Caritas
Diocese of Salford

Caritas School Service

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

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About the Caritas School Service

The Caritas School Service improves access to learning by working directly with pupils, their families and their school community.

- A specialist team with experience in social work, counselling and art therapy.
- Has worked in local schools for decades, with a reach spanning Greater Manchester and Lancashire.
- Supports around 500-600 children a year, either one-to-one or in small groups.
- Working knowledge of social and emotional need and where this interfaces with school life for children and young people.
- Confident in working with families and in supporting children, young people and schools around safeguarding issues or concerns.
- Well-versed in group work and individual direct work, as well as family support too.

School environments offer an ideal place for social work and therapeutic practice. Families can feel less stigmatised accessing help through schools.

Workers value the opportunity to work in schools and school staff often feed back that Caritas can respond more quickly to issues as they arise.

What we offer:

- Usually support children for between six weeks and six months, either with group or one-to-one support.
- Promotes different ways of thinking about various difficulties and overcoming fears.
- Involves being challenged, as well as being nurtured and encouraged with further exploration.
- 'Stars' used to take before and after snapshots of how able or confident the child or young person feels about issues that affected them initially. Feedback is also gathered from their family and school.

Social work:

This involves mainly task centered and systems theory approaches, listening and assessing the child in the context of their family and school environment to understand how to meet their needs, build on strengths and to act in order to support changes. This can be undertaken in many ways and will involve direct work, home visits and family support, and safeguarding support as needed. We also recognise the worry that families may have about seeing a social worker based in school, but once they build a relationship with the worker, families often continue to approach them for assistance and communicate that their worries are allayed.

Counselling:

The counsellors use a person-centered approach to facilitate stress reduction, increase emotional wellbeing and increase resilience. This approach deals with the ways in which individuals perceive themselves consciously, rather than how a counsellor can interpret their unconscious thoughts or ideas. The pupil is given time to articulate their needs and the counsellor will facilitate the journey of understanding and change process. There are no set timeframes and school staff are involved in reviewing the need for ongoing support on a termly basis. Our counselling service also works with teaching staff where this is needed.

Art therapy:

The art therapist works for around ten sessions initially, encouraging expression through creativity, visual exploration and imaginative play. Children are nurtured and supported to further articulate and develop around their curiosity. The therapist will then formulate a set of recommendations around what they have learned about the child and how they can continue to express themselves more fully. The therapist can also work with small groups of children, agreeing with schools what formats will be best for the young people.

Larger groups of children:

Larger groups are supported through NSPCC PANTS delivery, transitions support and planning, such as going to high school, and through Expect Respect or parenting groups and drop-ins too. Between April 2022 – 23 we supported around 2,700 children and families through broader group work.

Smaller group work:

Smaller group work with children will often involve tried and tested interventions like Superskills for Life, Relax Kids, Friendship and Other Weapons, Cool Connections, as well as harm reduction and / or support for children and young people who self harm.

We also have workers trained to deliver the Incredible Years Programme and Ride the Rapids.

The service offers smaller parent networking drop ins and coffee mornings which discuss supporting children though difficult situations like family breakdown or parental separation and where family relationships have been affected by domestic abuse too.

Supporting staff:

We also support staff in schools to feel more confident exploring children and young people's emotional needs and in adapting different approaches to reassure children. They can also support staff with how to work with families in relation to school issues, and our counsellors can support staff, either face-to-face or indirect.

Crisis Support:

We can support your school in the event of a crisis such as the death of a pupil, a teacher or a crisis involving any person from your school community. The support offered is a short-term crisis response and is available to all schools in the diocese, provided at no cost to the school. Support can be offered for one or two days, depending on need. To access this support, please contact 0161 817 2250 and press 4.

Longer term support for children and current issues in schools

At any one time there are around 60 to 70 children who are supported by our team for more than one year. We feel that these children have more entrenched difficulties and need extra time to build up a relationship with a trusted adult.

Many of the children being supported in this way may have more complex situations at home. Over a third have experienced family breakdown more recently, including where their parents have separated, and this has been more complicated. Children in this situation are worried about what happens next or how they will get to spend time with everyone in their family. They are getting used to living across different homes or maybe they are getting used to having a step-parent. Otherwise, they worry about tension between their parents, and this can take some extra time to comprehend.

