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# EVALUATION OF THE HELPING HANDS AND SOCIAL GUARDIAN TRAINING

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Key learning

The Helping Hands programme and associated two-day Social Guardian training have been successfully implemented in primary schools across Northern Ireland. There have been positive changes to practice and improved outcomes reported for children. These have included improved social behaviour, communication, emotional resilience and coping strategies which are all key life skills that should lead to long-term positive outcomes. Given the increased understanding of the importance of earlier intervention and the need for children to develop emotional resilience, this programme is a useful addition to teaching practice and should continue to be delivered.

Future development should look at how this programme can be funded to ensure that all schools can participate and how the activity booklets can be made available to more children. The resources are highly suitable for Key Stage 2. It would be useful to explore the development of resources for younger and older children. A half-day booster or refresher training should be developed to offer teachers a couple of years after they attend the two-day training. This evaluation has provided a well-rounded, and robust insight into how Helping Hands is delivered and perceived by teachers and trainers. It has examined what teachers report regarding its impact on their practice, and on children's emotional and coping skills. Future evaluations should build on this by directly examining the impact of the programme with the children themselves.



## Background

In 2019, Women's Aid Federation NI (WAFNI) commissioned Dr Helga Sneddon to undertake an independent evaluation of their two-day Social Guardian training for the Helping Hands programme. The aim of the evaluation was to examine existing data and collect new data, to see how effective the training was at increasing teacher knowledge so they could better support the emotional resilience of children in Primary school.

Helping Hands was developed as a preventative education programme for children. It is based upon two core Protective Behaviours themes:

- We all have the right to feel safe all of the time
- There is nothing so awful (or so small) that we can't talk about it with someone.

Children are also encouraged to explore the supporting statement to the Protective Behaviours themes that:

- Others have the right to feel safe with us.

Helping Hands explores each theme in detail through various activities that have been developed to facilitate enjoyment as well as learning. The programme consists of:

- Activity sheets for children to complete and colour
- An information book for facilitators
- 'Feelings' cards to be used for various activities
- The 'Even if ...' game
- Posters for display.

The activity programme has been designed for use primarily with Key Stage 2 children, although it can also be used, depending on teacher support, with Key Stage 1 children.

The implementation of Helping Hands in Northern Ireland primary schools is very timely. It contributes to several important areas.

Helping Hands has been matched against the NI Primary Curriculum's statutory requirements for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) and uses different tools and techniques in order to maximise pupil potential. It also contributes to skills and abilities in other areas of the curriculum such as language and literacy, art and design, and drama.

It contributes to children's awareness of their rights. All children have the rights related to protection under the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup>, namely:

### **Article 3 - Best interests of the child**

All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interest. The state shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with that responsibility, fail to do so.

### **Article 19 - Protection from abuse & neglect**

The state shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programmes for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

Led by our Health and Social Care system, Northern Ireland is working to become a 'trauma-informed' society by seeking to prevent, identify and address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Domestic violence is an ACE that can lead to poor outcomes. Living with domestic violence can lead to poorer outcomes for young people, but we know that young people do better when they experience safe environments, have supportive relationships and the right type of support offered as early as possible. Women's Aid has highlighted in their strategy See, Hear, Act,<sup>2</sup> the urgent need for full recognition of children and young people as equal victims of domestic violence. Helping Hands could help schools to become more aware of domestic violence as an important ACE, and help them to develop strategies for more sensitive practice and responsive approaches for children living with and without adversity.

The Social Guardian training programme for the Helping Hands is a two-day training programme aimed at Primary school staff. This training is validated by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), evaluated by Women's Aid Federation NI and the Department of Education, and facilitated by experienced and qualified trainers from WAFNI.

The main aims of the two-day training are to:

- Assist teachers and practitioners to develop preventative and early intervention strategies in relation to children who don't feel safe
- Enable teachers and practitioners to deliver the Helping Hands programme linked directly to the curriculum

- Assist teachers and practitioners to understand the context and impact of domestic violence and abuse in the lives of children and families.

## Findings

This independent evaluation used mixed-methods approaches to examine existing data collected by Women's Aid, and new data collected ourselves to fully examine how what various people thought of the training, the difference they felt it made to teachers' practice and children's outcomes, and what they felt was helpful in bedding-it down in schools.

The training has been delivered to a broad range of schools across all areas in Northern Ireland. Out of a potential 811 schools, a total of 489 schools had engaged with Helping Hands training (this figure does not include all special needs and preparatory schools in Northern Ireland). Many of these schools had more than one teacher trained in Helping Hands.

Overall, the attendees at the two-day training were very satisfied with the content and delivery. Most felt the training provided them with information and knowledge that would be of future use in safeguarding children. Most felt that the training was presented in a clear and organised manner, and the trainer was able to answer any questions they had. The expertise, experience and approachability of the trainers was highly valued by attendees as a key element in the success of the training.

Teachers liked the style and structure of the training and saw it as highly effective. They enjoyed being able to actually do the exercises as part of the training. They also valued hearing other teachers' experiences and sharing ideas with other schools. Several teachers highlighted that they had found the statistics and the video particularly powerful in changing their understanding of domestic violence and abuse. The feedback was that the two-day training was an ideal length and intensity for changing attitudes and building skills. There are no recommendations about changing the content or delivery of the two-day training as the current model is working and being received well by teachers.

The quality of the resources (e.g. Teacher's Handbook, lesson plans and activities) were highly and consistently praised in all the data we examined for this evaluation. Teachers liked the structure, the visual attractiveness of the materials. They saw these as child-friendly, age-appropriate, colourful and fun. They felt the programme could be easily implemented within the classroom/ school setting. Helping Hands was seen as complementing other initiatives within schools, existing policies and procedures, and making a useful contribution to PDMU and other curriculum requirements.

Teachers who participated in the training consistently highlighted the positive impact it had on changing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation. They left the two-day training feeling more empowered to build young people's emotional resilience, and felt they now had clear, workable strategies about how to do this.

After the staff had returned to their classrooms, they still highly valued the training and reported that it had long-lasting positive impact on their attitudes and teaching practice. Teachers were able to use what they learnt, both with individual and groups of children, as well as to improve the procedures and emotional environment within the wider school. Helping Hands was seen as a very useful addition to the support that schools could provide, and directly contributing to PDMU, as well as other areas such as Child protection and bullying policies. It was seen to complement other programmes such as PATHs, without there being duplication. It was seen as most useful when embraced as part of a whole-school approach.

All of the teachers had delivered the Helping Hands sessions after training, but some found it difficult to do this on an ongoing basis because of the cost of the resources. It was clear from the feedback that if cost had not been a barrier, they would have continued to deliver the sessions. Even when sessions were not being delivered after the first year post-training, the teachers still reported that the training had a long-lasting impact on how they supported and understood young people's needs and how to best support their emotional resilience. They all recommended the training for other teachers and said that it should be made widely available.

Teachers reported that they saw changes in the children who had participated in the Helping Hands sessions. The children were more confident and better able to express themselves in healthy and non-confrontational ways. They saw these children as having

developed important coping, problem-solving and communication skills for life as a result of having been exposed to the Helping Hands messages and activities. The increase in emotional resilience and coping skills for life that they describe seeing in the children may be particularly important given the pressures they are likely to face during and post the current pandemic.

## Conclusions

The Helping Hands programme and associated two-day Social Guardian training have been successfully implemented in primary schools across Northern Ireland. There have been positive changes to practice and improved outcomes reported for children. These have included improved social behaviour, communication, emotional resilience and coping strategies which are all key life skills that should lead to long-term positive outcomes. Given the increased understanding of the importance of earlier intervention and the need for children to develop emotional resilience, this programme is a useful addition to teaching practice and should continue to be delivered.

Future development should look at how this programme can be funded to ensure that all schools can participate and how the activity booklets can be made available to more children. The resources are highly suitable for Key Stage 2. It would be useful to explore the development of resources for younger and older children. A half-day booster or refresher training should be developed to offer teachers a couple of years after they attend the two-day training.

This evaluation has provided a well-rounded, and robust insight into how Helping Hands is delivered and perceived by teachers and trainers. It has examined what teachers report regarding its impact on their practice, and on children's emotional and coping skills. Future evaluations should build on this by directly examining the impact of the programme with the children themselves.

# FULL REPORT

## Introduction

In 2019, Women's Aid Federation NI (WAFNI) commissioned Dr Helga Sneddon at Outcome Imps to undertake an independent evaluation of their two-day Social Guardian training for the Helping Hands programme. The aim of the evaluation was to examine existing data and collect new data to see how effective the training was at increasing teacher knowledge and skills so they could better support the emotional resilience of children in Primary school.

The implementation of Helping Hands in Northern Ireland primary schools is very timely. It contributes to several important areas.

Helping Hands has been matched against the NI Primary Curriculum's statutory requirements for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) and uses different tools and techniques in order to maximise pupil potential. It also contributes to skills and abilities in other areas of the curriculum such as language and literacy, art and design, and drama.

All children have the rights related to protection under the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup>. Helping Hands contributes to children's awareness of their rights including:

### **Article 3 - Best interests of the child**

All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interest. The state shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with that responsibility, fail to do so.

### **Article 19 - Protection from abuse & neglect**

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Led by our Health and Social Care system, Northern Ireland is working to become a 'trauma-informed' society by seeking to prevent, identify and address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Domestic violence is an ACE that can lead to poor outcomes. Living with domestic violence can lead to poorer outcomes for young people, but we know that young people do better when they experience safe environments, have supportive relationships and the right type of support offered as early as possible. Women's Aid has highlighted in their strategy See, Hear, Act,<sup>4</sup> the urgent need for full recognition of children and young people as equal victims of domestic violence. Helping Hands could help schools to become more aware of domestic violence as an important ACE, and help them to develop strategies for more sensitive practice and responsive approaches for children living with and without adversity.



## Overview of Helping Hands

Helping Hands has been developed as a preventative education programme for children. It is based on the programme 'Protective Behaviours' which originated in Madison, USA in 1978.

The overall aim of Helping Hands is:



to increase children's understanding of feeling safe and to explore and promote behaviours which will contribute to a safe environment.

Rather than taking a narrow focus on particular issues, such as bullying or 'stranger danger', Helping Hands has a strong emphasis on building emotional resilience. It does this by helping children develop an internal measure of whether individuals feel safe or not, and developing individually based strategies and solutions. The programme is about

safety, empowerment, self-esteem, assertiveness and valuing yourself. It can be used to develop skills and abilities, which are vital for personal safety, stress reduction and promotion of self-worth. It can help children to develop a strong sense of themselves, and an ability to express their own wants and needs.

Objectives include to:

- Develop children's levels of self-esteem and confidence
- Enable children to explore and express different feelings
- Inform children of their right to feel safe at all times
- Increase children's abilities in safety planning
- Encourage children to seek support when needed
- Empower children to identify their own personal support network
- Explore how choice of behaviour can affect the feelings of others
- Identify healthy ways to manage conflict.

Children may:

- Understand that feelings are okay
- Express strong feelings without violence
- Practice non-violent problem-solving skills.

These skills are useful for all children, irrespective of whether they are or have experienced harm or not.

Helping Hands is based upon two core Protective Behaviours themes:

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- The 'Even if ...' game
- Posters for display.

The activity programme has been designed for use primarily with Key Stage 2 children, although it can also be used, depending on teacher support, with Key Stage 1 children.

## Content of Helping Hands

Helping Hands itself comprises ten sessions, each of which has specific learner outcomes, facilitator notes and activity sheets. The sessions are:

- Developing Children's self-esteem
- Feelings
- The Right to feel safe
- OH OH! Signs
- Helping Hands
- Even if ...?
- Others have the right to feel safe with us
- Secrets and surprises
- Quiz time
- Celebrating Achievements.

The Social Guardian training programme for the Helping Hands is a two-day training programme aimed at Primary school staff. This training is validated by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), evaluated by Women's Aid Federation NI and the Department of Education, and facilitated by experienced and qualified trainers from WAFNI.

The main aims of the two-day training are to:

- Assist teachers and practitioners to develop preventative and early intervention strategies in relation to children who don't feel safe
- Enable teachers and practitioners to deliver the Helping Hands programme linked directly to the curriculum
- Assist teachers and practitioners to understand the context and impact of domestic violence and abuse in the lives of children and families.

**Day 1** of the training focuses on developing participants' knowledge and understanding of domestic violence and abuse. It uses two training models:

- Alert to risk model – this illustrates how children react to stress/ threat and shows how the Helping Hands programme can support earlier building of children's safety strategies
- Plan to Protect – this provides a framework to assist children and teachers with different elements of safety planning.

