



Inverness Area Children's Services Forum:

Evaluating Liaison Arrangements

September 2005

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the context of *For Scotland's Children* (Scottish Executive, 2001), Highland is working towards developing multi-agency working to meet the needs of children. This is reflected in the current Integrated Children's Services Plan, *For Highland's Children 2* (Highland Council and NHS Highland, 2005).

In the light of this, the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute was commissioned to undertake a three year evaluation of Integrated Children's Services (2003-2006) throughout Highland. This is formative evaluation providing feedback on a regular basis. It focuses on both processes and outcomes and is monitoring progress towards the local outcome agreement targets.

The UHI evaluation is ongoing and is considering integration of services overall, looking at strategic and operational levels, structures and processes, and also at the reality of practice within integrated community schools, integrated services for children and families with autism and integration of youth justice services.

The methodology includes community surveys, interviews with service providers and service users, group discussions with service providers and service users, tracking users across services and piloting an integrated database.

In September 2004, the evaluation team presented some of the initial findings on the performance of liaison groups to the Joint Committee for Children and Young People.

Within this context, the Inverness Area Children's Services Forum (ACSF) decided to undertake an evaluation of liaison arrangements which have been running in the Inverness Area in many schools since 2001.

1.2 UHI Millennium Institute – Interim Findings

The function of liaison groups is expressed clearly by Balchin, Biggar, Cairns, Moore, Munro, Savage, Steele and Thomson (2004):

School staff, educational psychologists, community medical practitioners, social work staff and others, working in partnership with parents and pupils in a solution focused approach to:

- co-ordinate early intervention to individual pupils and families
- engage in multi-disciplinary assessment and planning
- identify resource issues and unmet need within specific schools
- plan individual casework.

liaison groups exist within a framework of staged intervention. If a child or young person is referred to the liaison group, the school will already have pursued in-house intervention measures and will be looking for input from a range of professionals as described above.

From the interim findings drawn from some early contextual interviews, the Millennium Institute evaluation team is finding that where liaison groups are working well, the following features are apparent:

- following the solution focused approach is being followed as intended;
- information is being shared amongst the core services;
- duplications of actions are being reduced;
- there was consistent monitoring and follow-through of agreed actions;
- as an appropriate range of interventions are being deployed (e.g. crisis, early, staged-approach interventions).

Initial findings suggested there was considerable support for liaison groups across the Highland area and that the development of liaison arrangements had already achieved positive outcomes for children and families. Professionals reported that many parents now had a much clearer understanding of the referral and support process, that they were supportive of the process and wished to be involved. (REMOVE Professionals also felt that the liaison group process was far more inclusive and that already there was some evidence of earlier and more targeted interventions.)

Further evidence from the evaluation's initial findings did show however that there was individual variation across groups. Liaison groups across the Highlands were found to be at different stages of development and there was some evidence that more needed to be done to share perspectives within the groups. In addition it was found that:

- the interpretation of role and function varied considerably amongst groups;
- the continuity of membership and attendance was often variable;
- and the awareness of liaison group function varied amongst practitioners in the core services;
- involvement of parents and children in the process was variable.

The initial findings of the pan-Highland evaluation have highlighted a range of issues needing addressed in order to improve liaison arrangements within Highland:

- professionals were not always clear about the function of liaison groups;
- confusion regarding the stage at which a child/family should be discussed at a liaison group meeting;
- the solution focused approach not universally known about nor understood;
- training in solution focused approaches required for new staff members and refresher courses for existing staff members;
- no consensus over benefits of inviting parents;
- some groups not alerting parents to meetings at all.

To date these are preliminary findings from the UHI Millennium Evaluation and they have emerged from a broader focus on area services and the operations of integrated schools. A more focused evaluation of Liaison Groups across the Highland area is planned for Autumn 2005. The evaluation continues until Spring 2006, during which time further reports of findings regarding the integration of services for children across Highland will be released.

1.3 Inverness Area Children's Services Forum Evaluation

The Inverness ACSF members were aware of the variation in practice regarding liaison groups in Inverness and took the decision to investigate these issues further in the local Area.

There was a need to identify good practice and areas for development and to communicate this to members of various statutory and voluntary bodies who attend liaison groups, to support the improvement of good practice.

Within the Inverness ACSF, a sub-group was created with members from a range of professions (appendix 1).

The decision was taken by the sub-group to undertake an in-depth evaluation of the experience of participants of liaison groups in the Inverness Area, with an initial focus on core members of liaison groups being followed up by researching the involvement of parents/carers and children/young people who have been involved in liaison group meetings.

2 Methodology

Contact was made with all chairs of liaison groups in the Area, requesting them to identify core members of their groups. (Chairpersons tend to be Head Teachers or Assistant Head Teachers since meetings tend to take place in schools). Core members are those who should attend every liaison group meeting at a school/given venue. Chairs were also asked to supply the sub-group with the names of people who had attended the last three liaison group meetings. This comprised core group members plus others who had attended. There was a 100% return rate from the Chairpersons which meant that all Core Group Members were invited to take part in the further aspects of the evaluation.

A questionnaire was formulated to access information about core members' experiences of liaison group arrangements. This questionnaire was structured to reflect each element of liaison arrangements from the child's initial referral to the liaison group through the stages of preparation, process of the meeting to the outcomes for children and their families (appendix 2). The questionnaire was designed to access quantitative data about liaison arrangements but also more semi-structured 'starter' questions to encourage respondents to reflect on their experience as part of the group process.

Throughout December 2004 and January 2005, members of the sub-group used this questionnaire in face-to-face and telephone interviews with core members who had attended any or all of the last three liaison group meetings. The telephone interview method was chosen in order to maximise the number of responses given the timescales available. Findings were then collated and an Area Children's Services Forum Network Seminar was organised in February 2005 to share the initial information that had been acquired and to consult with a wider network on next steps for the evaluation.

It was agreed that the views and experiences of parents and young people were vital in this evaluation process and so a further questionnaire was devised for this purpose, to be used with all the parents who had been invited to liaison group meetings between August and December 2004 (appendix 3). The contact names and numbers for parents/carers were received from the Chairpersons, who were asked to indicate whether parents had been invited to each meeting, whether they had attended, and if known, to state a reason why they had/had not attended. Similarly, they were also asked to indicate whether the child/young person being discussed had been invited or not and whether they had attended or not, stating the reasons why (appendix 4).

Of the 83 contacts made with parents, 35 responded positively, with 4 letters returned as they were no longer resident at the addresses given by the liaison group Chairpersons.

This information was held confidentially by the Educational Psychology Service. Each parent was then asked if they would be prepared to participate in the evaluation and those who indicated that they would be were contacted individually by telephone and a questionnaire completed with them by a member of the Psychological Service team.

Parents of children who had also attended the liaison group meetings were asked if they would consent to their child being interviewed about their experiences, but unfortunately only one parent agreed that her child's views could be included in the evaluation. As an alternative to being interviewed, the young person provided a piece of writing he had

completed in school following his attendance at the liaison group meeting, giving his thoughts on the meeting itself (appendix 5).

In order to provide individual feedback to each liaison group, a summary of the responses provided by core group members and parents, representing each liaison group was collated and sent as appropriate to each core group member. This was intended to provide the impetus for initial reflection and discussion within liaison groups at the start of the academic session 2005-6.

The collective responses from the range of discussions and interviews with core group members and parents provided the information required to compile guidance for liaison groups and a structure for a formal means of evaluating the effectiveness of the liaison group process. The evaluation is included as part of the “Guidance for Liaison Groups”, available to all liaison groups within the Inverness Area for discussion and following consultation in September/October 2005, this guidance will be available on the Council’s intranet system.

3 Summary Results of Interviews with Core Group Members

What follows is an analysis of information gathered from the telephone interviews with core group members. This was fed back to the seminar in the morning and became the basis of discussion in smaller groups in the afternoon. These discussions focused on identifying next steps for current liaison groups and implementation of this model of good practice in the development of Early Years Liaison Groups.

3.1 Participants

Numbers of participating liaison groups were broken down as follows:

- Primaries 18
- Secondaries 7
- Nurseries 1

Numbers of core members were broken down as follows:

- Senior school management (Headteachers and Deputies) 26
- Other school staff (Support for Learning and Guidance) 27
- Educational Psychologists 5
- Health (Community Paediatricians and School Nurses) 10
- Social Work (Social Workers and Children's Service Workers) 9
- Total 77**

Seventy-seven people responded. However there were one hundred and fifteen responses overall as some people attended more than one liaison group. Response coverage was analysed as follows:

- Community Paediatricians 3 covering 16 schools
- School Nurses 7 covering 16 schools
- Educational Psychologists 5 covering 15 schools
- Social Workers 6 covering 11 schools
- Children's Services Workers 4 covering 4 primaries
- Pupil Support Staff 3 covering 4 secondaries
- Headteachers / Depute Headteachers 26 : 1 nursery, 18 primary, 7 secondary
- Guidance staff 9 from 6 secondaries
- Support for Learning Teachers 14 : 8 primary, 6 secondary
- Total responses 115**

For the purposes of analysis the nursery has been included with primary numbers.

3.2 Frequency of liaison groups

3.2i How often are liaison groups held?

