

Creating a Climate of Safety:

**An Evaluation of the School Based
Child Welfare Social Worker Program
in Huron and Renfrew Counties**

Evaluation Report

October 2001



**Centre for Research and
Education in Human Services**

Building Bridges Within Communities



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Project Title:

An Evaluation of School-
based Social Work
programs

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Renfrew County Catholic
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CREATING A CLIMATE OF SAFETY:

AN EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL BASED CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKER PROGRAM IN HURON AND RENFREW COUNTIES

Executive Summary

Across Ontario, child welfare agencies are collaborating with school boards to place social workers in schools. This report presents the findings of an outcome evaluation of two such programs. The evaluation design included 56 in-depth interviews with children, parents, and other key stakeholders. It also included a survey of 211 teachers, and a quasi-experimental component that tracked child outcomes for 159 children over the first six months of participation. The study compares two models of school-based social work to traditional agency-based approaches. Findings suggest that school-based social workers connect with children that agency-based models miss. School-board/child welfare partnerships extend the reach of both institutions, and help parents and teachers to feel comfortable collaborating with child welfare workers.

Background:

Recent trends in child welfare service delivery include:

Emphasis on Partnerships. Child welfare agencies are working to increase their effectiveness by working closely with other community organizations. Sometimes, these partnerships focus on collaborative planning, coordination of services, and collective advocacy. Other partnerships involve collaborative service delivery.

Exploration of New Settings for Service delivery. Child welfare agencies are recognizing that access and awareness are improved when their workers move outside of the agency building and establish a presence in settings that are familiar and comfortable to the families they hope to reach. Examples include neighbourhood centres, family resource programs, and schools.

Emphasis on Prevention. The two trends already listed are both, in part, strategies intended to help child welfare organizations make contact with families before a child has been harmed, and build positive, trusting relationships with families and community organizations.

Placing social workers in schools is one of the ways child welfare agencies have tried to put these ideas into practice.

Eight Reasons to Fund School-Based Services

- to identify at-risk children and families who would otherwise have gone undetected
- to improve speed and frequency of access to social workers
- to more effectively help families to provide social support to children (as compared to traditional approaches to child welfare)
- to improve child behaviour in school settings (as compared to traditional approaches)
- to enhance partnerships between schools and child welfare agencies
- to allow schools and child welfare organizations to work more efficiently
- to improve the public image of child welfare agencies
- to move beyond reactive approaches and create a climate of safety within schools

Program Description

Activity Clusters		Sample Activities
Working with the School Community	Activities with all children	<input type="checkbox"/> Run prevention programs (e.g., peer mediation) <input type="checkbox"/> Present in classroom (e.g., skill building, conflict resolution)
	Activities with community, school and family	<input type="checkbox"/> Build relationships with community groups (e.g., police, doctors) <input type="checkbox"/> Present at parent council meetings
Working with Children and Families on a voluntary basis	Consultation with families and school staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Attend teacher staff meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Educate school staff about protection legislation <input type="checkbox"/> Plan and consult with principals, resource teachers and guidance counselors
	Treatment and support of children and families at risk	<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis intervention within school <input type="checkbox"/> Individual and group counseling with children
Case Management Work with Protection Cases	Treatment and support of children and families on CAS caseload	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete risk assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Crisis intervention within school <input type="checkbox"/> Consult with teachers re: behaviour management <input type="checkbox"/> Run groups for support and treatment
	Links to other community services	<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to school psychologist or other community services <input type="checkbox"/> Attend court cases, and do IPRC case reviews

Children's Aid Societies in Huron and Renfrew both base some of their child welfare social workers in local schools. These positions are jointly supervised and funded with local School Boards. School-based social workers provide the full range of child protection services, and also work with children in the school community on a voluntary basis. The two Children's Aid Societies involved in this study see this approach as more than a practical and cost-effective way to deliver traditional child welfare services. By placing these services in schools and making social workers fully integrated members of the school staff, these agencies hope to create school environments that are healthier and more nurturing for all students. The schools, it is hoped, will be equipped to respond effectively to children with a wide variety of needs - in a way neither child welfare social workers, nor school social workers could do individually.

This table summarizes the specific questions addressed in this project, and the methods used to address them.

Methods

Evaluation Methodology: Questions Guiding Evaluation	Interviews	Teacher Surveys	Outcome Tracking
		56 children, teachers, parents, and social workers	211 teachers, principals, vp's, and guidance staff
How fully has the vision of the program (as expressed in the table above) been implemented?	✓	✓	
What do stakeholders see as the strengths and weaknesses of the model?	✓	✓	
What difference has the model made at a systems level?	✓	✓	
Who is accessing the model? How do the children and families differ from those served through traditional models?	✓	✓	✓
What difference has the model made in the behaviour of children?	✓		✓
What difference has the model made in the support available to children from families?	✓		✓

NOTE: Outcome tracking tools included the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (the CAFAS), and the Risk Assessment and Eligibility Spectrum tools used by all Child Welfare agencies in Ontario.

What Difference Does School-Based Social Work Make?

Enhanced Partnerships between Schools and Child Welfare Agencies

The school based social worker model appears to be highly effective in achieving system-level change. *In particular, both Children's Aid Societies involved in this study have established stronger, more innovative, and more proactive partnerships with school boards and teachers.* The majority of teachers who work in schools served by the program consult with and refer to the social workers on a regular basis. Teachers report that these consultations have made them better at identifying signs of risk among their students, more confident and quicker to act on their concerns, and better at making sure that their efforts to help any given student are fully coordinated with those of the social worker.

The Numbers:

- ❑ 58% of surveyed teachers mentioned, without prompting, that the program had led to improved efficiency of response to problem situations
- ❑ 48% reported that the program had decreased their personal level of stress as an educator
- ❑ 45% felt they had a greater ability to problem solve with children and families

A Teacher's Perspective:

"I've taught for a number of years and I find it less threatening now to act on a problem where you would have to deal with Children's Aid, than I did some years ago ... Now I find it less threatening and I think I have more respect, I believe they are trying to keep family units together and I understand that now"

Teachers see the social worker as a unique and essential member of the staff team, and feel that *the school as a whole averts crises better with the social worker on board.* A level of trust rarely seen in child welfare exists between the two groups of staff.

At an even broader level, the school-based social worker program does seem to have helped *all stakeholders (students, parent, and teachers) understand Children's Aid Societies better, see them as a resource partner, and feel more comfortable and safe working with them.* Although this change is perhaps more gradual and less dramatic than the teacher-social worker partnership, it is profoundly important.

Improved Identification of Children and Families in Need

In interviews, stakeholders emphasized the importance of the social support provided to students and families by social workers. Whatever the practical focus of their work together, the social worker gave people a safe place to sit down and talk, a place where they felt trust and support. This was extremely important to the children and families we met. *The school-based approach has given some children, families, and school staff a more convenient and less threatening channel to access the child welfare system.*

A Teacher's Perspective:

"I consult her a lot and I usually go to her first when I notice a problem with a student and I think it is longer than just temporary misbehaving or typical problems of being a teenager and I suspect that something might be going wrong at home and also trying to figure out whether I'm too harsh on the kid or too gentle, she usually can set me straight to the proper way of dealing with the situation"

It seems clear that the school-based service is reaching *children at risk that might otherwise have gone undetected.* According to our CAFAS and risk assessment data, children served through the school-based program are more likely to have had conflict with parents, to have received inadequate social support from parents, or to have been emotionally abused than those served through agencies. The students reached by school based social workers are also less likely to be acting out in school, and more likely to be boys. They are less likely to have experienced neglect or caregiver capacity issues such as alcoholism or incarceration. Although we were not able to generate clear answers about why these differences exist, we feel confident that they are real differences. They emerged in two or in some cases three different kinds of independent assessments.

Presenting Issues on Eligibility Spectrum at Intake

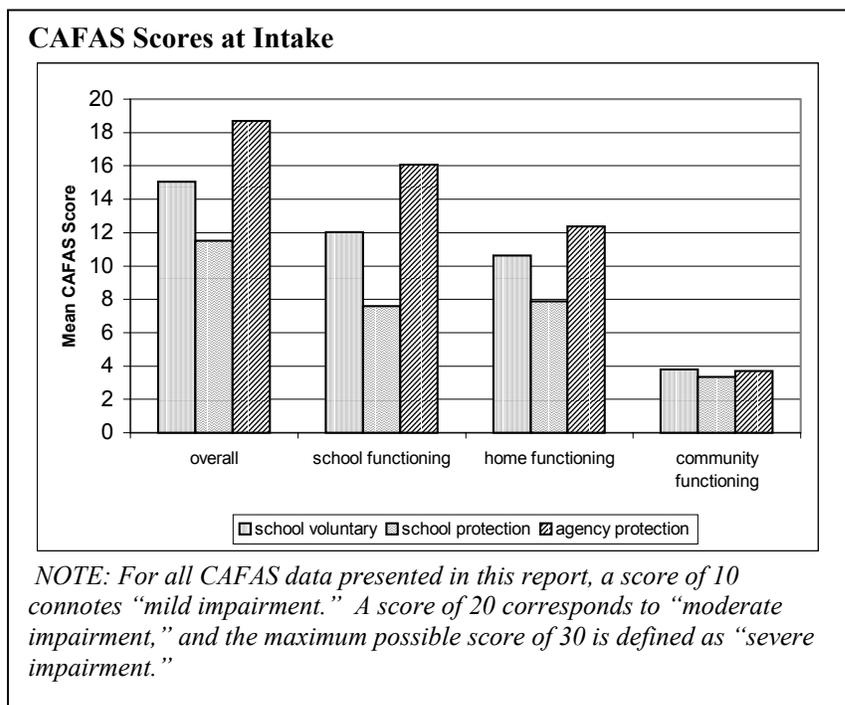
	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based cases
Physical/sexual harm	16.98% (34.5%)	13.64%	16.67%
Harm by omission	1.89% (3.9%)	9.09%	20.83%
Emotional harm	3.77% (7.7%)	13.64%	8.33%
Abandonment, separation, or conflict	9.43% (19.2%)	31.82%	16.67%
Caregiver capacity	16.98% (34.6%)	31.82%	37.50%
Counseling request	50.94%		
Sample Size	53 (26)	22	24

NOTE: Percentages in brackets exclude the 27 non-protection cases whose presenting issue was “counseling request.” In other words, bracketed percentages include only those voluntary children would have been assessed as “at risk” in the traditional child welfare model.

School-based social workers appear to work with a different mix of clients than agency-based social workers.

- school-based cases (and especially school-based protection cases) were likely to have fewer behavioural problems than agency-based cases. This difference was especially marked for behaviour at school.
- School-based cases tended to come from homes where there was less access to social support, and somewhat more negative family interactions. They were more likely than agency-based cases to have suffered emotional abuse or to have experienced parent-child conflict.
- school-based cases were less likely to have suffered neglect or to have had caregivers whose capacity to parent was influenced by substance abuse or similar issues.

Neither school-based nor agency-based models emerge from these data as clearly superior in reaching the full range of children at risk. However, the *school-based programs have clearly extended the reach of the child welfare agencies involved.* For parents, for teachers, and for students, one of the most important things about the school based program was that it afforded them access to an organization (and a body of expertise) they otherwise would have hesitated to contact. Similarly, this partnership has allowed *school boards to continue to serve children who might otherwise have developed disruptive behaviours and been difficult to teach in regular school settings.* These findings are perhaps best interpreted as evidence of the *value of using a diverse range of outreach and treatment approaches* in both school board and child welfare systems.



Improved Social Support Within Families

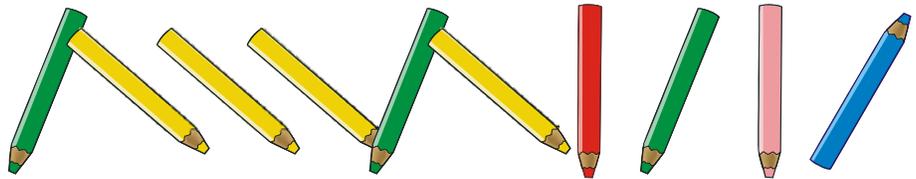
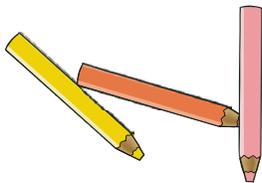
Social Support Scores at Intake

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based cases
Mean score for level of impairment in family/social support (CAFAS)	10.0 (mild)	10.03 (mild)	4.6 (none to mild)
% of participants with “severe” impairments in social support (CAFAS)	14.3%	12.9%	0%
Mean rating of availability of social supports (Risk Assessment)	Not available	2.39 (some support, but of limited use or reliability)	1.00 (some reliable and useful support)
% of cases where families are rated as having multiple sources of support (Risk Assessment)		3%	42.9%

A Parent’s Perspective:

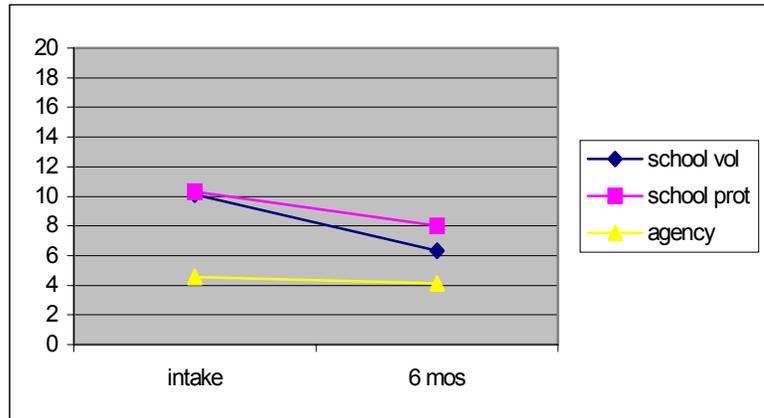
"[It has helped to be able to call] by phone for professional help when dealing with my children when my frustrations get the best of me. The help is right there with a new idea right on hand."

Access to social support has arisen as a theme throughout our findings. Our interview data suggested that *parents come to trust school-based social workers more than traditional child welfare workers*. We also heard that parents appreciated the role the social worker was able to play in keeping them up-to-date and involved with respect to their child’s life in school.



Perhaps it is not surprising then that school-based social work appears to excel when it comes to improving the social support provided to children by their families. When we tracked levels of impairment in family support across the first six months of contact, we found that *school-based programs were improving the quality of social support available to the child from his or her family*. This was especially true for cases that were classified as voluntary.