**Day 2** of the training focuses on how to deliver the Helping Hands programme, and provides attendees with opportunities to use the materials and activities, as well as share ideas with other attendees. Each attendee is provided with a Helping Hands pack which includes the Facilitator's Notes.

Attendance at the training is funded by the Department of Education who also provide payment for teacher cover. Attendees have to agree to deliver Helping Hands to at least one classroom of children within six months of attending the training.

## Previous evaluation

The pilot of the Social Guardians training was evaluated by McKee (2015).<sup>5</sup> A group of 12 Early Childhood Educators delivered Helping Hands to children in primary school and early years settings. The mixed-method approach endorsed Helping Hands as an effective, preventative, education programme for 5-8 year olds.

Our evaluation builds on McKee's previous work to examine the scaling-up of the training to 898 teachers across all areas of Northern Ireland.

## Methodology used in this evaluation

We examined existing data collected by Women's Aid, and collected new data to fully examine how what various people thought of the training, the difference they felt it made to teachers' practice and children's outcomes, and what they felt was helpful in bedding-it down in schools. The following information was examined:

- **School info from existing Women's Aid database** which included the number of teachers trained in each school, and overall uptake and scale across different areas/ types of school
- **Existing information from the questionnaires completed by teachers** at the start and end of the two-day training sessions. The closed questions from all questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was undertaken of open-ended questions,. This allowed for levels of satisfaction with the training, and changes in attitudes/ level of knowledge to be assessed
- **New information from an online questionnaire administered to all teachers who did the training.** This explored the longer-term impact of the training in terms of whether and how teachers were able to use what they had learnt in their classrooms, what helped or hindered, potential benefits from the teachers' perspective (what they saw as outcomes for themselves in terms of professional practice as well as the children in their classrooms), and any suggestions they have for future development
- **Semi-structured interviews with teachers and school Principals to explore insights into the programme in more detail.** These were purposively sampled to draw on the experiences of schools which had fully bedded down the programme in order to explore what factors had influenced the successful uptake on a school level. Five staff from three schools provided insights
- **Focus group with WAFNI staff using Ketso mapping.** This allowed exploration of what they saw as strengths of Helping Hands and the training, any areas for improvement or areas that they have seen as particularly challenging for teachers, and suggestions for future development.



# Findings

## How much did they do?

In this section the delivery of the programme across Northern Ireland is described.

### Number of schools

Out of a potential 811 schools listed in the database, a total of 489 schools had engaged with Helping Hands training (this figure does not include all special needs and preparatory schools in Northern Ireland).

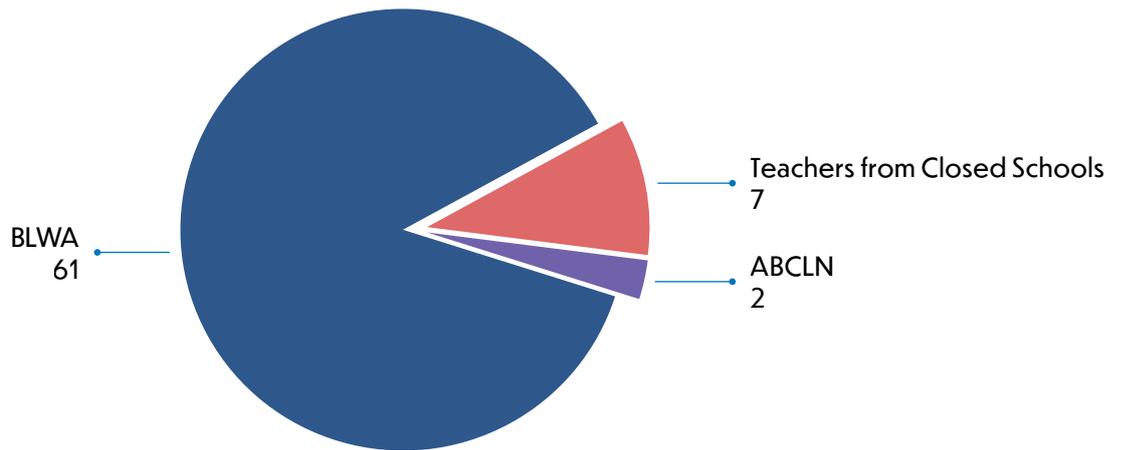
Helping Hands Social Guardian training has taken place in schools in every county in Northern Ireland. In terms of proportion of schools reached, the highest percentage of schools is in Co. Antrim (149 schools out of 185: 80.5%), followed by Co. Down (104 schools out of 167: 62.3%), Co. Armagh (32 schools out of 76: 42.1%), Co. Fermanagh (40 schools out of 44: 90.9%), Co. Tyrone (80 schools out of 123: 65%) and Co. Derry (83 schools out of 119: 69.7%). The list of schools in each town who have and have not yet received Helping Hands training is shown in Appendix 1.

It is useful to show schools within each Education Authority region and Women's Aid group. Many of these schools have more than one teacher trained.



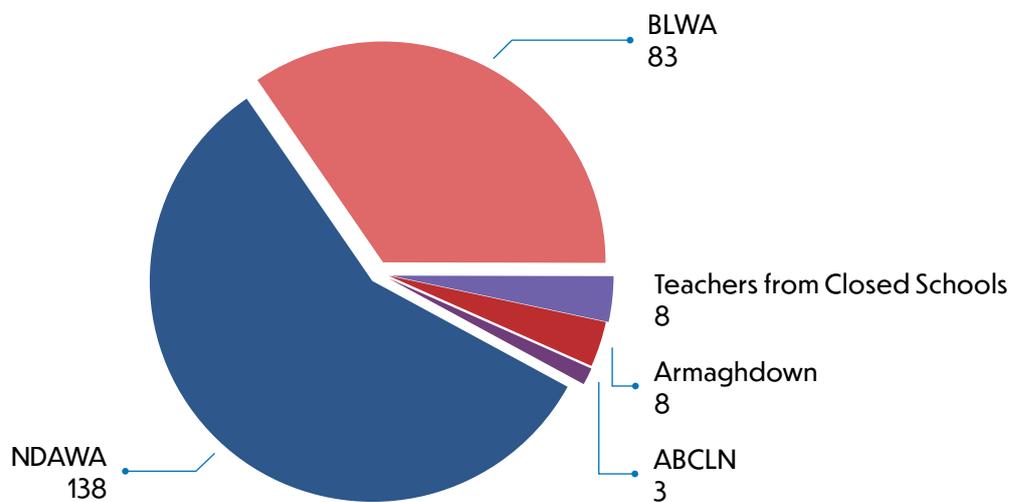
## Belfast area

In the Belfast area, a total of 70 schools have teachers who have been trained.



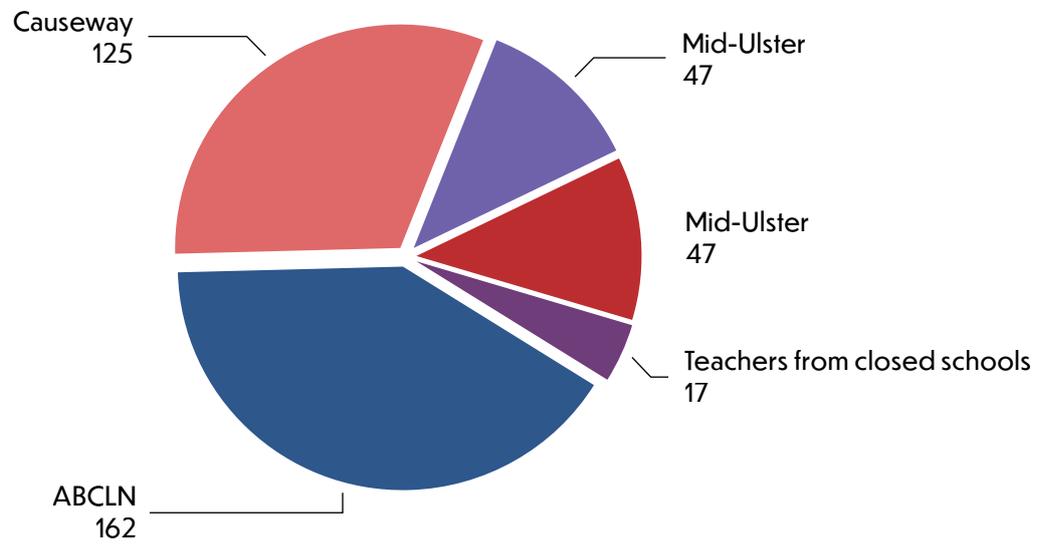
## South-Eastern area

In the South-Eastern area, there are 240 schools who have a teacher who has received training.



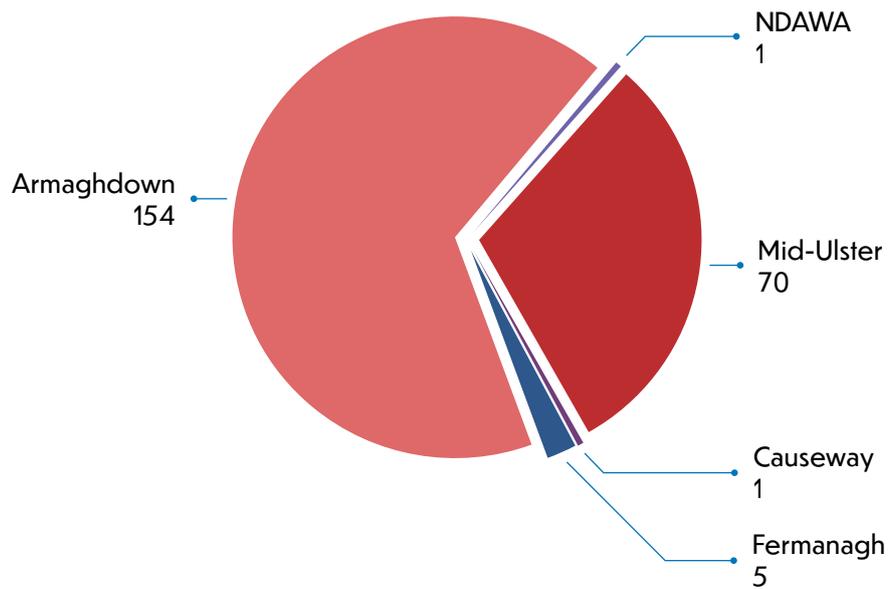
## North-Eastern area

In the North-Eastern area, 352 schools have one or more teachers trained in Helping Hands.



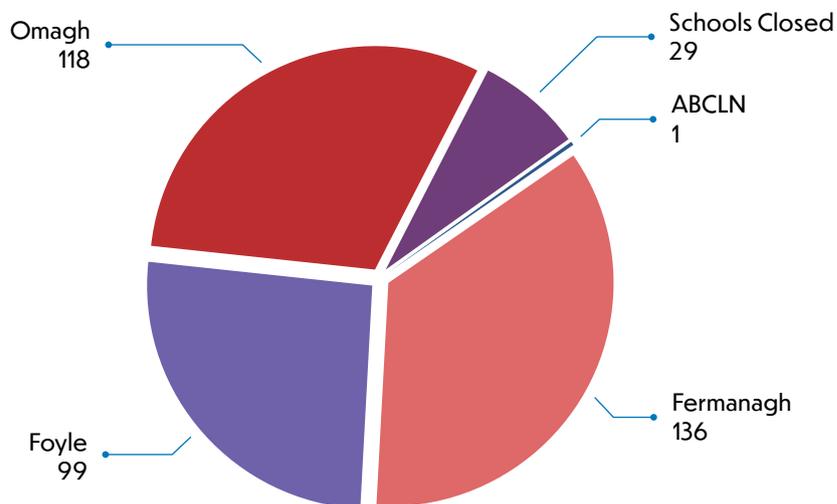
## Southern area

In the Southern area, 237 schools have one or more teachers trained in Helping Hands.



## Western area

In the Western area, 383 schools have had one or more teachers trained.



## How well did they do it?

As part of the two-day training session, every teacher completes a pre-course questionnaire and a short post-course questionnaire comprising quantitative and qualitative information. A total of 898 questionnaires was analysed for this evaluation.

Overall, the attendees at the training were very satisfied with the content and delivery.