All respondents:

- Fortnightly 4%
- Monthly 43%
- Two per term 8%
- Termly 34%
- Ad hoc/annual/rarely 10%

A further breakdown of these figures between primary and secondary revealed the following:

<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>	
<i>Monthly</i>	6	<i>Fortnightly</i>	1
<i>Two per term</i>	1	<i>Monthly</i>	3
<i>Termly</i>	11	<i>Two per term</i>	1
<i>As hoc</i>	1	<i>Termly</i>	2

3.2ii Is this frequency enough?

- Yes 73%
- No 19%
- Sometimes 4%
- Don't know 4%

3.2iii Can you give reasons for your answer?

Some respondents gave several reasons. All answers were subjected to content analysis which revealed the following themes:

Yes, there are enough meetings

- enough time to discuss all specific pupils' needs 35 comments
- effective use of other processes in school means the number of meetings is appropriate to the number of pupils needing to be discussed 15 comments
- no more time available/allocated 12 comments
- difficulty in getting so many people together 9 comments
- not aware of anyone being missed 7 comments
- time is required to action the outcomes 3 comments
- a good way to prioritise and focus caseloads 2 comments
- the team is effective 1 comment
- it's never too long before the next meeting 1 comment
- the agenda is full 1 comment
- some meetings have been cancelled 1 comment

No, there are not enough meetings

- the liaison group does not discuss all the pupils it should 18 comments

- too long between meetings so lose impetus 4 comments
- children with problems not identified 3 comments
- more meetings needed for fewer pupils with solution focused approach 3 comments
- difficulty of getting people together 2 comments
- always have a long list of children to discuss 2 comments
- the group feels more are needed 2 comments
- more meetings might reduce crises 2 comments
- liaison groups not seen as a priority by the school 1 comment
- the solution focused approach is not used 1 comment
- sometimes have a long list of children to discuss 1 comment
- need for more liaison 1 comment
- more regular meetings might improve attendance 1 comment
- liaison groups only happen when a child has problems 1 comment
- there is a need for constant evaluation 1 comment

Comment: The frequency of liaison group meetings is a subject for debate. There could be several different recommendations: monthly, termly or yearly, depending on the varying local needs of individual liaison groups. There are differences between the primary and secondary responses with the majority of primaries indicating they held termly meetings whereas there is considerable variations amongst secondaries.

There is a fairly clear consensus amongst respondents that they feel the frequency of liaison group meetings is adequate, with almost three quarters of respondents replying in this manner. Clarifying this response, a considerable number of individuals indicated that they felt that the needs of all pupils were being met within the time allocated. However, there are a number of people who felt that the time allocated to liaison groups was not enough to adequately discuss all pupils required. In addition, although indicating they felt liaison groups were being held often enough, a number of individuals believed this was more because of the difficulties in getting people together and that there was no other time available that could be devoted to the liaison group process.

3.3 Attendance

3.3i How often do core group members attend liaison groups?

From the total number of respondents, answers were as follows:

- Always 67%
- Often 20%
- Sometimes 12%
- Rarely 1%

Core group representation was as follows:

<i>Professional Group</i>	<i>Proportion Reporting 'Always' Attending liaison groups</i>
<i>Community Paediatricians</i>	44%
<i>School Nurses</i>	69%
<i>Social Workers</i>	45%
<i>Senior School Management</i>	100%
<i>Educational Psychologists</i>	73%
<i>Guidance/Support for Learning Staff</i>	61%

Comment: Ideally all professions would be represented at each meeting but there would be times when this was made impossible by illness, holidays etc. There is a general feeling that liaison groups are not able to get people together often enough. More regular meetings might improve attendance and the overall cohesiveness of the group. The challenge is to find a way for core members to agree in advance; perhaps at the beginning of each school year there needs to be an initial meeting where members allocate dates for the whole year.

3.3ii Why do you attend?

Some respondents gave several reasons. Content analysis of the responses revealed the following themes:

- it is part of my professional role 40 comments
- to contribute specialist input with children I work with 33 comments
- belief in multi-agency team working 25 comments
- to know what is happening / have an overview 17 comments
- to find out information from others in the group 16 comments
- to input information and solutions to the group 15 comments
- to support children / families / schools 9 comments
- time is well used in productive, focused meetings 8 comments
- to communicate with others / build relationships 7 comments
- because I am invited 3 comments
- to lead the solution focused approach 3 comments
- discussion at a liaison group indicates major concerns 3 comments
- because I may be involved in follow-up work 3 comments
- because of the level of need in the school 2 comments
- it is an opportunity for early intervention / assessment 2 comments
- liaison groups are interesting 2 comments
- to know that action points have been addressed 1 comment
- to represent the interests of referred pupils 1 comment
- because it benefits the school 1 comment

Comment: Forty people thought that attending liaison groups was 'part of my professional role'. This response came from a mixture of school staff and some other core group members. This could be viewed as a comment on their commitment to the liaison group process but may also suggest that some people are not yet fully buying into this process. This may be a reflection of the length of time groups have been running with diminished understanding of the ethos and function of the group. Only twenty-five comments explicitly

reflected that it was a belief in multi-agency team work that encouraged the respondents to attend meetings. As new members join the liaison group there may be a need to make clear what the aims and objectives are.

It is important that all professions are represented at each liaison group meeting in order to function as a cohesive group and effectively address the needs of the child. Although there will be times when this will be impossible due to illness, holidays etc, it is significant that only 67% of responses indicated that people ‘always’ attend liaison group meetings.

Pressures of work on some staff groups are noted in the responses from professional groups in relation to how often they attend liaison groups. Notably, less than half of all paediatricians or social workers attended all meetings. School staff are frequent attendees of course, given that the majority of liaison groups are held on school premises, with senior managers, who chair the meetings, always attending since they tend to take responsibility for the administration of the process. It is important to note that the proportion of Guidance and Support for Learning staff responding ‘always’ will naturally be lower due to individuals attending meetings only for pupils for whom they have responsibility. However, one member of the Guidance or Support for Learning team will generally be present at all meetings. Educational Psychologists and School Nurses provide regular input to liaison groups.

3.4 Function

3.4i What do you see as the function of the liaison group?

Answers to this question are reflected under the following headings:-

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • multi-agency working/working together | 45% |
| • to provide support | 21% |
| • to share information | 10% |
| • best available resources identified for child | 9% |
| • to include parents in discussions | 8% |
| • to work in solution focused way | 4% |
| • identification of children and families | 1% |
| • to keep other agencies informed about what is going on in school | 1% |

(There were 2 people who did not answer this question.)

Comment: *For Highland’s Children 2* (Highland Council and NHS Highland, 2005) highlights ‘early intervention’, ‘multi-disciplinary family support teams’ and ‘listening to and working with parents and communities’ as some of the particularly significant aspects of the Integrated Community School Approach. To varying extents, all answers to this question reflect these principles and highlight that core members of liaison groups recognise and understand how liaison groups should function. It is particularly encouraging to see that almost half of the respondents recognised that the main function of liaison groups was multi-agency working.

3.5 Training

3.5i Have you had any training in the development of skills required for working with liaison groups? If so, what was this?

<i>Total Response</i>		<i>Primary LG Response</i>		<i>Secondary LG Response</i>	
<i>Yes</i>	71%	<i>Yes</i>	75%	<i>Yes</i>	65%
<i>No</i>	29%	<i>No</i>	25%	<i>No</i>	35%

A further breakdown of these figures revealed the extents to which groups had received training:

- Community Paediatricians all
- Children’s Services Workers all
- School Nurses majority
- Headteachers (primary) majority
- Depute Headteachers (secondary) majority
- Guidance Teachers majority
- Educational Psychologists majority
- Social Workers half
- Support for Learning Teachers (secondary) half
- Support for Learning Teachers (primary) minority
- Pupil Support minority

Comment: Clearly, some professional groups and those responding from primary school liaison groups have received more training than others. Of those who had received training, most cited training in solution focused approaches/meetings or the ACSF seminars on multi-agency working.

The solution focused training cited by many is very brief, incorporating training lasting between two hours and half a day. This is a minimal amount. There is a need for joint core group training. This would also help build relationships within the groups and associated liaison groups. It would be particularly useful for groups to receive updated training in solution focused approaches and solution focused meetings. Some other possibilities for training include:

- in-house training as liaison group core team
- multi-agency working – what it is, how to do it, how to do it better
- working with parents, inclusive practices, involving/listening to young people
- better meetings – facilitation, preparation, roles.

It is essential that all core members of liaison groups have access to relevant training, especially solution focused training in order to maximise the effectiveness of the liaison group.

3.6 Preparation

3.6i Are there discussions with other professionals before the liaison groups to decide which children/families are to be considered?

A breakdown between primary and secondary revealed the following:

	<i>Primary Responses</i>	<i>Secondary Responses</i>
<i>Yes</i>	52%	60%
<i>No</i>	26%	18%
<i>Sometimes</i>	10%	18%
<i>Don't Know</i>	9%	4%

(There were 3% who left this blank)

Comment: Responses showed that most discussions were slightly more likely to take place before the secondary liaison groups than for the primary liaison groups. Primary school related responses were also more likely to indicate that no discussions took place between professionals before meetings.

However, a further breakdown of these figures demonstrated the extent to which core members from the various professional groups had been involved in such discussions:

- Headteachers / Depute Headteachers all
- Support for Learning / Pupil Support all
- Guidance all
- Community Paediatricians majority
- Educational Psychologists majority
- School Nurses minority
- Social Workers minority
- Children's Services Workers minority

Comment: These figures demonstrate that some professional groupings have had more involvement than others in these discussions. Education staff working in schools have had most involvement. As liaison groups are multi-agency groups, core members from all professional groups should have the opportunity to be involved in these discussions or feel able to instigate discourse should they feel it necessary.

