



Growing2gether Impact Report March 2023 -July 2023

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Introduction

Growing2gether

Growing2gether is an experiential learning programme which supports disengaged young people to develop confidence and self-belief. Since January 2017, Growing2gether has reached 1748 children and young people across the Highlands, building their mental health and educational/community engagement. Growing2gether is underpinned by transpersonal psychology, which provides a holistic psychological approach and focuses on enabling individuals to access more of their potential; on developing self-awareness and personal responsibility and on recognising the importance of *meaning* as requirements for well-being and positive engagement with society. Combined, we find a congruent pedagogy with transpersonal psychology and positive psychology, a branch of mainstream psychology which was founded 1998 by Seligman (Seligman 1998). These interventions are extremely useful and popular, considering their large-scale development and low cost. Growing2gether focus on bringing out the unique potential of young people, rather than seeing them as a 'problem', empowering them with life skills, work experience and a deeper understanding of who they are. There is increasing evidence that interventions based on positive psychology enhance wellbeing which has been recognised by The Scottish Government. This has further created many initiatives to address the significant challenges that children and young people in Scotland are facing today: Closing the Attainment Gap, getting it Right for Every Child, the Curriculum for Excellence, and Developing Scotland's Young Work Force. Growing2gether programmes aim to address these issues by working with young people facing disadvantage and children who are in need of additional support. Young people become mentors to children, supporting their development, which provides the young people with work experience, responsibility and a respected role in their community. The programme builds on learning from Growing2gether, covering skills such as re-engaging in school, communications and setting future goals. It leads to an accredited Level 4 SCQF interpersonal skills qualification (Self Awareness and Self in the Community), giving young people a sense of achievement and encouraging them to re-engage in education.

Growing2gether is a targeted youth intervention, which specifically selects young people who or are at risk for exacerbating current psychosocial, behavioural, and educational difficulties. Cross-age peer mentoring is a novel form of peer mentoring that matches an older youth mentor with a younger youth mentee to promote positive outcomes on mental health. Our intervention is novel in that it is the only early intervention programme in Scotland to target two sets of vulnerable children simultaneously, raising the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged areas by pairing them as a mentor and role model to a child in a nursery who require extra support. Growing2gether facilitators work closely with schools and nurseries to gain an understanding of the young person and child participating on the programmes. Consequently, they can successfully match and assign the young person with the child based on personality. Children act as an indirect and non-threatening tool to explore the young person's opinions and beliefs. Facilitators are trained to be flexible, non-judgemental

and facilitate young people to flourish, by encouraging the young person to reflect on their own behaviours through asking specific questions about their assigned child's interactions and behaviours, enabling them to extrapolate what they learn and apply it to themselves. Facilitators are crucial to this process and are trained to have bifocal vision, an ability to hold a perception of the young person which includes what is, as well as what could be (their potential). From this perspective, a young person can receive challenge and nurturing in a way which engages rather than alienates them and create a wider field for them to grow and develop within and to know themselves, their strengths, and weaknesses.



Growing2gether, Mental Wellbeing and Connectedness

The latest Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) conducted in 2019 (Ivey-Stephenson et al., 2020, in Vélez-Grau, M and Lindsey, 2022) suggested that, 19% of adolescents in secondary school think about suicide, and 9% of students had attempted suicide in the past. One of the prominent themes to emerge when studying young people who attempted suicide was their disconnection from others, as well as their perception of low self-competence (Choi et al, 2013). The study suggests that the young people's connection to others in their communities as well as their perception of self-competence are important in determining how a young person feels and subsequently, this determines their thoughts and feelings in relation to suicide and depression. Many other studies have echoed these findings, for instance one study examined the potential protective role of school connectedness in the relationship between cyberbullying and suicide risk behaviour. Findings indicated that being a victim of cyberbullying, was associated with increased risk of suicide and that connections to school moderated this relationship in that, among victims of cyberbullying, those more connected to school were less likely to report suicidal behaviour (Walsh et al, 2019).