Most felt the training provided them with information and knowledge that would be of future use in safeguarding children (94.8%; n=852) (Figure 1). Most felt that the training was presented in a clear and organised manner (94.8%; n=851) (Figure 2). Most felt the trainer was able to answer any questions they had (95.1%; n=852) (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Teachers who felt the training provided them with information and knowledge that will be of future use in safeguarding children

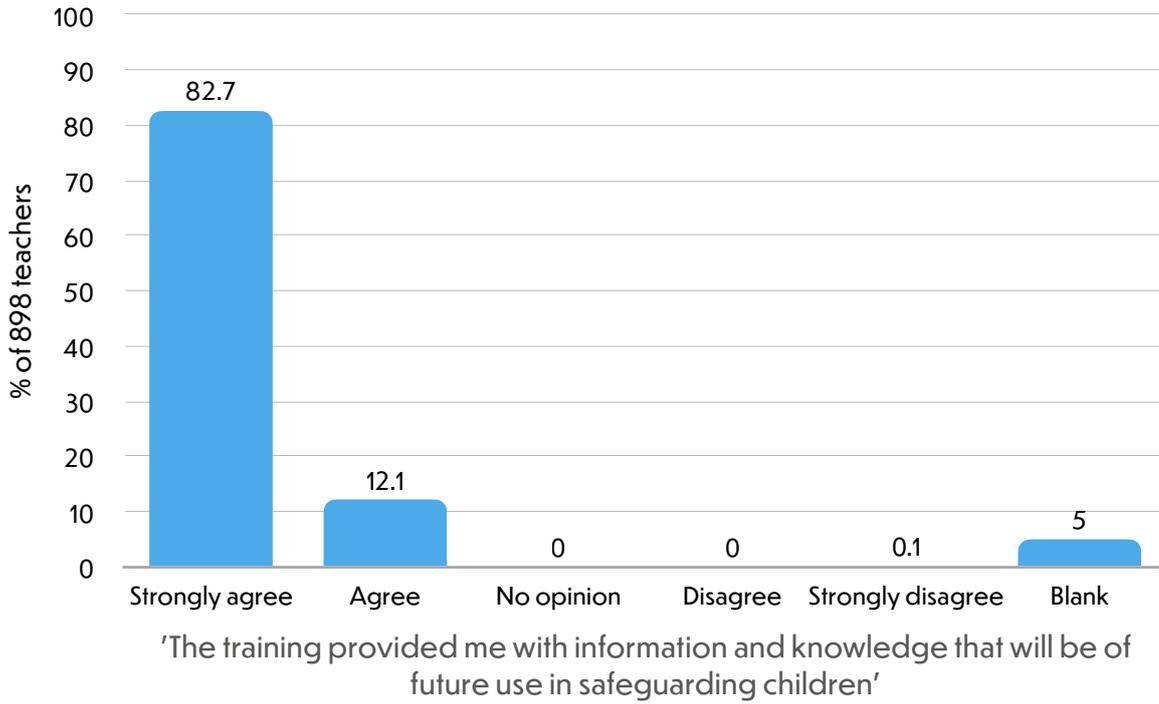


Figure 2: Whether teachers felt the training was provided in a clear and organised manner

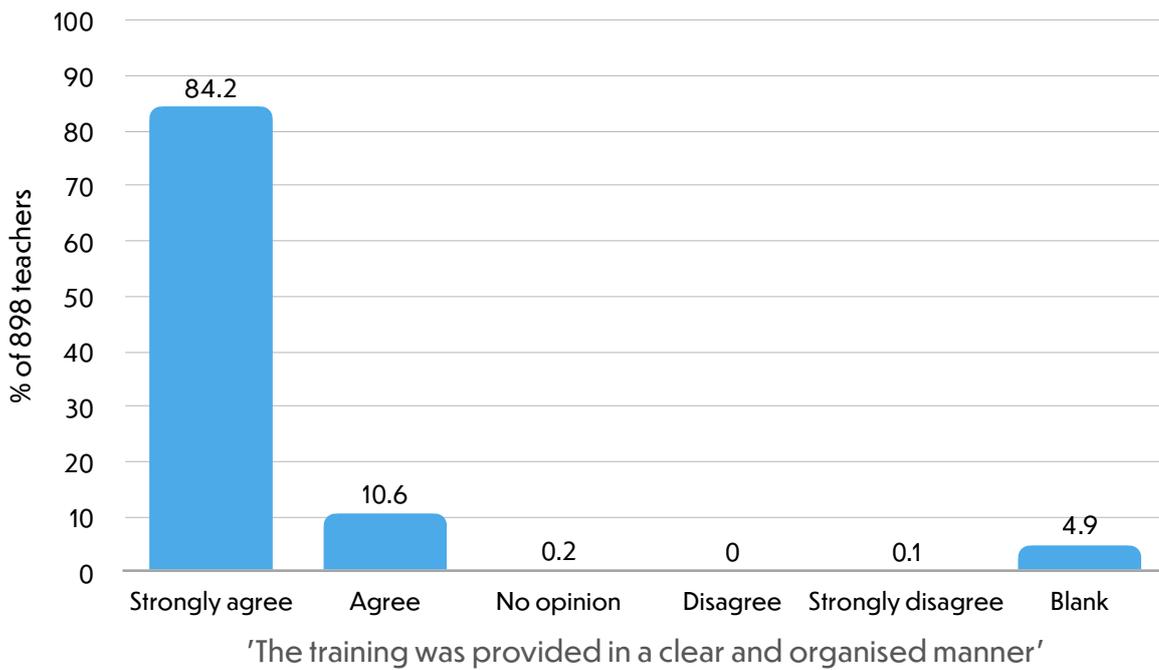
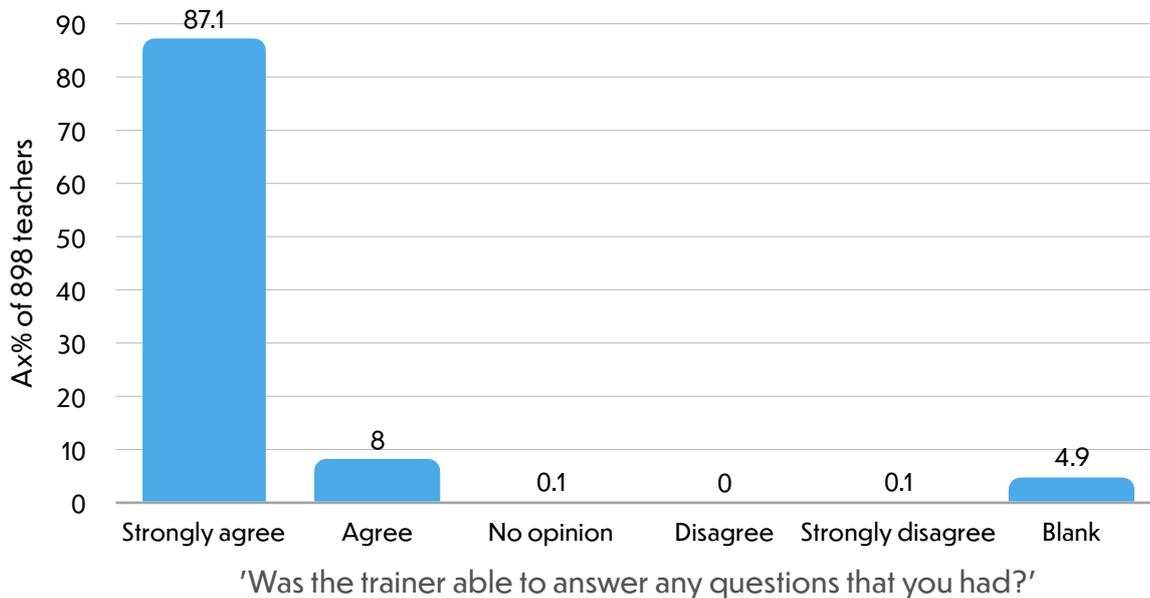


Figure 3: Whether teachers felt the trainer was able to answer any questions they had



Teachers in the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and in the interviews highlighted the importance of being able to actually do the exercises as part of the training. They also valued hearing other teachers' experiences and sharing ideas with other schools. Several teachers mentioned in the questionnaire at the end of the training session, that they had found the statistics and the video particularly powerful in changing their understanding of domestic violence and abuse.

"The opportunity to go through the materials in a practical group activity was really useful and has given me confidence to be able to deliver these elements."

"The clear explanation how domestic violence and how it can affect the children in my class. Having time to hear other people's experiences and how they handled them."

"To have opportunity to discuss the issues with colleagues has been very helpful."

"I now have more awareness of how a child might be affected by an unstable home life. It was useful to have resources to promote discussion/disclosure, and opportunities to hear from other schools about how they deal with issues."

"Both presenters were excellent and kept the presentation at a very useful, manageable pace."

"Both trainers were passionate, informed and dedicated to the work they do. Lots of scenarios were

shared making it very real for us. Although it was intense at times due to subject matter the ladies made it brilliantly enjoyable and a pleasure to be part of."

"It was a course I felt I learned a great deal from in a secure and stress-free environment. Trainers were excellent!"

The quality of the resources were highly and consistently praised in all the data we examined for this evaluation. Teachers liked the structure, the visual attractiveness of the materials, and that they were child-friendly, age-appropriate, colourful and fun. They felt the programme could be easily implemented within the classroom/ school setting. Helping Hands would complement other initiatives in the school, existing policies and procedures, and make a useful contribution to PDMU and other curriculum requirements.

"The resources are excellent - bright and appealing. The Teachers' Handbook is well structured, with many ready-made classroom friendly ideas and activities - perfect for busy teachers!"

"This is an excellent resource for teaching KS2 children. It is very important for children to have protective behaviours in place and for them to have access to help lines etc. if they need help. The booklet for the children is fabulous and gives them time to think about who they could turn to if they needed help."

"Bright, clear, well planned resource & lesson ideas, easily adapted for whole school."

"Bright, colourful, child friendly materials. Easily fitted into current PDMU topics."

"Brilliant pack of resources and teachers like some ready-made activities to add their own stamp to and help empower children to know how to stay safe."

"Brilliant, well designed and appropriate resource. Engaging and very user friendly. Strong issues supported from the very basic elements through to more complex."

"Can be adapted to suit any class. Facilitator's notes very comprehensive. Child's book attractive - would enjoy."

"Clear strategies and concepts that reflect objectives of N.I curriculum."

"I am delighted to bring these resources back to the staff in our school and can see them being fully implemented throughout the school. This has been one of the best courses I've attended, and I've been teaching for 24 years."

"It's very child friendly and based on children's experiences. It focuses on key points, and is manageable and approachable. The resources spark good discussion for children to share and express their views and feelings."

"Kids may find this more suitable to them especially if they prefer drawing/writing than talking. Very self-explanatory - lots of conversation needed but activities are child friendly."

"Very child friendly and not intimidating. Really believe this will help some of the children in my class."

"Very child friendly. Eases the children in gently."

"Very good resources. Age appropriate and teacher resources gives further examples of extension activities."



## Feedback from Women's Aid staff

A focus group was held with Women's Aid team who have experience delivering training on Helping Hands. This explored what they saw as strengths and challenges with the training, what changes they saw in teachers as a result of the training and suggestions for how it could be developed in the future.

The trainers saw the strengths of the training as including:

- Getting teachers out of the school environment to a different location. This enabled them to focus on the material without distractions, helped with shifting mindsets and changing attitudes
- The pacing of the training was deliberately set to gently expose and immerse attendees in the challenging material about domestic violence and abuse the first day, but do this in a supportive way. Presenting the local statistics tended to have a shock-value for attendees, but was useful for engaging them with why the training was important. Talking about the daily reality of domestic violence and abuse helped attendees to understand why women don't just leave, and the extent to which children are affected. Many of the trainers spoke about the emotional catharsis that many people experienced, and the importance of modelling self-care with the group. The two-day element was seen as key in allowing attendees time to absorb the information being presented and then develop their strategies to respond and use what they have learnt
- The mixture of presentation, discussion and practical exercises was seen by the trainers as working well with groups, as it offered opportunities to ensure attendees were taking on board the information and thinking about how to make it relevant and useable within their classrooms
- The mix of the group from different schools was seen as helpful in creating an atmosphere for peer support, and sharing of ideas and experiences
- The skills and practice experience of the facilitators was seen as important. They were able to draw on anonymised experiences to feed into discussions and to highlight key points. This allowed for flexibility in tailoring some of the content to the group, whilst ensuring core points were sufficiently covered
- Building up two-way relationships with the teachers was also seen as critical. After the training ended, the Women's Aid staff remained in ongoing contact providing support to schools. Schools approached Women's Aid for advice and to make referrals, but also provided support such as fundraising and highlighting Helping Hands to other teachers at presentations
- The professional accreditation of the programme was seen to provide credibility to the work, alongside the reputation of Women's Aid
- The Teacher's guide, presentation slides and resources are all visually appealing and well received by teachers when they first see them
- Teachers appreciated getting the box of resources at the end of the training
- Having the funding for the teachers to attend and for sub-cover were important.

