



Evaluation of Kids Taskforce Programmes

Executive Summaries for two reports:

Do the 'missdorothy.com' and 'Watch Over Me' programmes work?:

Exploring their effectiveness in delivering safety messages

Why do the 'missdorothy.com' and 'Watch Over Me' programmes work?:

Investigating the role of empathy and self-awareness

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**Do the ‘missdorothy.com’ and ‘Watch Over Me’ programmes work?:
Exploring their effectiveness in delivering safety messages**

Executive Summary

Background. Helping children and young people to better understand themselves and to relate to others is the central focus of the PSHE agenda (Personal, Social and Health Education) that now operates within schools in England and Wales. Over the past decade, the charity Kids Taskforce has developed curriculum-based programmes at both the primary and secondary levels that meet this agenda, by helping pupils learn how to keep themselves and their friends safe. The programmes have been rolled out to over one million youngsters and the secondary school programme is now undergoing a national roll-out, funded by the Home Office and the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Aims. Several previous qualitative evaluations have confirmed that these programmes are popular with teachers, pupils and stakeholders but few have been able to go beyond this basic level of analysis. The key aim of this study was therefore to determine the extent to which the programmes succeed in delivering safety messages. Pupils’ engagement with the programmes was also examined using novel methods. The study was envisioned as an initial exploration on which future larger-scale investigations might build.

Methods. The study involved a total of 179 pupils distributed over seven schools (three primaries and four secondaries) situated in various regions of England. All pupils had some degree of experience of either the primary programme, missdorothy.com, or the secondary programme, Watch Over Me (WOM). A variety of research evaluation methodologies were employed including written questionnaires, interviews and behavioural observations obtained through video recordings.

Results. Results confirmed that the pupils engaged enthusiastically with the programme materials. Levels of liking assessed through quantitative scales were high, with no pupil stating they disliked the materials. Attention levels during the lesson were also high, with many pupils never taking their eyes off the screen/teacher during the core element of the lesson (e.g., viewing the video or hearing the story read out by the teacher) for the periods during which each pupil was observed. When asked in interviews whether they would



recommend continuation of the programme, no pupil argued against this proposal, with most strongly endorsing the possibility. The reasons they gave for such a recommendation were rarely confined to simple enjoyment of the materials, but were much more commonly because they saw the materials as providing valuable information about safety.

But were pupils gaining safety knowledge? Absolutely. When pupils' comments during the interviews were systematically analysed, it emerged that 85% of the pupils interviewed spontaneously identified at least one insight they had gained in relation to safety. These included, for example, a better understanding of the dangers of carrying knives, of the impact of peer pressure, of the consequences of drug use, and of the trauma of bullying. A content analysis revealed four different types of messages that pupils were acquiring: greater awareness of risks in the community, strategies for ensuring personal safety, greater awareness of the consequences of one's actions, and more information about legal and police procedures. The most commonly acquired messages related to the first two categories: risks and strategies. These results confirm that the core aims of the Kids Taskforce programmes are being achieved: the vast majority of pupils are increasing in safety awareness. Moreover, such insights are generated rapidly, after exposure to even a single episode of the WOM soap opera.

Was there any evidence that the programmes went beyond provision of safety messages and might actually change behaviour? Yes. Although behavioural change could not be measured directly, it was possible to discern from the interview responses whether pupils felt their future behaviour was likely to change as a result of the materials, and if so, in what way. That is, would behavioural changes be those that served to keep themselves safe (e.g., less likely to join gangs, take drugs) or that also increased the safety of other people (e.g., reduction in carrying weapons)? And did they think the materials were likely to prompt change amongst other pupils exposed to the materials? Content analysis showed that 63% of pupils spontaneously volunteered the view that experience of the programmes would lead to behavioural change of some kind. The most common type of change predicted, by 48% of pupils interviewed, was that they would take action to keep themselves safe in future (e.g., not getting into strangers' cars), while 10% identified actions that would serve to protect others (e.g., being less likely to bully or to carry knives). Although 10% may initially seem a small percentage, this represents a drop in aggressive behaviours that cause serious concern in many schools and communities. Overall, these findings indicate that the Kids Taskforce



programmes are not only generating safety messages, they stand a very likely chance of actually altering young people's behaviour. This implies that the benefits of these programmes may well extend beyond the boundaries of the classrooms in which the material is being used.

Conclusions. These findings confirm that the missdorothy.com and WOM programmes are achieving their core aim of increasing the safety awareness of children and young people. They are generating safety messages which pupils are taking on board, and these are of sufficient strength that the majority of pupils suggest they will change actual behaviour.