3.6iii Who identifies the children to be considered?

- Any member 24%
- School 70%
- Headteacher 6%

3.6iv Have you ever asked for a child to be discussed?

- Headteachers / Depute Headteachers (primary) all
- Depute Headteachers (secondary) all
- Guidance all
- Support for Learning Teachers (secondary) all
- Community Paediatricians majority
- Children’s Support Workers majority
- Support for Learning Teachers (primary) majority
- Educational Psychologists majority
- Pupil Support half
- School Nurses minority
- Social Workers minority

Comment: It is interesting to note that the majority of responses (three quarters), indicate that it was either the school or headteacher who identifies children to be discussed at meetings. Despite this, the second set of figures show that core group members from all professional groupings have asked for children to be discussed at liaison groups at some point, although some professional groupings are less likely than others to have asked for a child to be discussed. Again, as the liaison group is a multi-agency group, it is important that all core members should feel that it is the responsibility of all members of the group to identify children to be discussed and feel able to ask for a child to be discussed when they feel this is appropriate.

3.6vi Are families invited to attend liaison group meetings?

The overall responses were as follows:

Always	75%
Often	18%
Sometimes	1%
Rarely	4%
Don’t Know	3%

A further breakdown of these figures showed the following:

<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>	
<i>Always</i>	77%	<i>Always</i>	72%
<i>Often</i>	19%	<i>Often</i>	16%
<i>Sometimes</i>	0%	<i>Sometimes</i>	2%
<i>Rarely</i>	1%	<i>Rarely</i>	7%
<i>Don’t know</i>	3%	<i>Don’t know</i>	2%

(These figures do not total 100% due to rounding up/down)

Comment: Whilst it is encouraging that the vast majority of liaison groups in both primary and secondary groups always invite families to meetings, it should be noted that this figure should be 100% as families should be invited to liaison groups in all cases. It should also be remembered that, even if invited, not all families attend liaison groups. *For Highland’s*

Children (Highland Council and NHS Highland, 2003) highlighted ‘listening to and working with parents and communities’ as a particularly significant aspect of the Integrated Community Schools Approach. Liaison groups need to consider what can be done both to improve the figures for inviting families to liaison group meetings and also to encourage families to attend.

3.6vii Are families prepared for liaison group meetings?

The overall responses were as follows:

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>
<i>Yes</i>	86%	50%
<i>No</i>	1%	14%
<i>Don't know</i>	13%	36%

3.6viii Who does this?

The responses regarding who prepares families for liaison group meetings were as follows:

- School 37%
- Headteacher 24%
- Social Work 2%
- Person who invites the family 10%
- Families are not prepared 6%
- Don't know 21%

Comment: Although 72% of responses indicated that families were prepared for meetings, over a quarter felt families either were not prepared, or did not know whether they were or not. Amongst secondary responses in particular, only half knew for sure that families were prepared for meetings. When asked in more detail, it was found that 21% of responses indicated that individual core group members did not know whose responsibility it was to prepare families for liaison group meetings. Other responses also showed there may be some confusion over this and that there is a presumption that someone is preparing families, which may not be the case. It is important that families are prepared in advance for liaison groups so that they understand the aims of the meeting and what professionals are going to be present. Therefore, there needs to be greater clarity among professionals as to whose responsibility it is to prepare families for meetings.

3.6ix What does this preparation consist of?

Respondents indicated that the following actions are undertaken by liaison groups as preparation for families:

- use a staged approach so the liaison group is not the first contact;
- invite personally, with a follow-up letter;
- use the liaison group leaflet to help explain to parents/pupils;
- create a leaflet for pupils;
- someone discussing parent/pupil issues beforehand;
- explain attendance at the meeting and format;
- invite parents/pupils to bring along a supportive friend;

- suggest they list their issues so they are not forgotten;
- key person to meet parents at office and personally bring them to the meeting;
- key person to leave meeting with parents to allow debrief;
- allow an opportunity after the meeting – perhaps a few days later – to go over action plan;
- ensure parents get a copy of the minute and action plan;
- ensure follow-up and review procedure/date is clear to parents/pupils.

Comment: As previously stated, it is vital that parents understand both the purpose and process of meeting, so a combination of the above approaches forms a model of good practice which liaison groups may choose to adopt.

3.6x Are you given the names of children/families to be discussed or an agenda before a meeting?

	<i>Number of Responses</i>
<i>Yes</i>	100
<i>No</i>	5
<i>Variable</i>	6
<i>N/A</i>	4
<i>Total Responses</i>	115

3.6xi How long before?

As can be observed above, the majority of respondents receive some notice of which children are due to be discussed before the meeting. However, the period of notice varies as follows:

	<i>Number of Responses</i>
<i>1 month or more</i>	6
<i>3-4 weeks</i>	6
<i>2-3 weeks</i>	5
<i>2 weeks</i>	18
<i>1-2 weeks</i>	18
<i>1 week</i>	8
<i>A few days</i>	16
<i>The day of the meeting</i>	4
<i>Variable</i>	13
<i>Total Responses</i>	94

Comment: There appears to be no consistent process regarding this aspect of liaison group meetings. The variability here could reflect the fact that sometimes emergency meetings are called and then agendas may not arrive promptly. There is also the possibility that some members may not receive mail regularly if they are working in different locations and not in the office. The variability could therefore be seen as both a positive and a negative aspect of the meetings. However, for regular planned meetings, anything less than one week would be considered inappropriate as members need adequate preparation time to maximise the effectiveness of the meeting.

3.7 Process

3.7i How many children do you usually discuss at a liaison group?

Primary

<i>Number of children and families</i>	<i>% of responses</i>
<i>1-3</i>	<i>60%</i>
<i>4-6</i>	<i>31%</i>
<i>Greater than 6</i>	<i>3%</i>
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>6%</i>

Secondary

<i>Number of children and families</i>	<i>% of responses</i>
<i>1-3</i>	<i>34%</i>
<i>4-6</i>	<i>55%</i>
<i>Greater than 6</i>	<i>9%</i>
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>2%</i>

Comment: From the overall responses it is clear that in the majority of liaison groups there tends to be two children discussed per meeting, but this is found to vary between both primary and secondary school groups. Secondary groups were considerably more likely to discuss more children per meeting than primary groups.

3.7ii Are there other issues you discuss at the liaison group meetings? For example, training, patterns of behaviour, priorities etc.

<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>	
<i>Yes</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>61%</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>39%</i>

(There were 6% who left this blank.)

Examples of issues discussed were:

- *Training 19%
- *Priorities 9%
- Information from other agencies 7%
- Reviews 6%
- *Patterns of behaviour 3%
- Transition 1%
- Unspecified 8%

Comment: The majority of responses identified training issues as other issues which were discussed at liaison group meetings. It should be pointed out, however, that the issues

marked (*) were ones which were suggested in the questionnaire which could have been construed as rather leading.

3.7iii How long are the liaison group meetings?

	<i>Number of Responses</i>
<i>Under 1 hour</i>	6
<i>1 - 1 ½ hours</i>	38
<i>1 ½ - 2 hours</i>	33
<i>2 – 2 ½ hours</i>	10
<i>2 ½ - 3 hours</i>	22
<i>Over 3 hours</i>	4
<i>N/A</i>	2
<i>Total Responses</i>	115

In 104 cases it was also possible to work out how long core members spent discussing each child/family.

- Less than 30 minutes 15
- 30 – 40 minutes 42
- 40 – 50 minutes 33
- 50 – 60 minutes 12
- More than 60 minutes 2

Comment: The length of meeting reflected the needs of each liaison group. Generally, the longer the meeting, the more children were discussed. Ideally, forty-five minutes should be allocated per child/family if the solution focused format is being followed.

3.7iv What proportion of your time do you spend discussing problems and solutions? For example, 50:50, 60:40.

The sub-group was interested in finding out about this as solution focused meetings should have a ratio of approximately 15:85 regarding discussion of problems and solutions. The following ratios were considered to be general indicators of the balance of focus in discussion:

- significant problem focus 70 : 30
- more problem focus 60 : 40
- equal balance 50 : 50
- more solution focus 40 : 60
- significant solution focus 30 : 70

Respondents' answers reflected the following ratios:

- 50:50 33%
- 60:40 15%
- 40:60 19%
- More on problems 7%
- More on solutions 13%

- Varies 6%

Within this framework it has been possible to grade the findings of this evaluation regarding the focus of discussions:

<i>Out of 18 primaries</i>		<i>Out of 7 secondaries</i>	
1	significantly problem focused	4	significantly problem focused
4	more problem focused	1	more problem focused
5	50 : 50	2	50 : 50
5	more solution focused		
3	significantly solution focused		

Comment: Although many respondents indicated that they had received training in solution focused techniques, responses to this question demonstrated that, in many cases, core members perceive liaison group meetings to be problem focused. This is further evidence of the need for updated training in solution focused techniques, with an emphasis on how to apply these techniques in liaison group meetings.

3.7v How are the meetings recorded?

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>
<i>Minutes</i>	60%	73%
<i>Action Points (solution focused)</i>	27%	24%
<i>Notes</i>	3%	-
<i>Not recorded</i>	3%	1%
<i>Don't Know</i>	3%	-

(There were 3% who left a blank under primary schools and 2% who left a blank under secondary schools.)

