predominantly white students aged 11-18. It was also one of the earliest schools in the UK to initiate an anti- bullying policy with peer support as a major strategy.

What can be called 'a positive atmosphere' has been conducive to its anti-bullying policy that began in 1990. Various indicators suggest that there has been a reduction in bullying and an increase in security with the severity and frequency of physical and property bullying falling to relatively low levels. Both staff and student interviewed for the Keele University Anti- Bullying Project showed a high awareness of anti-bullying work and support for the policy.[7] A history of strong commitment from senior management has enabled staff to have enough time to do the work of supervising and training the students. The peer support service evolved and changed over the years. However, the basic system of peer-supporters as buddies having weekly contact with Year 7 students, coupled with a drop-in and mediation service for the whole school, has been maintained. Over the last 25 years, the service has consistently included:

- annual participation of volunteer students and staff on a modified co-counselling skills course, originally based on the Re- evaluation Co-counselling (RC) model;
- the constant supervision and training of students by four trained staff. This number ensures that, in the absence of any staff, the system can still be maintained;
- a dedicated room for drop in sessions, where two peer listeners are ready to give one to one listening and/or mediation support for two lunchtimes a week; and
- a co-counselling club, where peer supporters have led and taught others how to co-counsel.

The longevity of the programme can be attributed to the constant support from senior management and to highly committed, self-motivated and fully trained co-ordinators. After the original co-ordinator left the school, in 2000, the management fully supported her replacements, two members of staff who had completed a 40-hour RC course. They have continued and

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[6] A description of the case study 'Peer Support at Walton High School in Staffordshire' can be found at J. Park, A. Haddon and H. Goodman, *The Emotional Literacy Handbook: Processes, Practices and Resources to Promote Emotional Literacy* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 2003). See also N. Cartwright, 'Setting Up and Sustaining Peer Support Systems in a Range of Schools over 20 Years', (2005) *Pastoral Care in Education* 23(2), pp.45-47 and N. Cartwright, *Peer Support Works: A Step-by-Step Guide to Long Term Success* (London: Network Continuum Education, 2007), pp.18, 124.

[7] D. Glover and N. Cartwright with D. Gleeson, *Towards Bully-free Schools: Interventions in Action* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), p.58.

developed the service with peer-supporters presenting at local and national conferences as well as participating alongside other schools in the Youth Voice Peer Power (YVPP) project.[8]

2.2. Case Study Two, Longton High School, Stoke-on-Trent: four years of predominantly white led peer support followed by nine years of peer mentors who are white, Asian and students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL)[9]

The school described by peer supporters as 'large comprehensive on top of a hill on a mostly council housing estate on the edge of Stoke-on-Trent'[10] decided to set up peer support in 1997 as an anti-bullying strategy after taking part in the Keele University Anti-bullying Project, alongside 24 other Midlands schools. This project was important to show that bullying was a serious issue in Longton High School as elsewhere[11].

Given the sizeable Muslim population in the school and the presence of an active British National Party in the local community, there is a history of racial conflict, which increased dramatically after 9/11. I had already been training students as peer supporters since 1997, but the few Asian students who participated often dropped out after the first day. Feeling uncomfortable as a minority, they requested a class exclusively for Asians. The response was a programme that used positive discrimination to ensure that peer supporters were a mix of Asian and white, male and female students. A service for year 7 and 8 Asian students was established in 2001 with a follow up workshop for white and Asian buddies who decided on a joint drop-in for white and Asian students. Considering that, more recently, Eastern European EAL students have also been attending the school, there is now a joint white, Asian and EAL peer mentoring service with mixed buddy teams allotted to each year 7 tutor group; and support for year 6 on induction days and their first day at school. Small teams of Asian, white and EAL buddies lead anti-bullying lessons. The groups have also represented the school at meetings of the Peer Support Forum and have published a report on their activities and problems. The following is a extract from the report:

> The kinds of problems students face are racial and bullying problems such as harassment, name calling, violence and singling out occurring both in between lessons on the schools corridors, and during break and dinner. The school has had a few major racial disputes but mainly faced with minor disputes between students, which with the skills we have been taught through our training, we are confident to deal with.[12]

Over the years, Longton High School has ensured that various types of mentoring services are provided for students, as the following examples show:

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[8] *Youth Voice Peer Power*. Available at http://yvpp.co.uk. Last access 19 May 2010.
[9] Also described in Cartwright 'Setting Up And Sustaining', p.47; and Cartwright, *Peer Support Works,* pp.124-125. See fn.6.
[10] Peer Support Networker, Peer Support in Action, available at http://peersupport.ukobservatory.com/psia/PeerPrc_35.htm. Last access 24 October 2010.
[11] See D. Glover, N. Cartwright, G. Gough, and M. Johnson 'The Introduction of Anti-bullying Policies: Do policies help in the management of change?', (1998) *School Leadership and Management* 18(1), pp.89-105.
[12] Peer Support Networker. See fn.10.

-   a mentor scheme for Asian students in Years 7 and 8 providing each student with a trained Asian student as same sex mentor;
-   group sessions arranged for mentors and mentees once every half term in PSHE lessons and informal contact the rest of the time;
-   a drop-in for students from all years to have one-to-one counselling;
-   a small team of Asian, white and EAL buddies going into each year 7 tutor groups regularly about once a week or every two weeks;
-   small teams of Asian, white and EAL buddies leading anti-bullying PHSE lessons;
-   Asian, white and EAL buddies supporting year 6 on induction days and when they start as Year 7s for the first time; and
-   peer education with buddies providing reading support to students.