Level of Impairment in access to family support (CAFAS)



Improved Child Behaviour in School

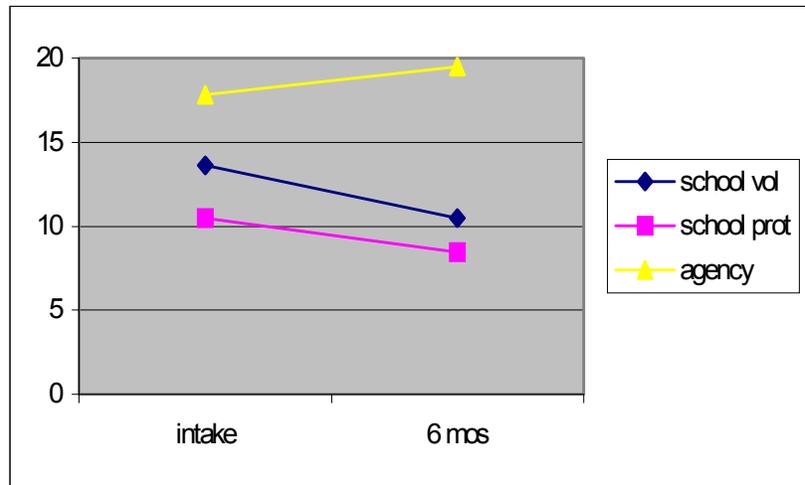
Our qualitative data shows that people involved with the program believe it is improving the behaviour of children. Teachers and parents identified better problem solving and anger management skills in students who had worked with the social workers.

A Student's Perspective:

"It's pretty good. You learn how you can control your anger better and identify different types of anger and responses; I know everybody in [the group run by the social worker]; they talk to me in the halls and stuff and they ask me questions; the social worker helped that and they're [friends from the group] there to help too. I hang out more than before with some of them cause you know you can trust each other and stuff."

Both models appeared to be making a positive change in the behaviour of children over a six month period, and each model had different strengths in terms of its clinical outcomes. *School-based social work was especially effective in enhancing social support and improving behaviour in school settings.*

Level of Impairment in role performance at school: For boys (CAFAS)

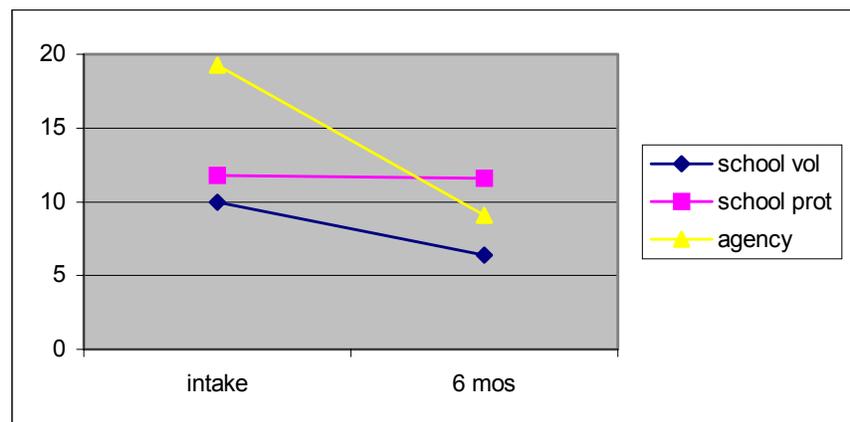


55% of surveyed teachers reported, without prompting, that the program had led to improved behaviour of students who have worked with school-based social workers.

When we analyzed our six-month pre-post intervention data, we found that *both school-based models appeared more effective at addressing behaviour in school than the agency-based model – especially for boys.*

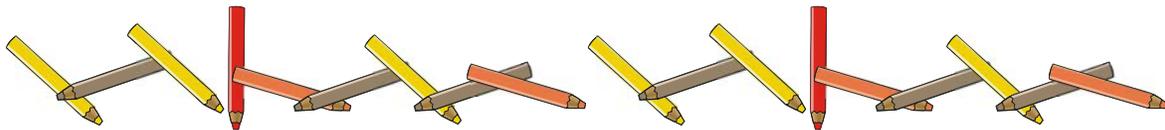
On the other hand, children aged 10-13 were much more likely than older or younger children to present with behavioural problems at home. Amongst children in this age group, the agency model dealt with more serious cases and led to greater improvements than school-based models. We also found that the agency model seemed more effective in dealing with self-harm, especially among girls. In fact, self-harm issues appear to have become more serious over time among girls participating in the school-based protection model of treatment.

Level of Impairment in Home Performance for children aged 10- 13 (CAFAS)



Reflections

The provincial government has expressed its support for cross-sectoral partnerships in children’s services, through such initiatives as Making Services Work for People, and the Early Years Challenge Fund. These initiatives, and the background research they are based upon, also emphasize the importance of service integration and simplifying access for families. However, changes in provincial policy have narrowed the mandate of both schools and child welfare organizations. The school boards involved in this project have experienced increasing pressure from provincial funders to focus their resources on basic classroom education, coupled with more centralized control over how this mandate is carried out. Similarly, child welfare organizations have been required to focus much more narrowly on child protection. *These trends greatly reduce the capacity of these kinds of organizations to form the kinds of partnerships envisioned by, for example, the McCain & Mustard report.* Since these data were collected, the programs described here have been forced to cut back the school-based services they provide.



Additional Information on Methodology

Sample for Outcome Tracking

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based protection cases
Renfrew	34		37
Huron	46	33	9

Data Sources for Outcome Tracking

Data Source	Information included	Methodology used	
		Renfrew	Huron
Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) – a standardized assessment of child behaviour used specifically for this study	Child behaviour at intake and 6 months (some family situation)	Specially Trained Assessor completes form with input from primary social worker and others as needed	
Risk Assessment – a tool used by all CAS’s when they begin working with a child, and at six month intervals. Intended to help agencies accurately assess the level of risk to the child	Family situation at intake and 6 months (some child behavior)	Primary Social Worker (at intake and 6 mos)	Intake worker (at intake) Primary Social Worker (at 6 mos)
Eligibility Spectrum –another tool used by all CAS’s to track the reasons why children come into contact with the child welfare system, and their severity.	Presenting Issue for all cases at intake		
School Board Records	# of Suspensions	School board staff	

Creating a Climate of Safety: The Policy Implications

Our evaluation project concluded with a forum at which partners explored the broader implications of the findings reported here. They identified several key policy questions that emerged out of the research findings. These questions are intended to provoke and inform discussion among advocates, policy makers, and practitioners about how public policy can maximize the return on resources invested in child welfare.

- ❖ This report demonstrated that it is possible for child welfare organizations to play an important role in partnerships for safer, healthier school environments. Given that the province has expressed a commitment to improved child health and safety through greater service integration, ***how can mandatory services be supported to participate?***
- ❖ This report demonstrated that school-based social work programs enhance collaboration between child welfare organizations, schools, and families, and allow each to work more efficiently and effectively within existing funding envelopes. ***How can public policy continue to support innovation in child welfare? How can policy support creative programming within existing service structures and not only in demonstration projects?***
- ❖ This report demonstrated that alternative, collaborative approaches can improve the effectiveness of child welfare services. However, it also shows that this kind of programming is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain within existing funding structures. ***How can public policy ensure effective and efficient services, without imposing restrictive models of service delivery that do not fit the needs of every community?***
- ❖ No single organizations can address complex issues like bullying or youth crime alone. However, this report demonstrated that school board/child welfare partnerships can, with sufficient resources, initiate preventative programs that neither organization had the skills or resources to sustain alone. Given that the province has acknowledged the importance of removing obstacles to a child's readiness to learn, ***how can public policy support proactive and preventative efforts to create a climate of safety and well being?***
- ❖ This report demonstrated that school-based social work allows teachers and child welfare workers to understand the needs of individual children more holistically. It also allows for earlier intervention with certain groups of children at risk, and the development of more coordinated strategies for action. It appears that this partnership has led to efficiencies that are visible only when the two systems are considered as components of a larger whole. ***How can public policy document and support these kinds of system level efficiencies?***

CREATING A CLIMATE OF SAFETY:
An Evaluation of the School Based Child Welfare
Social Worker Program in Huron and Renfrew Counties

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* Teacher survey data reported here were collected by Marie Parsons as part of an independent research project. We are grateful to Marie for sharing her data with us.

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CREATING A CLIMATE OF SAFETY:

An Evaluation of

The School Based Child Welfare Social Worker Program in Huron and Renfrew Counties

Abstract

Across Ontario, child welfare agencies are collaborating with school boards to place social workers in schools. This report presents the findings of an outcome evaluation of two such programs. The evaluation design included 56 in-depth interviews with children, parents, and other key stakeholders. It also included a survey of 211 teachers, and a quasi-experimental component that tracked child outcomes for 159 children over the first six months of participation. The study compares two models of school-based social work to traditional agency-based approaches. Findings suggest that school-based social workers connect with children that agency-based models miss. School-board/child welfare partnerships extend the reach of both institutions, and help parents and teachers to feel comfortable collaborating with child welfare workers.

Introduction

This report presents the results of an outcome evaluation of the school-based child welfare social worker program in Huron and Renfrew Counties. This evaluation took place between 1999 and 2001. The methodology involved three main phases, and this report considers the data from each in turn, in order to show how our understanding of the findings progressed.

We begin with a description of the program as practiced in Huron and Renfrew Counties. Next, we describe the purpose and methodology for this study. Our results and discussion section begins with a review of the findings from a series of interviews we conducted with teachers, students, parents, and social workers. Findings from a survey, completed by a much larger sample of teachers and school staff, follow.

These two sets of findings were used as the basis for the next phase of the study, which tracked the individual outcomes of the program over a six month period. The findings from this phase are presented in the “Outcome Tracking” section. The report concludes with a synthesis of our main findings and some suggestions for the future.

Background Information

Across Ontario, child welfare agencies play a role that is widely understood to be both important and difficult. There continues to be a great deal of discussion and debate about exactly how this role should be defined. The precise goals and priorities for child welfare practice are frequent topics of discussion amongst researchers, practitioners, and the public at large.

In Ontario, recent years have seen several significant changes in the regulations governing the practice of child welfare agencies. We have seen an increased emphasis on tracking and documentation, implementation of a more structured and formalized approach to assessing risk, and a general shift towards a more narrowly-defined focus on protecting the child.

At the same time, local child welfare agencies have continued to develop innovative approaches. Trends in service delivery have included:

- **Emphasis on partnerships.** Child welfare agencies are working to increase their effectiveness by working closely with other community organizations. Sometimes, these partnerships focus on collaborative planning, coordination of services, and collective advocacy. Child welfare agencies have been key partners, for example, in the Alliance for Children and Youth in Waterloo Region, and the Let's Grow initiative in Grey and Bruce counties. Other partnerships involve collaborative service delivery. In Guelph, for example, Family and Children's Services works with Onward Willow to provide support to families in a community centre setting.
- **Exploration of New Settings for Service delivery.** Child welfare agencies are recognizing that access and awareness are improved when their workers move outside of the agency building and establish a presence in settings that are familiar and comfortable to the families they hope to reach. Neighbourhood centres, family resource programs, and in particular schools are seen more and more as naturally occurring "hubs" within given neighbourhoods that can act as a point of access for a variety of supports and services.
- **Emphasis on Prevention.** The two trends already listed are both, in part, strategies intended to help child welfare organizations make contact with families before a child has been harmed, and build positive, trusting relationships with families and community organizations.

These principles are not always easy for child welfare organizations to implement. Prevention is not emphasized in provincial guidelines. Child welfare organizations are sometimes viewed with mistrust by families and even by other service providers. Experienced social workers who are prepared to attempt innovative approaches have been difficult to recruit and retain in recent years. Even so, many child welfare organizations have attempted innovative programs that overcome these obstacles and embody the principles listed above.

One such innovation is the school-based social worker model. Used to varying degrees by many of Ontario's child welfare organizations, this model involves developing partnerships with school boards so that child welfare social workers can offer service directly out of the school. This model is seen as an efficient use of resources that has the potential to improve the efficacy of traditional child protection efforts, while at the same time offering the possibility of more preventative efforts.

Interest in this model is growing across the province. A provincial network of agencies who use school-based social workers has met twice, and has plans to become more formalized in the near future.

Program Description

Renfrew County Children's Aid Society was one of the first in Ontario to implement a school-based social work program. Huron County is also a pioneer in this area, developing a very strong working partnership with the school board and implementing school-based social work on a larger scale than most communities.

The vision which underlies these models is important to understand. The two Children's Aid Societies involved in this study see this model as more than a practical and cost-effective way to deliver traditional child welfare services. By placing these services in schools and making social workers fully integrated members of the school staff, these agencies hope to create school environments that are healthier and more nurturing for all students. The schools, it is hoped, will be equipped to respond effectively to children with a wide variety of needs - in a way neither child welfare social workers, nor school social workers could do individually.

The school-based social worker program evaluated here is organized the following way:¹

	Huron	Renfrew
Schools Served	29 (all public elementary and secondary schools in the county)	8 (selected Catholic elementary and secondary schools)
Staff	14	9
Funding Sources	School Board, CAS	CAS/Catholic School Board

Social workers are expected to be active and integrated members of the school team. They offer behavioural consulting to classroom teachers, and run in-service training sessions for school staff. Where practical, they have assisted with recess duties and extracurricular programs. Social workers also offer the full range of child welfare social work services. They handle protection cases, and are involved when necessary in investigations and court proceedings.

Project Activities and Intended Outcomes

We began this evaluation process by working intensively with staff and management to understand the principles, goals, and objectives of the program. Through informal visits to schools in both counties and a series of meetings with school board and CAS management, we developed a *program logic model* that mapped the relationship between program activities and intended outcomes. We saw the development of this model as a necessary first step in developing the key questions that would guide our outcome evaluation design. We also saw it as a catalyst for staff to reflect in more depth on what they see as the most valuable or important aspects of the work they do.

¹ This table describes the programs as they were when the evaluation information was gathered. They have since changed. However, the basic structure remains the same.