Trainers were asked to identify what types of challenges they had experienced during the training. These included:

- Teachers are all individuals. Some come with positive and some with negative approaches. The flexible style of delivery and being able to respond to queries as they arose during the training were seen as helpful strategies in cases where people were coming with quite fixed mindsets. Highlighting the importance of doing something versus not doing anything was also helpful to discuss in these situations. For example, a teacher may have received information that there is domestic violence occurring in a family, but not done anything differently themselves because they feel they know the family and have never personally seen any issues, or they don't want to be seen as interfering and lose the relationship they have with the family. The style of the training allows space for situations like these to be constructively thought through in terms of what a teacher can do
- Sometimes there can be some fear in the group at the start of the training session. Few teachers feel comfortable with the topic. Some feel constrained that they do not always know a family's full circumstances because of confidentiality etc. This can lead to them feeling powerless about what they can do to help children. The trainers felt that the pacing of the sessions helped with this and the overall ethos of the training being one of empowering the teachers with practical strategies that they could use in the classroom. Being able to talk about their concerns, and hearing how other schools dealt with similar challenges were also seen as helpful during the sessions
- The main barriers that teachers talk about during the training that they anticipate will make it harder for them to use in practice relate to time and the cost of the booklets. The trainers try to address this by giving time on the second day of training for teachers to develop strategies for how they will use the programme when they return to school, and ensuring that every teacher attending the training gets a box with enough booklets to deliver to one class. They also have to deliver the programme within six months of attending the training
- Sometimes teachers who have attended the training come back to do it again. This may happen because of Helping Hands being a whole school approach, so if a teacher moves school someone in that new school needs to be trained.

Facilitators talked about the changes they tended to see in the teachers during the two days of the training. These included teachers:

- Initial shock at the prevalence of domestic violence, moving to a conviction that things can and must change
- Teachers showing a greater understanding and empathy for family's and children's experiences and the importance of emotionally supportive learning environments
- Moving from being afraid of intervening at the start, to empowered and feeling they have the right tools to tackle the issue
- Developing a greater understanding of the difference they personally can make

- Having a greater knowledge about the support available and how to access this
- Relief in being able to discuss their concerns and share ideas with other teachers.

After the two-day training, there is often ongoing communication with the teachers and school which may be around general support in using Helping Hands, advice about individual cases, or schools fundraising for Women’s Aid and showcasing the work being done.

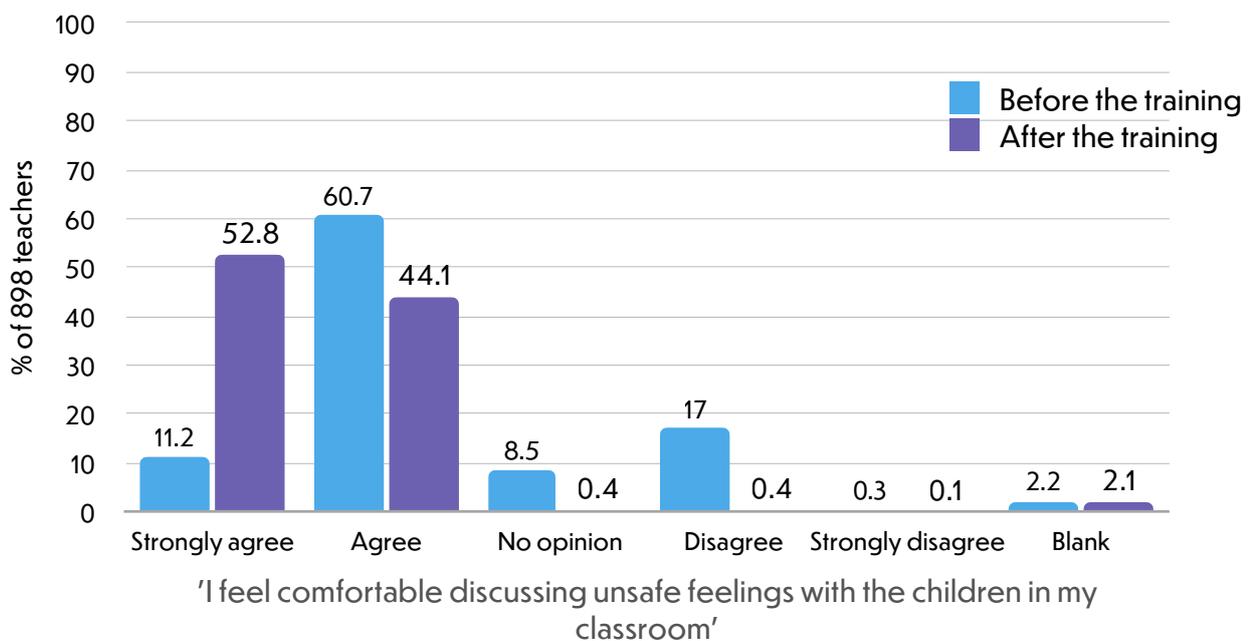
## Is anyone better off?

### Pre-and Post-training course questionnaire for teachers

Teachers completed a questionnaire at the start and end of the two-day training, providing a pre-post measure. They reported several improvements in their knowledge, confidence and skills as a result of the course.

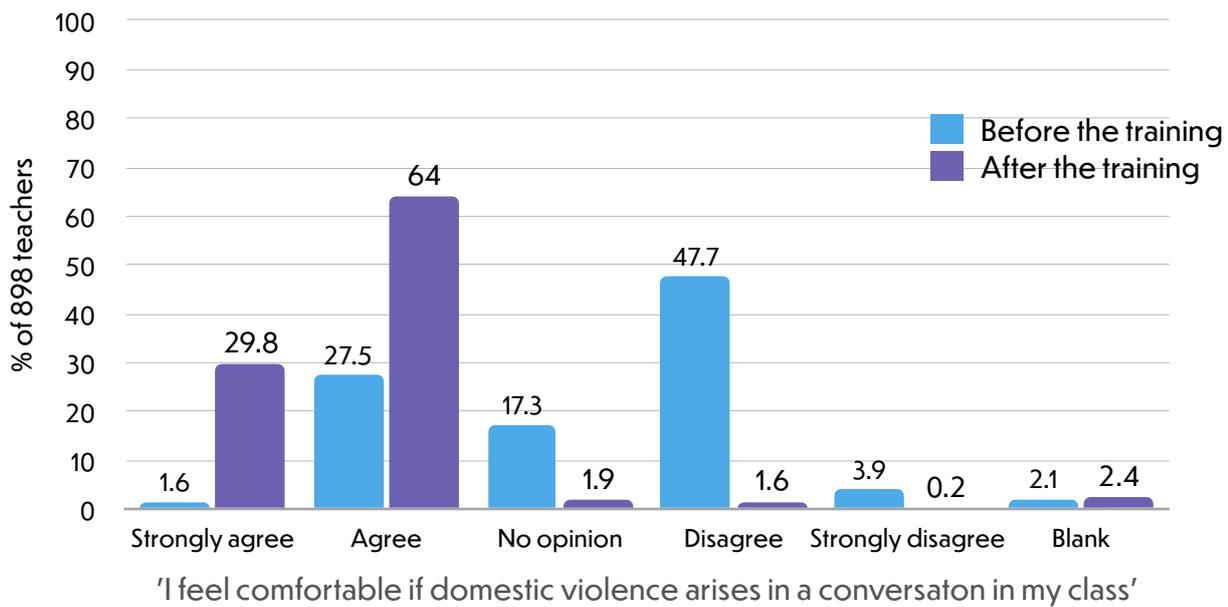
Teachers felt more comfortable discussing unsafe feelings with the children in their school following the course (96.9% compared to 71.2% at the start of the course) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Teachers’ ratings of how comfortable they feel discussing unsafe feelings with the children in their classroom (pre- and post-training)



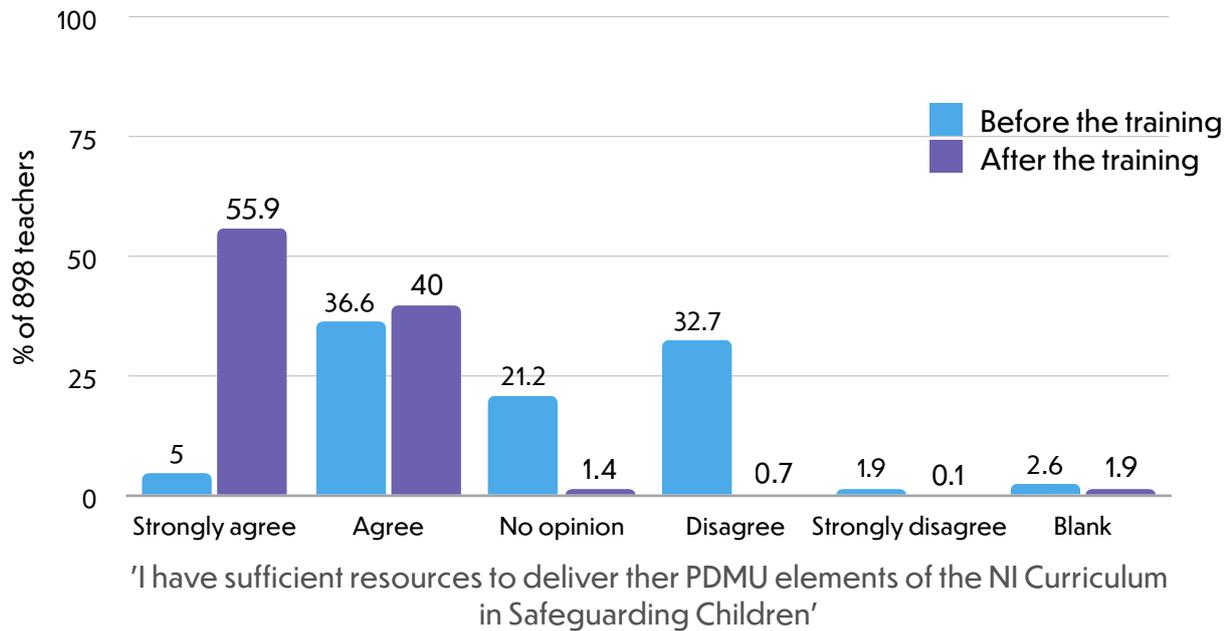
At the start of the course, less than a third of the teachers said they would feel comfortable if domestic violence arose in a conversation with the children in their school (29.1%: n=261). By the end of the course there was a dramatic improvement in their confidence with nearly all the teachers saying they would now be comfortable with these conversations (93.8%: n= 842) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Teachers' ratings of how comfortable they would feel if domestic violence arose in a conversation with the children at their school (pre- and post- training)



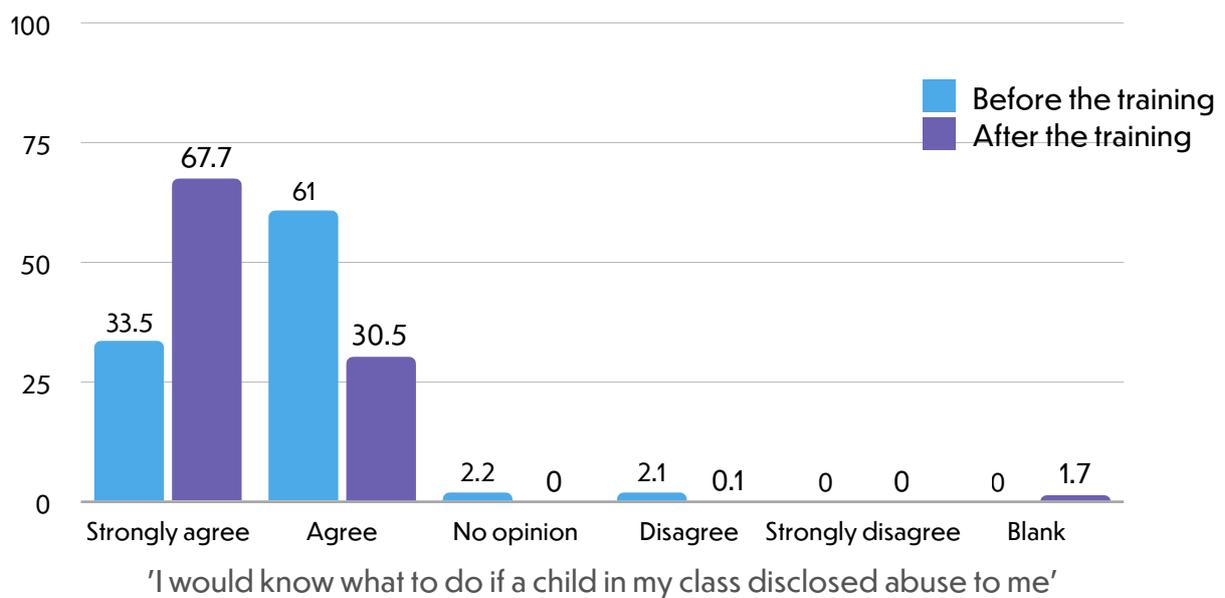
At the start of the course fewer than half of teachers felt they had sufficient resources to deliver the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) elements of the NI Curriculum in Safeguarding children (41.6%: n=374). Teachers felt better prepared after the course, with nearly 96% of the teachers feeling that they now had enough resources (n=861) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Teachers' ratings of whether they had sufficient resources to deliver the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding elements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum in Safeguarding children (pre- and post-training)