Research places great importance of connectedness in relation to positive youth development programmes and claims to protect young people from sexual risk taking as well as performance in school (Visser, 2017)

Given that early life experiences can impact on long-term mental health problems as well as issues with relationships, well-being, educational attainment (Brännlund, Strandh & Nilsson, 2017) and employment, (Sadler et al, 2018) the research would suggest that early intervention to address the mental health needs of young people can prevent lifelong problems. Policy in the UK emphasises the important role that schools have in promoting good mental health, despite there being little evidence on what aspects of schools influence mental health in pupils (Ford, et al 2021). Teaching staff are under increasing pressure to deliver the curriculum while managing children's well-being, hence, mental health-based programmes may offer a solution to fulfil the needs of young people with mental health issues. Growing2gether aims to reduce mental health inequalities by selecting "at risk" teenagers to enrol on the programme and provide them with an opportunity to build their confidence through helping them to establish positive connections and experiences. Growing2gether is multifaceted in that it includes many components such as positive psychology, transpersonal psychology and experiential learning to help promote well-being.

Growing2gether and Self-esteem

"Self-esteem is an overall assessment of people's worthiness, expressed in a positive or negative orientation towards themselves" (Rosenberg, 1995). While high self-esteem is characterised by strong confidence and belief in oneself, low self-esteem is characterised by lack of confidence and the tendency to feel badly about oneself. Adolescence is a critical period for changes in the development of self-esteem as during this transitional period, self-esteem typically diminishes (Winarsunu et al 2023). High self-esteem is related to the fulfilment of interpersonal relationships and the ability to implement adaptive coping strategies hence leading to better mental health and wellbeing (Birndorf et al, 2005). Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem can lead to increased levels of anxiety, depression, poorer educational attainment, high risk sexual behaviour or even suicide (Jirdehi et al 2018). Recent research (Winarsunu, et al 2023) suggested that by providing an intervention (life-styles training) increased self-esteem through helping individuals improve their communication, cognitive and skills training in a group setting. Similarly, Growing2gether offers an experience whereby, a young person can feel a sense of connectedness to others through being part of a group where they are all equals and must learn to communicate effectively and openly with one another. Through receiving positive appraisal and unconditional positive regard from facilitators, staff and even children, coupled with coaching and mentoring, are powerful elements in helping to reduce anxiety and depression in young people through raising their self-esteem.

Growing2gether and Social-emotional Learning

On Growing2gether, there is a high component to social-emotional learning in the sessions, for example helping young people to realise the skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, feel and show empathy for others (though their child), establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions as well as setting goals. Through promoting social problem solving (for example, creating role play scenarios on how to best deal with a problem) self-acceptance and care, enabling individuals to respond appropriately to various situations, such as avoiding drug use and having unsafe sex (health/risk). The programme aims to improve young people's decision-making ability through teaching how to consider consequences of their choices and encouraging them to make appropriate (and less risky) decisions. Positive appraisal (by child and facilitator) within a supportive environment enhances individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy. This, coupled with the strong emphasis

on choice, enhances the effect on their school behaviour as well as raising future aspirations. These effects are hypothesized to extend to their community and home life, whereby relationships are strengthened through positive communication, respect and understanding.