The main difficulty in this school has been recruiting boys, especially Asians, as peer supporters. However, positive discrimination measures have been used to ensure a gender and ethnic balance in each new cohort of peer supporters. Despite the difficulties, peer supporters at Longton High School, alongside peer supporters from other schools, have been successful. They have, for example, attended Youth Voice Peer Power (YVPP) residential and day workshops, which resulted in them writing 'The Buddy Guide', an online booklet on how to solve everyday problems in school, which could be downloaded for new school students.[13]

2.3. *Case Study Three, Hagley Park Sports College, Rugeley, Staffordshire: twelve years of peer mentoring with smooth transition in supervision changeover*[14]

The Hagley Park Sports College, which serves a working class area of a small town, set up a peer support 'buddy' system in 1998. The teacher who led it completed a 40-hour RC counselling course with me, helped train the first two cohorts of buddies and sustained the service until 2005 as trainer and supervisor. Peer supporters operated a drop-in room, five days a week, and a playground patrol system looking for isolated children and any other problems. In 2005, the supervisor left the school and another teacher took over her role as buddy tutor. This new supervisor and twenty Year 11 buddies were then trained by me using a basic version of the RC model to cover negotiation, mediation, peer-support counselling, and anti-bullying awareness and strategies. The supervisor trained another twenty five Year 10 students. Moreover, in-school refresher training is ongoing, despite difficulties in getting permission for buddies to have time out of lessons for peer support training. The training and the peer support service itself is regularly run by the Buddy Team Staff, which at the time of writing consists of the buddy tutor supported by a behaviour manager.

The service provides peer mentors who are, with two older buddies, allocated to each Year 7 and Year 8 tutor group. They make themselves present at least once a week, usually during registration, and are available to listen to any worries about school or home, which could include bullying of pupils themselves or of their peers. Peer mentors also lead activities such as class and group games with the purpose of teaching the students assertiveness skills, to build up their

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[13] West Midlands Peer Support Network, *The Buddy Guide* (Brighton: TSA, 2008). *Available* at http://yvpp.co.uk/?q=node/323. Last access 24 October 2010.
[14] Also found in Cartwright, *Peer Support Works*, pp.126-127. See fn.6.

confidence and self-esteem. The students become familiar with their buddies and learn to trust them.

There is also a Buddy Drop-In, a dedicated room staffed by two buddies on a rota each lunch time. Students can share their concerns and receive support. All worries or incidents are treated seriously. Any bullying that has been reported to a buddy is dealt with promptly by the Buddy Team staff. This reassures the pupils concerned, helps them to feel happier and stops further bullying. All issues are recorded in the Confidential Buddy Folder and checked by the supervisor at the end of each lunchtime. They are sorted out by the buddies confidentially, or, if necessary, referred on to the Buddy Team Staff using a referral form designed by one of the buddies. All incidents addressed at the same day, and tutors are informed. The buddies regularly monitor any students who have consulted them.

The local community officer put in a bid for funds to purchase buddy logo jackets as well as buddy badges to help make them more easily recognisable. In response to requests from students, a very popular buddy activity club was opened two lunchtimes a week with a pool table, board games, and role-play, all designed to increase confidence of students and encourage co-operation and the making of new friends. One activity involved designing an anti-bullying booklet for a competition. The success of the club and the scheme as a whole has led the buddy tutor to comment on the impact of the activity club on students, and on the impact of the buddy scheme on the local community, as follows:

> There have been bullies and survivors of bullying working alongside and in harmony with the buddies and each other. It has been fantastic and is very popular. Other schools have heard about us and several parents have remarked on how impressed they are with the Buddy System which we have in place. We even had a visit from a Head and Deputy Head of a nearby school who also want to start a Buddy Scheme in their school which is encouraging.

As in case studies one and two, the buddies of Hagley Park Sports College were actively involved in the YVPP workshops and conferences and also contributed to writing 'The Buddy Guide'.

2.4.   Case Study Four, The Tamworth Peer Support for Inclusion Project: an example of individual programmes for individual schools[15]

The Tamworth Peer Support for Inclusion Project was a two-year project that began in 2004 and involved a number of girls and some boys from five high schools, a special school and a pupil referral unit (PRU) in Tamworth. As part of the project, each school set up peer mentoring for their year 7 students and peer support for students moving between the PRU, the special school and the high schools. After leading a conference for student and staff representatives for all schools to launch the project, I taught the staff a three-day co-counselling course. This was followed by three-day courses for students in each school led by myself and the trained staff. In addition, selected students from each school were taught a three-day course focusing on supporting students moving between schools and students in danger of being excluded. Nearly

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[15] Also found in Cartwright, 'Setting Up And Sustaining Peer Support Systems', p.46; Cartwright, *Peer Support Works,* p.127. See fn.6.

all the high schools began or were moving towards mentoring support for students who have been suspended. All schools have also, to varying degrees, sustained their peer support services after the completion of the project. One school's peer supporters were involved in the YVPP project and the writing of 'The Buddy Guide', as in the previous case studies.

2.5. *Case Study Five, Monitoring a befriending service at Castlechurch Primary School, Stafford*[16]

In 2003, a befriending service was organised at Castlechurch Primary School, following training of the staff and the first cohort of year six students, formed by ten girls and eight boys. The group organised a lunchtime drop-in for rainy days, and used the playground informally to befriend and support other pupils. They built up relationships with and actively sought out students who seemed alone. They intervened in aggressive situations using mediation to calm students and encouraged them to listen to each other, so that they could reach agreed solutions. They recorded confidential notes on events and had access to three trained staff members to discuss concerns confidentially. These members of staff then trained the second cohort. As well as helping 46 individual children, the buddies were also mentors to four children who were having specific behaviour problems with two buddies per child.

A school evaluation found that, out of the 42 girls and 4 boys aged 8 to 11 supported from October 2004 to January 2005, several were helped more than once and a few up to 6 times. The most common problems reported were friendship (51 occasions) and 'fallings out' (8). Other problems related to game disputes, lack of friends, name-calling, past events, being rough, being bullied, younger children, groups, family problems, and rumours. In their evaluations, peer supporters reported on what they gained from the experience, which included making more friends, having fun and learning new things. They thought that service users gained most from the confidentiality, from being actually helped to solve problems, and from getting more friends. On the other hand, peer supporters considered that not knowing what to say, not giving advice and keeping secrets were the three main difficulties involved in their role. Another reported drawback was the fact that they could not play with, or talk to, friends at lunchtimes, while on duty. They enjoyed the training days for learning different skills, activities and games but disliked missing good lessons. Their ideas for future improvements to their service included the improvement of the drop-in centre and the provision of more skills development for peer supporters.