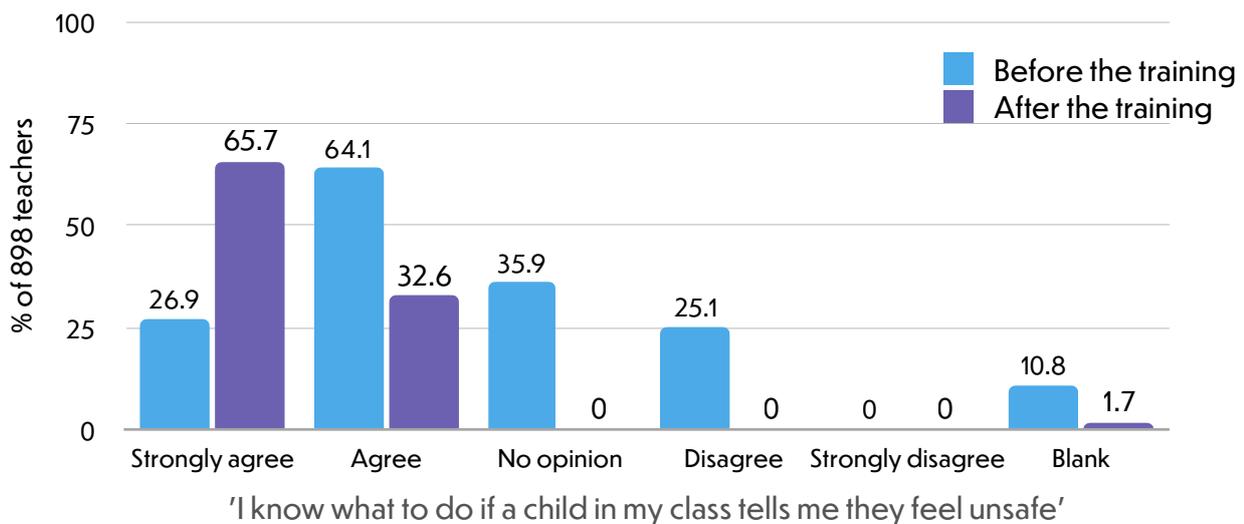
Although most teachers at the start of the course were confident that they would know what to do if a child in the classroom disclosed abuse to them, there was still an increase in confidence (94.5%; n=849 at the start and 98.2%; n=882) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Teachers' ratings of whether they would know what to do if a child in their class disclosed abuse to them (pre- and post-training)



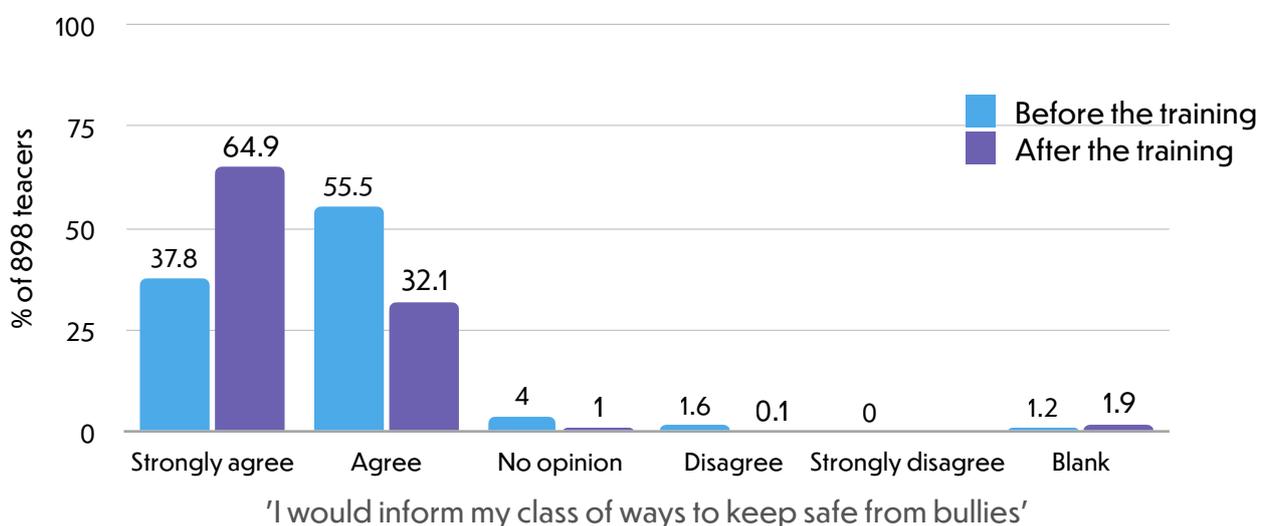
At the start of the course most teachers said they knew what to do if a child in their class told them they felt unsafe (91%; n=818). A quarter of the teachers felt they did not know what to do (25.1%; n=28). Teachers were more confident at the end of the course with 98.3% (n=883) saying they would know what to do and no one now saying that they did not know (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Teachers' ratings of whether they would know what to do if a child in their class told them they felt unsafe (pre- and post-training)



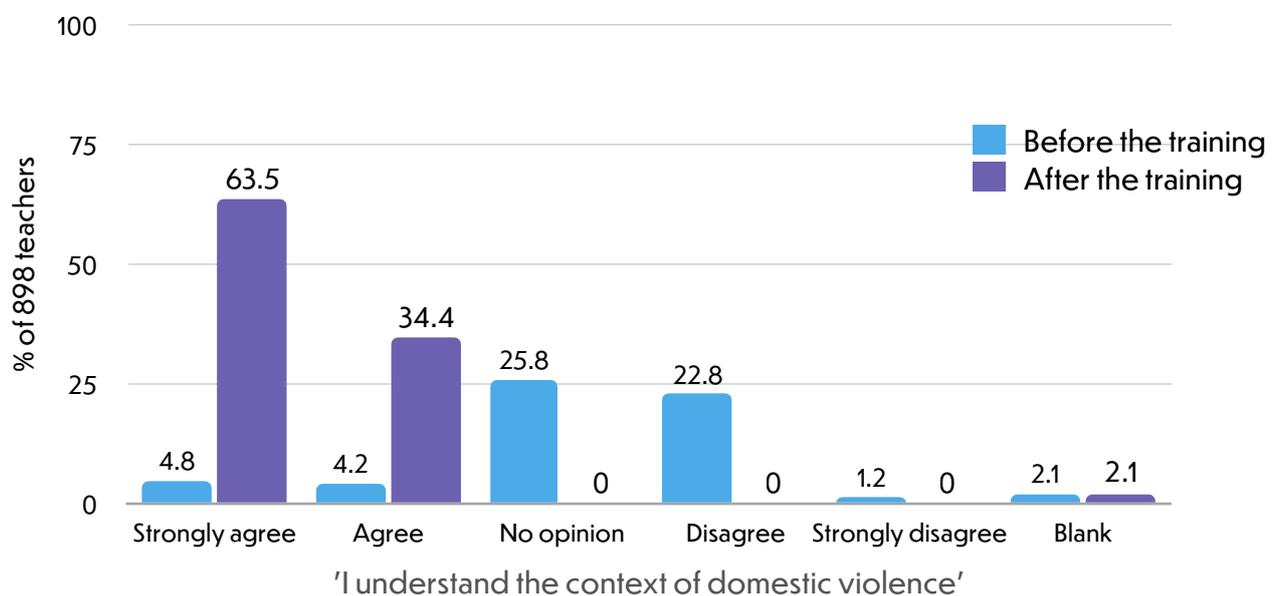
Similarly, most teachers said they informed their class of ways to keep safe from bullies (93.3%; n= 837). By the end of the course, there was a slight increase in confidence (97%; 871), with fewer teachers now disagreeing (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Teachers' ratings of whether they would inform children in their class of ways to keep safe from bullies (pre- and post-training)



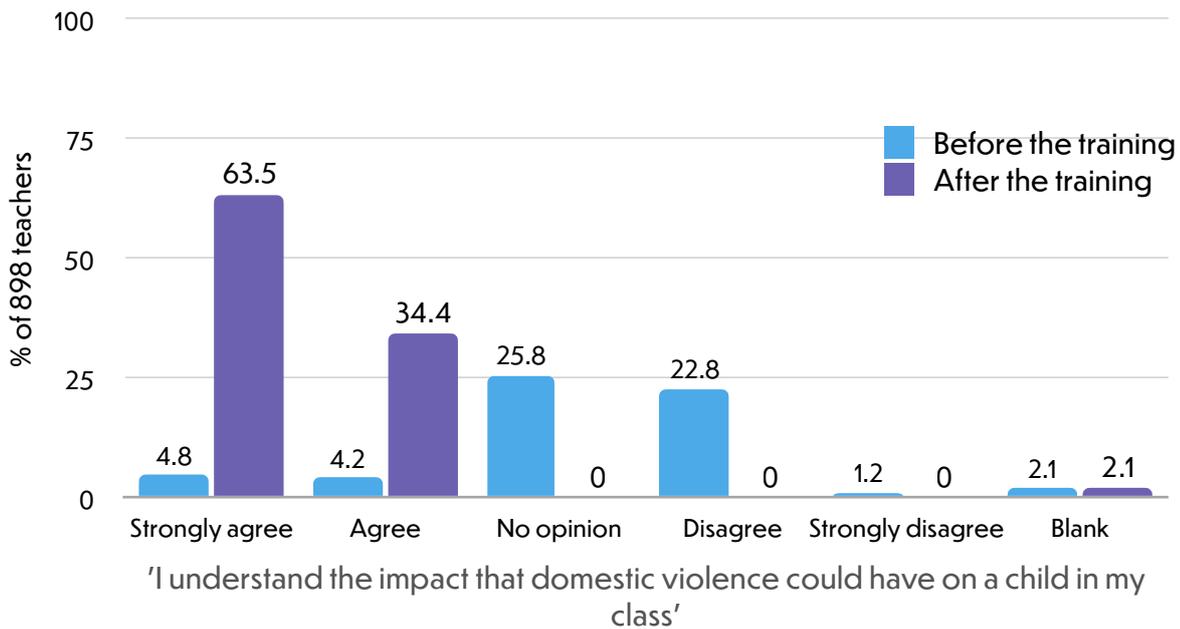
Attending the course led to teachers having a better understanding of domestic violence. Fewer than one in 10 of the teachers said they understood the context of domestic violence at the start of the course (9%; n=431), and around quarter of the teachers said they did not understand it (24%; n=211). This increased substantially by the end of the course with most teachers now saying they understood the context (97.9%; n=879), and no one saying they did not understand it (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Teachers' ratings of whether they understood the context of domestic violence (pre- and post-training)