The first step in the development of the model was to identify the clusters of activities that constitute the school-based social work program. We asked staff to tell us, in as much detail as possible, exactly what they do in their positions at the schools. Analysis of their responses led to the identification of the following clusters of activities:

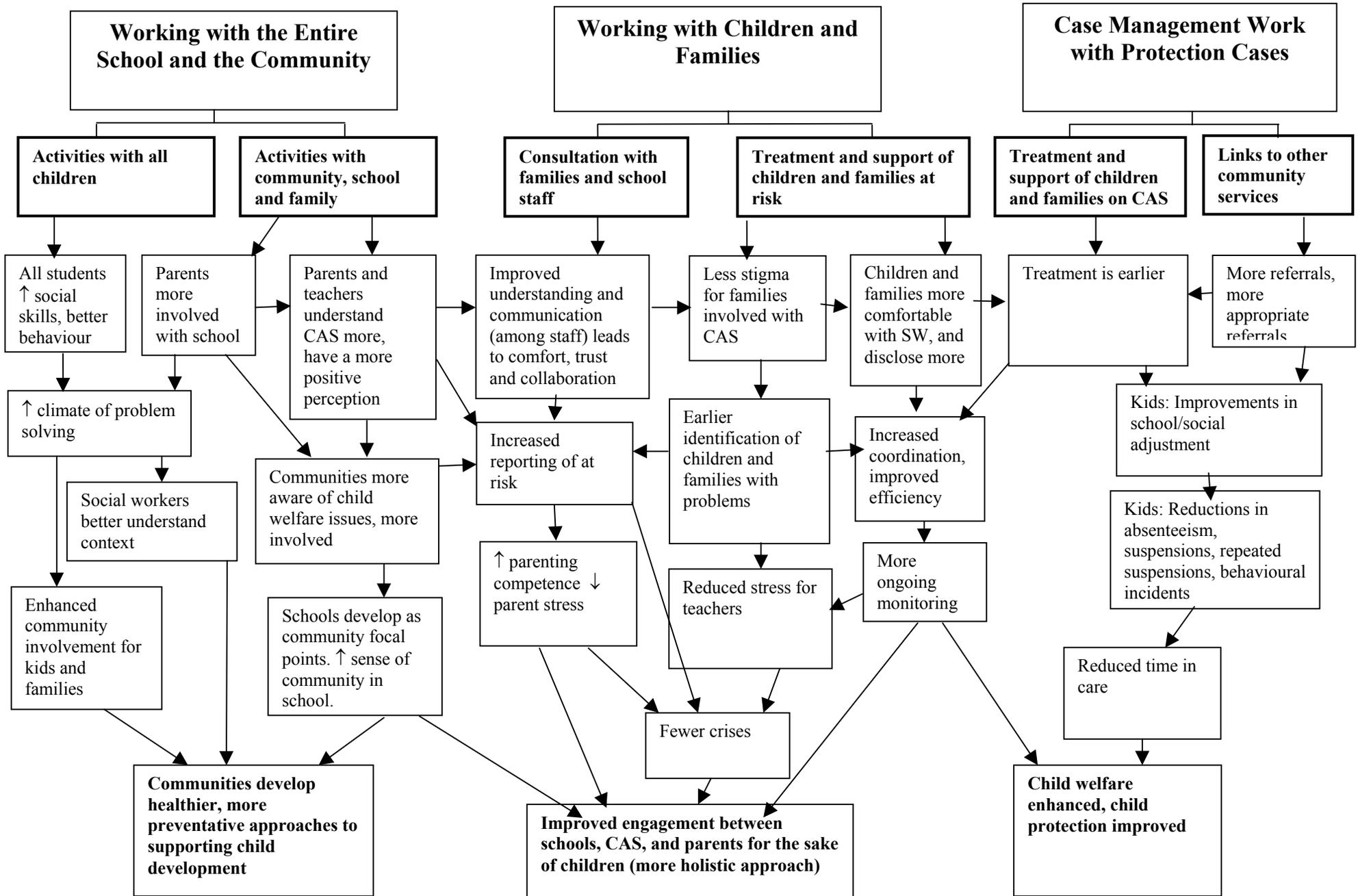
Table 2: Activities that Constitute the School-Based Social Work Program

Activity Clusters		Sample Activities
Working with the Entire School and the Community²	Activities with all children	<input type="checkbox"/> Run prevention programs (e.g., peer mediation) <input type="checkbox"/> Present in classroom (e.g., skill building, conflict resolution) <input type="checkbox"/> Socialize with children (e.g., basketball) <input type="checkbox"/> Observe children at recess and lunch
	Activities with community, school and family	<input type="checkbox"/> Build relationships with community groups (e.g., police, doctors, clergy, recreation) <input type="checkbox"/> Present at community meetings (e.g., lawyers, school board) <input type="checkbox"/> Present at parent council meetings
Working with Children and Families on a voluntary basis	Consultation with families and school staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete risk assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Attend teacher staff meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Educate school staff about protection legislation <input type="checkbox"/> Plan and consult with principals <input type="checkbox"/> Connect with resource teachers and guidance counselors <input type="checkbox"/> Individual consultation with teachers (e.g., run drop-in) <input type="checkbox"/> Manage case info flow between school and CAS <input type="checkbox"/> Provide info and support to school staff about investigations <input type="checkbox"/> Hold school case conferences
	Treatment and support of children and families at risk	<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis intervention within school <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with parents about behaviour management (e.g., parent/teacher night) <input type="checkbox"/> Run groups for parents <input type="checkbox"/> Individual counseling with children (e.g., set goals) <input type="checkbox"/> Run groups for children (e.g., support and education) <input type="checkbox"/> Hold drop-in for children <input type="checkbox"/> Refer reports of abuse to intake <input type="checkbox"/> Link child with community services
Case Management Work with Protection Cases	Treatment and support of children and families on CAS caseload	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete risk assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Crisis intervention within school <input type="checkbox"/> Consult with teachers re: behaviour management <input type="checkbox"/> Individual counseling with children in care (e.g., goal setting) <input type="checkbox"/> Run groups for support and treatment <input type="checkbox"/> Follow up on recommendations of board Psychologist assessment
	Links to other community services	<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to school psychologist <input type="checkbox"/> Refer child to other community services <input type="checkbox"/> Attend court cases <input type="checkbox"/> IPRC case reviews

These clusters of activities were then linked to the stated goals and objectives of the model. The complete logic model tries to depict the routes through which the project hopes to achieve its' ultimate goals. In the logic model, more immediate, short-term and concrete outcomes are linked by arrows to the longer-term outcomes they in turn help to achieve.

² While this kind of "primary prevention" work is a stated goal of this model, resource and policy limitations have never allowed the programs to devote as much time or energy to this work as they feel is necessary.

Huron and Renfrew CAS School-Based Social Worker Program Objectives



Evaluation Purpose and Questions

The evaluation project was designed to be participatory, and action-oriented. It had the following key characteristics:

- ❑ ***Stakeholders had input into the evaluation design.*** An evaluation committee including front line social workers, teachers, principals, and managers from both child welfare agencies and school boards participated in the development of the methodology. Additionally, informal site visits to two schools in each county during the design phase allowed students and staff to provide input too.
- ❑ ***Stakeholders participated in interpreting findings.*** The evaluation committee was actively involved in developing themes and implications. Through three conference presentations, interested professionals from other communities also provided feedback while the project was still underway.
- ❑ ***The methodology was adapted as the project unfolded, in response to stakeholder feedback.*** The design for the outcome tracking portion of the study was developed on the basis of the findings from the other methods.
- ❑ ***Qualitative and quantitative methods were both used.*** A more naturalistic, exploratory and open-ended approach was used with the teacher survey and the interviews. A much more structured, quasi-experimental approach was applied to the outcome tracking phase of the project.

The table below itemizes the specific questions addressed in this evaluation project, and the methods used to address them. It is important to note that the rationale for the school-based social work model works at several levels. Although there is hope that this model will improve access to children in need, and provide more effective treatment and support, equally important are the system-level advantages, such as improved coordination across school boards and child welfare agencies.

Care was taken to ensure that each question was addressed using more than one methodology.

Table 3: Evaluation Questions and Associated Methods

	Interviews	Teacher Surveys	Outcome Tracking
	56 children, teachers, parents, and social workers	211 teachers, principals, vp's, and guidance	159 children
How fully has the vision of the program (as expressed in the table above) been implemented?	✓	✓	
What do stakeholders see as the strengths and weaknesses of the model?	✓	✓	
What difference has the model made at a systems level?	✓	✓	
Who is accessing the model? How do the children and families differ from those served through traditional models?	✓	✓	✓
What difference has the model made in the behaviour of children?	✓		✓
What difference has the model made in the support available to	✓		✓

children from families?			
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Methodology:

Phase 1: Interviews

Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with school-based social workers, school staff (including classroom teachers, resource and special education teachers, guidance counsellors, and vice-principals), mothers, fathers and students at both elementary and secondary schools in Huron and Renfrew Counties. Interviews took place in four schools. We visited one secondary school and one elementary school in each region, selecting sites that reflected the diversity of participating schools. Sites were all schools that displayed an established school-based social worker program that demonstrated all three component activities from the logic model (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention activities).

School-based social workers contacted potential interview participants. They approached students, parents and teachers that were the most familiar with the program through their recent participation in it. In total, 19 school staff members, 15 parents, and 22 students were interviewed. Our sample of participants has the potential to suffer from a volunteer bias since the parents, students and school staff members that are most active in the school-based social worker program were the ones who agreed to participate in the focus group discussions. Results of these discussions, while encouraging, may not be indicative of all parents in the community. Our data reflects a description of the experiences of 56 very motivated, very satisfied and very grateful individuals who have experienced the school-based social worker program.

A team comprised of a senior researcher and a research assistant conducted the focus groups in Renfrew County. With the exception of two elementary school interviews, all of the focus groups were facilitated jointly by both researchers. In Huron County, two additional senior researchers conducted the focus groups and interviews individually.

Interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Phase 2: Teacher Survey

As our evaluation project was taking place, an independent research project, conducted by Marie Parsons, was also under way. The two projects collaborated extensively. As part of this independent research project, a survey was developed and sent to all classroom teachers, resource teachers, guidance counsellors, principals and vice principals in schools served by the program in Huron County. There were 182 respondents from Huron (a 52% response rate). Our evaluation team collected an additional 29 surveys from Renfrew's (smaller) program (a 30% response rate). The survey itself is included as Appendix C. Questions dealt with the amount and type of contact the respondent had had with the social worker, and with the respondent's impressions of the outcomes of the program for students and for themselves.

Phase 3: Outcome Tracking

During the second phase of our study, we gathered and analyzed quantitative data. These data describe a total of 159 different children from three naturally occurring sub-groups. Thirty-three, or about 21%, were children with child protection files, whose primary contact was a school-based social worker. Forty-six (29%) were child protection cases who worked with social workers in traditional agency settings. For the most part, these were children who attended a school from a board that was not participating in the program (the Catholic Board in Huron County, or the Public Board in Renfrew). The remaining 80 were children who worked with school-based social workers, but did not have child protection files.

Table 4: Sample for Outcome Tracking

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based cases	Totals
Renfrew	34		37	71
Huron	46	33	9	88
Totals	80	33	46	159

Our sample was a *population sample*, in that it included all newly opened school-aged cases at both agencies during the school year 1999-2000.

The data we have for these cases comes from several sources, with some variation in methodologies across the two sites. However, most information comes from highly structured and standardized tools. In each case, at least two independent and well-trained individuals have contributed to the overall assessment.

Table 5: Data Sources for Outcome Tracking

Data Source	Information included	Methodology used	
		in Renfrew	In Huron
Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) – a standardized assessment of child behaviour used specifically for this study	Child behaviour at intake and 6 months (some family situation)	Specially Trained Assessor completes form with input from primary social worker and others as needed	
Risk Assessment – a tool used by all CAS's when they begin working with a child, and at six month intervals. Intended to help agencies accurately assess the level of risk to the child	Family situation at intake and 6 months (some child behavior)	Primary Social Worker (at intake and 6 mos)	Intake worker (at intake) Primary Social Worker (at 6 mos)
Eligibility Spectrum –another tool used by all CAS's to track the reasons why children come into contact with the child welfare system, and their severity.	Presenting Issue for all cases at intake		
School Board Records	# of Suspensions	School board staff	

Results and Discussion

Each of the three phases of this evaluation built on those that preceded it. Our major themes and conclusions also evolved as more information was gathered and analyzed. For this reason, we have presented the findings of each method (i.e., interviews, then teacher surveys, then outcome tracking) separately, and tried to incorporate the insights gained in each section into our interpretation of the next.

Phase 1: Interview Findings

In the fall of 1999, members of our research team visited two schools in each county and met with students, parents, and teachers who had worked with school based social workers. The questions used in these interviews are included in Appendix B. This section reviews what we heard in these interviews, under three main headings. “Implementation of the Model” covers interviewees’ perceptions of how the program function in practice. “Satisfaction” discusses the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, and “Outcomes” reviews the ways in which the program has made a difference for children, families, teachers, and school communities.

Implementation of Model:

Social worker involvement

A school-based social worker's time in an individual school differed across sites and ranged from one day a week to five. The range of social worker activities also differed, with some sites conducting a great deal of preventative and group based programming, and others focusing primarily on individual counseling. School based social workers counseled students individually, ran groups (e.g. anger management), made referrals to outside agencies, set up appointments for students regarding housing, medical care, and financial support, and connected parents and students to other community services, such as Big Brothers or summer camps.

Teacher/school involvement

Teachers relied on the school-based social worker as a resource for dealing with students more effectively in the classroom, and for a better understanding of the legal system. In instances where teachers might be hesitant to phone the Children’s Aid office to ask questions, the informal atmosphere of the school allowed teachers and the social worker to consult with one another as they naturally cross paths.

Child involvement

The level of child involvement with the school-based social worker also varied across individual cases and settings. While some schools offered more extensive opportunities for the student population at large, more generally, at-risk and in-care students were the focus.

This subset of students, who were referred by either teacher, parent, self, or principal, typically receive individual or group counselling once a week. However, their degree of involvement increased or decreased depending on individual need. Students reported that sometimes the elementary group sessions involved completing worksheets or books on such topics as self-esteem, emotion regulation, conflict resolution and academic success. These activities were completed either during the group or individual session with the school-based social worker or at home with the assistance of a parent.

Teachers reported that students often initiated contact with the school based social worker: *“I know that several people in my class will ask [after a situation arises] ‘Look, can I go talk to [the school-based social worker]’, nothing planned, just can I go bounce something off him and he’s there for them when they ... need to talk to him”*. However, despite most children’s reported comfort level with the school-based social worker, there is evidence that some younger children and their parents still carefully guarded their conversations with the school-based social worker for fear of censure and loss of custody.

Satisfaction with the program

The parents, students and school staff members we spoke with were generally very satisfied with the school-based social worker program. The positive comments often centred on their appreciation for all that the school-based social worker had done for them and their children or students. Some words used by parents to describe their social workers are listed here:

- ❑ *“excellent”*,
- ❑ *“never judges”*,
- ❑ *“so suited for this particular school”*,
- ❑ *“sense of caring”*,
- ❑ *“an angel”*,
- ❑ *“goes the extra mile for whatever”*,
- ❑ *“I’ve seen a lot of social workers--never seen such a caring person”; “I’ve had people help outside of the school, but nowhere near the support [as with this school-based social worker]”*;
- ❑ *“[My child] has been to other agencies. [school-based social worker] helped the most.”*

All of the participants described the role of the school-based social worker as one that cannot be filled by teachers, resource teachers, or guidance counsellors. The resource teacher's role was primarily geared toward academic assistance, rather than the social and emotional issues that children struggle with and the disruptive behaviour they may exhibit in the classroom. Teachers who were interviewed expressed appreciation for a peer whose role it is to take on the role of counsellor, a role that they themselves are not legally responsible for nor trained to perform.

Older students who went to the school-based social worker sought additional support in dealing with personal issues that could not be provided by school personnel. Students felt that teachers' perceptions of them were often one-dimensional: *“Teachers see you in class only. They see your marks and don’t understand why”*. The school-based social worker provided a link between students and teachers, as well as between students and their parents. Students valued the school-based social worker as an advocate who would back them in their negotiations with both teachers and parents, concerning academic, behavioural, social, or

personal issues. Students we talked with reported being very comfortable with and trusting of their school-based social worker, and often referred to him or her “like a friend” who “treats you like a person” with respect and dignity; “it’s somewhere you can spill your guts and the principal won’t get you in trouble for doing it.”

Interviewees often told us that the individual social worker in their school was highly skilled and contributed a great deal to their positive perceptions of the program. Some people, however, were also able to articulate that outcomes were due to the way the program was structured. One parent explained it this way: “If it weren’t for CAS it [all of the observed successes] wouldn’t have happened...because the social worker was in school – it wouldn’t have been the same if she had been at the agency.”