2.6. *Case Study Six, Formal one-to-one, peer counselling leading to students as active stakeholders at Walton Hall Community Special School, Staffordshire*[17]

Walton Hall Community School is an all age, including post-16, special school with about 130 students who all have a statement of special needs and have learning difficulties. In addition, many have associated emotional, physical, behavioural, speech, hearing and autism problems. In

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[16] Also found in Cartwright, 'Setting Up And Sustaining Peer Support Systems', pp.48-49; Cartwright, *Peer Support Works,* pp.127-128. See fn.6.

[17] See Cartwright, 'Setting Up And Sustaining Peer Support Systems', pp.48-49; Cartwright, *Peer Support Works,* pp.127-128. See fn.6.

2002, one of the post-16 students told the head teacher about her peer support training with me at another special school. She lobbied for a similar training course at Walton Hall Community School. As a result, I trained two of the staff in 2002 on a 40-hour RC course. They then assisted her in training the first two groups of eight post 16 students who were partly volunteers and partly selected for a 15-hour course. Students and staff continued to use co-counselling to support each other on a one-to-one basis. Some students counselled other students who were not on the one-to-one course and used the process to support younger residents at the school. They launched an active anti-bullying campaign with a dramatic play and continued to meet for one and a half-hour fortnightly for an ongoing training programme of co-counselling. According to the headteacher, Rodney Goldthorpe, speaking about the programme, '[o]ur Buddy Group work has not only helped others but empowered the BG students - they are more pro-active, confident and able to provide an excellent support system for our residential youngsters.'[18] He also gave as an example the case of Andrew, aged 17, who started training this year: 'We have seen his confidence grow, he listens more to others, is pro-active in helping other students now and will encourage free-flow feelings. He is able to follow through this training within the main school with other pupils.'[19]

Much of the Buddy Group work helped develop the School's Council, which encouraged student participation, decision-making and empowerment:

> Youngsters are real stakeholders - we have a pupil interview panel for staff appointments as standard now, have taken part in Active Youth Work in the County, have even been used to help the DfES launch its Special Educational Needs strategy. Recently they have been involved in developing the Oasis Centre - a sanctuary where pupils can chill out, talk, socialise. The development has made our lunch times much better. Would we have even considered this 3 years ago? Without the Buddy Group work and its impact on pupils, our youngsters would not have been as effective as stakeholders in the school community, would not have supported or been as tolerant of individuals. It has helped us to achieve real inclusion. We have Inclusion Quality Mark status. The Buddy Group is an active ingredient of a successful inclusive school.[20]

The young woman who lobbied for the programme is, at the time of writing, working as an adult mentor. She also assists me on school peer support training courses.

2.7. *Case Study Seven, Yeading Junior School: A range of peer support initiatives in a school where 78% of children speak English as a second language*

All 483 students at Yeading Junior School were assigned a buddy from their own year group when they entered the school, during the relevant period of analysis of the case study.[21] Year 5 and 6 students could volunteer for training as Playground Friends who looked out for isolated children and played with them. Some of these befrienders could take further training in conflict

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[18] Rodney Goldthorpe, headteacher of Walton Hall Community School, Programme Evaluation.
[19] Rodney Goldthorpe, headteacher of Walton Hall Community School, Programme Evaluation.
[20] Walton Hall Community School, Programme Evaluation.
[21] For a description of this case study, see Council on Social Action, *Side by Side: A Report Setting Out the Council on Social Action's Work on One to One* (London: Community Links, 2008), p.14.

resolution and elements of restorative justice to become peer mediators. Staff reported that the mediators, working in pairs, had successfully enabled the inclusion of many previously disruptive students. The peer mediation team then helped select and train the next cohort of peer mediators.

Although these student-led programmes required staff commitment as supervisors, members of staff were saved much time otherwise spent on resolving playground and class issues. The programme was indeed successful. For example, even though there was constant movement in and out of the school due to its catchment area, students performed above the national average in Key Stage 2 tests. Staff reported that the untested progress in emotional intelligence was even more outstanding. The one-to-one schemes helped many children to gain confidence and social skills so that eventually they took responsibility for the management of the programme and often went on to lead other initiatives.

2.8.   *Case Study Eight, APAUSE (Added Power and Understanding in Sex Education): Peer education programme working towards accreditation for peer educators[22]*

The APAUSE programme was developed from research at the University of Exeter in two schools supported by Devon Curriculum Services (DCA) and funded by the local Primary Care Trusts. APAUSE was a theory-based, behaviourally effective Sex and Relationships Education programme, supporting effective Sex and Relationships Education within the Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship framework.[23] As collaboration between Education and Health working with, and for, young people, the programme was firmly established as a service provision in 13 different Health/Education areas across England and Wales. More than 16,000 young people per year, in approximately 150 schools, were involved and new areas were regularly adopting this innovative peer led approach. The programme included offering curriculum support to participating schools in a year 7/8 programme developing work from National Curriculum, Key Stage 3, Science.