Comment: The responses suggest that most liaison group meetings are being recorded in some form. Those who indicated that 'action points' were recorded rather than 'minutes' would suggest that these meetings are following a solution focused approach in meetings.

3.7vi Do you receive a copy?

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>
<i>Yes</i>	88%	87%
<i>Usually</i>	1%	5%
<i>Rarely</i>	-	7%
<i>No</i>	7%	1%

(There was 3% who left a blank under primary schools.)

Comment: Responses indicated that the vast majority of participants are receiving some sort of written record of liaison group meetings. However, this figure should be 100% as core

group members should always receive a copy of the action plan so that they know what is happening and who is implementing each action point.

3.7vii Is there an action plan drawn up at the end of the meeting?

<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>	
<i>Always</i>	89%	<i>Always</i>	84%
<i>Sometimes</i>	3%	<i>Sometimes</i>	7%
<i>Rarely</i>	-	<i>Rarely</i>	-
<i>Never</i>	1%	<i>Never</i>	4%
<i>Don't know</i>	4%	<i>Don't know</i>	2%

(There were 2% who left this blank.)

Comment: The majority of core members in both primary and secondary liaison groups say there is an action plan drawn up at the end of liaison group meetings. This suggests that this element of the solution focused approach has been adopted in the majority of liaison groups. It is recommended that all liaison groups draw up action plans for the children they discuss in order to monitor and evaluate the outcomes for each child.

3.7viii Is it followed through?

- Yes 73
- To some extent 11
- No 3
- Think so 7
- Don't know 18
- NA 3

Comment: The majority of respondents were able to say that the action plan was followed through. However, it is worrying that so many respondents (16%) actually did not know whether the action plan was followed through. Liaison groups need to consider their communication / record keeping / evaluation procedures to address this issue.

3.7ix How do you know the action plan is followed through?

There was a wide range of answers to this question. Some people gave more than one comment. When these comments were subjected to content analysis, the following themes emerged:

- review 57

(This included 31 who said the action plan would be reviewed at a liaison group and, 5 who said a review date was set as part of the action plan and 4 who said the review process would continue until the needs were met.)

- internal (education) meetings / review 13
- school / Headteacher co-ordinates 11
- keep in touch with the Headteacher 9

• people are identified to undertake tasks	8
• liaison with parents	6
• noted in the minutes	5
• some members follow up their action points	5
• one person is appointed to co-ordinate	4
• informal discussion	4
• timescale clearly identified	3
• primary / secondary liaison	3
• everyone knows who is doing what	3
• agencies are contacted if they need to be involved	2
• points from the action plan are seen to happen	2
• feedback	2
• the action plan is incorporated in the Individual Education Plan	2
• points are not put in the action plan if they cannot be carried through	1
• it tends to be the school that has action points	1
• contact with Children's Services Worker	1
• because it has to be	1

Comment: Although the majority of responses indicate some liaison groups are reviewing their action plans, a number of these responses are rather vague and/or refer to informal procedures. It seems that often there is not a clear process for establishing whether the action plan has been followed through. liaison groups should ensure that a mechanism for this form of update/review is established. If an internal education review format is used within schools, it is essential that information from this is fed back to other core members. It is also worth noting the low number commenting here on liaison with parents. Considering again the aspect of 'listening to and working with parents and communities' highlighted in *For Highland's Children* (Highland Council and NHS Highland, 2003) as a particularly significant aspect of the Integrated Community Schools Approach, liaison groups should consider how they can further develop the inclusion of parents at this stage of the liaison group process.

3.7x Have you been involved in follow-up work from the action plan?

Responses revealed the following figures:-

	<i>Always</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>Community Paediatricians</i>		14	1	1
<i>School Nurses</i>	1	12	1	
<i>Social Workers</i>	1	6		4
<i>Children's Services Workers</i>		4		
<i>Headteachers/Depute Headteachers (Primary)</i>	12	7		
<i>Depute Headteachers (Secondary)</i>	1	6		
<i>Guidance</i>	2	7		
<i>Support for Learning Teachers (Primary)</i>	5	1	1	
<i>Support for Learning Teachers (Secondary)</i>		5	1	
<i>Pupil Support</i>		4		
<i>Educational Psychologists</i>	1	10	4	
Total Responses	23	76	8	5

(There were 3 people who did not respond to this question.)

Comment: Responses here indicate that the majority of core group members are 'sometimes' involved in follow-up work from the action plan. A significant exception to these figures are primary school staff whose responses reflect that most are 'always' involved in follow-up work. Only two school-based staff said they were 'rarely' involved in follow-up work. Most respondents who said they were 'rarely' involved in follow-up work and all who said they were 'never' involved were core members who were not school based. liaison groups should remember to consider the full range of options available to them for follow-up work to maximise the effectiveness of liaison group meetings and ensure the best outcomes for children and young people discussed.

3.7xi Is the action plan or outcomes for children and families evaluated?

	Yes	No	Don't know
<i>Community Paediatricians</i>	6	5	5
<i>School Nurses</i>	6	7	2
<i>Social Workers</i>	3	2	6
<i>Children's Services Workers</i>	2	2	
<i>Headteachers / Depute Headteachers (Primary)</i>	11	7	
<i>Depute Headteachers (Secondary)</i>	5	2	
<i>Guidance</i>	6	2	1
<i>Support for Learning Teachers (Primary)</i>	6	1	
<i>Support for Learning Teachers (Secondary)</i>	3	2	1
<i>Pupil Support</i>	2	1	1
<i>Educational Psychologists</i>	11	2	2
Total Responses	61	33	18

(There were 3 people who did not respond to this question.)

3.7xii How is the action plan or outcomes for children and families evaluated?

The response to this question was extremely difficult to gauge due to the words “review” and “evaluate” being used interchangeably. There appeared to be some confusion about what constituted an evaluation and it seemed possible that some of the reviews referred to may have been Individual Education Plan reviews rather than evaluations of liaison group action plans. However, positive responses were loosely categorized as follows:-

- Follow-up meetings (usually internal) 33%
- Informal evaluation 23%
- Planned long term and short term reviews 21%
- At the start of the next meeting 13%
- Intention to review 2%

Comment: To avoid this confusion, an evaluation tool requires to be developed for liaison groups.

3.8 Effectiveness

3.8i Do you feel the liaison group process, as it operates in this school, is effective in achieving positive outcomes for children and families?

- Yes 51%
- No 9%
- Sometimes 39%

Only just over half of respondents felt the liaison group process was effective in achieving positive outcomes for children and families. In only three liaison groups (all primary) did all interviewed core members say 'yes'.

The following issues were identified by respondents as influencing the effectiveness of liaison groups:

- process 33%
- lack of resources 17%
- lack of involvement/follow up 17%
- attendance 15%
- time 13%
- lack of training 2%

Responses to this question raised issues about a number of aspects of the liaison group process.

Attendance

Responses showed that attendance was variable across different groups. One comment was: "Didn't appear to have many issues related to my profession but it was good to be there to see the broader picture." This was a very positive point of view which shows understanding of the ethos of liaison groups. Another comment was, "Some professionals don't attend meeting. There are too many cases. Not inviting parents is an issue." This reflects several separate ideas around a general feeling of discontent with who attends.

Preparation

There appeared to be confusion in some liaison groups as to whose responsibility it was to prepare and support parents for the meeting and what that preparation consisted of. Clarification here would prevent that confusion and allow parents to feel confident in expressing valued opinions and ideas.

Good Practice

From participants' responses, comments regarding good practice referred mostly to whether meetings were run on a solution focused model with time allocated in favour of solutions rather than dwelling on problems. One comment was, "Don't feel we are as effective as other schools that use solution focused." Comments such as these were often noted by professionals attending several liaison groups and seeing varying models in practice. There were also comments here about how meetings were chaired and run and another core member said that action plans do not always work.

Use of Time

There were a number of comments about time constraints and effective use of time available: "Too many cases. Allocate specific time in advance." And another: "The key is time". Another: "As effective as they can be with the time that it's given."

Commonality of understanding of process and purpose of liaison groups

Some people felt that there was not much difference between liaison groups and other multi-agency working. One comment: "Doesn't add to the process. Group would probably get together to discuss youngsters anyway". Another: "Depends. [It's] so school-based. Kids being referred need school strategies so not a great deal for me to advise on." This tends to

suggest a lack of understanding of the purpose of meetings from certain respondents, whilst others have a clearer view of the process: “*Everyone has their say and knows their part to play.*”

Joint ownership between those attending

This relates somewhat to the “who attends” factor. There are answers within the questionnaires which indicate that non-attendance can lead to frustration if a key member of the liaison group is not there. This can, in turn, affect the overall dynamics of the group, for example, one comment: “So difficult to get people to attend even once a year”. And another comment: “It’s” – meaning the group – “effective as everyone is meeting together, very helpful for parents to see everyone involved”.

Feeling of “making a difference”

There was a very positive feeling with many people showing appreciation of the efficacy of the liaison group. “Yes, I think it makes a difference. Even if it’s just a feeling for the child and parent to feel someone is interested and trying to help. The parent and child appreciate that. An incredibly positive experience.” Such comments are, of course, subjective interpretations but nonetheless they are indicative of a good group process which is in turn important to the effectiveness of the liaison group.