Although all of the students were very pleased with their particular school based social workers and tended to believe that they were irreplaceable; students did concede that any school-based social worker in the school would be preferable to having none at all. The teachers explained, “we would be better off if she were here full time as a counsellor. However, we will get faster attention from CAS than we would if we didn’t have her here”.

Outcomes

Primary Prevention: Working with the Entire School and the Community

Parent interviewees felt that there should be a greater emphasis on primary preventative activities such as classroom presentations on teasing and bullying and entire school involvement in the promotion of better behaviour. At the same time, they acknowledged the resource limitations that made this kind of work difficult to sustain.

Those students, teachers and principals who were directly involved with primary prevention programming reported that they were pleased with its operation and results. Particularly in some elementary schools, the school-based social worker program allowed students increased opportunities to participate in the school community through discussion groups, and other preventative programming initiatives such as the “Buddy Program” and “Peace Keepers”. Through this type of programming students had the opportunity to help other children as they themselves are developing socially and emotionally. However, these programs typically targeted at-risk children rather than the school population at large.

The greatest primary prevention outcome that was unanimously mentioned by parents, students and teachers was a more positive perception of CAS resulting from interactions with the school-based social worker. Other key outcomes mentioned included a better understanding, among social workers, of the context of the child’s daily functioning. An increased climate of problem solving in the school was also mentioned, as were increased social skills among all students and better behaviour on the whole.

Parents, teachers understand CAS more, have a more positive perception

The most salient primary prevention outcome reported by both parents and teachers was their increased understanding and trust toward the Children's Aid Society. More experienced teachers said that they were more willing to collaborate with Children's Aid as a result of increased familiarity with the agency and greater understanding of their child welfare mandate:

"I've taught for a number of years and I find it less threatening now to act on a problem where you would have to deal with Children's Aid, than I did some years ago ... Now I find it less threatening and I think I have more respect, I believe they are trying to keep family units together and I understand that now".

Some parents described the school-based social worker as a CAS staff person, who was free to act as a "buffer" between the student and the school (i.e. acted as an advocate for the child to bring a broader context when the school was considering disciplinary action). When parents were asked whether their perception of CAS had changed as a result of their contact with the school-based social worker, the majority gave a resounding, "Yes", explaining that, "in every way, they are there in every way to help with our children, not to snatch them away from us when we as parents make mistakes".

This finding, however, needs to be placed into context. Those parents most active in the school-based social worker program were the ones who agreed to participate in the focus group discussions. Results of these discussions, while encouraging, may not be indicative of all parents in the community. Interestingly, some teachers and parents expressed a split perception of Children's Aid. Their negative view of the agency remained; since the school-based social worker is viewed as a school staff member, rather than a bona fide CAS employee. One parent pointed out, "I don't view Children's Aid differently...I don't consider [school-based social worker] as Children's Aid...[school-based social worker] is not a social worker, he is [more like a] a guidance teacher...a counsellor".

Some teachers remained concerned about whether some parents would be less forthcoming to them as a result of the partnerships with Children's Aid.

Parent Involvement in School Community

On the whole, teachers did not notice a dramatic change in the level of parental involvement with the school as a result of the school-based social worker program. However, they said that parents typically came in to the school to participate in team meetings to discuss their child's progress with the school-based social worker and the classroom teacher. Occasionally, the school-based social worker intervened to resolve conflict between students and their parents or step-parents. The parents we spoke to, however, indicated a willingness to drop in to the school to speak to the school-based social worker and/or teachers about their child's progress and parenting advice. Parents helped their children to "practice" new strategies (i.e. anger management skills) taught by the social worker, and provided input into the child's program of counselling. In addition, some parents told us that, "I've volunteered here; there's a sense of closeness here; I can come in and they all know me".

Social workers better understand context

One significant result of the increased collaboration between social workers, parents and teachers is that all parties better understood the broader context of students' behaviour. Teachers pointed out that it is *"important [for the school-based social worker] to see the whole picture [and to be] aware of what's going on in the school"*.

On one hand, teachers indicated that the school provides a *"richer context"* for the school-based social worker, so that they are *"not working with the child in isolation [since] all players [are] in house"*. On the other hand, teachers acknowledged that social workers already have access to information that is not normally available to school personnel. From this perspective teachers felt that *"[the school-based social worker already] has the big picture, we have the child in isolation really"*. Regardless of which way one looks at it, the prevailing theme is that teachers strongly believe that school staff, parents, and social workers need to share information with one another in order for each to perform his or her role effectively, and to better serve the whole child.

Community-wide changes

Teachers, parents and students did not feel the program had influenced the attitudes or involvement of the community at large. However, they felt strongly that this process is a gradual one, and that progress would need to be tracked over a period of many years to detect any community-wide changes.

Within the school, however, teachers believe that there is an increased sense of community and that the school is evolving gradually as a focal point in the community. Teachers noted that

"Schools are moving from being a traditional place of just strictly education to now areas of child-centred, child caring centres...[Where] the child is the common denominator and here we hit them from several different angles whether that's counselling with respect to their behaviour, on their emotional status... someone in [the school-based social worker]'s position certainly contributes to that team aspect".

In addition, parents and school-based social workers reported that they worked together to increase children's involvement in community groups such as Big Brothers or summer camps.

Secondary Prevention

Parents, teachers and students most often reported what we have termed ***secondary prevention*** outcomes. These are the outcomes tied to the activities in the second major cluster of the logic model – activities which focus on children and families who work with the social worker on a voluntary basis and are not classified as protection cases.

We know that voluntary cases sometimes become protection cases over time. We also know that social workers in schools have the opportunity to engage children who are protection cases in the kinds of activities considered here, while they would not in a traditional, agency-based model.

Students, teachers, and parents alike reported the accessibility and convenience of on-site services as the most important secondary prevention outcome. They also mentioned reduced stigma for students and families, reduced stress for teachers, parents and students and increased co-ordination and efficiency between CAS and the school with respect to reporting and ongoing monitoring.

Increased Accessibility

Those students who had past experience with Children's Aid social workers stated that they preferred the accessibility and convenience of the school-based social worker. Particularly in rural areas, the ease of access to on site counselling, while still remaining distinct and independent from the school was expressed as a major advantage of the program.

Students recognised that their problems typically show up at school and should be handled there. Elementary students described the school-based social worker's office as "*peace and quiet*" compared to the fighting or teasing that goes on in the school yard or in the classroom: "*I know it's the best place in the school; it's nice and peaceful...I love it up here*". Both elementary and secondary school students described the school-based social worker as "*easy to talk to*", "*caring*", and "*very helpful*". The consensus among students, teachers and parents was that, "*every school should have one*".

Teachers confirmed the need for onsite service, and attributed the successful outcomes of the program to this arrangement;

"She's also had the opportunity to do all these things ...to be successful and all those things that come about because of the fact that she is here, if she just went over here for an hour and had to be back for an eleven o'clock appointment, all of those good things wouldn't have occurred, if she came over just on demand all of that positive stuff that we've observed, can't develop because of the fact that she is present in the building and is a very visible part of our community, it has allowed all of those other things to develop simply because she is here."

Reduction of Stigma for Children working with SW

Students, on the whole, did not seem concerned with any stigma associated with their on-going contact with the school-based social worker. The students we spoke with said that their friends and families supported them, and that other students were largely unaware of their school-based social worker involvement.

"My friends know I see the school-based social worker. They say they wish they had a social worker. They ask how my session went".

Even so, teachers and school-based social workers still took steps to ensure the confidentiality of students who worked with school-based social worker. Through the use of confidential meeting reminder notes, students watched the clock and slipped out of class unannounced to go to the school-based social worker office.

In some cases, students experienced positive perceptions of their participation in social work activities. For example, one student explained,

“If they [teachers] see me going to anger management stuff, they see I’m trying and will give me a break; if you had a teacher who saw you all bad and stuff and if they see you going in there then they see you as different.”

However, there remains the perception that “bad” students visit the school-based social worker (perhaps a reflection of the number of behavioural incidents that child may have been involved in); and some elementary school students still voice a fear of Children’s Aid. They know not *“to get too personal, if they don’t want the school-based social worker to take them away from their family.”*

So, it seems that this objective achieved partial success with some students, and hopefully will continue to erode remaining misconceptions of the Children’s Aid Society.

Value of Social Support

The opportunity to talk about feelings, conflicts, or problems at a familiar, convenient and non-threatening location was reported frequently as one of the most valued benefits of the program. Teachers, other school staff members, parents and students listed, *“an outlet for students, a friend who is willing to listen”*, as an important role of the school-based social worker. According to teachers,

“they really rely on her, if they are having a bad day I will also send them down and say you know perhaps it would be wise to speak with [the school-based social worker]. Or there are times that they come into class and they are really distraught or upset and they need to speak with her. I let them go”.

Students, too, envision the school-based social worker as a person they could confide in who was non-judgemental, independent from the school, and trained to deal with crisis situations. When dealing with serious issues like grieving, abuse, or suicide, students trust that their discussions with the school-based social worker are kept confidential: They say that *“sometimes it feels that there is no one to talk to and then you talk to [the school-based social worker] and you know he won’t tell anybody”*. The social support given by the school-based social worker was described as; *“probably one of the best things in my life that happened to me, because you have someone to talk to and that doesn’t happen very much in life”*. Students felt that having a social worker on site made school a more supportive environment for them.

Students reported having formed a good rapport with the school-based social worker, and were eager to *“share happiness and sadness with her...sometimes when there is not anything bothering you; you don’t have to go to her in crisis”*. This ongoing relationship was bolstered by the informal encounters that students had with the school-based social worker in the school hallways. Students said that the school-based social worker could tell when students needed extra support; *“she might know from your teacher, or just from the way you are acting”*.

Other times, *“the school-based social worker found I was acting weird in a group, so she talked to me one-on-one to find out why”*. Even after the formal counselling had concluded, students agreed that the school-based social worker, *“doesn’t forget about you...I left school for 7 months and went to an alternative school. I came back in September and she asked me ‘How’s this and that going’. She remembers, she never forgets: I’ll see her in the hall and she’ll ask ‘Is everything OK now?’ She never forgets about it. She listens. She remembers.”*

In addition to providing support for students, the school-based social worker was sometimes called upon to provide support to staff members as well, *“I remember I was having a yucky couple of days and we chatted and she helped me through. The time she can give to a staff member who may be going through a bad period is helpful as well”*.

Improved Problem Solving Skills among Students

Students reported that the school-based social worker, *“gives you feedback and suggests how to deal with a problem”*. Both elementary and secondary school students said that they have learned how to handle anger more effectively, without yelling or swearing; and to apologise when it is necessary. According to students, the role of the school-based social worker, *“is to help kids understand why they act up; what causes their actions”*. Generally, both elementary and secondary students felt that the anger management groups were helpful in this regard. According to a high school student who had been in an anger management group for a month, friendships were made within the group and the group members supported each other:

“It’s pretty good. You learn how you can control your anger better and identify different types of anger and responses; I know everybody in there; they talk to me in the halls and stuff and they ask me questions; she’s [the school-based social worker] helped that and they’re [friends from the group] there to help too. I hang out more than before with some of them cause you know you can trust each other and stuff.”

Increased social skills, better behaviour

School staff members in Huron county described a sense of calm within the entire school community that has been evolving since these programs have been in place;

“Everybody in the school is more relaxed as a result of the school-based social worker program. It is good to have these preventative programs. It has made the school really non-violent”.

Teachers in Renfrew noted that,

It’s hard to measure that [whole school change] but I’m sure that there is an impact out on the yard.”

Teachers from both sites testified that,

“The work that [the school-based social worker] does I’m sure translates into [other] areas like play yard and recess...now it’s hard to empirically measure that because...stuff happens in the yard and some of it will be clients...but I have to think, just from the people that I had in my class and that I bounce up against every day that I know that he does have some positive impact and that I can see the changes from last year to this year, and that can’t be all my doing, there are other things happening that are contributing to those positive behaviours”.

Increased Parenting Competence and Decreased Parent Stress

All of the parents we spoke with expressed a common theme relating to the impact that the school-based social worker program has had on the parents themselves:

“[It has help to be able to call] by phone for professional help when dealing with my children when my frustrations get the best of me. The help is right there with a new idea right on hand.”

Most often, parents reported a sense of increased parenting competence, and decreases in their personal stress and feelings of isolation. For some parents these changes brought a new sense of hope for themselves and for their children, while others appreciated the support and lack of blame that school-based social workers conveyed to them.

Reduced stress for teachers

Teachers reported that overall the school-based social worker program has “*been a great load off my back. I had nowhere to go before, especially [to relieve] stress*”. Teachers stress that having the social worker nearby is invaluable in an emergency situation;

“Being a classroom teacher, I process a lot of kids during the day, unfortunately when you have a crisis situation it doesn’t always conveniently fall between class periods. A lot of times you’re in the middle of a class, the kid starts crying or they come to class very upset about something, so I use [the school-based social worker] quite frequently to kind-of intervene in those situations, and I get immediate feedback to those kids”.

Crises averted

Parents noted that the school-based social worker program had increased the opportunity for students to immediately and conveniently discuss their issues and struggles, thereby decreasing the likelihood of a future crisis. Parents gave evidence that “[the school-based social worker helped to] *get to the root of the problem*”. They said that early intervention helped to “*iron out the problem before it gets explosive*”. In the past, a serious problem would have been referred out of the school. Since the advent of the school-based social work program, it had been dealt with immediately by the social worker in a non-threatening way. Parents said that their children automatically go to the school-based social worker office when they are upset, viewing this office as a safe place to deal with their strong emotions.

Teachers were unable to estimate whether there has been a reduction in crisis incidents in the school since the implementation of the school-based social worker program, but the general

feeling was that the early intervention provided helped to diffuse situations before they became crises.

Improved communication and teamwork

Parents noticed improved communication and teamwork among the school-based social workers, the school, and families. They attribute the program's success to the fact that the social worker is located in the school. Parents said that they feel more meaningfully involved in their child's life and that they appreciate the efforts the school-based social worker has made to connect with them:

"The best thing I like [about the school-based social worker program] is the communication. You know what is going on, whereas so many times you don't know what's going on with your kids at school" ... "Very supportive and lots of communication, which was great; [I] usually didn't get lots of communication [before] because teachers were busy".

One parent illustrated this improved collaborative relationship by a triangle with the parent, student and teachers at the three points and the school-based social worker in the middle to co-ordinate the efforts of the other three players.

Overwhelmingly, teachers demonstrated incidences where improved understanding and communication between the school-based social worker and the school staff led to increased comfort, trust, and collaboration. Specifically, accessibility and familiarity were reported to be key benefits of the school-based social worker program. "[The school-based social worker] builds up a sense of trust, because they are real people, not a voice on the end of a phone". Some teachers indicated that they would be hesitant to phone the CAS office to consult someone they didn't know on a case.

Another advantage cited by teachers was the opportunity to consult the school-based social worker so as not to unknowingly "reverse" a child's progress. One teacher reported,

"I've come across people...and may have dealt with [them] ruthlessly. ...I don't know what happened at home...I am not aware of their personal baggage...so when I dealt with their behaviour, perhaps I didn't concern myself too much with that, so I may have left in my wake a further problem after disciplining this child...[the school-based social worker] has come... in with the soft side and has dealt with that student in his way, in a softer way, and the end result of that is that I haven't destroyed somebody else's good work ... I've seen him diffuse situations when myself could have escalated".