The long-term goal of APAUSE was to promote the positive aspects of relationships, both emotional and physical, in a context of public health benefit. More specifically, the objectives of the project involved:

- increasing tolerance, respect and mutual understanding
- enhancing knowledge of risks and counteracting myths;
- improving effective contraceptive use by teenagers who are already sexually active; and
- providing effective skills to those who wish to resist unwelcome pressure.[24]

The WISE Project, Negotiations for Adolescent Sexual Health, is an example of one of APAUSE's peer led projects. It addressed issues such as the kinds of negotiations young people need to have for enjoying good sexual and relational health; and how these negotiation skills could be learnt in the classroom situation. David Evans, of IMÙLÈ Theatre-for-development, worked with groups of young people to develop three scripted performance workshops delivered

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[22] Cartwright, *Peer Support Works*, pp.20 and 129-131. See fn.6.
[23] For more information, see Cartwright, *Peer Support Works*, pp.20 and 129-131. See fn.6.
[24] See Cartwright, *Peer Support Works*, pp.20 and 129-131. See fn.6.

by Year 11 GCSE drama students to Year 10 PSHE students. These were entitled: 'Starting a relationship', 'Taking things a bit further' and 'Safer sex and accessing health-care services'. The workshops acknowledged that many negotiations of an intimate nature take place with little or no verbal dialogue. These were explored using floor puppets and solutions were found through interactive theatre techniques. The third session included a visiting health professional who facilitated the class in the rehearsal of necessary negotiations in accessing health care provision.

The project was successfully piloted in six schools with an impact evaluation showing very positive results. An adaptation of the WISE Project has also been piloted as part of the Year 10 English Syllabus (AQA Combined English Language and Literature). It was sponsored by The Department of Health for replication in the large conurbation of Manchester, Salford and Trafford where teenage pregnancy rates were high and where there were significant levels of social exclusion. The development began in six pilot schools in September 2001 and involved 13 schools across the conurbation. The Project was available to any school, irrespective of their involvement with the main APAUSE programme, and came with a comprehensive training programme for teachers, including a manual with video support materials in CD-ROM, DVD or VHS formats.

Another project — RAP (Respect and Protect) — was designed for young people outside mainstream secondary education.[25] The peer educators had themselves experienced seriously disrupted education and life in institutions outside mainstream education. Using drama based techniques they explored key themes in sexual and relational health issues that threatened to keep 'at risk' young people in a state of permanent social exclusion. As the material developed, so did the social and performance skills of the peer educators. Through a series of pilots in such institutions as Pupil Referral Units, School Inclusion Units and Young Mums Units, the team successfully compiled a series of six sessions run by peer educators each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The long-term aim of this project was to make materials and processes widely available so that appropriately trained workers in the field could establish their own peer-led programme both drawing from and contributing to the growing body of good practice established by RAP.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Case Studies

As exemplified above, peer-support includes befriending schemes where people offer support and friendship to other people of a similar age, work or status; mentoring schemes where older students provide positive role models to younger students in schools; peer-education where young people of similar age or background teach others skills such as sex education or drug awareness; peer-mediation where girls and boys provide a neutral conflict resolution service for their peers; and counselling based schemes where ongoing support is provided on a regular basis over a period of time. Key recognised qualities of peer-support systems include the advantages of direct responses to requests for help; the fact that peer-supporters are taught skills to help people resolve problems and that young peer-supporters are trusted by adults as being able to help others in distress; the fact that interventions are not punitive; and the circumstance that peer-support often takes place beyond the classroom or workplace.[26]

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[25] See http://www.sreproject.org/rap.
[26] Cartwright, *Peer Support Works*, pp.26-27. See fn.6.

The main theory underlying peer support is that it is part of altruistic human nature. Sometimes peers work together co-operatively as a survival tactic to keep each other out of danger. For example, friends form gangs to help them stay safe and keep out of trouble.[27] The existence of such informal peer support schemes challenges assumptions that deprived areas have a negative culture and that peer group activity is largely anti-social.[28]

However, there is a difference between children helping each other in an everyday informal manner and the kind of formal organised peer support structures shown in the case studies. The former naturally happens, but tends to be unreliable. Some victims find the decision to seek help very difficult, and many see it as an admission of failure. Young people want to be actively involved in offering support to their peers, and have much to offer but can be prevented by negative peer pressure and doubts about the adequacy of that help. Formal programmes, as exemplified in the case studies, are therefore established specifically to facilitate peer support, so that it happens more easily, reliably and effectively. There are often wider achievements associated to formal peer support and research indicates that one of its benefits is the reduction of bullying behaviour, as in several of the case studies shown above.

If children are brought up in an excessively violent environment they will adopt a defensive stance that retards their curiosity and imagination and develops remorseless behaviour that is unsociable, survivalist and exploitative of others.[29] Nevertheless, if children relate well with peers and cope well with conflicts they will be well prepared for successful relationships in later life. If peer relationships are bad, there could be long-term problems. Within social groups power relationships are inevitable and when that power is abused this causes distress to others, which is central to bullying behaviour and the damage caused to individuals and communities. By promoting co-operation, social responsibility, friendship and conflict resolution peer support enables young people to prevent, overcome and transcend the damage caused by anti-social and distressed behaviour. This seems to be true for Yeading Junior School in the seventh case study where disruptive children were prevented from being excluded with the help of peer mediators. Furthermore, in this school, and in others in the case studies, survivors of bullying who were assigned peer mentors later became peer supporters themselves.

Studies have shown that peer support gives more advantages than disadvantages to both peer supporters and their clients as well as to schools in general. Research so far points to success lying in 'a process of flexible monitoring and clear observation of the needs of potential users'.[30] The monitoring process at Castlechurch Primary School in case study 5 effectively indicated not only the extent of help received by service users but also the benefits and disadvantages accrued by the peer supporters.

Another wider aim in peer support is to take account of the societal context in which the process takes place. Supervising teachers must 'make use of the situated knowledge that the young peer

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[27] P. Seaman, K. Turner, M. Hill, A. Stafford and M. Walker, *Parenting and Children's Resilience in Disadvantaged Communities,* Joseph Rowntree Foundation Parenting in Practice Series (London: National Children's Bureau, 2006).

[28] Seaman et al., *Parenting and Children's Resilience.* See fn.27.

[29] H. Cowie and S. Sharp (ed.), *Peer Counselling in Schools: A Time to Listen* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1996), p.9.