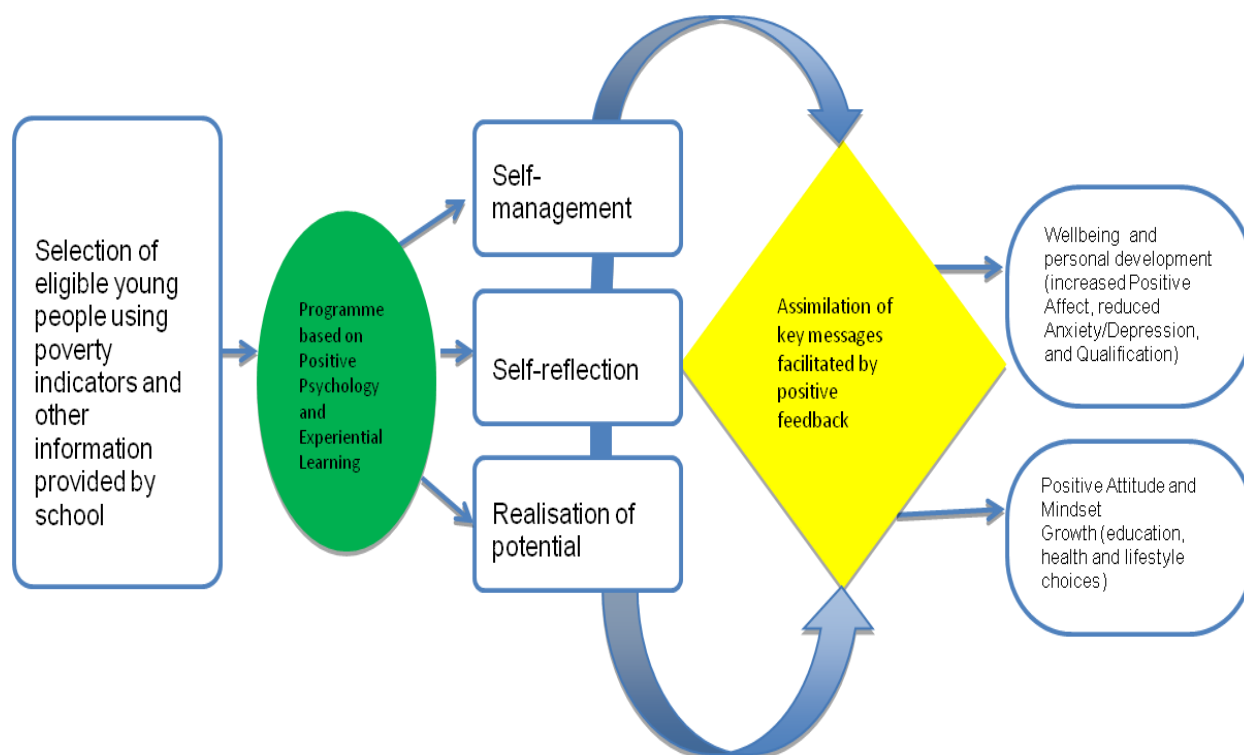
Growing2gether and Growth of Mindset

Some researchers suggest that individuals who believe intelligence is malleable (a growth mindset) are better able to bounce back from failures than those who believe intelligence is fixed, (Dweck, 1986). With regards to the latter, these people tend to feel helpless after encountering failures and this can have profound effect on learning achievement, skill acquisition, personal relationships, professional success, and many other dimensions of life (Dweck, 1986). Not only does mindset have implications for educational outcomes but recent research suggests that stressful life events, depression, substance use, and motivations for non-suicidal self-injury were weaker among those with more of a growth mindset relative to those with more of a fixed mindset (Schroder et al, 2017). These findings suggest that anxiety mindsets function in a similar way for mental health resilience as how mindsets of intelligence function for academic outcomes (Schroder et al, 2017). Throughout the curriculum, Growing2gether refer back to growth of mindset and encourage young people to perceive this as being malleable, hence realising their own potential to achieve goals.

Theory of Change

The model above illustrates Growing2gether's Theory of Change model. Our primary outcomes are positive mental health (a reduction on anxiety and depression) and positive mindset. Through experiential learning and an approach/curriculum underpinned by positive psychology, young people are able to better able to self-reflect, self-manage and self-regulate, meanwhile enhancing relationships with others. See **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Summary of Growing2gether



Method

Participants

Young people were selected for the programme on the basis of psychosocial disadvantage, (for example, the young person has been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, is withdrawn, has low self-esteem) economic disadvantage, (the young person has parents on income support, a parent in prison or parents on Universal Credit) behavioural disadvantage, (has a record of truancy or exclusion or has behavioural problems) or who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These are highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. For example, **39%** had received psychological intervention and **34%** had experienced parental abandonment through separation, divorce or death and **55%** of young people have experienced ACEs, which can have a negative impact on young people's physical and mental health. In total, **95%** were selected as they had low self-esteem, **69%** did not have many friends, **53%** were withdrawn or socially isolated, **38%** were bullies or had been bullies and **39%** weren't making expected progress in education.