Increased reporting and earlier identification of children and families with problems

Familiarities, trust, convenience and accessibility contribute to increased informal consultations between teachers and the school-based social worker, and consequently increased reporting of risk. One teacher remarked,

“I think a lot more cases are dealt with because he is right here...we don't have [time] ...everybody's busy and as a teacher, to go make the phone call and to find who to talk to [would be a hassle] It's much easier when the school-based social worker is right here, and I can send a student to see him.”

Another teacher revealed,

“I consult her a lot and I usually go to her first when I notice a problem with a student and I think it is longer than just temporary misbehaving or typical problems of being a teenager and I suspect that something might be going wrong at home and also trying to figure out whether I'm too harsh on the kid or too gentle, she usually can set me straight to the proper way of dealing with the situation”.

In addition, teachers reported being more attuned to the “*little things*” that a child might say, draw or write in the classroom, and more likely to report to the school-based social worker if abuse is suspected. Teachers also reported being better able to respond to potential protection cases as a result of in-service training conducted by the school-based social worker.

Ongoing monitoring

The school-based social worker is able to monitor student progress both through the classroom teachers and through daily interaction with students. Teachers reported that social workers, *“always (even if it's a minute little thing) kept up and asked 'how are things going now' or updating... it is not as if it is a one day thing and that's it, [the school-based social worker] carries it through”.*

Tertiary Prevention: Case Management Work with Protection Cases

Tertiary prevention outcomes were not mentioned by parents as frequently as either secondary or primary prevention outcomes. This is surprising given the fact that parents were selected, in part, because of their high level of involvement with the school-based social worker (i.e., the parents interviewed were most likely to have children in protection files). The changes parents did notice at this level were very positive and dealt primarily with two issues: positive changes in their child, and more appropriate referrals made to other services and supports in the community.

Parents talked about social, academic and behavioural changes they have noticed in their children as a result of the school-based social worker program. A few parents questioned whether their children would still be at school if not for the school-based social worker.

Parents noted,

“You can hear [the school-based social worker's] voice. The kid will copy word for word...you know where it is coming from... They are following [the school-based social worker's] advice, they are straightening up...my son hasn't been in the [principal's] office for over a year – he's like a different child. He completes his work”.

Improvements in school/social functioning

Teachers reported that through individual and group sessions with the social worker, children have gained insights into the causes and consequences of unacceptable behaviours, and have learned methods of emotion regulation and behavioural inhibition. Teachers indicated that students have become more responsible, more confident and better at problem solving. Teachers have observed that students' *"behaviour has changed some but the biggest difference is they know their choices, I ask them and they can rhyme them off, I'm hoping that saying their choices enough will make them act on them"*. They contend that the full impact of the school-based social worker program will be observable gradually over time.

High school students reported a variety of positive outcomes that they have observed in both themselves and others. These include having a more positive attitude toward school, returning to school after having dropped out, graduating high school, successfully balancing the demands of school and teen parenting, resolving disputes with parents and teachers, and *"learning new skills to deal with life"*. Elementary school students state that they have learned to solve problems, manage anger and have improved relationships with parents and teachers. In terms of the school as a whole, students reported that it is less violent, there are fewer problems in the schoolyard and fewer people are coming to the office since the school-based social worker programming has been in place.

Teachers indicated that the use of behavioural contracts has reduced the incidence of problems and has increased school attendance. The teachers did not indicate (and perhaps were not aware) whether the program has led to reduced time in protective care.

Summary of Interview Data

Most of the suggestions and concerns raised by teachers, parents and students focused on the need to invest more resources in the program. Interview findings suggest that the greatest success of the program is the accessibility of the school-based social worker and the convenience for teachers. Nevertheless, consistency and availability are a major concern for many teachers. Their most common suggestion for improvement was to have the school-based social worker in the school more often, or even for the school to employ additional full-time school-based social workers to meet student needs. Teachers and parents believe that having both male and female social workers available to students would further increase disclosure from students who are currently being served by an opposite sex-social worker.

All of the persons interviewed - students, teachers, parents and school staff members - agreed that they would prefer at least one full-time school-based social worker who is free of outside demands from the agency.

Some parents suggested having the school-based social worker train peer support workers in secondary schools. This is already occurring informally with teen mothers in one school. Another major concern was voiced by parents of elementary school children who fear that all of their child's progress may reverse during the summer break. Parents would like to continue

programming during the summer months: “ *It’s going to be hard in the summer. I wish I could take [the school-based social worker] home with me for the summer.*”

Another suggestion provided by parents is to provide more classroom group work and other school-wide prevention work for all students. In particular parents feel the elementary school students would benefit from preventative programming regarding teasing and fighting.

Different Perspectives Reported by Different Stakeholders

While interviewees told us a lot about their own interactions with the social worker, most knew little about the social worker's contact with others. For example, both high school and elementary teachers stressed the frequency and value of their informal consultations with the School Based Social Worker. The teachers that we spoke with recalled many times when they had approached the school-based social worker for advice about how to best help a student who was experiencing problems outside of school which were impacting on their academic and classroom performance. Teachers rated the helpful tips provided by the school-based social worker as extremely valuable. However, it was somewhat surprising to discover that students and parents greatly underestimated the extent to which teachers and school-based social worker interact. Among their suggestions for the improvement of the program was greater teacher training in child protection issues and sensitivity to the whole student.

Another difference in the reports of different stakeholder groups involves the way the relationship between the school-based social worker and the school staff is viewed. Teachers describe the school-based social worker as an integral part of the school team, and list this as one of the greatest benefits of the program. Students and parents, on the other hand, really appreciate the fact that the school-based social worker is independent of the school and is able to advocate for the student without divided loyalties and without having to adhere to an academic agenda. A final difference of opinion concerns the extent to which preventative activities are performed. Parents and students indicated that they are not aware of many preventative activities that involve the whole school. They do, however, support and request this type of programming, specifically whole class presentations at the elementary level and groups discussions at the high school level. Nevertheless, when compared to the number of issues on which parents, teachers, and students held similar views, the number of opposing perceptions are really quite minimal.

Unanticipated Issues

Two of the key themes that emerged from these data were not included in our original logic model for the program. These were *the importance of the school-based social worker's perceived independence from the school* and *the value of social support*. First, parents and students appreciated a school staff member who has a child welfare mandate rather than a purely educational one. Having a social worker on-site gives opportunities for immediate attention, assistance in resolving conflict between students and between students and teachers. Secondly, apart from the impacts of the program on behaviour and school-agency collaboration, stakeholders told us that school-based social workers are important for the very simple reason that students need someone to talk to. The need for unconditional social

support within the school was cited by all three-stakeholder groups as a valuable release and safe place for student to express their feelings, conflicts, and problems to a concerned listener who has their best interests in mind.

Another non-traditional outcome that was reported by high school students and their parents was the degree of involvement of high school seniors with the school-based social worker. These students, who are over the age of the traditional CAS mandate, are receiving much assistance from the school-based social worker in areas such as housing, financial assistance, and teen parenting.

Outcomes

Overall, the strongest outcomes identified by interviewees had to do with ***access to support***. The people we met reported a more positive perception of CAS and reduced stigma of CAS involvement. Children and families reported that they are more comfortable, and feel less threatened visiting the school-based social worker at the child's school than going to the agency.

It also seems clear that the project has strengthened the working relationship between front line teachers and the Children's Aid Societies. The very existence of the program is evidence of ***improved collaboration between child welfare agencies and school boards***. Our interviews provided us with real-life examples of the value these partnerships have for teachers and front-line social workers. They are able to co-ordinate their respective efforts more, and to sustain their collaboration through time. Together, they are able to keep parents more informed about their child's experiences in school.

Benefits in behaviour and emotion regulation were cited by students, parents and teachers. They attribute these successes to the greater amount of individual attention and to the repetition of the lessons through weekly group meetings such as anger management helps to reinforce the issues.

Teachers, parents and students did not indicate any evidence of the program's influence on the attitudes or involvement of the community at large, although they strongly feel that it is a gradual process, and therefore it is too soon yet to see changes of this scale within the entire community.

While they did feel that the program had led to some improvements in social and school functioning, parents and teachers also mentioned that it might be too simplistic to expect to see dramatic behavioural and emotional change in children following a year of involvement of the school-based social worker.

The data reviewed to date do not allow us to reach firm conclusions about other important program outcomes, such as earlier treatment, improved behaviour and problem solving of the entire school population, and increased parent involvement.

Phase 2: Teacher Survey Findings

After interviews were completed, a structured teacher survey involving both qualitative and quantitative questions was developed. This survey (developed as part of an independent research project conducted by Marie Parsons) focused on the frequency and content of teachers' interactions with the social workers, and their perceptions of the value of these interactions. Sixty-seven percent of the 211 respondents to the survey were classroom teachers, and 64% had worked with the school-based social worker for less than 1 year. Please see Appendix D for detailed results.

Program implementation: Role of the Social worker

83% of teachers surveyed felt they understand school-based social worker role well. About 22% of respondents had weekly or daily consultations with the social worker, and 51% had consulted with the social worker more than 5 times during the past school year. About 84% of teachers had referred a student to the social worker.

Many teachers reported that there had been cases where they had not made referrals, even though social worker intervention may have been appropriate. Most often, the connection was not made because the social worker was unavailable, or because the teacher felt they could handle the situation.

The majority of respondents (65%) felt that the social worker was an integrated member of the school team. Those who felt otherwise often cited the social workers' frequent absences from the school as a barrier to integration.

When prompted to identify the programs strengths and weaknesses, school staff generated the following list:

Table 6: Strengths of Program as Reported by Teachers

<u>Reported Strengths of the Program</u>	% of survey respondents
A resource person for teachers and school staff members	14%
Availability of social worker	12%
Provides individual help for students	12%
Located in the school	9%
Social worker is a good listener	8%
Team approach possible	8%
Good communication with families	7%
Provides practical solutions	7%

Table 7: Challenges Reported by Teachers

<u>Reported Areas Needing Improvement</u>	% of survey respondents
Need better communication between social worker and teachers	24%
Many new teachers are uninformed about the program	19%
Social Worker needs to have greater availability for a school	15%
Need more visibility of social worker in school	13%
More involvement of social worker in school activities	8%
More group work desired	6%
Need consistent social worker	6%

NOTE: Percentages for these two tables reflect the number of respondents who mentioned each strength or challenge while answering an open-ended question. The fact that 24% of respondents chose to identify the need for better communication as a challenge does not mean that the remaining 76% of respondents were pleased (or displeased) with communication levels. It simply means that they did not include this issue in their list of important challenges.

These findings provide an affirmation of qualitative results. School-based social workers are filling a much-needed role in the schools. They have been successful in developing close working partnerships with teachers. Criticisms that were levelled at the program focused on the need for more resources to expand and improve service.

Outcomes:

Survey respondents rated the degree to which the program had achieved several pre-selected outcomes. Teachers rated the program as most successful in the following areas:

- ❑ 58% felt that the program had led to improved efficiency of response to problem situations
- ❑ 55% felt that it had led to improved behaviour of students who have worked with school-based social worker
- ❑ 48% reported that the program had decreased their personal level of stress as an educator
- ❑ 45% felt they had a greater ability to problem solve with children and families

Very few respondents felt that the program had made things worse or made no difference in these areas. However, as Appendix D shows, roughly one-third of respondents reported that they were unsure about program outcomes.

Generally speaking, these outcomes map well onto the feedback we gained through interviews. The majority of teachers surveyed were very positive about the program. Many of them felt that the program had made a difference in the behaviour of children as well as the ability of the school system as a whole to respond to the needs of students. The specific

outcomes they identified (improved student behaviour, reduced personal stress, and enhanced problem solving ability) map well onto the programs' stated objectives, and suggest that the social workers played a complementary and supportive role in the schools.

Phase 3: Outcome Tracking

During the last phase of our study, we gathered and analyzed quantitative data describing a total of 159 different children from three naturally occurring sub-groups. Thirty-three, or about 21%, were children with child protection files, whose primary contact was a school-based social worker. Forty-six (29%) were child protection cases who worked with social workers in traditional agency settings. The remaining 80 were children who worked with school-based social workers, but did not have child protection files.

Information about each child was gathered as they began working with a child welfare social worker, and the same information was gathered again six months later. A behavioural assessment tool, the CAFAS, was completed, and we also looked at Risk Assessment and Eligibility Spectrum data.

How comparable are the children served in schools and in agencies?

One of the challenges inherent in our design was that we were comparing outcomes across three quite different groups of children. It was unlikely that children in school would enter treatment for the same reasons as those connected with agency based social workers. For this reason, the children served through agencies were far from an ideal comparison or control group.

At the same time, part of the rationale for the school-based program is that it would be able to identify and contact children that the traditional model might have missed – those who experience more subtle forms of abuse, for example, or those whose behavioural issues have not yet progressed to the point where they would be likely to come to the attention of child welfare organizations.

For this reason, the comparability of the three groups of participants at intake is an important and useful research question, and not a methodological inconvenience. In this section, we explore the question of how the children served through the three models (school-based protection, school-based non-protection, and agency) are different.

The table below shows that protection cases served by school-based social workers were similar in age to those served through the agency-based model. “Part 2” or non-protection school-based cases tended to be somewhat older than the other two groups.

Table 8: Ages of Participants

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based cases	Totals
% aged 0-6	10.7%	27.3%	24.4%	18.3%
% aged 7-9	14.7%	27.3%	26.7%	20.9%
% aged 10-13	44%	33.3%	31.1%	37.9%
% aged 14+	30.7%	12.1%	17.8%	22.9%

However, children working with school-based social workers were more likely to be male.

Table 9: Gender of Participants

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based cases
% of participants who were boys	60%	60.1%	50%

Risk assessment data suggest that agency-based cases were more likely than school-based protection cases to have physical illnesses or disabilities.

Risk Assessment data is not available for non-protection cases, but it does tell us that protection cases in the two settings were not markedly different with respect to the material needs of the families. However, families of school-based cases were rated, on both the CAFAS and the risk assessment, as having less access to social support than agency-based cases.

Table 10: Social Support Scores at Intake

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency-based cases
Mean score for level of impairment in family/social support (CAFAS)	1.0	1.03	0.46
% of participants with “severe” impairments in social support (CAFAS)	14.3%	12.9%	0%
Mean rating of availability of social supports (Risk Assessment)	Not available	2.39 (some support, but of limited use or reliability)	1.00 (some reliable and useful support)
% of cases where families are rated as having multiple sources of support (Risk Assessment)		3%	42.9%

The presenting issues also seem to differ across groups. Both protection groups were equally likely to present on the eligibility spectrum with evidence of physical harm, sexual harm, or caregiver capacity issues. As compared to agency-based cases, however, school-based protection cases were much more likely to present with child-caregiver conflict issues (especially for children aged 10-13), and somewhat more likely to present with issues around emotional harm within the family (especially for children aged 7-9). Risk assessment findings showed a similar trend, with school-based protection cases more likely to be rated as having inconsistent or negative family interactions.