[30] H. Cowie and N. Hutson, 'Peer Support: A strategy to help bystanders challenge school bullying', (2005), *Pastoral Care in Education* 23 (2), p.40.

supporters bring to their task'.[31] The RC training in case studies one to six addressed this challenge by including awareness-raising on sexist, racist, disability and social class prejudice. This had the purpose of enabling peer supporters to champion policies and practice in their schools that challenge and reduce the abuse of human rights. They were also encouraged to take the kind of stakeholders responsibility, as exhibited in case study six.

As mentioned, the first school to have peer support in the UK used the RC model,[32] a peer self-help movement with a number of social implications.[33] By using this model of co-counselling, peer supporters focus on the expression of feelings and take turns as client and counsellor. In this way, they support each other in their work as peer supporters when offering one way attention to other students. Rowan places the origin of organised peer support within the theoretical framework of humanistic psychology and gives an account of RC as an example of a type of peer support.[34] RC is a theory based on the concept of peer support practice leading to systemic change. This relates with Vygotsky's idea of creating psychology for social purposes and as a tool for social change rather than just a mirror of reality.[35]

The theoretical framework for RC practice has similarities with the concepts and methods of other models of counselling and psychotherapy, such as the one developed by Rogers.[36] Somers discusses these similarities.[37] He describes RC therapy as having a working assumption that all human beings have a core being that is loving, zestful, co-operative, curious and communicative, with a creative and flexible intelligence. Jackins, Rogers and others maintain that the helper's experiencing of her own core being is a critical part of her ability to help her client and to believe in the client's underlying core being. A peer supporter using these ideas therefore needs to maintain her own emotional well being as well as having an intellectual belief in her client. In the schools featured in case studies one to six, the peer supporters and their staff supervisors were trained to regularly co-counsel with each other in pairs and groups in order to practice their skills and most importantly to release the emotions brought to the surface by the work in their programmes.

The RC theory postulates a socio-historical cause for people's distressed behaviour patterns, which lead them away from their core being.[38] The focus of the therapy is the discharge of feelings, which is in effect similar to Rogers' sixth or breakthrough stage. The difference is that for Rogers and others the release of emotions is merely a by-product or part of the process of therapy but for Jackins it is the main aim. Another major difference is 'in the treatment of self denigration'.[39] The Rogerian approach is to endure self-rejection in order for authentic growth to

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[31] Cowie and Hutson ,'A strategy to help bystanders', pp.43-44. See fn.30.

[32] H. Jackins, *Basic Postulates of Re-evaluation Counselling* (Seattle: Rational Island Publishing, 1965). Kauffman and New, *Co-Counselling.* See fn.4.

[33] T. J. Scheff, 'Re-evaluation counselling: Social implication', (1972) *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 12(1), pp.58-71.

[34] J. Rowan, *Ordinary Ecstasy: Human Psychology in Action* (London: Routledge, 1976), p.78.

[35] H. Daniels, 'Introduction: Psychology in a social world' in H. Daniels (ed.), *Introduction to Vygotsky* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.1-27.

[36] C. Rogers, 'The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change', (1957) *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 21, pp.95-103.

[37] B. Somers, 'Re-evaluation Therapy: Theoretical Framework', (1972) *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 1(1).

[38] Jackins, *Basic Postulates*. See fn.32.

[39] Rowan, *Ordinary Ecstasy,* p.81. See fn.34.

take place.[40] For Jackins, 'putting oneself down is usually a distress pattern in itself, and has been reinforced down the years by parents, teachers, peers and others'.[41] The RC counsellor sees the client in a positive and realistic manner being aware that any negative aspects are part of undischarged distress patterns. This is the RC model used in case studies one to six in this article. Co-counselling peer supporters can swap attention as client and counsellor as well as offering one-way attention to other students. In this way, they can discharge in confidence the various feelings that inevitably occur when they are helping others. Having done that, they are better placed to give the service users better attention.

These kinds of humanistic ideas are a departure from Freud, who created psychoanalysis, and from other traditional psychological theories. Freud recognised that people who talked to an attentive listener could be released from the effects of earlier traumas or mishaps in life and used catharsis under hypnosis to get to the roots of a problem. However, psychoanalysis has the assumption that human anti-social and destructive behaviour is intrinsic and therefore inevitable. On the contrary, humanistic theories view this behaviour as learnt: children are likely to adapt defensive behaviour that cripples their curiosity and imagination if they are reared in an excessively violent, uncaring environment where personal rights are denied.[42] They become 'unsociable, uncultured, specialised in survival and remorseless in exploitation of others'.[43]

Cowie et al. consider two main aspects of social relationships — affiliation and power.[44] Adults suffering interpersonal problems were probably neglected or rejected by their peers when children. Within social groups, power relationships are inevitable, as people who are stronger physically, intellectually, emotionally or financially are more likely to become leaders. When that power is abused, this causes distress to others and it is central to bullying and violent behaviour,[45] thus damaging individuals, schools and communities.[46] As shown in the variety of case studies above, peer support can promote the kind of co-operation, social responsibility, friendship and conflict resolution that enables students to prevent, overcome and transcend the damage caused by anti-social and distressed behaviour in schools. It also enables them to defend the rights of others.

4.   The Benefits and Difficulties of Running a Peer Support Programme

In the case study above and in other peer support programmes, school staff and students testify to their effectiveness and illustrate it to some extent with monitoring and evaluation. However, proving the importance of peer support interventions through rigorous scientific research of outcomes and processes is difficult. That kind of empirical evidence requires a control group, with directly comparable features between projects and precise definitions of variables. The necessary time frame enabling longer-term outcomes to be evaluated is also difficult to achieve.

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[40] A. Newsome, B. Thorne and K. Wyld, *Student Counselling in Practice* (London: University of London Press, 1973).

[41] Rowan, *Ordinary Ecstasy*, p.81. See fn.34.

[42] C. Trevartthen and K. Logotheti, 'Child in Society, and Society in Children: The nature of basic trust' in S. Howell and R. Willis (ed.), *Societies at Peace* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.177.