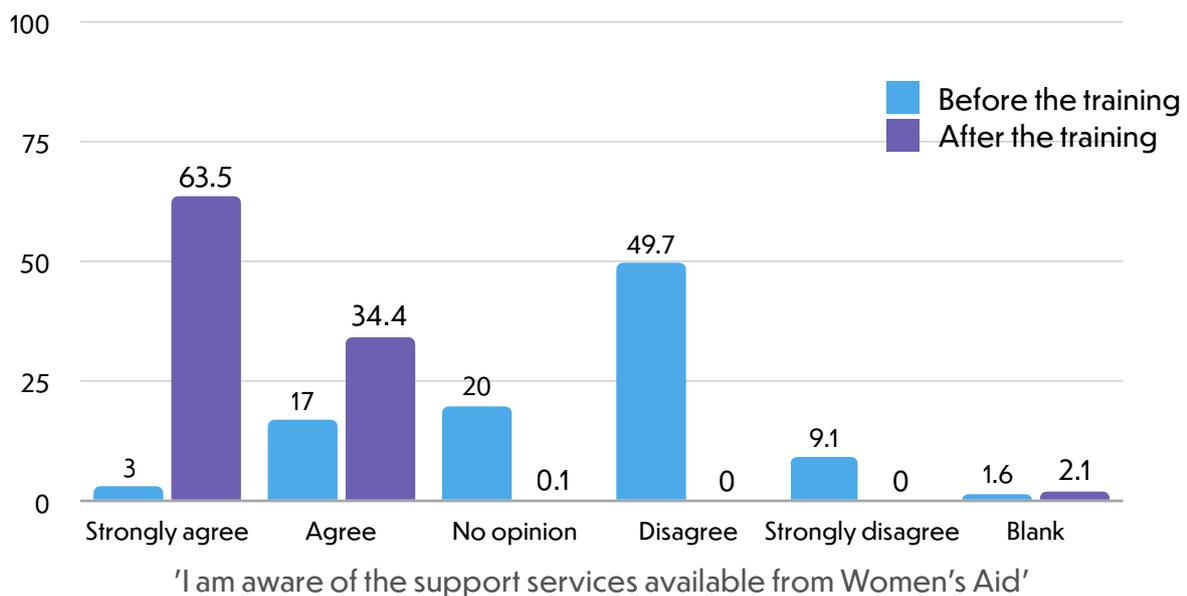
Just over 10% of the teachers strongly agreed at the start of the course that they understood the impact domestic violence could have on a child in their class (11.9%; n=107), and around half said they agreed (51%; n=458). A fifth said they did not understand this (21.1%; n=186). By the end of the course all the teachers said they understood the impact, with 70.9% strongly agreeing (n=637), and 27.3% agreeing (n=245) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Teachers' ratings of whether they understood the impact that domestic violence could have on a child in their class (pre- and post-training)



Attending the course gave teachers a much better understanding of the support services available from Women's Aid for teachers and children. Only a fifth of the teachers said they knew what was available at the start (19.6%; n=176). This increased substantially, so by the end of the course nearly all the teachers said they understood the support available (97.8%; n=878) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Teachers' ratings of whether they understood the support services available from Women's Aid for teachers and children (pre- and post-training)



There were consistent themes in the open-ended responses to whether the teachers would access further support from their local Women’s Aid group. Most teachers said they would, because they valued the skills and expertise of the Women’s Aid staff. It was important to them that there was an opportunity for ongoing support and relationship after the training. This reassured them greatly and was a theme in both the training questionnaires and the interviews.

“Absolutely, this has been a complete revelation and it is so comforting to know that Women’s Aid are there to contact for support.”

“I would contact Women’s Aid as a reference point, if I have any queries about discussions with children e.g. disclosures. Women’s Aid are experts dealing with these issues – we teachers only touch the surface.”

Most of the 898 attending the training stated that the Helping Hands programme had not been delivered previously to a class they had been teaching (76.6%; n=688) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Whether teachers attending the two-day training had been teaching a class who has already experienced the Helping Hands programme**

Has the Helping Hands programme been delivered previously to a class you have been teaching?	Number of teachers (n=898)	%
Yes	207	23.1
Unsure	7	0.8
No	688	76.6
(blank)	12	1.3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>

At the end of the two-day training, feedback about what they had learnt in relation to specific areas of knowledge was extremely positive. Nearly all the teachers felt that the course increased their knowledge of:

- the concept of social guardians (94.4%; n=848)
- the Helping Hands programme (95.1%; n=854)
- strategies to safeguard all children who do not feel safe (83.5%; n=850)
- strategies to safeguard children affected by domestic violence (94.8%; n=851).

Most teachers felt training helped to create a shared language and tools for themselves and the children in their classroom to discuss feelings and safety (94.7%; n=851), and they now felt confident to deliver the Helping Hands programme to children in their class (94.1%; n=845).

All the teachers readily recommended the training to other teachers and would recommend Helping Hands as an educational resource to other teachers of Key Stage Two children. Some of the teachers' open-ended feedback is provided below:

"Excellent course, a must for any teacher."

"100% all teachers should have the opportunity for this training."

"Would be beneficial to all KS2 teachers."

"All educational professionals should access training & all adults who come into daily contact with children. Brilliant delivery. Contentious but necessary."

"A fantastic resource. Provides a range of activities, with step by step guidance of how you can plan your lessons. Looking forward to trying it out in our school."

"A fantastic resource that my teaching partner and I will be using to write PDMU scheme of work with close links to Helping Hands resources! I have found this course invaluable!"

"A refreshing approach to dealing with many real issues that arise in school/at home. Gives the children life skills for staying safe and prepares the teacher with the best way of working with such scenarios."

"A resource that can be adapted well to many KS2 topics especially for P7 transition issues and preparation for future relationships they will develop."

"A super resource - very well structured and lots of ideas for further activities included. Links to NI curriculum included and learning intentions listed."

"A very manageable programme, bright, attractive and high-quality visual resources."

"Absolutely! It is child friendly and easy to slot into a school week."

## Impact of the two-day training

The qualitative data from the questionnaires and interviews was very consistent in terms of what teachers said the training had impacted. Some teachers highlighted the impact on their knowledge, motivation, confidence and practice, while others talked about how it would improve outcomes for young people.

Some highlighted that they felt differently about how their role as a teacher and were more empowered to act.

"I have learnt how to use Helping Hands as a tool. Feeling safe is a right. We have a responsibility to do something - doing nothing is not an option."

"It has given me a variety of strategies to help children talk about their feelings. Confidence in own abilities or strengths. To go with my 'gut'."

"A better understanding of feelings and a more sensitive approach."

"Opened my eyes to things that could be happening that you wouldn't think would actually be happening. Made you think and makes you become more alert to possible cases. Became aware of more strategies to deal with cases of this."

"It was provoking – I'm shocked by this, particularly the Statistics – I'm shocked at the volume. Some good ideas emerged through group lesson planning."

"I know now that I can have an impact."

"That there are clear dangers to children in our care and as teachers we have a role as social guardians. We have a key role in helping children keep safe and realise uncomfortable/unsafe scenarios."

"Realising it is good to talk about issues with pupils in my class."

"It has broken down the fear I have about approaching the topic of domestic abuse. I'm actually really excited about delivering it and feel it is such an essential part of teaching and developing the whole child."

"I am a lot more passionate and eager to teach my children to voice their opinions and develop strategies to cope."

"I will place much more importance on the preventative education."

Some teachers talked about how it had increased their understanding of what the reality of domestic abuse is for children and families, and increased their empathy:

"I have a better understanding of domestic abuse, how deeply impacted children can be, and the warning signs. I know now there are resources to help, places to refer children/parents on to, also that there is help available for me."

"To remember each pupil is an individual with unique backgrounds/experiences. There are valid reasons why women/men 'stay' when onlookers feel they should 'go' and leave the place of domestic violence. Children wear masks, keep secrets and are protective of what happens at home... we need to be aware of this."

"There are more children than you think at risk. The definite ways to make a child feel comfortable if they need to make a disclosure. Mainly how to teach a child to be more self-aware - understand their feelings and early warning signs why they are there, and what to do when things are not okay."

"I was forced to try to see things from a child's point of view."

"I think this learning will make me think more about children's home situations and the importance of teaching healthy relationships and feeling safe."

"More aware of varying backgrounds from which children come in from in the morning. Need reminded from time to time that everyone's household is not like my own."

It was important to teachers that they now knew what to look for and what symptoms a child living with domestic violence might be showing:

"I now know that domestic violence is not just physical."

"The signs and effects that a child may exhibit if they are going through a dramatic event."

"Recognition that not all children 'present' in the same way with regards to abuse. Helped me to develop and explore ways to deal with/help those who have suffered abuse, but also gave me very valuable tools to aid with the children's coping strategies."

Teachers valued the practical skills that they had gained from the training:

"I now know what domestic violence is and its impact, why domestic violence continues, how to deliver group sessions."

"Other strategies schools use to support children - worry boxes, 'Muddles' etc."

"Role of Women's Aid highlighted. Seriousness of domestic abuse/violence. How we can help and provide children with strategies/avenues of hope."

"Signs to look for in a child suffering abuse/domestic violence. The protocol on how to deal with it. I am not the investigator, but I can do something. Knowledge of level of abuse within our society - it's shocking."

"Signs to look for re: children affected by domestic violence. Increased awareness and appreciation of the importance of early intervention. Appreciation of how domestic violence impacts on a child's learning/wellbeing at school. Developing effective communication skills and appreciating the level that non-verbal communication impacts on a situation."

"How children really feel when they are unsafe and how we all display different levels of stress in difficult situations."

"Greater understanding on difficulties faced by children who may live in a home where domestic violence is present. How important it is for children's emotional welfare to be assessed and supported. Very practical support and resources in carrying out Helping Hands programme. Importance of shared language."

"More awareness of how children may be carrying burden/worries from home to school. Helped me understand how as a teacher, we can be a very important go between for the child who has concerns. Helping Hands is an excellent resource for teaching specific areas."

Knowing how to respond to a disclosure was seen as a particularly valuable skills that the teachers had learnt:

"How abuse affects a child. The right things to say to a child who relays a disclosure."

"Keep calm and talk to the child. Listen to what they say – accept it, reassure the child, record appropriately and report appropriately."

"The ability to approach difficult topics with children in a child friendly manner. I feel more confident about dealing with a child who discloses something to me."

Teachers also spoke about how Helping Hands would have an impact of the children in their classrooms such as helping them to understand feelings, communication, and increase their skills around keeping safe:

"It will help children to understand the importance of understanding their own feelings, to talk about their feelings and to know that it is very important to ask for help so that they can find solutions for themselves."

"I think it will help me to get the children to think more carefully about their own safety and also how they have a responsibility for making others feel safe."

"Helps children understand their emotional feelings and respond/cope in an appropriate way."

"Great for emotional/social learning skills."

"Help develop pupils' self-esteem, awareness and understanding of their feelings. Improve strategies to support child in feeling safe."

"An excellent resource that is engaging, fun and thought provoking. Will provide excellent information. On a personal note, a family member is suffering domestic violence and the training highlighted to me the need to offer her more support and help."

"This resource will provide my kids with life-long strategies."

"Helping children understand how to differentiate between feeling scared in situations like movies/Halloween, and being in situations that make them scared and secrets that are ok/not ok to keep."

Many of the teachers highlighted how this training would help them to deliver PDMU, and it complemented other initiatives and policies within the school:

"This course has completely changed my thinking and we will now use the Helping Hands programme as part of PDMU throughout our school. I am inspired and empowered!"

"It will definitely enhance it with fantastic resources and my professional development. I understand elements of PDMU much better now."

"Had not appreciated links with PDMU which I feel makes 'Helping Hands' more acceptable to parents. Always take it down to personal level - say to children how you feel ... when you feel ... before you ask them to do something/express feelings."

"Importance of making more time for children's needs. Feel more comfortable/confident about covering sensitive issues."

"A very comprehensive course that would fulfil several PDMU strands effectively. It is much more engaging for the children than some of our current resources, and I think much more informative and real to life."

"It will change the way I structure PDMU lessons - make them less 'closed' and more open to children to respond."

"It will change the way I teach PDMU entirely, with clear planning, clear objectives and goals and exciting resources. More of a focus on the child's own life outside school community."

"A very helpful ready-made programme which covers many aspects of the PDMU programme for KS2."

"Fits well with PDMU, RSE, NSPCC programme. Serious messages appropriate."

"There is a strong correlation between PDMU, and the work outlined in Helping Hands. I think they dovetail perfectly. Teachers would be more likely to use them as they are not additional workload - they supplement what we already use."

"The programme will slot in with current work on PDMU/ alongside the PATHS programme and Rights Respecting Schools. It is very specific and targets these difficult topics in an age appropriate way and it is manageable for all teachers."

"Materials provided - excellent & link well with Living Together resource."

"I will use alongside CCEA materials."

"It will enhance our current PDMU and Paths Plus programmes along with our other school pastoral policies."

"Great for circle time."

"I feel that the importance of PDMU has been really highlighted. Really looking forward to delivering it. More time will be given on the delivery of PDMU."

The style and content of the resources were praised by many teachers. They were seen as child-friendly, visually appealing and engaging:

"An excellent resource for the teaching of PDMU. Super curricular links and a fantastic, colourful, engaging resource."

"I think that the resources are a fantastic means of approaching difficult subjects without frightening pupils."

Several teachers commented on how Helping Hands would provide them with a structure to work within, but still flexibility to adapt for their own class and individuals within it. This mix of ready-made resources but opportunity to adapt was highly valued:

"Much easier to cover certain strands with a clear progression and framework."

"This will allow a very comprehensive detailed programme to be delivered with confidence that key skills/ideas will be dealt with in the right way for our children - improve the current provision with more structure for teacher."