Agency-based cases were more likely to focus around issues of neglect, and to involve caregivers with problems affecting their ability to parent such as substance abuse, incarceration, or psychiatric illness.

Table 11: Presenting Issue on Eligibility Spectrum

	School-based non-protection cases	School-based protection cases	Agency- based cases
Physical/sexual harm	16.98% (34.5%)	13.64%	16.67%
Harm by omission	1.89% (3.9%)	9.09%	20.83%
Emotional harm	3.77% (7.7%)	13.64%	8.33%
Abandonment, separation, or conflict	9.43% (19.2%)	31.82%	16.67%
Caregiver capacity	16.98% (34.6%)	31.82%	37.50%
Counseling request	50.94%		
Sample Size	53 (26)	22	24

NOTE: Percentages in brackets exclude the 27 non-protection cases whose presenting issue was “counseling request”

Generally speaking, agency-based cases were rated as having more behavioural issues than school-based cases on the CAFAS. This was especially true for school functioning and home functioning.

Figure 1a: CAFAS Scores at Intake³

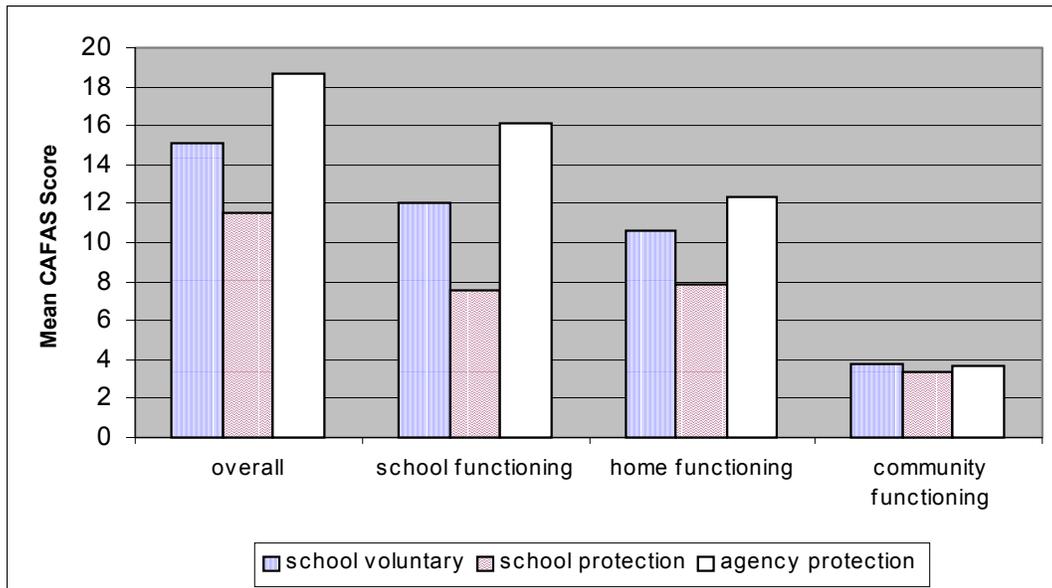
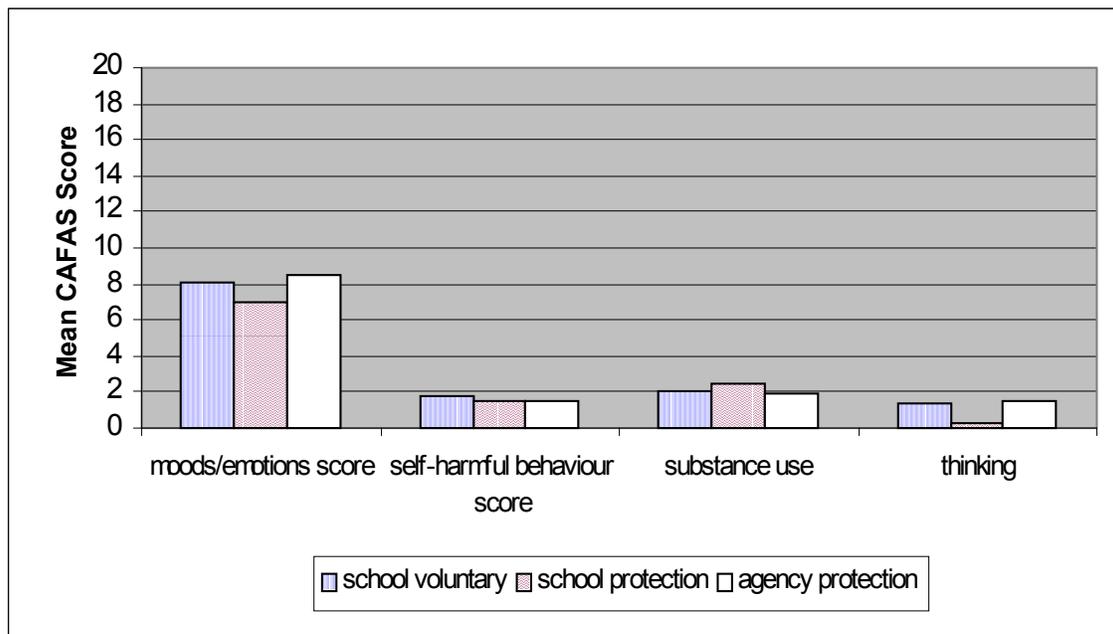


Figure 1b: CAFAS Scores at Intake (cont'd):



³ For all CAFAS data presented in this section, a score of 10 connotes “mild impairment.” A score of 20 corresponds to “moderate impairment,” and the maximum possible score of 30 is labelled as severe impairment.

Summary

While all three models of support are clearly reaching children in need of child welfare services, each appears to connect with a somewhat different range of individuals. The differences in populations reached show up consistently in risk assessment, CAFAS, and Eligibility Spectrum data. However, they are complex and difficult to interpret. There is no evidence here to suggest that one model reaches a wider or more needy range of children than the others.

School-based social workers appear to work with a different mix of clients than agency-based social workers. For example, school-based cases (and especially school-based protection cases) were likely to have fewer behavioural problems than agency-based cases. This difference was especially marked for behaviour at school. Although firm conclusions are not possible, one interpretation may be that school-based social workers are able to intervene before children reach the point where they are acting out at school.

School-based cases tended to come from homes where there was less access to social support, and somewhat more negative family interactions. They were more likely than agency-based cases to have suffered emotional abuse or to have experienced parent-child conflict.

However, school-based cases were less likely to have suffered neglect or to have had caregivers whose capacity to parent was influenced by substance abuse or similar issues.

Children who work with school-based social workers but are not protection cases are different again. Like school-based protection cases, they may come from families where social support is an issue. However, they are more similar to agency-based cases with respect to their behavioural problems in school and at home.

Neither school-based nor agency-based models emerge from these data as clearly superior in reaching the full range of children at risk. However, the school-based programs have clearly extended the reach of the child welfare agencies involved. These findings are perhaps best interpreted as evidence of the *value of using a diverse range of outreach and treatment approaches*.

Outcomes: What Difference has School-Based Social Work made over six months?

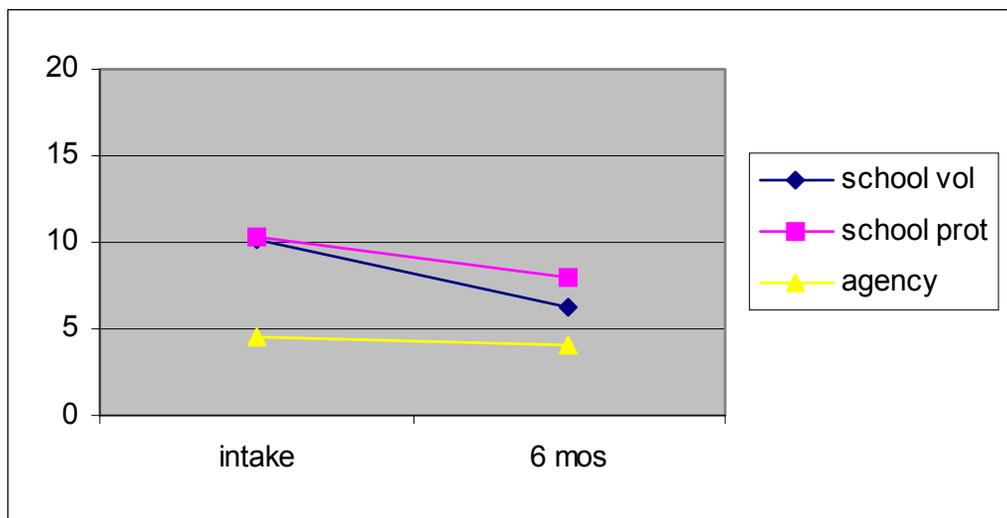
In this section, we review changes over time in CAFAS scores, for children served by school-based social workers. Although six months is a relatively short period of time, the data presented below allow us to address the very basic question of whether this form of intervention appears to be helpful for individual children. While acknowledging the important and complex differences between school-based and agency-based cases, we have used data from agency-based cases as a point of comparison where it seems to be useful.

Family Support

In the previous section, we concluded that school-based cases are more likely to come from homes where lack of social support is a concern. This difference emerged in both the CAFAS data and the risk assessment information.

When we tracked levels of impairment in family support across the first six months of contact, we found that *school-based programs were improving the quality of social support available to the child from his or her family*. This was especially true for cases that were classified as voluntary.

Figure 2: Level of Impairment in access to family support



Behaviour in School

School-based social workers were less likely than their agency-based counterparts to come into contact with children who had serious behavioural issues at school. In the last section, we suggested that this may reflect the ability of school-based social workers to intervene before children begin to act out seriously in school.

Behavioural problems at school were not unheard of among school-based social workers, of course. Voluntary school-based cases in particular sometimes had scores in the “moderate impairment” range.

Despite the fact that the presenting issues were less frequent and severe, *both school-based models appeared more effective at addressing behaviour in school than the agency-based model – especially for boys*.

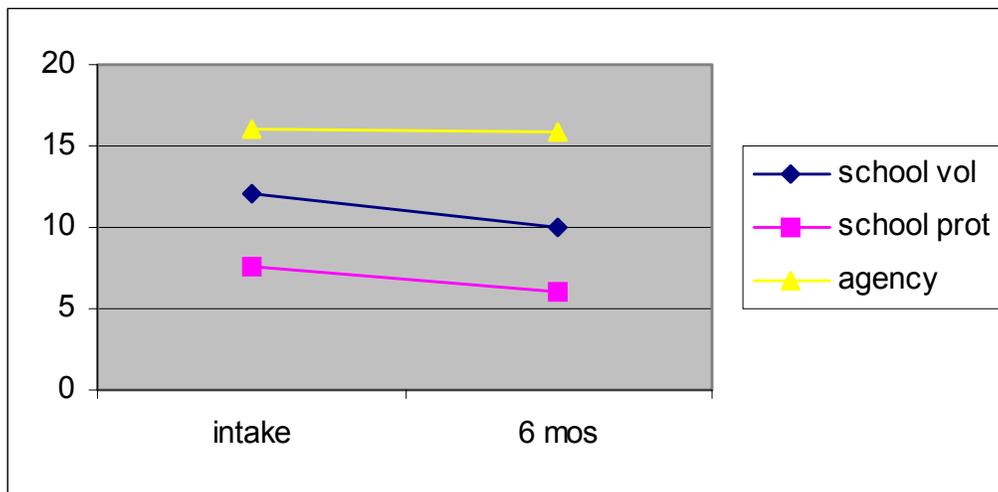
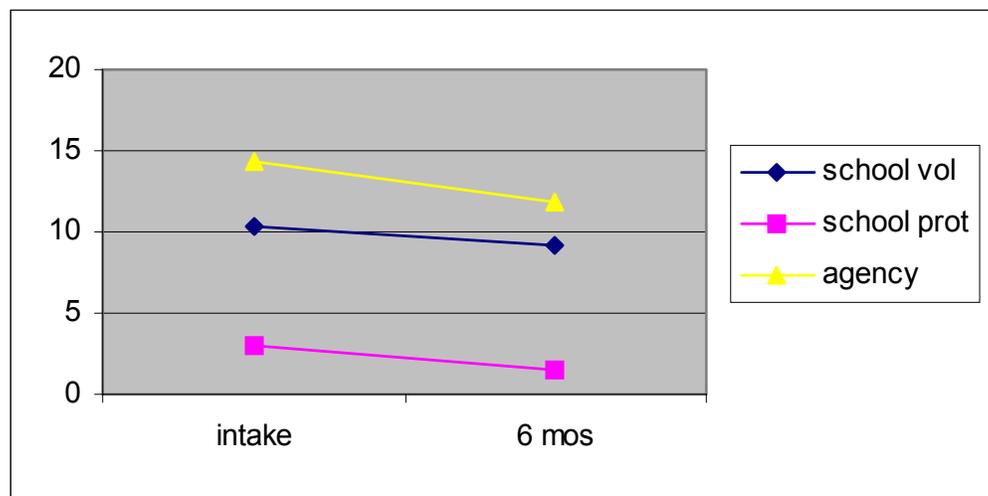
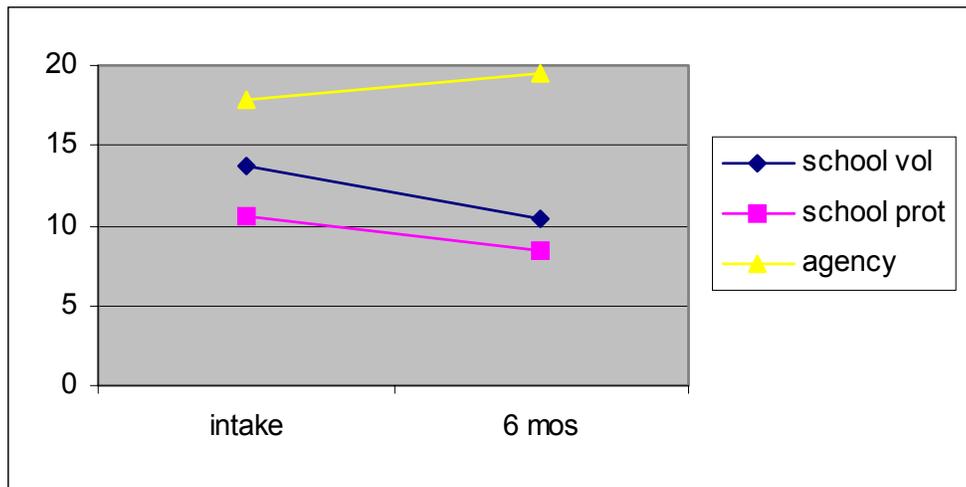
Figure 3: Level of Impairment in role performance at school: All children**Figure 4: Level of Impairment in role performance at school: For girls**