[43] Trevarthen and Logotheti, 'Child in Society', p.177. See fn.42.

[44] H. Cowie, P. Smith, M. Boulton and R. Laver, *Co-operation in the Multi-ethnic Classroom* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1994).

[45] Cowie and Sharp, *Peer Counselling in Schools: A time to listen*, p.9. See fn.29.

[46] P. Smith and S. Sharp (ed.), *School Bullying: Insights and Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Measuring peer support is particularly problematic bearing in mind the many interpretations of 'success'. Claimed outcomes such as changes in school ethos, bullying incidences, levels of social responsibility and any other effects are inevitably coloured by the assumptions and values of the evaluators and the systems they work in.

This article doest not provide such scientific evidence, but instead shows that there is some evidence of the importance of peer support. There is a growing body of literature that explores the ways in which peer-support interventions in schools contribute towards strategies to combat bullying and racial harassment, as well as helping girls and boys deal with distress at home and in school. Research shows that peer support can encourage a more caring atmosphere in schools and promote greater democracy; a less stressful ethos; and a shift in power towards young people. Schools with these kinds of values, like those in the case studies above, are also more able to set up and sustain peer support.[47] The Keele Anti-bullying Project[48] examined how the atmosphere in schools impacted on the effect of peer support. They found that those schools with the more caring and democratic values had more success in reducing bullying than schools with a more authoritarian approach.[49]

Examples of research on peer support in general with comprehensive evaluations of large projects revealing a number of successful features have been carried out by Cowie and Wallace,[50] Naylor and Cowie,[51] and Carr.[52] Small scale and qualitative evaluations have also provided evidence of positive results from a variety of peer work interventions over the last two decades, both in the UK and elsewhere. Examples of research on more specific forms of peer support include: befriending;[53] peer tutoring;[54] peer-delivered health promotion;[55] peer mentoring and peer mediation;[56] bereavement support;[57] group counselling;[58] telephone counselling;[59] Conflict Resolution;[60] Circle of Friends approach;[61] the impact of peer listening and counselling;[62] and improved behaviour from previously challenging pupils.[63]

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[47] R. Carr, 'Peer Helping in Canada', (1994) *Peer Counselling Journal* 11(1), pp.6-9.

[48] Glover and Cartwright with Gleeson, *Towards Bully-free Schools*. See fn.7.

[49] Glover and Cartwright with Gleeson, *Towards Bully-free Schools*, pp. 39-51. See fn.7.

[50] H. Cowie and P. Wallace, *Peer Support in Action: From bystanding to standing by* (London: Sage, 2000).

[51] P. Naylor and H. Cowie, 'The Effectiveness of Peer Support Systems in Challenging School Bullying: The perspectives and experiences of teachers and pupils', (1999) *Journal of Adolescence* 22, pp.467–479.

[52] See, for example, R. A. Carr, 'The City-Wide Peer Counselling Program', (1988) *Children and Youth Services Review* 10(3), pp.217-232.

[53] R. Konet, 'Peer helpers in the middle school', (1991) *Middle School Journal*, September, pp.13-16.

[54] V. M. Franca, M. M.Kerr, A. L. Reitz & D. Lambert, 'Peer Tutoring among Behaviourally Disordered Students: Academic and social benefits to tutor and tutee', (1990) *Education and Treatment of Children* 13, pp.267-76.

[55] I. Clements and M. Buczkiewicz, *Approaches to Peer-led Health Education: A Guide for Youth Workers* (London: Health Education Authority, 1993).

[56] H. Stacey, 'Mediation into schools does go', (1996) *Journal for Pastoral and Personal and Social Education* 14(2), pp.7-10.

[57] D. Quarmby, 'Peer Counselling with Bereaved Adolescents', (1993) *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 21(2), pp.196-211.

[58] N. Sprinthall, J. Hall and E. Gerber, 'Peer Counselling for Middle School Students Experiencing Family Divorce: A deliberate psychological education model', (1992) *Elementary School Guidance and Counselling* 26(4), pp.279-294.

[59] K. Boehm, J. Chessare T. Valko and M. Sager, 'Teen Line', (1991) *Adolescence* 26(103), pp.643-648.

[60] P. Lane, J. McWhirter and J. Jeffries, 'A peer mediation model: Conflict resolution for elementary and middle school children', (1992) *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* 27(1), pp.15-23.

[61] C. Newton, G. Taylor, and D. Wilson, 'Circle of Friends: An inclusive approach to meeting emotional and behavioural needs', (1996) *Educational Psychology in Practice* 11(4), pp.41-48.

Research also shows a number of common outcomes with three main beneficiaries: the young people who receive peer support, the peer supporters, and the school. The main benefits are listed below with some examples of researchers:

- increased confidence and self esteem for both peer supporters and their clients;[64]
- improved communication and social skills for peer supporters;[65]
- a better atmosphere in school and the wider community;[66]
- improved behaviour and a reduction in bullying;[67]
- enhanced supportive pastoral systems;[68]
- better academic performance;[69]
- greater student involvement in problem solving;[70]
- positive impact on disabled students;[71]
- reduction in self-harm and substance abuse;[72]
- increased likelihood that young people will seek help from peers than from adults;[73]
- pupil counsellors can offer unique perspectives on why their peers may be suffering and can often identify appropriate strategies for helping them;[74]

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[62] Cowie and Sharp, *Peer Counselling in Schools: A time to listen*, p.9. See fn.29; K. Rogers, J. Scherer-Thompson, and S. Laws, *Peer Support Programme: Report on the Findings from Stage 1 of the Evaluation* (London: The Mental Health Foundation, 1999).

[63] L. Lowenstein, 'The Peer Group Promoting Socialised Behaviour: How can the peer group be mobilised to counteract and remedy negative behaviour?', (1989) *Education Today* 39(2), pp.27-34.

