

Jane Ansell is the director and founder of Sleep Scotland.  
For more information please visit the website: <http://www.sleepscotland.org>

## Jane Ansell

### *Sound Sleep*: raising awareness in schools of the importance of sleep for our emotional and physical wellbeing

**S**leep Scotland is a charity, established in 1998, providing support to families of children and young people with additional support needs and severe sleep problems. Sleep Scotland has worked throughout Scotland developing services and providing intensive sleep programmes for children by establishing sleep clinics and training sleep counsellors.

#### *Sound Sleep*

Based on experience gained from their work, Sleep Scotland launched a new project in 2010. *Sound Sleep* aims at raising awareness, in mainstream secondary schools, of the importance of sleep for students' emotional and physical wellbeing.

Jane Ansell, the director and founder of Sleep Scotland, said lack of sleep among UK teenagers was a "huge problem". "We began in 1998 working with children with special needs with sleep problems," she said. "In my teenage clinic I felt I'd got a lot of kids who maybe didn't have ADHD or Asperger's - they had total sleep deprivation."

Glasgow city council estimated that as many as one in four teenagers were not getting the appropriate nine hours of sleep at night, and said there was "increasing evidence" suggesting a link between lack of sleep and obesity, lower academic achievement and depression.

#### **Pilot project**

Using funding from *BBC Children in Need Scotland*, Sleep Scotland, put together an outline for a pilot project that specifically supported teenagers who have sleep problems.

Part of the project involved conducting school workshops with three secondary schools in Glasgow in an attempt to tackle problems caused by a lack of sleep. Surveys in the schools

showed that after going to bed at 11 pm or midnight, teenagers were staying awake for hours watching television, playing on games consoles, or browsing the Internet. Some pupils were getting as little as four or five hours sleep a night.

Ms Ansell said, "Sleep is when the brain rewires and consolidates the memory. If that is being deprived, not only do you have a kid who is too tired to concentrate, but also his brain won't work to full capacity." Ms Ansell also said that addressing the problem has been made harder by a wider social attitude towards getting by on small amounts of sleep, but insisted that ensuring children were getting sufficient sleep was as important as making sure they ate five pieces of fruit and vegetables a day and did regular exercise.

#### **Workshops**

The classes were offered as workshops for groups of 20 secondary school pupils, with an after-school session for parents and staff advising how to support teenagers to get good sleep.

One 15-year-old who attended the first of a series of sessions said he had tried going to bed early as a result of what he had been taught. "I went to bed at ten-ish rather than 11, and I do feel a little bit more awake," he said. "I wasn't sleeping in French, as I usually do, so my French teacher is pleased anyway."

#### **Better sleep**

The pilot project enabled students to understand the process of sleep, why it is so important for their well being and strategies that they could implement to promote a good night's sleep.

Some of the strategies Sleep Scotland

discussed with students were:

- o Make sure you have a substantial main meal at a regular teatime
- o Restrict homework, exercise and computer games to the early evening
- o The hour before bedtime should be for relaxing and bathing, and should include no stimulating activities
- o Switch off the computer, mobile and television before having a bath. Try listening to music, radio, or read a book
- o Avoid chocolate, caffeine, additives, alcohol and nicotine before bedtime Have a warm milky drink instead
- o Your bedroom should be quiet and dark; make sure it is a media-free zone
- o Keep to a regular bedtime
- o In order to have a good sleeping pattern it is important to be consistent. This also includes having a set waking time

### Outcomes

One of the outcomes of the pilot project was the development of a teaching pack which was then offered to other schools. The pack was supported by training days for education professionals throughout the UK.

### Teaching pack

The *Sound Sleep* teaching pack aims to raise awareness of the importance of sleep to young people in secondary schools across the UK and encourages them to make informed decisions. By providing young people with information about sleep and its importance, they will be enabled to understand how the choices they make will impact upon their ability to learn and their general health and wellbeing.

Young people will have an opportunity to learn about, discuss and implement strategies to develop a good sleep routine that will help them to achieve their full potential. Having sleep on their agenda helps young people to discuss it in peer, teacher and parental relationships. Information about different agencies also provides additional support.

The pack includes: User's guide: Background reading for teachers; Curriculum guidelines;

Detailed lesson plans for different ages throughout secondary schools; Resources for lessons including PowerPoint presentations and handouts; Resources to address staff and parental awareness of sleep and its importance for wellbeing.

### Training Days

The *Sound Sleep* training for trainers provides delegates with the skills and resources to deliver training to secondary school staff about sleep awareness and how to implement the *Sound Sleep* pack into schools.

The training includes: Sleep: An introduction to the physiology of sleep, adolescent sleep and sleep disorders; How to sleep well: Overview of sleep hygiene theory and putting it into practice; The Sound Sleep Pack: Aims & objectives; Becoming a Sleep Ambassador: Planning, implementing and monitoring sleep awareness in schools.

### Developments

Jane Ansell said '*Sound Sleep* fits perfectly into our Curriculum for Excellence. We are delighted to work with education on this new project giving our future citizens sound sleep.'

*Sound Sleep* one day training events will be held in Perth on Friday 16th November 2012 and in Glasgow on Wednesday 13th February 2013. For more information visit Sleep Scotland's website at [www.sleepscotland.org](http://www.sleepscotland.org) or contact Karen Jenkinson on 0131 651 1392.