Comment: These issues are all pertinent in building a model of good practice for an effective liaison group. Groups should consider how their own group measures against these standards: whether attendance for their meetings is satisfactory and leads to a feeling of joint ownership, whether they have a clear system for choosing children/young people to discuss, preparing parents, how effectively their meetings are run, whether they use time effectively, whether they have a common understanding of the process and purpose of liaison groups and whether they feel their liaison group meetings make a difference.

3.8ii What are the strengths of this process?

All respondents identified some strengths in the liaison group process. Through content analysis the following common themes emerged:

- communication
- multi-agency working
- advantages for parents and families
- shared responsibility and commitment
- solution focused approaches
- structure of meetings
- attendance
- supportive and positive ways of working
- holistic approach
- creative ways of thinking
- action plans.

Communication: sharing, information gathering, building relationships:

17% of comments

This was communication in many forms. It was said that liaison groups:

- ‘allowed for soliciting information from a variety of sources about the same child;’
- ‘people can put a face to a name;’

- ‘improves communication and liaison between agencies;’
- ‘a group identity is established and this leads to good relationships;’
- ‘everyone is aware of what others are doing;’
- ‘gives a better understanding of each other’s role;’
- ‘provides a forum for discussing wider issues like trends happening within the school;’
- ‘the amount of knowledge the combined group has is impressive.’

Multi-agency working: 15% of comments

- ‘the benefits of having a range of expertise’ from different agencies;
- ‘the idea that two heads are better than one;’
- the process ‘highlights concern to the right people.’

Advantages for parents and families: 14% of comments

Many of these comments referred to a level of involvement for the family:

- ‘it is not a case of us and them;’
- ‘parents have an equal contribution and are seen as an expert in their own right;’
- they feel ‘listened to and taken into the planning process;’
- ‘parents can meet and quiz professionals and contribute to the different solutions;’
- ‘they can see that people are trying their best and that the school and other agencies are a source of help;’
- ‘the family know that the group is working together;’
- at the same time there is a ‘raised awareness of the needs of the family and all other professionals.’

Shared responsibility and commitment – a motivated team: 11% of comments

These comments developed further on the strengths seen in multi-agency working:

- ‘trust;’
- ‘cohesion;’
- ‘taking collective responsibility and decisions;’
- the process ‘highlighted people to do things;’
- ‘everybody knows what is expected of them;’
- ‘everyone is motivated to get positive outcomes for children and families;’
- people ‘know things will be followed up.’

Solution focused approaches: 8% of comments

- ‘a move away from just seeing problems’ towards ‘effective problem solving;’
- the process, ‘allows people to feel quite free to brainstorm possible solutions without constraints’ and that, ‘this leads to divergent thinking which can be very powerful and useful;’
- ‘solutions are shared;’
- ‘focused on what can be positively added to make a difference to the child;’
- ‘the outcome is never predicted beforehand.’

Structure of meetings: 7% of comments

- always having an agenda;
- sticking to the timetable and having an allocated time slot;
- having dates for meetings set in advance;

- meetings having focus and dealing with business quickly and efficiently;
- meetings happening at the end of the day so that people can attend without interruption;
- effective and efficient chairing;
- excellent minutes with action points.

Attendance: 4% of comments

- ‘good turn out for liaison groups – a good representation of agencies – probably because they don’t feel it is a waste of time;’
- ‘everybody in one place;’
- ‘key staff who always attend;’
- ‘cuts down on the numbers attending.’

Supportive, positive, constructive ways of working: 4% of comments

- ‘supportive;’
- ‘positive;’
- ‘constructive.’

Holistic approach: 3% of comments

- ‘you get a better picture of a child’s life in and out of school.’

Creative thinking: 3% of comments

- ‘an opportunity to think out the box;’
- thinking towards the future, thinking of practical things rather than trying to uncover causes for things;’
- ‘schools have been able to evolve their thinking and practices;’
- ‘the whole is bigger than its parts.’

Action plans: 3% of comments

- planning is effective and agreed;
- decision making is immediate;
- action plans address complex needs and are followed through;
- ‘actions are undertaken quicker so children are serviced quicker.’

Additional comments: 11% of comments

- relaxed, informal, comfortable
- awareness of what is available – improved use of other agencies
- evaluation – periodic updates, less tendency to drift
- early warning, early intervention
- appropriate choices of children to attend
- regularity or flexibility of meetings

Comment: All the strengths identified are pertinent in building a model of good practice. It is encouraging that many comments focused on communication, multi-agency working and the advantages for parents and families. This suggests a level of commitment from many respondents to the principles of ‘multi-disciplinary family support teams’ and ‘listening to and working with parents and communities’ highlighted in *For Highland’s Children* (Highland Council and NHS Highland, 2003). Comments regarding shared responsibility and

commitment, the use of solution focused approaches, the structure of meetings and creative thinking emphasise how important it is for groups to spend time explicitly developing an effective group process. Targeted training may help groups to focus on these issues. It is also interesting to consider how few respondents identified certain issues as strengths. For example, only 4% of comments identified attendance as a strength. Groups would do well to consider whether attendance, for example, is a strength for their liaison group. If not, how will they address this issue? Very few comments identified early intervention as a strength although this is also highlighted in *For Highland's Children 2* (Highland Council and NHS Highland, 2005). In the light of this, liaison groups should consider whether their liaison arrangements fit clearly and appropriately into the staged approach to intervention.

3.8iii How could the liaison group process be improved?

Respondents had a wide range of ideas about how the liaison group process could be improved. From content analysis of responses, the following key themes emerged:

- greater commitment from all involved in the process;
- improvements in the process itself;
- development of skills and understanding.

Respondents identified several points within each theme.

Greater commitment from all involved in the process:

- regular attendance;
- consistency of personnel attending;
- more responsibility to ensure follow-up is completed;
- agreement to gather information before the meeting.

Improvements in the process itself:

- agendas/invitations go out on time;
- dates are set well in advance and prioritised by all;
- there is clarity in the process of referral to agencies and feedback on the progression of the referral;
- minutes/action plan is completed and circulated to all;
- cases discussed require a multi-agency approach;
- action plans are reviewed and followed up;
- evaluation is built into the process;
- meetings are solution focused;
- all members are equal (including children/young people and parents);
- parents and (where appropriate) children/young people are always invited;
- parents are fully involved and prepared for their involvement.

Development of skills and understanding:

- team building for the core group;
- the development of trust and understanding of the various professional roles;
- a common understanding of the process and the rationale for the liaison group;
- a deeper understanding of multi-agency working;
- a greater knowledge and understanding of solution focused approaches and running/participating in solution focused meetings;

- more effective meetings (process and outcomes).

Comment: These suggestions, generated by core members of liaison groups, provide a bank of ideas for developing good practice and once again the focus is upon attendance, preparation, follow-up and evaluation. It is important to include all core members in an evaluation of a liaison group against these standards. Some core group members may attend a number of liaison groups in other schools and will be able to draw on these experiences.

3.8iv Are your liaison groups evaluated internally?

Only five primary liaison groups and two secondary liaison groups reported any kind of formal evaluation.

Comment: It appeared that respondents, including chairs of liaison groups, were unsure about what constituted an evaluation. This requires to be clarified. The aspects of good practice identified by core members throughout this questionnaire form a useful measure.

The following activities could be considered as forms of evaluation for liaison groups to undertake:

- looking at outcomes for children and families;
- developing the involvement of parents and pupils;
- consideration of priorities, referral pathways, criteria for referral;
- discussion of why members don't attend/how to make meetings a higher priority;
- formal evaluation methods to target wider issues that need to be addressed
- an action plan for future development of the liaison group;
- a training needs analysis for the core group.

4 Summary Results of Parental Interviews

4.1 Invitations and Attendance

Numbers of parents and children invited to attend Liaison Group Meetings from August-December 2004:

	<i>Number of Meetings</i>	<i>Number of parents invited</i>	<i>Number of parents attending</i>	<i>Number of children invited</i>	<i>Number of children attending</i>
<i>Primary</i>	77	74	65	19	14
<i>Secondary</i>	47	35	22	5	4
<i>Totals</i>	124	109	87	24	18

The reasons given by parents for not being able to attend liaison group meetings following an invitation included:

- work commitments
- family illness
- recently had met with SMT and therefore did not wish to attend meeting
- preferred individual meetings to large groups

In almost all situations in primary schools, parents were invited to attend all meetings, with 88% of these parents then attending, resulting in 84% of these meetings having parental representation.

In secondary school meetings parents were invited to 74% of meetings, with only 63% of those invited actually attending. This resulted in only 47% of these meetings having parental representation.

Children attended much less frequently, with 19 out of a possible 77 invited to primary school based meetings and 5 out of a possible 47 invited to secondary school meetings. This resulted in only a small proportion of children actually represented at meetings, (18% in primaries and 8.5% in secondaries), although they themselves, along with their parents/carers must be considered the main experts in the difficulties they face.

Primary school staff gave the explanation for non attendance as the age of the children, feeling that children in the infant stages in particular were considered too young to participate in meetings. However all secondary school pupils should be encouraged to attend meetings and a much higher proportion of this age range would have been expected to be both invited and then to attend than is currently the case.

Overall, of 124 meetings where children were discussed, 70% were attended by parents and only 14.5% attended by children.

Of the 87 parents who attended liaison group meetings, 35 agreed to participate in the evaluation study, using the questionnaire that had been developed to gather parental views of the school based multi agency liaison group meetings. Of this 35, 29 were subsequently able to be contacted and interviewed. 23 had attended liaison group meetings at a primary school and 6 had attended meetings at a secondary school.