These are important outcomes because they suggest that the financial investment associated with implementing the programme -- approximately £2.50 per child, including materials and staff training -- is well spent. Economic analyses, conducted by internationally regarded economists such as a James Heckman, suggest that investment during the preschool years may yield societal savings at a rate of 1-10. That is, for every £1 invested during the earliest years, approximately £10 is estimated to be saved in the costs of criminal justice, mental health and educational performance. If even a small proportion of such savings can be achieved through schools-based PSHE programmes, happier and more productive lives will have been achieved.

How well do the present findings generalise to other pupils and schools in other areas of the country? Does the behavioural change that pupils predicted actually occur? These are questions that will need to be pursued in future evaluations. It is hoped that the findings yielded by this small-scale exploratory study will provide a platform for establishing a larger and ongoing evaluation of the Kids Taskforce programmes. This evaluation model could even prove useful for the evaluation of other PSHE programmes, which is conducted surprisingly infrequently in the UK despite the strong PSHE agenda that now exists. Certainly the findings of such evaluation would be of interest to a wide variety of sectors, including the police, criminal justice, and social work, as well as education.



**Why do the ‘missdorothy.com’ and ‘Watch Over Me’ programmes work?:
Investigating the role of empathy and self-awareness**

Executive Summary

Introduction. Most primary and secondary schools in England and Wales now offer lessons that meet the Personal, Social, and Health Education agenda (PSHE). PSHE courses have come to be regarded as a major contributor to the government’s policy of Every Child Matters, which aims to help children be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being. The charity Kids Taskforce has developed two programmes that accord closely with this agenda. For primary pupils, there is the missdorothy.com programme and for secondary pupils, the Watch Over Me programme (WOM). The key aim of both programmes is to help youngsters develop greater awareness of the risks that they face within contemporary society, and to work out strategies for keeping themselves safe in the face of those risks.

Aims. Earlier work has already confirmed that the programmes are effective in enhancing pupils’ safety awareness. The aim of this study was to begin the process of providing a theoretical explanation for such success. We looked specifically at the role of empathy and self-awareness, because it was felt that these could be important drivers in getting children to fully engage with challenging safety issues.

Method. A total of 179 pupils participated in the overall study from three primary and four secondary schools in various regions of England. Following their participation in a missdorothy.com or WOM lesson, a total of 118 were interviewed about their experiences of the programme. Interviews were transcribed and all instances in which they referred to their own self-awareness or to awareness of others’ thoughts and feelings were noted.

Results. Results indicate that the programmes are effective in promoting both empathy and self-awareness. Spontaneous empathic statements were most common amongst secondary pupils (67% overall). Empathy was also expressed by primary pupils (33% overall), but more impressive were the figures for self-awareness in primary schools, which were 72% or above for each of the participating primary schools. The results also point to a developmental trend for attending to others’ internal experiences, in that the older pupils were



more likely to comment on internal experiences (e.g., thoughts and feelings) and the younger pupils were more likely to do so for external behaviour (e.g., being good at a sport or at leadership). This is a trend that accords with findings of other developmental psychological studies. Finally, the empathic insights generated by secondary pupils appear to be novel ones for them. Overall, 57% spontaneously commented that the insights they had gained about other people was a new one for them. This suggests that the WOM materials are introducing novel topics and situations, which the pupils are interested in and engaged by.

Conclusions. The findings from this study definitely suggest that the missdorothy.com and WOM programmes are promoting children's and young people's awareness of self and of others. This suggests that empathy may be one of the key factors accounting for the programmes' effectiveness in promoting safety messages (as reported in an earlier study). In short, pupils seem to be taking on board safety messages not because they are acquiring new rules but because the messages are helping them to think in richer ways about themselves and about others.

These are valuable insights, given that the costs of delivery of the programme are estimated to be £2.50 per pupil. This is a striking figure, in the face of economic analyses, conducted by internationally regarded economists such as a James Heckman, which suggest that investment during the preschool years may yield societal savings at a rate of 1-10. That is, for every £1 invested during this period, society saves £10 in the later costs of criminal justice, mental and physical health, and educational outcomes. If even a small proportion of such savings can be achieved during the school years, the investment will have been worthwhile.

Future studies of the missdorothy.com and WOM programmes involving a much larger cohort of pupils will be needed to confirm these preliminary findings. However, the outcomes that this small study has been able to generate leave little doubt that that would be a worthwhile endeavour, especially given that the WOM programme was now been funded for a national roll-out by the Home Office and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Tantalising opportunities for evaluation exist within a national delivery programme. There is, for example, an increasing debate about the effectiveness of traditionally-endorsed drivers such as self-esteem in contrast to mechanisms such as empathy, which emphasise the importance of relationships with others as opposed to self.



Thus, larger-scale evaluations of the Kids Taskforce programmes have much to offer the wider PSHE agenda and debate.