The following data is based on starting figures. The programme consisted of 78 participants who were predominantly female, (n = 41, **53%**) the remainder were male (n = 37, **47%**). The age range was 14-15 years old (Mean = 14.1, SD = .31). 9 (12%) had a disability and 8 (11%) were religious. See **Figure 1** for participating schools and **Figure 2** for ethnicity breakdown.

Figure 1 displays participating schools as a percentage

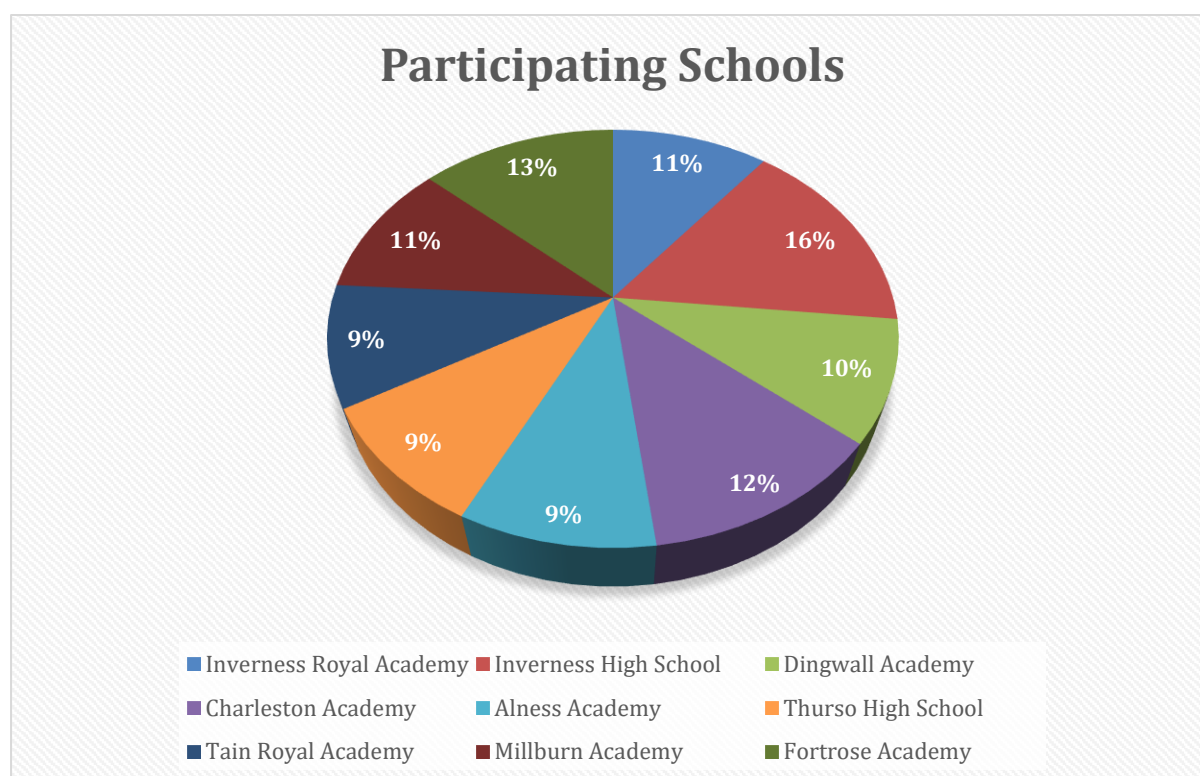
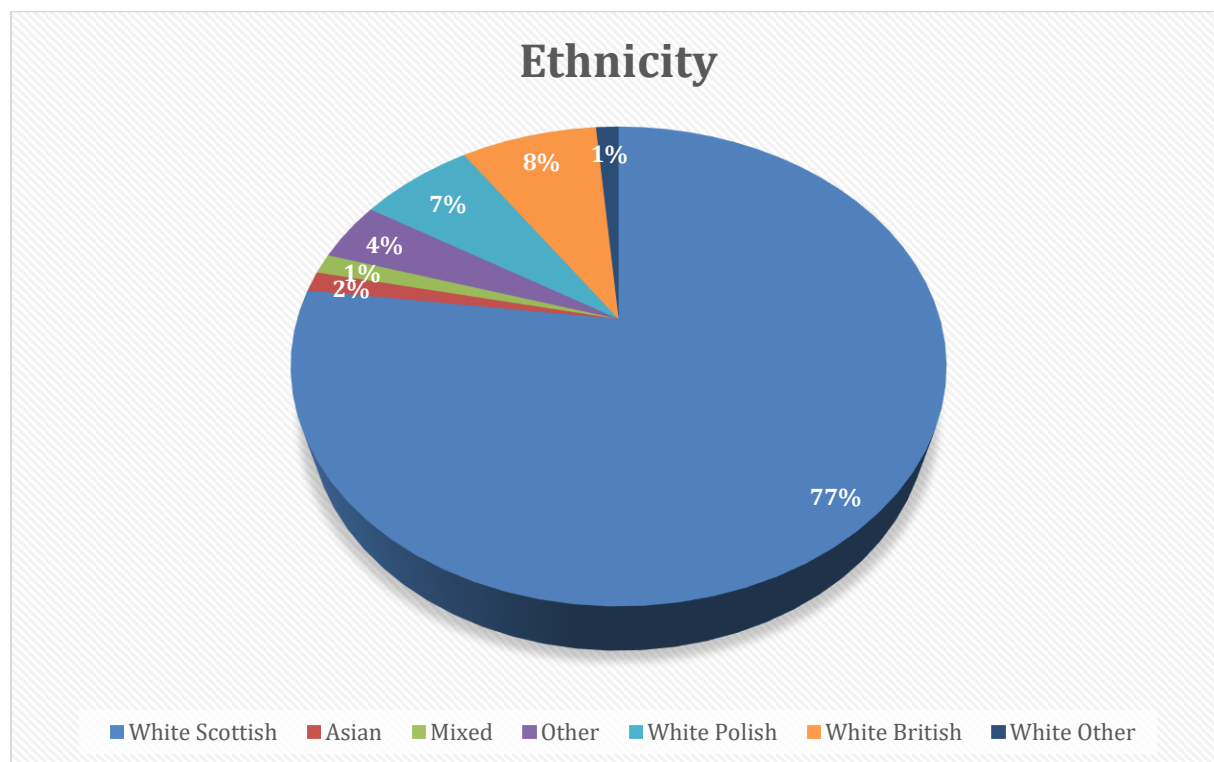