Longer-term support can be needed where children need more time to adapt or try out different approaches to their worries and difficulties. An example of this is where we support a significant number of children who self-harm and may cause huge worry through their expression of more serious harm or even suicidal intent. They account for around one in six children and young people who see our team for more than a year.

A similar number of young people need more intensive support around their difficulties in dealing with peers in school and where they are considered to be disruptive. This may also come across as anger or aggression. There are a variety of reasons why children are not coping so well in class or at play time and sometimes this can take longer to resolve.

Both schools and families observe that some children have found it very difficult to get ‘back to normal’ after the pandemic and multiple lockdowns. School attendance issues through school avoidance is far more common than before 2020. We have intervened in these situations with a good degree of success through gently building up the expectation of accessing education, getting back to school and triumphing against the anxieties which feel all too real. One in ten children and young people supported by Caritas describe this as a real area of difficulty and this also includes ‘emotionally based school avoidance’ and what school staff sometimes call ‘separation anxiety’.

ADHD, sensory or autistic spectrum referrals and support:

More school staff feel that they are trying to meet the needs of children with ADHD, sensory or autistic spectrum associated need and families who are asking for help with parenting or achieving some form of diagnosis. Their child may also struggle with school routines and/or the school environment. We can help with referrals for additional support and resources after getting to know the child and their family.

Supporting after a bereavement:

Around one in ten children have suffered a bereavement with the loss of someone very close and they may need support for longer. Our team can support the family and the school in working together to help settle the situation for the child.

Avoiding school or disengagement – supporting through worries:

Children can sometimes avoid school and disengage. Sometimes children want to speak with someone who is not going to judge them and this can also include where they are exploring sexuality and their own identity. Sometimes 'self-image' and social media are areas of difficulty for them and, for many different reasons, this can impact on school life.

Some children are worried about the wellbeing of their parents or carers and around one in nine children worried about their mum's or dad's mental health difficulties.

Domestic violence and abuse support:

Around one in seven children who continue to see their worker for a longer period of time have been affected by domestic violence or abuse either now or in the past. The worry doesn't go away easily and is difficult for children to understand. Our team works with the family and the school closely together until the child or young person feels safer and reassured and their main carer feels confident again.

Safeguarding and referrals for additional help

Where there are worries about on-going violence or domestic abuse in the home, we will assist in safeguarding the child and the care giver as needed. Sometimes there are issues with alcohol or substance misuse which can further complicate the situation.

School staff may be concerned that a child is experiencing neglect or abuse and will seek advice from our team around the routes and processes to access additional help or resources.

For example, we have supported children and their families where there have been risks in accessing inappropriate content (or contacts) online or through gaming and peer issues at school where sexual assaults, or threats of sexual assault, as well as sexual exploitation is also reported. Our team will also support with making referrals and planning around these situations, including referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

How does it work?

Teachers or support staff identify a group or a child that would benefit from support.

Families can also request extra help via school over a range of stresses on family life, for example, housing concerns, how they can respond to the increasing burden of bills and the cost of living crisis.

School staff obtain consent from the parent to make contact with Caritas and discuss what school feel is needed and how the social worker/ counsellor or art therapist can support the child.

Discussion with the family (through the main carer) and the child to create a plan. Time will also be identified to review the work and to explore with the child, family and school if this is helping.

Group work offered around a range of themes and parents can consent by email but for one-to-one or more intensive support, including access to additional referrals or resources, then a meeting at school or a home visit is recommended.

Feedback and brief evaluation with the child, family and school, with support extended if needed. If many of the issues are resolved and the child or family feel happy to try out some of the ideas or resources then the worker will complete a Summary of Involvement and the school and family will receive a copy of this.

Opportunity to take part in an annual review – this does not discuss individual children but school needs as a whole, the effectiveness of the service and future plans.

Find out more or discuss your needs:

Visit **www.caritassalford.org.uk/service/school-service/** for more information or email **schoolsadmin@caritassalford.org.uk**.

(Please note, you will need to have the consent of a child's parents or carers in order to share information and a referral with Caritas.)