Responses were generally collected through telephone interview, although two responded in written form, having been sent the questionnaire by post as they were not contactable over the phone during the evaluation period. The questionnaire was split into four main sections:

- preparation/pre meeting,
- at the meeting
- the process
- after the meeting

Parents were also given the opportunity to add any additional comments which were not covered through the questions. The responses, in relation to what parents identified as good practice are reported below under these four headings.

4.2 Preparation /Pre Meeting

There were three main ways reported by parents in which they were informed about the liaison group meetings. These were:

- through regular school contact such as weekly/ monthly meetings with a member of staff,
- by letter
- the parents themselves had requested a liaison group be held.

Generally parents reported that it was useful to know who would be at the meeting, the purpose of the meeting, the way the meeting would be run, possible outcomes of having a meeting, if children could attend, as well as having sufficient notice to prepare for the meeting, which many reported as a stressful event.

Parents reported that it would be good practice to supply the name of each professional and detail their role and involvement so that they could prepare questions for the relevant person and remember who they were more easily once at the meeting. A leaflet would be found useful by parents if it details the above points and provides contact details for other useful agencies such as CHIP+ as well as general information about liaison groups.

Some parents would have also liked to meet professionals individually before the meeting, although this in part defeats the implicit benefits of liaison group meetings. Some parents would also have liked the meetings to be held after school hours due to child care issues, although reports of family friendly practice included allowing parents to take other children along to the meeting.

Generally, parents who felt that they had received enough information about the meeting reported that it was useful in preparing them for the meeting. An interesting comment made by one parent raised the issue of preparing parents for the tools of the meeting, such as flipcharts, which professionals attending meetings may use routinely, but parents are not so comfortable or familiar with. In addition, there is a need to ensure that separated or divorced parents both receive invitations to meetings where they are both involved with the child.

4.3 At the Meeting.

Parents reported that they would feel/ did feel welcome at the meeting through being introduced to those present, the use of soft seats, circular arrangement of seats, soft voice tone, being offered a drink and a snack, friendly eye contact, smiles and the relaxed and informal manner of the meeting. In order to ensure that parents are relaxed and comfortable with the situation and therefore able to contribute openly and confidently to the discussion, the professionals involved in liaison groups do need to pay close attention to these 'softer' skills, especially when there may be several meetings running one after the other. Even when parents felt welcome, many thought it was difficult to help parents really feel at ease as the liaison group meeting was a stressful and daunting situation for them.

4.4 Process

There were mixed views from parents as to whether the liaison group meeting allowed enough time for discussion of the child, with some parents reporting that they were aware of the time restrictions on the meeting and on those attending. Parents generally felt listened to and able to put forward their own views, although it is difficult to determine how representative is the sample of parents who responded positively to taking part in the evaluation. Many parents remarked throughout the interviews that they were concerned that other parents may not feel able to cope with the demands of a liaison group meeting as they currently exist. Meetings which explicitly gave everyone a chance to speak or asked parents to comment on what was said were seen as good. Some parents felt recognised as experts on their child. However, a small number of parents participating in the evaluation did report that they felt their ideas were not taken as seriously as those of the professionals and this was evidenced through not writing them on flip charts or putting discussions off until a future meeting.

Parents felt that the discussions gave a fair picture of their child when those at the meeting had a good knowledge of the child through personal contact. Additionally, when people were clear about their aims for the child and listened to parents and children, parents thought that there were good levels of interest in and understanding of their children. However, it is important to parents that issues surrounding differences between the child at home and the child in school are not glossed over.

Generally parents were happy with the balance of the time spent on discussing problems and the changes for the better, acknowledging the need to do both. Individual comments noted that some problems need to be discussed at length rather than summed up and it was hard to do this at liaison group meetings. Additionally, parents felt that they may be seen as overly negative if they wanted to discuss problems within the solution focussed framework of liaison group meetings (an indication that solution focussed thinking is working well within this setting?). It is very important for parents to feel that they are listened to and there should be opportunities outside the meeting for them to talk through their concerns and issues so that the liaison group meeting itself can be focused on solutions and looking at possible ways forward.

Parents were most happy with the way liaison group meetings were run when they were informal, child centred, well organised, chaired well and focussed. By the end of the meeting they were generally aware what was going to be done and by whom and reported that they

were generally happy with the outcomes of their meetings. Parents reported good practice such as each person being reminded of their individual action points and explicitly checking whether parents were happy with proposals. They also reported that as a result of the meetings they had more clarity as to professional roles and a deeper understanding of all the efforts school and agencies make for their child.

When asked about changes that would make liaison group meetings better for parents one suggestion was for liaison groups to be tailored to the needs of individual parents, to take account of individual differences such as levels of confidence in contributing to the discussion. Those suggesting improvements appeared to want information before the meeting begins about the people who will be in attendance and also issues for discussion.

4.5 After the Meeting

After the meeting some parents had a regular contact time established with the school. However many parents who participated in the evaluation were already having regular meetings with school staff or felt that their schools were open and approachable at all times if they wanted to discuss anything. This ongoing parental contact is useful in ensuring progress updates and give opportunities for parents to ask follow up questions. Parents often did not have the contact details for everyone at the liaison group and therefore it was very important to have a key person at the school to coordinate the involvement of others and to keep them informed of progress.

Parents reported that things had changed for the better when:

- targets had been achieved
- people had done what they said they would
- different solutions had come to light at the meeting
- people had contacted those they said they would
- clear, time limited action points had been set
- with people being clear about their responsibilities

Parents also felt it was useful to get to know people from different agencies in person, whether those agencies were directly involved at that stage or not. Suggestions for improving follow up arrangements included having more progress updates and having a key person as a point of contact for any questions or to chase up information. In some situations however, reviews were very far apart, yet they tended to be the only point at which parents engaged with the agencies. Although parents wanted to see more long term planning being developed through the liaison groups, they very much needed less formal, but more regular ongoing contact with key professionals or school staff.

Additional comments about the liaison group meetings given by parents included their view that liaison groups were good, useful and that it was great to have agencies (not just education) working together. There was a view however that there is a need to develop better links at transition times, whether those are between pre-school and primary, primary and secondary schools or between secondary schools and post school services.

Liaison group meetings are useful for parents to help understand the difficulties their child experiences and getting appropriate agencies involved in developing support strategies.

However professionals need to be clear as to their roles if they are to be involved in meetings since these are daunting enough for parents, without including more group members than is necessary.

4.6 Implications for Professional Development

The parents who participated in the evaluation of liaison groups hold mainly positive attitudes to the liaison group process. They have given a clear indication of what they feel constitute well run and effective meetings and are appreciative of the involvement of agencies and services working together for the benefits of their children and families. However, there are variations in experiences and clear areas for improvement and parents were able to give suggestions as to how improvements could be made and specific areas that need to be addressed in relation to the process as a whole.

Preparing parents for meetings is an essential area for liaison groups to consider in greater detail. Allowing parents opportunities to discuss issues prior to the meeting, providing information on the people who will be in attendance, giving an overview of how the meeting will be run and the tools that may be used within the meeting, are all essential components in preparing parents.

Although there is a leaflet available which contains information about liaison groups, no parent interviewed mentioned receiving this. This leaflet was created some time ago and it could now benefit from being updated in line with the parental suggestions made and then routinely distributed at the invitation stage as part of the preparation.

There are also issues for the process of the meeting itself. Sufficient time should be allocated to ensure parents feel listened to. Where a flip chart is used within a solution focused meeting, parents' views and opinions should be given equal status with those of professionals, with comments made being recorded as stated. To help parents feel comfortable and relaxed at meetings, liaison group members should consider how they can create a welcoming atmosphere.

Agreeing a key person to keep parents informed about the progress of the action plan is important, as it is often the only way that they are able to gain information about changes that may have been made and the effects these may be having on their child's situation. Where a formal review is arranged through the liaison group process for some time in the future, contact with the key person in a less formal way but more regular way is even more important.

There may also be scope to involving the liaison group in developing more fluent transition periods and ensuring that children/young people and parents feel fully involved and informed at these stages, which are reported to be very stressful for families and a time when reassurance, preparation and information are even more necessary.

5 Discussion / Summary of Recommendations

When considered in the light of the description of liaison groups by Balchin et al. (2004) referred to in the introduction to this report, this evaluation has demonstrated that various aspects of good practice are evident within some liaison groups in the Inverness Area. It has however also highlighted various concerns which require to be addressed.

5.1 Attendance:

Regular attendance by core members enables liaison groups to function effectively. Ideally, all professions should be represented at each meeting. This requires commitment to the liaison group process both from professional groups as a whole and from individual core members. To facilitate this, attendance at liaison groups needs to be prioritised by service managers, for their staff to legitimately put time aside to spend in this way. As far as possible, core members should agree on dates for liaison group meetings well in advance. It is, however, also important to maintain flexibility to accommodate emergency meetings when necessary.

Parents should be invited to all liaison group meetings and consideration be given to changes to the arrangements that will make it more likely that parents accept invitations and attend. Where parents/carers are not able to attend, their views should always be sought, presented to the meeting and taken into account in terms of the discussion and action plan.

Children and young people considered old enough and capable of participating in the liaison group meeting should also be invited and encouraged to attend. For those children/young people who do not wish to attend or for whom attendance is considered inappropriate, there should be a process whereby their views are sought and then presented at the meeting on their behalf. The person seeking these views should be skilled at talking to children and young people and ideally use solution focused techniques to engage the child.