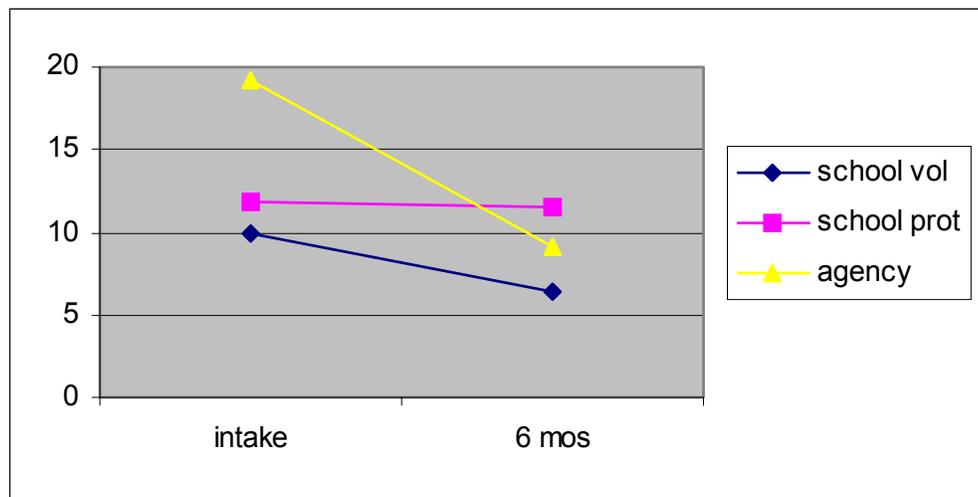
Figure 5: Level of Impairment in role performance at school: For boys



Behaviour at Home

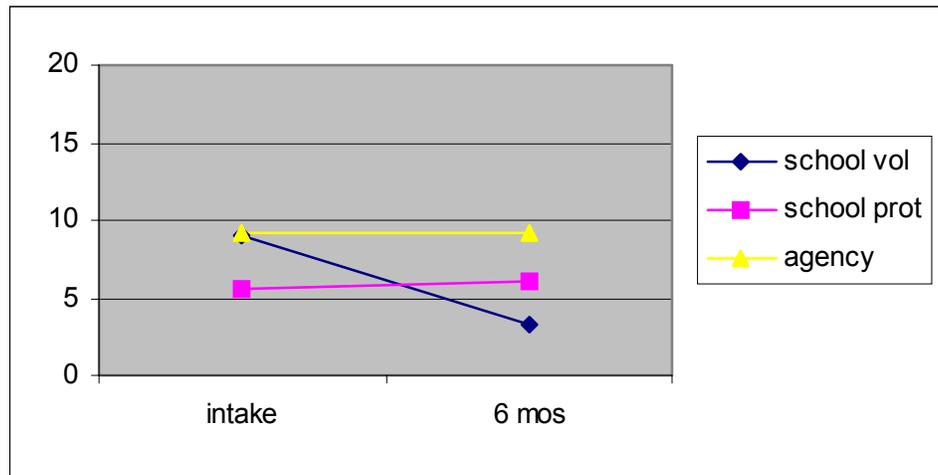
Children aged 10-13 were much more likely than older or younger children to present with behavioural problems at home. Amongst children in this age group, ***the agency model dealt with more serious cases and led to greater improvements than school-based models.***

Figure 6: Level of Impairment in Home Performance for children aged 10-13



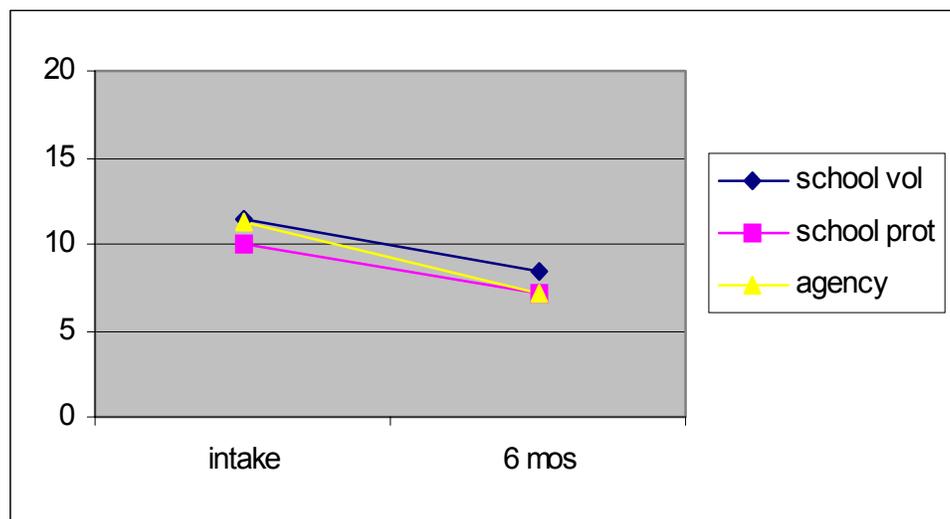
Overall, younger children were rated as having lower levels of impairment in this area. However, ***the voluntary school-based program seemed most effective at addressing the problems that did exist within this age group.*** Agency-based treatment made no difference at all for 7 to 9 year olds over the course of 6 months.

Figure 7: Level of Impairment in Home performance for children aged 7 – 9



Among older children, all three groups of children presented with similar levels of impairment in home functioning, and all three had small positive effects over the course of six months.

Figure 8: Level of Impairment in Home performance for children aged 14+

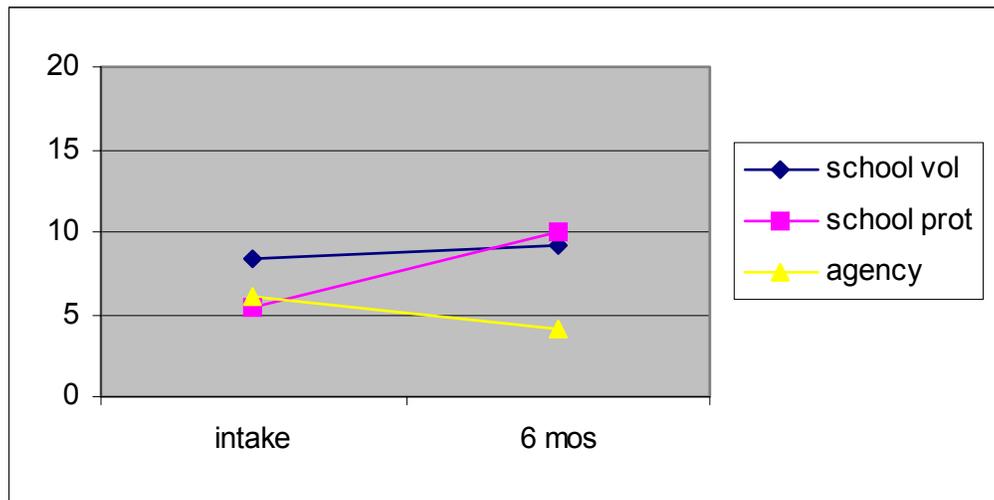


Moods and Self-Harm

The agency model seems more effective in dealing with self-harm, especially among girls.

In fact, self-harm issues appear to have become more serious over time among girls participating in the school-based protection model of treatment.

Figure 9: Level of Impairment in Moods and self-harm for girls



Summary

School-based social work practice appears to have made a difference in the lives of the children it serves, even during a short six-month period. The school-based model seems especially helpful in dealing with issues of social support within families, and behavioural problems in the school.

Conclusions

This report reviews a great deal of information, and many of the questions it addresses are answered only partially. However, we do feel that a number of clear messages emerge when all three phases of the study are considered together. In this concluding section, we review some of these messages and attempt to draw out implications for the future.

All three groups of stakeholders who participated in our focus groups gave overwhelmingly positive comments about their experiences with the program. They told us that they understand the Children's Aid Society better and have a more positive perception of their work since interacting with the school-based social worker. As well stakeholders agree that the school-based social worker, by being in the school, better understands the context of student functioning, which leads to more thorough, and more appropriate assistance. Teachers, parents, and students all feel the program has made a difference in the academic, behavioural, social-emotional functioning of students. They attribute this success, in part, to the fact that their involvement with the school-based social worker has taken place in a comfortable, accessible, non-threatening and non-stigmatising location. In addition, they gave examples of referrals to community supports for treatment, recreation, housing, financial and legal advice that were made possible through the school-based social worker program.

Enhanced Partnerships between Schools and Child Welfare Agencies

The school based social worker model appears to be highly effective in achieving system-level change. ***In particular, both Children's Aid Societies involved in this study have established stronger, more innovative, and more proactive partnerships with school boards and teachers.*** The majority of teachers who work in schools served by the program consult with and refer to the social workers on a regular basis. Teachers report that these consultations have made them better at identifying signs of risk among their students, more confident and quicker to act on their concerns, and better at making sure that their efforts to help any given student are fully coordinated with those of the social worker. It is telling that teachers feel that social workers have reduced their levels of stress. Parents and students see these changes too.

Teachers see the social worker as a unique and essential member of the staff team, and feel that ***the school as a whole averts crises better with the social worker on board.*** A level of trust rarely seen in child welfare exists between the two groups of staff.

At an even broader level, the school-based social worker program does seem to have helped ***all stakeholders (students, parent, and teachers) understand Children's Aid Societies better and feel more comfortable working with them.*** Although this change is perhaps more gradual and less dramatic than the teacher-social worker partnership, it is profoundly important.

Everyone involved seems to agree that resource limitations prevent the model from reaching its full potential. Social workers could contribute more to in-school-problem solving, support

teachers better, and do more prevention work if they were able to devote more hours to each school.

The provincial government has expressed its support for cross-sectoral partnerships in children's services, through such initiatives as Making Services Work for People, and the Early Years Challenge Fund. These initiatives, and the background research they are based upon, also emphasize the importance of service integration and simplifying access for families. However, changes in provincial policy have narrowed the mandate of both schools and child welfare organizations. The school boards involved in this project have experienced increasing pressure from provincial funders to focus their resources on basic classroom education, coupled with more centralized control over how this mandate is carried out. Similarly, child welfare organizations have been required to focus much more narrowly on child protection. ***These trends greatly reduce the capacity of these kinds of organizations to form the kinds of partnerships envisioned by, for example, the McCain & Mustard report.*** Since these data were collected, the programs described here have been forced to cut back the school-based services they provide.

Improved Access to Child Welfare Services

In interviews, stakeholders emphasized the importance of the social support provided to students and families by social workers. Whatever the practical focus of their work together, the social worker gave people a safe place to sit down and talk, a place where they felt trust and support. This was extremely important to the children and families we met. ***The school-based approach has given some children, families, and school staff a more convenient and less threatening channel to access the child welfare system.***

Improved Identification of Children and Families in Need

It seems clear that the school-based service is reaching ***children at risk that might otherwise have gone undetected.*** According to our CAFAS and risk assessment data, children served through the school-based program are more likely to have had conflict with parents, to have received inadequate social support from parents, or to have been emotionally abused than those served through agencies. The students reached by school based social workers are also less likely to be acting out in school, and more likely to be boys. They are less likely to have experienced neglect or caregiver capacity issues such as alcoholism or incarceration. Although we were not able to generate clear answers about why these differences exist, we feel confident that they are real differences. They emerged in two or in some cases three different kinds of independent assessments.

Neither school-based nor agency-based models emerge from these data as clearly superior in reaching the full range of children at risk. However, the ***school-based programs have clearly extended the reach of the child welfare agencies involved.*** For parents, for teachers, and for students, one of the most important things about the school based program was that it afforded them access to an organization (and a body of expertise) they otherwise would have hesitated to contact. Similarly, this partnership has allowed ***school boards to continue to serve***

children who might otherwise have developed disruptive behaviours and been difficult to teach in regular school settings.

These findings are perhaps best interpreted as evidence of the *value of using a diverse range of outreach and treatment approaches* in both school board and child welfare systems.

Improved Child Behaviour in School

Our qualitative data shows that people involved with the program believe it is improving the behaviour of children. Teachers and parents identified better problem solving and anger management skills in students who had worked with the social workers. When we analyzed our six-month pre-post intervention data, we found that *both school-based models appeared more effective at addressing behaviour in school than the agency-based model – especially for boys.*

On the other hand, children aged 10-13 were much more likely than older or younger children to present with behavioural problems at home. Amongst children in this age group, the agency model dealt with more serious cases and led to greater improvements than school-based models. We also found that the agency model seemed more effective in dealing with self-harm, especially among girls. In fact, self-harm issues appear to have become more serious over time among girls participating in the school-based protection model of treatment.

Both models appeared to be making a positive change in the behaviour of children over a six month period, and each model had different strengths in terms of its clinical outcomes.

School-based social work was especially effective in enhancing social support and improving behaviour in school settings.

Improved Social Support Within Families

Access to social support has arisen as a theme throughout our findings. Our interview data suggested that *parents come to trust school-based social workers more than traditional child welfare workers.* We also heard that parents appreciated the role the social worker was able to play in keeping them up-to-date and involved with respect to their child's life in school.

Perhaps it is not surprising then that school-based social work appears to excel when it comes to improving the social support provided to children by their families. When we tracked levels of impairment in family support across the first six months of contact, we found *that school-based programs were improving the quality of social support available to the child from his or her family.* This was especially true for cases that were classified as voluntary.

Reflections and Implications

We feel that the people involved with this evaluation project and with all aspects of the program – students, parents, and staff - deserve to be congratulated for the hard work they have invested in an innovative and successful model of child welfare service delivery. Clearly, the notion of basing child welfare social workers in schools has a great deal of merit.

In particular, this model is an excellent way for child welfare agencies to build close working relationships with the people who run the schools. Outside of the home, the school is undoubtedly the environment with the greatest potential to contribute to the healthy development of children. These findings provide evidence that child welfare services can become better understood, more accessible and a more fully integrated partner in promoting healthy child development when they are embedded in school communities.

It is also clear that child welfare agencies can connect with more children facing a greater variety of challenges when they use a range of approaches. The two models compared here each have their advantages and limitations, but together they can serve a greater diversity of families.

There is the potential for this model to go even further – to create an environment that promotes the health of all students and draws child welfare workers fully into primary prevention efforts. This was always the vision for the model. To date, resource limitations and lack of explicit support for prevention in child welfare policy have prevented this level of the model from being fully implemented.

Limitations and Unanswered Questions

It is important to remember that the findings presented here reflect the reality of these programs in the 1999-2000 school year. This was a period of rapid change for both the school system and the child welfare system in Ontario. Even as data was gathered, there was some uncertainty regarding how long the program could be sustained and at what resource level. The consensus seems to be that we gathered our data as the programs were at their peak. In Huron County, for example, the number of schools involved and the number of hours devoted to each school began to drop off shortly after our study was completed.

Child welfare interventions are aimed primarily at improving the life situation of children and protecting them from harm, not at changing children's behaviours. However, we chose to focus our design on changes in child behaviour because school-based social workers have the opportunity to work much more intensively with children than most child welfare workers do, and because this level of outcome is important to school board partners.

Although we did gather data pre and post intervention, we tracked changes over a very short period of time – six months. Some of the individuals we interviewed told us that this time period was much too short to see the ways in which the program had changed children's and family's lives.

Our work was further complicated by the fact that we were comparing children in two programs who we expected (and hoped) would be different from one another before our intervention even began.

Even so, there are some promising trends in our findings that deserve more thorough study.

Lessons for the Future

One of the most interesting and unexpected findings of this study was the role school based social workers seem to play in enhancing the social support available to children from their families. There may be ways for agencies and school boards to capitalize more fully on this previously unidentified strength of school-based child welfare social work.