[64] J. Hahn and J. E. LeCapitaine, 'The Impact of Peer Counseling upon the Emotional Development, Ego Development, and Self-concepts of Peer Counselors', (1990) *College Student Journal* 24(4), pp.410-420; Konet, 'Peer helpers'. See fn.53.

[65] H. Cowie, P. Naylor, L. Talamelli, P. Chauhan and P. Smith, 'Knowledge, Use of, and Attitudes towards Peer Support: A two- year follow-up of the Prince's Trust survey', (2002) *Journal of Adolescence* 25(5), pp.453-467; J. S. Christopher, D. J. Hansen, and V. M. MacMillan, 'Effectiveness of a Peer-Helper Intervention to Increase Children's Social Interactions: Generalization, maintenance, and social validity', (1991) *Behavior Modification* 15(1), pp.22-50; California Association of Peer Programs (CAPP), *Comprehensive Evaluation of Peer Programs* (Woodland Hills: The California Wellness Foundation, 1998).

[66] P. Naylor and H. Cowie, 'The Effectiveness of Peer Support Systems in Challenging School Bullying: The perspectives and experiences of teachers and pupils', (1999) *Journal of Adolescence* 22, pp.467-479; CAPP, *Comprehensive Evaluation of Peer Programs*. See fn.65.

[67] Lowenstein, 'The peer group promoting socialised behaviour'. See fn.63; Smith and Sharp, *School Bullying*, See fn.46; M. Baginsky, 'Peer Support: What schools expect and what schemes can deliver', (2001*) British Educational Research Association Conference*, September 2001.

[68] Glover and Cartwright with Gleeson, *Towards Bully-free Schools*. See fn.7.

[69] J. James, T. Charlton, E. Leo and D. Indoe, 'Using Peer Counsellors to Improve Secondary Pupils' Spelling and Reading Performance', (1991) *Maladjustment and Therapeutic Education* 9(1), pp. 33-40; D. C. Simmons, L. S. Fuchs, , D. Fuchs, P. Mathes and J. P. Hodge, 'Effects of Explicit Teaching and Peer Tutoring on the Reading Achievement of Learning-Disabled and Low-Performing Students in Regular Classrooms',(1995) *Elementary School Journal* 95, pp.387-408; CAPP, *Comprehensive Evaluation of Peer Programs*. See fn.65.

[70] CAPP, *Comprehensive Evaluation of Peer Programs*. See fn.65.

[71] G. G. McGee, M. C. Almeida, B. Sulzer-Azaroff and R. S. Feldman, 'Promoting Reciprocal Interactions via Peer Incidental Teaching', (1992) *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 25(1), pp.117-126; S. Burley, T. Gutkin & W. Naumann, 'Assessing the Efficacy of an Academic Hearing Peer Tutor for a Profoundly Deaf Student', (1994) *American Annals of the Deaf* 139(4), pp.415-419.

[72] CAPP, *Comprehensive Evaluation of Peer Programs*. See fn.65.

[73] Cowie, et al, 'Knowledge, use of, and attitudes towards peer support'. See fn.65; P. Le Surf and G.. Lynch,.'Exploring Young People's Perceptions Relevant to Counselling: A qualitative study', in G. Lynch (ed.), *Clinical Counselling in Pastoral Settings* (London: Routledge, 1999).

- young people report that a peer support system in their school is useful whether they used it or not;[75]
- young people turn out to be more tolerant towards the behaviour of others;[76]
- increased practice of safe sex or less likely to be sexually active amongst certain group;[77]
- increased knowledge of sex, contraception and Sexually Transmitted Diseases among 16 year olds;[78]
- more acceptance of sex education by 16 year olds;[79]
- young people less likely to believe that intercourse should be part of relationships for under 16s;[80]
- enhancement of the National Curriculum;[81]
- raising standards in mainstream curriculum;[82]
- peers can accurately access each other;[83] and
- cost-effectiveness of peer support.[84]

The case studies in this paper confirm most of the benefits listed above but they also exhibit some of the problems inherent in the practice and setting up of such programmes. A major challenge is that girls and boys do not always take advantage of the help on offer. Some find the decision to seek help very difficult, and for many it is viewed as an admission of failure in their own and others' eyes.[85] A potential hurdle therefore is finding students who are confident enough to provide a service and not be discouraged when students do not readily take it up. Sharp and Cowie argue that schoolchildren want to help peers they perceive to be in distress, but can be held back by negative peer pressure and lack of confidence in the adequacy of their help.[86] This seemed to partly account for the difficulty encountered at Longton High School, case study two, when staff tried to recruit Asian boys.

It can be difficult for peer supporters to establish credibility with other students. There is a danger of them being targeted, ridiculed and seen as 'geeks' by other students.[87] Staff who are not kept informed may dismiss the whole project if they feel that peer supporters are trying to do the work of adult professional services. They could feel threatened if some peer supporters become overly involved with students' problems. These difficulties are compounded if peer supporters have unclear boundaries about child protection and confidentiality. Inappropriate

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[74] R. Carr, 'The City-Wide Peer Counselling Program', (1988) *Children and Youth Services Review* 10, pp.217-232; S. Sharp, A. Sellors and H. Cowie, 'Time to Listen: Setting up a peer counselling service to help tackle the problem of bullying in schools', (1994) *Pastoral Care in Education* 12(2), pp.3-6.

[75] Cowie, et al, 'Knowledge, use of, and attitudes towards peer support'. See fn.65.

[76] A. R. Mellanby, J. B. Rees and J. H. Tripp, 'Peer-led and Adult-led School Health Education: A critical review of available comparative research', (2000) *Health Education Research* 15(5), pp.533-545.

[77] Mellanby, Rees and Tripp, 'Peer-led and Adult-led'. See fn.76.

[78] Mellanby, Rees and Tripp, 'Peer-led and Adult-led'. See fn.76.

[79] Mellanby, Rees and Tripp, 'Peer-led and Adult-led'. See fn.76.

[80] Mellanby, Rees and Tripp, 'Peer-led and Adult-led'. See fn.76.