5.2 Function:

Core members of liaison groups seem to recognise and understand how liaison groups should function, appreciating the importance of multi-agency working. This understanding may not however always translate into reality. It would be useful for liaison groups to state explicitly what their aims and objectives are, particularly when new members join, so that there is a common understanding of each other's role within the liaison group process and shared aims within the liaison group. Being clear about the function of the liaison group is crucial in ensuring that appropriate children/young people are discussed at meetings and the work of the professionals involved is targeted appropriately.

5.3 Training

Some professional groups have received more training than others. To maximise the effectiveness of the liaison group, all core members should have access to relevant training. Joint core group training would be useful in this respect and would also help build relationships within individual and associated liaison groups. Updated training in solution focused approaches and solution focused meetings is a priority training need as many core members have received only minimal training in this area and in many cases solution focused approaches are not being fully implemented in liaison groups. Use of solution focused

approaches is highly effective in encouraging creative thinking to reach positive outcomes for children and families.

5.4 Preparation

Professionals are involved to varying extents in preparatory work for liaison groups. As liaison groups are multi-agency in nature, core members from all professional groups should have the opportunity to be involved in discussions about which children should be discussed and all core members should feel able to ask for a child to be discussed when they feel this is appropriate.

Agendas for regular, planned liaison group meetings should be received by core members at least one week in advance to allow time for adequate preparation. However, flexibility is required to accommodate emergency meetings.

Agendas for regular, planned liaison group meetings should be received by core members at least one week in advance to allow time for adequate preparation. However, flexibility is required to accommodate emergency meetings. Parents also require notice of meetings to allow them to make alternative child care arrangements, time off work etc.

Where children and families are being discussed within a multi-agency context, they themselves are the experts and essential participants in the process of finding solutions to challenging situations. There is a lack of clarity however about whose responsibility it is to prepare families for liaison group meetings and therefore often there is little or no preparation at all. Liaison groups should consider what they can do to improve this situation. Good practice used by individual liaison groups provides a bank of useful strategies for liaison groups to adopt, including clearly identifying core group members and other professionals attending meetings, explaining the format of the meeting and the tools that may be used within it and valuing and respecting parents/carers and children/young people as key participants and as the real experts on their own situations.

5.5 Process

Core members perceive a considerable number of liaison group meetings to be problem focused. This emphasises the need for more solution focused training for liaison groups, with guidance regarding how to use these techniques in meetings. When the solution focused format is used, ideally forty-five minutes should be allocated per child/family discussed in a meeting. Meetings should have an 80:20 split, with more time being spent on discussing solutions than problems. Therefore in a 45 minute meeting, no more than 10 minutes should be spent on discussing problems. If more time is required from a particular group member or parent to discuss the 'problems', this may be an indication that preparation has been incomplete and the group member or parent has not been able to express their concern or anxiety appropriately prior to the meeting, or that they have not felt 'heard' on previous occasions.

Written records are produced for most liaison group meetings, some as action points, and most attendees receive a copy of the record. This should happen in all cases, so that core members, parents/carers and children/young people know what is happening and who is implementing each action point.

The majority of core members say there is an action plan drawn up at the end of liaison group meetings. It is recommended that all liaison groups draw up action plans for the children they discuss. Often there is not a clear process for establishing whether an action plan has been followed through. Indeed, some respondents did not actually know whether the action plan of their liaison group was followed through. To address this issue, liaison groups should ensure that an appropriate mechanism for this form of update/review is established. Liaison groups should make efforts to include parents in this process so that they are kept informed about the progress of the agreed actions by individuals and ideally a key contact person will be available for families.

With regard to follow-up work, liaison groups should consider the full range of options available to them to maximise the effectiveness of liaison group meetings and ensure the best outcomes for children discussed.

It is important that liaison groups undertake self-evaluation to ensure the development of good practice to achieve best outcomes for children / young people. As there seems to be some confusion about what constitutes an evaluation, an evaluation tool has been developed as part of this evaluation and is available within the 'Guidance for Liaison Groups'.

5.6 Effectiveness

In response to the core group members' questionnaire, core members of liaison groups generated a wealth of ideas which contribute to developing a model of good practice and which will be useful in evaluating individual liaison groups.

When considering the effectiveness of the liaison group, group members may find it useful to ask themselves whether attendance for their meetings is satisfactory and leads to a feeling of joint ownership, whether they have a clear system for preparing parents, how effectively their meetings are run, whether they use time effectively, whether they have a common understanding of the process and purpose of liaison groups and whether they feel their liaison arrangements make a difference.

Groups may consider the strengths of their own liaison arrangements in comparison with the strengths generated through this questionnaire, for example, communication, multi-agency working, advantages for parents and families, shared responsibility and commitment, use of solution focused approaches, structure of meetings, creative thinking, attendance, early intervention.

This process may generate training needs for liaison groups. In response to the core group questionnaire, core members have identified three main themes for improvement of the liaison group process at present: greater commitment from all involved in the process, improvements in the process itself and development of skills and understanding. It is likely that training needs identified will fall into these categories.

Where liaison arrangements work well, parents feel that these are beneficial and generally are very supportive of the whole process of integrated working. In order to participate more fully in this process however, they cite preparation and the 'softer' skills used within the meeting itself, as being those that ensure their own involvement in the process and lead to a greater level of commitment and success.

6 Conclusion

The evaluation of liaison groups in the Inverness Area was undertaken in order to assess how liaison groups were developing and functioning throughout the Area. The response from professionals from all agencies and services and from parents has been considerable and has provided the evaluators with a wealth of information to examine.

Some extremely positive messages have emerged from the evaluation. The majority of respondents have welcomed the introduction of liaison groups and believe that the process is achieving positive outcomes for children and families. A majority of professionals involved in the evaluation study now see attending a liaison group as part of their professional role and for many the belief in multi-agency working and integrating children's services is the reason they attend liaison groups. The multi-agency approach to addressing the needs of children and their families and the opportunities to share information and communicate with colleagues from other agencies are both highlighted by professionals as key strengths to liaison arrangements.

Nevertheless, of the professionals who participated in the evaluation study, 39% felt the liaison group process was only sometimes effective in achieving positive outcomes and 9% felt the process as it operated in the groups they attended, was not effective at all. This mixed reaction was also given by parents, with all agreeing that the aim of joint working and integrating services for children was a worthwhile aspiration, but their experiences of this process varied considerably, depending on the liaison group they attended.

Several key issues have emerged as aspects of practice that some groups need to address. Regular attendance at meetings appears to vary amongst professional groupings with only two thirds of professionals who responded, indicating that they 'always' attend liaison group meetings. A number of concerns were also expressed about the frequency of liaison groups, the feeling being that in certain cases they are not held frequently enough to discuss all the children requiring this supportive intervention. There is a fine balance to be struck here in terms of attendance at meetings versus time to follow up on action points through direct intervention. As the Highland landscape changes in relation to new additional support needs legislation and integrated assessments for children and young people, it will be even more important to maintain an appropriate balance between assessment and intervention, while continuing to promote liaison arrangements that are effective.

Several concerns have emerged through the evaluation regarding the inclusion of families within the liaison group process. 25% of responses from professionals indicated that families were not invited to attend liaison group meetings, which is very concerning given that they know their children best of all and are key partners in finding a solution pattern. Parents are invited to 88% of meetings, with fewer parents accepting these invitations. As a result, there is parental representation at only 70% of liaison group meetings. The involvement of children and young people is of a much lesser order, with only 14% of meetings attended by the children themselves. Families should always be invited to attend a discussion about their child and where children are considered old enough and able to participate in the process, they too should be invited. Where invitations are given but attendance is low, groups need to discuss why this may be the case and consider ways to encourage and support a much higher level of attendance from families.

It is also significant that a considerable proportion of professional respondents, either did not know whether families were prepared for meetings or thought they were not. Indeed this was the case in half of the responses relating to secondary school groups. Parents report that preparation for meetings is important to them to help them feel confident and equal participants in the process. If this is done well, it is more likely to encourage more parents to attend more often and to ensure positive outcomes from discussions.

The written response from the young person who participated in the evaluation (appendix 5), very clearly expresses the vulnerability felt by children and young people attending meetings and the level of anxiety that they can feel when they are not fully prepared for the meeting, the surroundings and who will attend. It is also clear, that even when children/young people agree to attend meetings, they need to be prepared for the questions they may be asked and to have a chance to rehearse or consider the issues that affect them or the questions they may wish to ask others in attendance at the meeting.

There were examples of extremely good practice regarding parental inclusion from certain liaison groups, for example, where families were already well acquainted with the school and liaison group process because the school had been following the staged intervention approach, but also where schools had used the standard liaison group leaflet which had been designed specifically to prepare families for the meeting they are about to attend.

It is crucial that the liaison group process sits within a staged approach so that attendance at meetings is not the first time that parents have either been aware of the wider group of professionals aligned to a school, or been aware of the concerns for their child/young person. Any meeting will be difficult for a parent/carer and the better prepared they are for this, the better they will be able to really contribute to the process.

A further area in which groups will need to examine their practice is the use of the solution focused approach in meetings. From the responses received it appears few schools are utilising this approach as intended, with the result that many liaison group meetings are still too problem focused.

Although a considerable number of liaison groups hold regular reviews for their children, 25% of responses indicated that participants were unsure whether the action plans for individuals were followed through or not. In order for liaison groups to operate effectively, a process needs to be in place to ensure liaison group meetings are followed up so that all the professionals, parents and children involved know whether the interventions proposed have been effective or whether further input is required.