It is important to track the outcomes of this model in the longer term. Since the tools we used in the last phase of our study are part of the ongoing clinical routine in Huron and Renfrew, longer-term follow up of some of the children included in this study would be relatively easy. Additional indicators, such as school success, drop-out rates, numbers of child protection files closed and re-opened, should also be considered.

Creating a Climate of Safety: The Policy Implications

Our evaluation project concluded with a forum at which partners explored the broader implications of the findings reported here. They identified several key policy questions that emerged out of the research findings. These questions are intended to provoke and inform discussion among advocates, policy makers, and practitioners about how public policy can maximize the return on resources invested in child welfare.

- This report demonstrated that it is possible for child welfare organizations to play an important role in partnerships for safer, healthier school environments. Given that the province has expressed a commitment to improved child health and safety through greater service integration, ***how can mandatory services be supported to participate?***
- This report demonstrated that school-based social work programs enhance collaboration between child welfare organizations, schools, and families, and allow each to work more efficiently and effectively within existing funding envelopes. ***How can public policy continue to support innovation in child welfare? How can policy support creative programming within existing service structures and not only in demonstration projects?***
- This report demonstrated that alternative, collaborative approaches can improve the effectiveness of child welfare services. However, it also shows that this kind of programming is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain within existing funding structures. ***How can public policy ensure effective and efficient services, without imposing restrictive models of service delivery that do not fit the needs of every community?***
- No single organizations can address complex issues like bullying or youth crime alone. However, this report demonstrated that school board/child welfare partnerships can, with sufficient resources, initiate preventative programs that neither organization had the skills or resources to sustain alone. Given that the province has acknowledged the importance of removing obstacles to a child's readiness to learn, ***how can public policy support proactive and preventative efforts to create a climate of safety and well being?***
- This report demonstrated that school-based social work allows teachers and child welfare workers to understand the needs of individual children more holistically. It also allows for earlier intervention with certain groups of children at risk, and the development of more coordinated strategies for action. It appears that this partnership has led to efficiencies that are visible only when the two systems are considered as components of a larger whole. ***How can public policy document and support these kinds of system level efficiencies?***

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Introduction: name and classroom grade
 - *Brief description of exposure to SBSW programming*
 - *Nature of contact*
 - *How did it begin?*
 - *How did it feel to work with SBSW?*
2. What is the role of the SBSW within the school?
3. One of the things we are interested in understanding is the impact of the SBSW on your school as a whole. What difference has the SBSW made at this level?
 - *Do you see a more holistic approach to the child evolving within the school system?*
 - *Are schools emerging as a focal point in the community? Is the SBSW program a significant step in this direction? How could this approach be promoted further?*
 - *To what extent has the SBSW been active in a preventative capacity in the school? Have these preventative efforts been successful?*
4. In what ways has this partnership benefited both organizations?
 - *Enhanced lines of communication between the CAS and the school? In what ways?*
 - *Greater mutual understanding? What are your attitudes towards CAS? Have they changed as a result of contact with the SBSW?*
 - *Can you think of instances in which you or other school staff were able to work together with social workers and achieve things that neither of you would have been able to do alone?*
5. Has the implementation of the SBSW programming helped you in your role as a teacher in any way?
 - *Decreased your daily stress level?*
 - *Supported your efforts to deal with issues in your classroom?*
 - *Supported your efforts to deal informally with individual students?*
 - *Decreased time spent on managing family and personal issues?*
6. In what ways have families been affected by the program?
 - *Do you sense that there has been a reduction in the stigmatization of families who are involved with the Children's Aid Society? To what do you attribute this decrease/increase/maintenance of the status quo?*
 - *Has there been increased parental involvement in school activities?*
7. What difference, if any, do you think the SBSW program has made in the lives of the students that the social worker has worked with?
 - *Improvement in social skills, conflict resolution, and respect?*
 - *Changes in academic performance?*
 - *Changes in behavioural incidents?*
8. Final Position: *"All things considered, do you feel that this is a valuable program?"*
9. Summary (of points 1-7): *"Is this an accurate summary of our discussion?"*
10. *"Have we missed anything?"*

Parent Interview Questions

- 1(a) When did you first hear about the SBSW program?
- 1(b) What different roles does the SBSW play in the school?
- 1(c) Have you personally had any contact with the social worker?
- 1(d) What benefits do you see in this arrangement? More accessible? More efficient?
- 1(e) Has your knowledge of or experiences with the SBSW programming altered your former perceptions of the Children's Aid Society in any way?

2. What positive changes do you feel have resulted from the SBSW program?

In the school:

- (a) *More emphasis on prevention in the schools?*
- (b) *Leisure and recreational activities for children?*
- (c) *Community focal point?*
- (d) *School serves more of its students' needs? & (e) School and social adjustment in children?*

Personally:

- (f) *Has the SBSW programming/parenting groups helped to decrease your level of stress? Increased sense of competence? In what ways?*
- (g) *Have you noticed any growth in social skills, respect, or behaviour of your children and their classmates at home?*

3. Are you satisfied with the existing opportunities for involvement in your child's schooling?
 - (a) *What remains as a barrier to parental involvement?*
 - (b) *Do you feel that the school is a helpful resource for parents?*
 - (c) *Where can parents turn for help in dealing with their children? Friends? Extended family? Church? Schools? Parenting groups? Community resources?*
4. Final Position: *"All things considered, do you feel that this is a valuable program?"*
5. Summary (of points 1 - 3): *Is this an accurate summary of our discussion? Have we missed anything?"*

Appendix B – SURVEY OF SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

developed by Marie Parsons as part of an independent research project

The school-based social worker program is intended to provide both child protection and school support counseling services. It is intended to give educators better access to expert support when needed and improve cooperation between school and social services. **Please answer the following questions, based on your experience over the past 2 years.**

1. Please describe your role:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades JK - 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades 4 - 6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance Counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades 7 - 8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vice Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades 9 - OAC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal | |

Please describe your school:

Grade Range:

Approximate #
of students:

2. How well do you feel you understand the role of the school-based social worker?

' not at all well ' not very well ' somewhat well ' very well

3. Please estimate the number of times during the past two years that you have come into contact with a student who you felt could benefit from contact with a social worker.

Of this number, please estimate the number you have **referred to the School Based Social Worker** either directly or through the school team:

Please estimate the number of times you have **informally consulted with the School-Based Social Worker** about a student:

Please briefly describe the nature of the informal consultation:

In cases where you **have not consulted the social worker** formally or informally, please describe the reasons why:

4. To what degree does the School-Based Social Worker in your school:

Participate as a member of our school team	1 not at all	2	3	4 very much
Work with parents	1 not at all	2	3	4 very much
Develop or support groups in the school	1 not at all	2	3	4 very much

5. To what degree has the School-Based Social Worker program made a difference in:

Behaviour of students who social worker has worked with	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure
Social-emotional functioning of students who social worker has worked with	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure
Behaviour and social skills of the student population in general	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure
Your level of stress as an educator	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure
Home-school co-operation	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure
Efficiency of response to problem situations	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure
Early identification of child and family problems	<input type="checkbox"/> made things better <input type="checkbox"/> made no difference	<input type="checkbox"/> made things worse <input type="checkbox"/> unsure

6. Has the involvement of the school-based social worker reduced the burdens placed on:

Vice Principals	1 not at all	2	3	4 very much	N/A
Guidance Counselors	1 not at all	2	3	4 very much	N/A
Resource Teachers	1 not at all	2	3	4 very much	N/A

7. Please list areas of the school-based social work program that you would cite as:

Strengths

Areas Needing Improvement

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

8. Please include any additional comments.

<hr/>
<hr/>

Appendix C: Summary of Teacher Survey Findings

School-Based Social Worker Survey Findings

<u>Respondents Role</u>				<u>Teachers' Grade Level</u>			Total
	Huron	Renfrew	Total	Huron	Renfrew	Total	
Classroom Teachers	68%	72%	70%	JK - Grade 3	26%	16%	23%
Resource Teachers	6%	13%	9%	Grades 4-6	16%	12%	15%
Guidance Counselors	7%	4%	6%	Grades 7-8	11%	21%	14%
Vice Principals	6%	4%	5%	Grades 9-OAC	17%	46%	27%
Principals	13%	7%	10%				
Total Respondents	182 (60%)	119 (40%)	301				

<u>Grade Range of Respondents' Schools</u>				<u>Total Student Enrollment</u>			Total
	Huron	Renfrew	Total	Huron	Renfrew	Total	
Elementary	83%	57%	73%	0-299	48%	29%	41%
Secondary	17%	43%	27%	300-399	25%	3%	17%
				400-599	14%	42%	25%
				600-999	10%	5%	8%
				1000+	3%	21%	9%

How Well Respondent Understands school-based social worker Role

	Huron	Renfrew	Total
Not at all well	4%	2%	3%
Not very well	14%	11%	13%
Somewhat well	46%	49%	47%
Very well	36%	38%	37%

Number of Times Respondent Referred or Informally Consulted with school-based social worker

	Huron		Renfrew		Total	
	Refer	Consult	Refer	Consult	Refer	Consult
Not at all	17%	14%	15%	16%	16%	15%
Under 5	48%	39%	40%	26%	45%	34%
6-15	18%	18%	18%	27%	18%	22%
16-25	5%	8%	9%	7%	7%	7%
25+	6%	9%	4%	2%	5%	6%
"daily"	6%	12%	14%	22%	9%	16%

Reasons why Respondents have not consulted with the school-based social worker on occasion

	Huron	Renfrew	Total
"I felt capable of handling the situation myself"	19%	29%	22%
"The Social Worker was not available"	34%	14%	28%
"The student was already in care"	1%	9%	4%
"The student was already seeing school-based social worker"	4%	3%	4%
"The school-based social worker had too heavy a caseload already"	10%	0%	7%
"I lacked information about the program"	10%	0%	7%
"The situation was not applicable"	6%	26%	12%
"There was no parental consent given"	3%	0%	2%
"I was concerned about CAS repercussions"	1%	3%	2%
"It breached students' confidentiality"	3%	3%	3%
"I had no confidence in that Social Worker"	3%	0%	2%
"Someone else on School team referred student"	4%	14%	7%
"Reported it directly to CAS"	3%	0%	2%

Perceived Degree to Which the School Based Social Worker Performs the Following Roles:

Participates as a Member of our School Team

		Huron	Renfrew	Total
Not at all	(1)	17%	4%	12%
	(2)	30%	13%	23%
	(3)	30%	27%	29%
Very much	(4)	23%	56%	36%

Works with Parents

		Huron	Renfrew	Total
Not at all	(1)	4%	1%	3%
	(2)	25%	10%	19%
	(3)	37%	35%	36%
Very much	(4)	34%	54%	42%

Develops or Supports Groups in the School

		Huron	Renfrew	Total
Not at all	(1)	16%	4%	11%
	(2)	30%	12%	22%
	(3)	29%	45%	36%
Very much	(4)	25%	39%	31%

Perceived Degree to Which the school-based social worker Program has made a difference in the Following Areas:

	Better			Worse			Unsure			No Change		
	H	R	T	H	R	T	H	R	T	H	R	T
Behaviour of students the SW has worked with	53%	64%	57%	1%	0%	1%	33%	30%	32%	13%	6%	10%
Social-emotional functioning of students SW has worked with	49%	65%	56%	1%	0%	1%	40%	33%	37%	10%	2%	6%
Behaviour/social skills of student population	31%	59%	42%	1%	0%	1%	40%	33%	37%	28%	8%	20%
Your level of stress as an educator	44%	60%	50%	1%	0%	1%	16%	19%	17%	39%	21%	32%
Home-school cooperation	44%	55%	48%	0%	0%	0%	29%	36%	32%	27%	9%	20%
Efficiency of Response to problem situations	55%	66%	59%	1%	0%	1%	29%	26%	28%	15%	8%	12%
Early identification of child and family problems	37%	53%	44%	1%	0%	1%	37%	40%	38%	25%	7%	17%

Perceived Degree to Which the school-based social worker Program has Reduced the Burdens on School Staff Members:

	Not at All (1)			(2)			(3)			Very much (4)			Not Applicable (5)		
	H	R	T	H	R	T	H	R	T	H	R	T	H	R	T
Principal	10%	6%	8%	17%	7%	13%	22%	29%	25%	14%	32%	21%	37%	26%	33%
Vice Principal	2%	3%	2%	12%	5%	9%	11%	17%	14%	11%	19%	14%	64%	56%	61%
Guidance Counselor	1%	3%	2%	15%	5%	11%	7%	13%	9%	7%	26%	15%	70%	53%	63%
Resource Teacher	8%	4%	7%	18%	13%	16%	21%	26%	23%	12%	27%	18%	41%	30%	36%

Reported Strengths of the Program

	Huron	Renfrew	Total
A resource person for teachers and school staff members	13%	15%	14%
Availability of social worker	12%	12%	12%
Provides individual help for students	13%	1.10%	12%
Located in the school	9%	9%	9%
Social worker is a good listener	10%	5%	8%
Team approach possible	7%	4%	8%
Good communication with families	10%	4%	7%
Provides practical solutions	6%	10%	7%
Friendly, approachable social worker	4%	4%	4%
Improves Social-emotional functioning	4%	4%	4%
Social Worker has access to CAS records	4%	2%	3%
Easy Access to CAS	2%	4%	3%
Class presentations worthwhile	1%	5%	3%
Social Worker has training to deal with student problems	6%	0%	2%
Can remove a student from class	1%	2%	2%
Anger Management groups and Peer Helpers are worthwhile	1%	2%	1%
Independent of classroom	0.5%	2%	1%
Can help in crisis situation	0%	2%	1%
Provides support for teachers and school staff	0.5%	1%	1%
Social Worker is a male role model	0%	2%	1%
Continuity of service through high school	1%	1%	1%
Prevention is possible	0%	1%	0.5%

Reported Areas Needing Improvement

	Huron	Renfrew	Total
Need better communication between social worker and teachers	27%	20%	24%
Many new teachers are uninformed about the program	11%	24%	19%
Need more visibility of social worker in school	12%	19%	13%
Social Worker needs to have greater availability for a school	8%	26%	15%
More involvement of SW in school activities	9%	2%	8%
More group work desired	5%	8%	6%
Need consistent social worker	9%	0%	6%
Need better facilities for Social Worker in school	4%	0%	4%
More students need help	3%	4%	3%
Social Worker should be more approachable	3%	0%	3%
More classroom observation needed	2%	0%	2%
Social Worker should train teachers	2%	3%	2%
Social Worker's caseload too heavy	1%	0%	1%
Improve confidentiality	1%	0%	1%
Remove CAS stigma	2%	0.5%	1%
Should see students after class	1%	0%	1%
Improve home-school link	0.5%	0%	0.5%

Additional Comments Provided

	Huron	Renfrew	Total
Excellent job/worthwhile program	32%	37%	34%
Program not as effective as it could be	8%	4%	7%
Program has helped students	3%	3%	3%
Concerned that program attracts young offenders	0%	4%	2%
Mine is a very needy school	2%	3%	2%
Success of program depends on the individual Social Worker	2%	0%	1%
I have not observed changes in students	0%	1%	0.5%