"Facilitator's book great for ideas, and the sequence of activities just provides structure in exploring these issues."

"Great to have a resource I don't have to adapt - clear, visual, talking cards etc."

"I love the pack - It's so well laid out and easy to follow. It covers it all - language, what to do if disclosures etc. PDMU will be fun and progressive."

"Excellent course, relevant to all teachers as it can be used for dealing with children who not only have been affected by domestic violence but have difficulties with anger etc."

Teachers reported that the Helping Hands programme would be easy to implement within their schools and anticipated that it would fit well with other approaches. They said they were leaving the training with clear strategies for how to embed the programme within their schools:

"Excellent resources will enable me to incorporate this area into PDMU classes. There is certainly a place for it and can be built in without any fuss."

"As a newly appointed PDT, I would be seeking to review all our safeguarding pastoral care, PDMU provision throughout our school."

"Positive impact - key messages will impact children. Will also be displayed in school corridors. Not just knowledge - give children practical support/coping mechanisms."

"Prioritised the need to create a Helping Hands culture & how to ensure I am a Social Guardian."

"I will spend more time building relationships with pupils."

"Super ideas to further develop the work in PDMU & People Who Help Us topics."

"I will deliver the ethos of the training to the whole staff during an in-service day."

"Investment paid back 10 times."

## Summary

The pre- and post- training questionnaires showed a high level of satisfaction with the training. Teachers showed increased levels of confidence in their ability to support children with emotional resilience, as well as practical skills such as how to talk about sensitive areas, and how to support a child who is making disclosure. They learnt more about the signs, symptoms and impact of domestic violence, and felt the training equipped them with practical strategies that they could easily use within their classrooms and school.

Helping Hands was seen as useful addition to their professional practice, and one that they were keen to use as it would help them to fulfil their PDMU requirements, as well as improve outcomes for children and young people.

## Follow-up survey to teachers who had participated in training

A follow-up survey was sent electronically to all teachers who had participated in the two-day training to explore whether and how they had been able to use what they had learnt when they went back to school, and what difference it had made to their practice and classrooms. A total of 101 responses was received.

The findings show that school staff who participated in the training found it useful and useable when they returned to their classrooms. They reported that it has improved tangible skills and made real differences to what they do in the classroom, and in how confident they feel supporting young people and improving children's wellbeing. Once again, the feedback on the training programme is extremely positive.

Teachers reported that they learnt a lot of useful information and it increased their confidence in teaching PDMU and supporting young people within their classes:

- 98% felt it provided them with practical ideas to use in the classroom
- 98% felt better prepared to help children deal with unsafe feelings
- 91% were more comfortable with dealing with conversations in class about domestic violence
- 94% had been able to use what they had learnt to keep children safe from bullies
- 92% had been able to use what they had learnt to safeguard children
- 97% had been able to use their learning to create a shared language in class to discuss feelings and safety
- 97% felt better able to teach PDMU as a result of the training
- All respondents (100%) felt the training helped them understand the impact domestic violence could have on a child in their class
- All respondents (100%) felt the training helped them understand services and support available from Women's Aid
- 93% identified themselves as being social guardians.

In terms of how they used the Helping Hands sessions in their classroom following the training, most teachers (85%) had delivered Helping Hands sessions.

In terms of reasons why they had not been able to deliver Helping Hands sessions in the classroom, the main reason stated was lack of time:

- 27% reported that there had not been enough time to deliver Helping Hands in their classroom and a further 7% were not sure whether this had been a factor
- Most teachers agreed that they did have the right resources to be able to deliver Helping Hands. 12% reported that the resources were a barrier to delivering the programme (most teachers commented that the resources were of excellent quality. Some suggestions were made for future development around having resources for different ages or pre-verbal children/ learning difficulties, or making resources freely available to schools).

Teachers reported that the children's reactions to the programme were positive and it led to improved social interactions and better communication:

- 88% reported that children enjoyed using Helping Hands
- 63% reported that children's social behaviour improved as a result of Helping Hands, and 33% were not sure
- 86% reported children were able to keep safe from bullies as a result of Helping Hands and 10% were not sure
- 80% felt Helping Hands had improved communication within the classroom, and 16% were not sure.

Nearly all the teachers (95%) felt that the training had helped them develop new skills as a teacher, and they would recommend Helping Hands to other teachers (97%):

"An excellent course that is very informative and well placed. Thank you so much - I wish I had known about your organisation sooner."

"I thought the resources were fantastic. I would make this training compulsory for all teachers. This is one of the most memorable training sessions I have been on, and I have been teaching for 22 years."

"I felt the training was an excellent blend of active learning and facilitator led sessions."

"The booklet is very comprehensive, colourful and engaging for children. The training was of a high standard and facilitated by people that had the experience and knowledge of the impact that this training would have on children in the classroom. Great if more teachers had access to it."

"I really enjoyed the training. I feel so much more aware of what children might be experiencing and in a much better position to guide and support them. Since training I have encouraged two families

to contact Women's Aid after they disclosed what they were experiencing at home. A very useful service to have within our community."

"In my 17 years of teaching, this has been one of the best delivered and most relevant courses that I've been on. Keep the cycle going to refresh teachers who were on older courses. This course should be compulsory for all teachers. Keep up the great work."

Teachers found the resources straightforward to use after the training and felt well equipped to deliver the programme:

"The packs provided at training enable the programme to be used each year with little preparation. The programme is straightforward and easy to use with the class."

"The training and the resources provided at the course were excellent. Resources complemented and supported work that was already ongoing in the classroom."

"It is a particularly useful tool for foundation and KS1 classes. It is so well structured to support children with limited vocabulary and help them express their concerns at an early level."

"I completed the training some time ago but have felt confident using the resources provided on a 2-year cycle with my composite class."

Teachers reported that the children really engaged with Helping Hands and enjoyed it:

"The children look forward to their helping hands lessons each week. They help us to explore feelings, encourage children to discuss their feelings and build their resilience."

"We have used it with our P6 class for the last 2 years. They have really enjoyed it."

"A very practical, easy to use programme that was very successful with a P6/7 class. They enjoyed discussing the topics and completing the workbook."

"The children enjoyed the programme and were open to the discussion and awareness of feelings that it generated."

"Resources were easy to use. Big time commitment when running the programme given all the other curricular demands but worth the time spent."

Where teachers had not been able to implement the Helping Hands sessions after the training, this was described as being due to time constraints. Some of the teachers reported that even if they had not delivered actual sessions with the children, they still felt

they had changed their practice by drawing on the language and key elements of the programme such as using some of the activities:

"There is the danger of feeling overwhelmed at having to implement another initiative in an already busy environment."

"I would like to be sent a box of the books every year to deliver the programme as Principal doesn't always supply money for these."

"Without permission from the parents/ senior management, and due to industrial action, we are unable to implement new initiatives."

"As a school we agreed that the programme workbook would be delivered to KS2 children. As I am KS1, I have made use of practical tips and examples."

"Like all schools, we are finding it difficult to cover all subject areas and at times it would be good to devote more time to the programme. I feel it is a great tool though, and the key messages can be easily delivered."

I have taken aspects relevant to my age group and been able to adopt through small groups and whole class teaching."

"I have not had the chance to use the resource materials. However, I have used a number of activities and helped many children with their feelings, and in one case a disclosure as a result of the training I received."

Some teachers found the cost of the booklets prohibitive, given the limited budgets they had available. Suggestions included having the Department of Education provide ongoing funding for these resources or making them either printable or available in a cheaper format:

"I loved the Helping Hands booklets provided. However, I feel they are too expensive to buy - the pack costs £100 and this is the total amount of the money I have for my whole class! It would be great if the booklets could be made available at a much-reduced price."

"The two-day training is invaluable for staff CPD, and in how to deal with children affected by domestic violence in their classroom. I feel the booklet is excellent. However, teaching time is already stretched in schools. If these resources were available in editable ppt and worksheets that the teacher could adapt or relate to other areas of the curriculum, this would be extremely useful."

"Photocopiable resource and PowerPoint would be amazing. If schools could get resources online to print off for free every year so they could deliver it to their new classes."

## Feedback from interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 5 teachers from a sample of 3 schools purposively sampled as having fully embedded Helping Hands into their daily practice. This included two principals and three staff who had delivered the programme. All had attended the two-day training.

All spoke very highly of the Helping Hands programme, and how easy they had found it to implement it after attending the training. Factors which they saw as important to successful implementation are described below.

Helping Hands was seen as fitting easily and successfully with PDMU, thereby fulfilling a need that the teachers have to address anyway. These schools did not see Helping Hands as an additional piece of work, or something that they had to find time for. It was an integral piece that fitted with the school ethos of rights and respect, and helped them in practical ways to fulfil their existing mission.

The resources were seen as very child-friendly and engaging. Some of the interviewees note that there are many courses which have not been developed by teachers and these can be difficult to integrate into school life. In contrast to these, Helping Hands was seen to fit particularly well in the classroom. Teachers found it well-paced and easy to use without any need for adaptation. They described experiences of using it with whole classes, as well as individual children. One of the teachers described how it was used as an intervention with two children in a family at the request of Social Services in a case conference.

The quality of the training was seen as critical. This was in terms of the skills of the trainers, their experience and ability to change the teachers' attitudes. The first day of the training was seen as 'heavy-going' and very emotionally tough, but all the teachers said that this was essential in terms of getting their buy-in and motivating them that something needed to be done to support the young people. They had not appreciated the daily reality for children living with domestic violence, or understood the work of Women's Aid, and the first day was essential for this. The statistics were described as shocking but necessary. The second day of the training was also praised in terms of providing a good insight into the content of the programme and how to deliver it. Practical time for doing some of the

exercises, and opportunities to share ideas and work out strategies with teachers from other schools were seen as very helpful. This level of familiarity and planning made a real difference to the teachers when they returned to their own schools and they were able to 'hit the ground running' with implementation. They already had a plan of what they wanted to do so it was easier to get the programme up and running quickly.

The interviewees highlighted the importance of supportive environment and self-care within the schools. They reflected that attending the training and supporting families experiencing domestic violence could be emotional draining, and even potentially distressing for staff, and felt that the training had prepared them well for creating a supportive culture within the school. An important part of this was also knowing that they could contact Women's Aid for support and advice at any stage and they found this very reassuring.

These schools had all delivered the sessions to children in specific classes, but had gone beyond that to embed the programme and make it visually present in other aspects of school life. This included making reference to it in policies and procedures relating, for example, to pastoral care or bullying. It also included ensuring a common language was used by all the staff, and the programme was brought to life visually throughout the school by displaying posters or creating large art pieces done by the children such as a Helping Hands wall. These strategies were all seen as important in showing that Helping Hands was a key part of school life. They became a showcase for the messages and the common language, showed how important feelings were. These also became a point of conversation with parents, so the messages were widely shared, and parents were supportive of the school doing something to help their children's emotional development (it was not seen as threatening).

The schools highlighted the importance of having more than one member of staff trained and ensuring that it was a whole-school approach taken, rather than just in one classroom. The principals and teachers spoke of the importance of taking a whole-school approach. The recurring nature of the training meant that a strategic approach could be taken over several years to get staff trained and build up expertise in key roles within the school. They saw it as important to approach the training strategically so to begin by training senior staff who have specific leadership, pastoral care or safeguarding responsibilities first, then staff in middle-school (around P5), and then the other teachers. It was suggested that it would

also be useful to train classroom assistants if possible. The existing funding arrangements were seen as very helpful in opening up access to the training, and all the interviewees thought it was an extremely worthwhile investment of funding and time and would strongly recommend that all schools and all teachers avail of this training and use Helping Hands.

The teachers and principals highly valued the ongoing relationship with Women's Aid, and stressed the importance that it was not just 'drive-by' or stand-alone training. Some of the teachers highlighted that before they had attended the training they had not fully understood the services offered by Women's Aid, and had assumed it was more for women who needed legal aid. They felt it was important to have developed an ongoing relationship with Women's Aid and felt reassured that they could contact them for advice or support. This was important because they saw the Women's Aid team as having expertise and experience which they did not have in-house, and it was important to have their support in trying to navigate complex safeguarding situations. Importantly, it was not a matter of the schools making a referral and divesting themselves of responsibility or further action. They all talked about how the relationship helped them to do things differently themselves to support families, as well as linking the families in with specialist support where necessary. They did not feel that they would have made those links with Women's Aid without having attended the training.

Some interviewees suggested that there needed to be a stronger alliance between Women's Aid and the Education Authority so that this work could be put on a stronger footing strategically, alongside the trauma-informed approaches being supported regionally.