[81] Qualification and Curriculum Authority, *The secretary of State's Proposals for the Review of the National Curriculum in England* (London: QCA, 1999).

[82] Cowie and Sharp, *Peer Counselling in Schools: A time to listen*, pp.138-145. See fn.29.

[83] L. A. Stefani, 'Peer, Self, and Tutor Assessment: Relative reliabilities', (1994) *Studies in Higher Education* 19(1), pp.69-75.

[84] Sharp, Sellars and Cowie, 'Time to listen'. See fn.74.

[85] Le Surf and Lynch, 'Exploring Young People's Perceptions'. See fn.73.

[86] S. Sharp and H. Cowie, *Counselling and Supporting Children in Distress* (London: Sage, 1998).

[87] P. Naylor, *Peer Support Systems as a Challenge to Bullying in Schools: Some recent research findings on their effectiveness* (School of Psychology and Counselling, Roehampton Institute, 1997).

disclosures by peer supporters of individual students' serious problems can cause distress to all involved. When the power balance shifts from teachers helping students to students providing support to others there can be empowerment issues with conflicts between supervising teachers and peer supporters. Staff at Hagley Park Sports College partially addressed this problem by having a system of recruitment involving the endorsement of two teachers for each applicant for peer support training.

Time management, lack of resources and lack of commitment from senior management are also a major challenge. Schools often find it hard after peer support has been set up to invest the resources needed to sustain it with regular staff supervision. This was the case in 14 schools where the NSPCC was involved.[88]

Inadequate training is another issue that can create more problems than solutions. Training might be appropriate for the type of problem that it is envisaged that peer supporters would face, but it might be inadequate and too short to prepare them for dealing with students with behavioural problems.[89] Other problems associated with peer support have been reported as follows: reduced confidence in peer supporters if inadequately trained and supported; frustration when raised hopes and expectations are not met;[90] lack of adequate supervision;[91] gender differences and imbalance;[92] limited impact in reducing student violence;[93] and psychological readiness is necessary to gain from peer counsellor experience.[94]

Despite these difficulties, studies have shown more advantages than disadvantages to both peer supporters and their clients as well as to schools in general.[95] Since the early days of peer support in the UK, many schools have sustained their service over several years as part of an ongoing process of promoting young people's full participation in schools and society. Peer support programmes, as exemplified in the case studies above, are one of the many initiatives that provide glimpses of a society where young people have an equal voice with that of adults. The strength of peer support systems lies in the commitment of their staff and students, the funds and resources available, the quality of training and the adaptability of the schemes to meet their own specific needs.[96] Also important is the careful selection of students; maintaining the momentum; networking and sharing experiences, and regular monitoring and evaluation. In order for all this to happen in the long term, the commitment and direct involvement from senior management is necessary.[97]

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[88] Baginsky, 'Peer Support'. See fn. 67.

[89] Baginsky, 'Peer Support'. See fn. 67.

[90] Baginsky, 'Peer Support'. See fn. 67.

[91] M. W. Lewis and A. C. Lewis, 'Peer Helping Programs: Helper role, supervisor training, and suicidal behavior', (1996) *Journal of Counseling & Development* 74(3), pp.307-313.

[92] A. M. Storm, *Natural helpers: The differences in views of the male and female participants*, Research in Education, October, 1991 (EDRS Document).

[93] H. Cowie and R. Olafsson, 'The Role of Peer Support in Helping the Victims of Bullying in Schools with a High Level of Aggression', (2000) *School Psychology International* 21(1), pp.79-95.

[94] E. J. Silver, S. M. Coupey, L. J. Bauman, and S. R. Doctors, 'Effects of a Peer Counseling Training Intervention on Psychological Functioning of Adolescents', (1992) *Journal of Adolescent Research* 7(1), pp.110-128.

[95] Cowie and Sharp, *Peer Counselling in Schools: A time to listen*, pp.138-145. See fn.29. Cowie, et al, 'Knowledge, use of, and attitudes towards peer support'. See fn.65.

[96] Cartwright 'Setting Up And Sustaining Peer Support Systems', pp.49-50. See fn.6.

[97] Cartwright 'Setting Up And Sustaining Peer Support Systems', pp.49-50. See fn.6.

5.   Conclusion

The case studies in this article are examples of the proliferation of projects that have been developed over several years to become part of the fabric of everyday school life, as agencies for the defence of young people's rights. The energy and commitment of the young people leading and using the peer support services and their adult allies have been significant factors in this achievement. Peer support not only has the potential to improve and transform life in schools, but also has an impact on life beyond school and in the wider community. Having evaluated most of the projects referred to in this article, a key finding is the long-term positive impact peer support can have on individual young people. Of those students, mostly girls, who have used a peer support service (whether as mentees or as counselling clients), many go onto become peer supporters themselves. For example, on leaving school, some return as volunteers to help with training peer supporters, such as at Walton High School. Many have gone on to use their peer support skills in their careers and family life. Others have become teachers themselves and set up peer support in their schools, such as the first female buddy supervisor at Hagley Park Sports College, who was a peer supporter at Walton High School. One of the disabled female peer supporters at Walton Hall Community Special School has assisted in peer support training in a number of schools.

Over the past twenty-five years, peer support in its many forms has become part of everyday life in increasing numbers of schools. It has been a vital part of a national and worldwide movement towards systemic change to normalise school student participation. As such, peer support has a critical role to play in current UK government initiatives promoting young people's citizenship and participation. As required by the United Kingdom Education Act 2002, schools are now concerned with embedding participation into everyday practice and ensuring that the skills and learning are consolidated and rewarded. This involves a fundamental and continuing shift in the beliefs, values, approaches and changes in school systems and structures. Ultimately, peer support is part of a wider participation agenda. As such, it is pivotal to changing the culture of schools by providing a mechanism for enabling the voices and actions of girls and boys to defend young people's rights, prevent bullying and to contribute to decision-making in meaningful and sustained ways.