It would therefore seem that in order for the liaison group process to be more effective in achieving positive outcomes for children and families, groups should consider the factors affecting their group function. As identified from the evaluation, respondents feel that the liaison group process could be improved through greater commitment from all involved in the process, improvements in the process itself and development of skills and understanding. There is circularity in the improvement process as each of these factors will affect the other. The evaluation has also identified good practice. The way forward for groups is therefore to evaluate their own practice in the light of these findings.

The development of liaison groups within the Inverness Area has generally been received very positively by both professionals and parents alike. As an evaluation, this report has

tended to highlight the areas of concern and those which groups examining their own practice need to focus upon. However, it is important to note that there is a considerable wealth of good practice and generally a commitment to this process by all concerned.

This evaluation study has been extensive and with a very high level of cooperation from parents and practitioners, it has proved to be very informative. The results have been so detailed as to have informed the development of the 'Guidance for Liaison Groups' that provides the context for the whole liaison group process, detailed information and guidance and also tools for evaluating individual skills and group effectiveness. Liaison groups have become central to the various processes supporting a wide range of children and families and with local and national developments such as the further progress of Integrated Children's Services, the creation of an Integrated Assessment Framework and the Additional Support for Learning Act, it is likely that they will become even more important in the process of coordinating services for children. The continued development of liaison groups is therefore important and so the evaluation group will continue to monitor the development of liaison arrangements within Inverness over the coming months, informing further measures of evaluation that may be taken by the wider Area Children's Services Forum in the future.

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Appendix 1

Members of the IACSF sub-group

Bernadette Cairns, Acting Principal Educational Psychologist

Alison Clark, Research Officer, Integrated Children's Services

Ian Kyle, Depute Headteacher, Cauldeen Primary School

Emma MacLeod, Educational Psychologist in Training

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Appendix 2

Questionnaire used by Inverness ACSF sub-group members in telephone interviews with core members of liaison groups

General:

- 1 How often does the Liaison Group meet?
- 2 Is this enough?
- 3 Can you give reasons for your answer?
- 4a How often do you attend the Liaison Group?
(Always/often/sometimes/rarely)
- 4b Why do you attend?
- 5 What do you see as the function of the Liaison Group?
- 6 Have you had any training in skills required for working with Liaison Groups?
If so, what was this?

Preparation:

- 7 Are there discussions with other professionals before the Liaison Groups to
decide which children/families are to be considered?
- 8 Have you ever been involved in such discussions?
- 9 Who identifies the children to be considered?
- 10 Have you ever asked for a child to be discussed?
- 11 Was the child subsequently discussed?
- 12 Are families invited to attend Liaison Group Meetings?
Always/Often/Rarely/Never

13 Are families prepared for Liaison Group meetings? Who does this?

13b What does this preparation consist of?

14 Are you given the names of children/families to be discussed, or an agenda before a meeting? How long before?

Process:

15a How many children do you usually discuss at a Liaison Group?

15b Are there other issues you discuss at Liaison Group Meetings? E.g. training, patterns of behaviour, priorities etc.

16 How long are the Liaison Group Meetings?

17 What proportion of your time do you spend discussing problems and solutions? (e.g. 50/50, 60/40)

18 Is there an action plan drawn up at the end of the meeting?

(Always/Sometimes/Rarely/Never)

19 Is it followed through? How do you know?

20 Have you been involved in follow-up work from the action plan?

(Always/sometimes/rarely/never)

21 Is the action plan or outcomes for children and families evaluated? How?

22 How are meetings recorded? Do you receive a copy of the record?

23 Do you feel the Liaison Group process as it operates in this school is effective in achieving positive outcomes for children and families?

23b What are the strengths of this process?

23c How could the Liaison Group process be improved?

23d Are your Liaison Groups evaluated internally?

24 Are you going to attend/did you attend?

Appendix 3

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule **Liaison Group Survey for Parents**

General:

1. **Base School:**
2. **Parent ID:**
3. **Date of Interview:**
4. **Interviewer:**

Preparation Pre-Meeting

1. **How did you first find out about the meeting?**
2. **Who contacted you?**
3. **What information were you given at this stage:**
 - *Who will be attending*
 - *Purpose of the meeting*
 - *The way the meeting will be run*
 - *Your right to bring a supporter*
 - *Whether your child can attend*
 - *Other (details)*
4. **What format did this information come in?**
 - *Leaflet*
 - *Personal contact (phone/home visit)*
 - *Letter*
 - *Other (details)*

5. **How useful was this information?**
6. **Did you feel this was enough information at this stage?**
- 7a. **Did you feel able to ask questions?**
- 7b. **If so, what did you want to know?**
- 8a. **Were you contacted again before the meeting?**
- 8b. **If so by whom?**
9. **Were you offered support/did you feel able, to voice your opinions?**
10. **Are there any improvements that could be made in relation to preparing for the meeting?**

At the Meeting:

- 1a. **Were you made to feel welcome?**
- 1b. **How was this done?**
2. **Were you introduced to everyone?**

3. Did you understand why everyone was there?

4. Could anything else be done to help people settle in at this stage of the meeting?

Process:

1. Did you feel there was enough time for discussion of your child?

2a. Did you feel able to put forward your views and ideas?

2b. Why was this?

3a. Did you feel the discussions gave a fair picture of your child at this stage?

3b. Why was this?

4. Was there:-

- Too much time spent on discussing problems and not enough time spent on change for the better?**
- Too much time spent discussing change for the better and not enough time spent on discussing problems?**
- The right amount of time was spent between discussing problems and changes for the better?**

5. **What did you feel about the way the meeting was run?**
 - *Equal partner*
 - *Comfortable*
 - *Mutual trust/respectful practice*
 - *Beneficial*
 - *Other (details)*

6. **By the end of the meeting, did you feel you knew:**
 - **What was going to be done?**
 - **Who was going to do it?**
 - **Were you happy with these outcomes?**
 - **Other (details)**

7. **Are there any changes that can be made in the way the meetings are run that would make things better?**

After the Meeting

1. **Did you have a point of contact immediately after the meeting?**

2. **Did you receive a written record of the meeting?**

3. **Did anyone contact you after the meeting to give you a progress update or was there a review meeting arranged?**

4. **Do you feel things have changed for the better for your child as a result of this meeting?**
Have targets been met?
Have people followed through on what they said they would do?

5. **How do you think the follow-up arrangements could be improved?**

Any other comments:

Appendix 4

This information will remain confidential to the meeting and will be held only by myself within the Psychological Service

Please complete the details of the pupils and parents who were invited to attend each of your Liaison Groups between August and December 2004.

<u>PUPIL NAME</u>	<u>INVITED TO ATTEND (Y or N)</u>	<u>ATTENDED (Y or N)</u>	<u>REASON FOR NON ATTENDANCE</u>	<u>REVIEW (R) OR INITIAL (I) MEETING</u>

<u>PARENTS/CARER S NAME(S)</u>	<u>PARENTS/CARER S ADDRESS(S)</u>	<u>INVITE D TO ATTEN D (Y or N)</u>	<u>ATTENDE D (Y OR N)</u>	<u>REASON FOR NON- ATTENDANC E</u>

Appendix 5

THE MEETING

(Secondary School Pupil)

A time I had to overcome shyness is when I had to go to a meeting for support options about 2-3 weeks ago.

I felt nervous before I went into the conference room, as I thought that there would be a lot of people that I didn't know and people I didn't want to know in the room.

I also knew that if this meeting went the wrong way, it would have a negative effect on my future.

As I entered the conference room, I immediately felt repulsed.

The room was shabby, the carpet was worn, the chairs were of a cheap plastic sort, the walls were painted an ugly mouldy purple colour and the table where the meeting was supposed to be held at was not just a singular table, but several old, weathered, and cheap looking tables bunched together in the middle of the room.

All in all, it was unwelcoming.

I had honestly thought that I had gone into the wrong room.

As I sat down, ten or so people instantly filed into the room, took out their various notes, notepads, and expensive looking pens, and sat at their respective places at the old conference tables.

And then the meeting began.

Most of the people in that room were new to me, people who I had not seen before, almost all of them were officials for some department or other, and they were all making decisions about me.

The people introduced themselves as representatives for health organisations, education officials, and other grand sounding capacities, and then all of these people, of whom I hardly knew anything about, started discussing my future.

The meeting was boring to me, and my mind slipped away, to places outside the conference room, and probably this world.

Then all of a sudden, the unavoidable happened, and a plethora of questions hit me at what seemed like once.

At the start, I froze, and started worrying, as I hadn't been listening to a lot and I wasn't prepared for the questions that were facing me.

I looked around the table, and found ten pairs of eyes, carefully monitoring my every move, some looking for signs of weakness, some purely out of boredom.

I felt like giving up all hope, trading it for embarrassment and shame, then I looked around the table once more, in an attempt to grasp any remaining lifelines.

This time I looked more carefully, and I saw lots of familiar faces, the ones of my mother, several teachers who I worked with for the past two years, I saw the support teacher who I had worked with longer than that.

I saw hope.

Filled with courage, I started talking, and people listened, with eventually growing interest, I then noted that I sounded good, and that I wasn't making myself into a fool, as I first thought I would.

At the end of the meeting, I felt great, and after the initial depression and stress, I found the meeting turned out better than I thought it would, and that is a time when I had to overcome shyness.

The End