## Summary

The feedback across the various data collected for this evaluation is very positive and remarkably consistent. Helping Hands is seen as a useful programme that can be easily implemented in primary schools and which contributes usefully to children's wellbeing and to the delivery of the NI curriculum. The two-day training programme is highly valued by attendees, and it can lead to long-lasting changes in attitudes and practice. Teachers who participated in the training consistently highlighted the positive impact it had on

changing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation. They left the two-day training feeling more empowered to build young people's emotional resilience, and felt they now had clear, workable strategies about how to do this.

After the staff had returned to their classrooms, they still highly valued the training. They reported having been able to use what they learnt, both with individual and groups of children, as well as to improve the procedures and emotional environment within the wider school. Helping Hands was seen as a very useful addition to the support schools could provide, and directly contributing to PDMU, as well as other areas such as Child protection and bullying policies. It was seen to complement other programmes such as PATHs, without there being duplication.

All of the teachers had delivered the Helping Hands sessions, but some found it difficult to do this on an ongoing basis because of the cost of the resources. It was clear from the feedback that if cost had not been a barrier, they would have continued to deliver the sessions. Even when sessions were not being delivered after the first year post-training, the teachers still reported that the training had a long-lasting impact on how they supported and understood young people's needs and how to best support their emotional resilience. They all recommended the training for other teachers and it should be made widely available.

Teachers reported that they saw changes in the children who had participated in the Helping Hands sessions. They were more confident and better able to express themselves in healthy and non-confrontational ways. They saw these children as having developed important coping, problem-solving and communication skills for life as a result of having been exposed to the Helping Hands messages and activities.

# Recommendations

Teachers made some suggestions for future development. These are summarised here irrespective of whether they came from the questionnaires or interviews.

The most common suggestions made related to:

- providing booster or refresher sessions to 'top-up' training after a couple of years (possibly online)
- ensuring the programme was linked in strategically to wider educational initiatives
- having the opportunity to see the course being delivered in action by a Women's Aid member of staff
- providing this training to all teachers in all schools
- further developing the resources for younger children and older children
- developing a mentoring or buddy system whereby schools who are experienced in using the programme could provide support to schools being newly trained
- ensure all teachers are trained in this, possibly as part of their degree
- embed as part of Child protection training
- funding to be provided for the resources in class so schools do not have to cover the costs themselves
- reduce costs by providing resources that could be photocopied, or used online like an App.

More information is provided below around some of these suggestions. Several teachers said there was a need to further develop more age-specific resources:

"While the Helping Hands programme looks fantastic, it could be developed further by making workbooks specific to each key stage."

"I think persona puppets could be developed for foundation/ KS1. These puppets could have a story that could be explored through circle time activities and to help promote the same messages as I currently promote in P5 using Helping Hands."

"Would need to be altered some worksheets a tad easy/basic for key stage 2 (Suitable at P3/4 level at the moment. Lovely colourful and clutter-free book."

"Great resource - it could be extended to include a bit more thinking for key stage 2 pupils (P6/7)."

"I do think this resource could be adapted to KS1 too - to only recommend/use in KS2 seems limiting!"

"Possibly booklet more suitable for P4/5/6 - maybe a short follow up in P6/7 to reinforce what was taught in P4/5 would be useful e.g. a small booklet."

"Some parts do seem quite childish or more appropriate for younger children - not sure if P6/7 would talk to a teddy, though on other hand lot of content requires children to be older to comprehend and work through."

"Additional poems/stories/activities will be very helpful to supplement the programme. Can't wait to get using the programme in school."

"I would like further info/resources on relationships with others."

"Training, activities and resources for children with severe learning difficulties and who are also non-verbal."

The importance of all teaching staff attending this training was highlighted by many:

"All schools should use this resource and have training on domestic violence."

"Every school should be represented at these training courses."

"Elements could be introduced as part of Child Protection training for others working with children - sports coaches."

"Education board – Child Protection officers should be making schools aware of this training - valuable/essential. Educational Psychologists would benefit from this training as children as written off as having issues when in reality trauma. Should be essential part of teacher training."

I feel it would also be useful to KS1 teachers. Lovely, user friendly resources. Children and teachers will love these. A very informative and interesting two days. It is great to be leaving a course equipped with something that is ready to use.

Suggestions were made about how the training/ resources should be funded or costs reduced in the future:

"The Department of Education needs to fund follow up books/packs for all schools who have been trained, otherwise schools can't afford to buy the packs next year."

"Some schools are concerned over cost of booklets. The Board should fund it."

"Excellent resource but would be good to be able to photocopy pages as I feel booklets would be expensive resource in the future. However, also an excellent tool to help plan oral lessons, art and drama etc."

"I would suggest having a resource box/ pack, including the recommended books etc. for schools to buy. Or possible, an A4 page with a list of the books etc. that are recommended for use, e.g. Voices in the Park."

"Room for development (resource material), online access for children/app."

Several teachers suggested a follow-up or booster session to refresh knowledge, or to develop a community of practice so ideas and resources could be shared amongst schools:

"Perhaps a follow-up course after a few years – maybe a shorter refresher, as there was so much information. It would be good to revisit and discuss any updates in legislation or share good practice with other schools."

" Would love Women's Aid to deliver the course to the school as this would allow me an opportunity to see it delivered properly."

"Training was excellent – possible develop cluster groups between schools to share ideas and resources."

"Come into schools and do larger group training days, Inset training days etc. More staff need to hear this information."

The trainers also made suggestions for future development. These included:

- Update content such as the TED talks, trends and information, DVD and references to the See, Hear, Act strategy. Include trauma resources
- Develop resources for other ages
- Update every 3 years
- Develop ½ day refresher training for teachers who have previously attended the two-day training
- Develop training for post-primary.

## Conclusions

The training has been delivered to a broad range of schools across all areas in Northern Ireland. Out of a potential 811 schools, a total of 489 schools had engaged with Helping Hands training (this figure does not include all special needs and preparatory schools in Northern Ireland). Many of these schools had more than one teacher trained in Helping Hands.

Overall, the attendees at the two-day training were very satisfied with the content and delivery. Most felt the training provided them with information and knowledge that would be of future use in safeguarding children. Most felt that the training was presented in a clear and organised manner and the trainer was able to answer any questions they had. The expertise, experience and approachability of the trainers was highly valued by attendees as a key element in the success of the training,

Teachers liked the style and structure of the training and saw it as highly effective. They enjoyed being able to actually do the exercises as part of the training. They also valued hearing other teachers' experiences and sharing ideas with other schools. Several teachers highlighted that they had found the statistics and the video particularly powerful in changing their understanding of domestic violence and abuse. The feedback was that the two-day training was an ideal length and intensity for changing attitudes and building skills. There are no recommendations about changing the content or delivery of the two-day training as the current model is working and being received well by teachers.

The quality of the resources (e.g. Teacher's Handbook, lesson plans and activities) were highly and consistently praised in all the data we examined for this evaluation. Teachers liked the structure, the visual attractiveness of the materials. They saw these as child-friendly, age-appropriate, colourful and fun. They felt the programme could be easily implemented within the classroom/ school setting. Helping Hands was seen as complementing other initiatives within schools, existing policies and procedures, and making a useful contribution to PDMU and other curriculum requirements.

Teachers who participated in the training consistently highlighted the positive impact it had on changing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation. They left the two-day

training feeling more empowered to build young people's emotional resilience, and felt they now had clear, workable strategies about how to do this.

After the staff had returned to their classrooms, they still highly valued the training and reported that it had long-lasting positive impact on their attitudes and teaching practice. Teachers were able to use what they learnt, both with individual and groups of children, as well as to improve the procedures and emotional environment within the wider school. Helping Hands was seen as a very useful addition to the support that schools could provide, and directly contributing to PDMU, as well as other areas such as Child protection and bullying policies. It was seen to complement other programmes such as PATHs, without there being duplication. It was seen as most useful when embraced as part of a whole-school approach.

All of the teachers had delivered the Helping Hands sessions after training, but some found it difficult to do this on an ongoing basis because of the cost of the resources. It was clear from the feedback that if cost had not been a barrier, they would have continued to deliver the sessions. Even when sessions were not being delivered after the first year post-training, the teachers still reported that the training had a long-lasting impact on how they supported and understood young people's needs and how to best support their emotional resilience. They all recommended the training for other teachers and it should be made widely available.

Teachers reported that they saw changes in the children who had participated in the Helping Hands sessions. The children were more confident and better able to express themselves in healthy and non-confrontational ways. They saw these children as having developed important coping, problem-solving and communication skills for life as a result of having been exposed to the Helping Hands messages and activities.

In conclusion, the Helping Hands programme and associated two-day Social Guardian training have been successfully implemented in primary schools across Northern Ireland. There have been positive changes to practice and improved outcomes reported for children. These have included improved social behaviour, communication, emotional resilience and coping strategies which are all key life skills. Given the increased understanding of the importance of earlier intervention and the need for children to develop emotional resilience, this programme is a useful addition to teaching practice

and should continue to be delivered. The data for this evaluation was collected before the Covid-pandemic, but given the positive feedback from the teachers about the increased emotional skills and coping shown by the children who took part in Helping Hands, it is likely that this type of programme and support will become even more important for our children and young people.

Future development should look at how this programme can be funded to ensure that all schools can participate and how the activity booklets can be made available to more children. The resources are highly suitable for Key Stage 2. It would be useful to explore the development of resources for younger and older children. A half-day booster or refresher training should be developed to offer teachers a couple of years after they attend the two-day training. This evaluation has provided a well-rounded, and robust insight into how Helping Hands is delivered and perceived by teachers and trainers. It has examined what teachers report regarding its impact on their practice, and on children's emotional and coping skills. Future evaluations should build on this by directly examining the impact of the programme with the children themselves.



# Appendices

Appendix 1: Number of schools in each town which have had Helping Hands training or have not received training

Town	Schools without Helping Hands	Schools with Helping Hands
Antrim	4	13
Ardglass	2	0
Armagh	17	8
Augher	1	1
Aughnacloy	1	1
Ballycastle	1	4
Ballyclare	6	5
Ballygawley	1	1
Ballymena	16	19
Ballymoney	2	13
Ballynahinch	3	2
Banbridge	4	6
Bangor	1	14
Belfast	56	48
Caledon	1	1
Carrickfergus	5	7
Castleberg	3	2
Castlewellan	5	4
Coalisland	1	2
Coleraine	7	15
Cookstown	5	8
Craigavon	15	9
Crossgar	1	2
Crumlin	5	2
Downpatrick	13	4
Dromore	2	2
Dungannon	19	17
Enniskillen	4	36

Fivemiletown	1	2
Hillsborough	2	2
Holywood	1	2
Keady	2	1
Kilkeel	2	1
Larne	5	6
Limavady	5	7
Lisburn	9	12
Londonderry	19	29
Loughgall	1	0
Lurgan	3	5
Maghera	3	4
Magherafelt	7	18
Newcastle	3	2
Newry	14	29
Newtownabbey	11	9
Newtownards	8	18
Omagh	6	37
Portadown	4	3
Portrush	2	2
Poyntzpass	1	0
Stewartstown	2	0
Strabane	7	9
Strangford	1	0
Tandragee	2	1

## References

<sup>1</sup> UN (1989). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Geneva: UN.

<sup>2</sup> Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (2019). See, Hear, Act – a Strategy for children and young people (2019-2029). Belfast: Women's Aid.

<sup>3</sup> UN (1989). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Geneva: UN.

<sup>4</sup> Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (2019). See, Hear, Act – a Strategy for children and young people (2019-2029). Belfast: Women's Aid.

<sup>5</sup> McKee, B. (2015). Helping Hands. Preventative Education in the Early Years Classroom – helping children 'draw' conclusions about keeping safe. Belfast: DHSSPS.





If you require any further information, advice or support relating to the Helping Hands programme please contact:



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Alternatively you can contact your local Women's Aid group:



**1** Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne & Newtownabbey Women's Aid  
T: 028 2563 2136

**2** Armagh Down Women's Aid  
T: 028 3025 0765

**3** Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid  
T: 028 9066 6049

**4A** Causeway & Mid Ulster Women's Aid - Causeway Office  
T: 028 7035 6573

**4B** Causeway & Mid Ulster Women's Aid - Mid Ulster Office  
T: 028 8676 9300

**5** Fermanagh Women's Aid  
T: 028 6632 8898

**6** Foyle Women's Aid  
T: 028 7141 6800

**7** North Down & Ards Women's Aid  
T: 028 9127 3196

**8** Omagh Women's Aid  
T: 028 8224 1414

**9** Women's Aid Federation  
T: 028 9024 9041