Figure 2 displays ethnicity profile as a percentage



Intervention

Growing2gether Programme

The programmes run for 17-18 weeks and each session is divided into 1.5 hours of mentoring, whereby the young person mentors their assigned toddler, and 1.5 hours of classroom time, where young people work towards gaining a Level 4 SCQF Qualification in "Personal Development: Self in Community" and "Self-Awareness" units.

Measures

Teacher's check-list eligibility questionnaire

Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire prior to the programme's commencement in order to obtain basic information to assess eligibility.

Teacher's pre and post questionnaire

Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire on the student's behaviours and attitudes prior to the programme's commencement and at the end of the programme. Pre and post test scores were then analysed to measure impact.

Programme Impact of Emotional wellbeing

The Positive Affect Schedule (PAS) component of PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) is one of the most robust and widely used scales to measure mood and subjective wellbeing. The scale is comprised of 10 items, with 10 items measuring positive affect (e.g., excited, inspired). Each item is rated on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 = Very Slightly or Not at all to 5 = Extremely, to measure the extent to which the affect has been experienced. The responses range from 10 – 50, with higher scores representing higher levels of positive affect. Mean Scores: 33.3 (SD±7.2). Responses are evaluated before and after the programme in

order to measure impact. Responses are evaluated before and after the programme in order to measure impact.

Programme Impact on Self-esteem

The Rosenberg self-esteem Scale (1965) is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Programme Impact on mental health (Depression and Anxiety) The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) is a 47-item self-report measure consists of questions relating to emotional wellbeing such as "I feel worried when someone is angry with me" and "I feel sad or empty". Each question is scored on a 4-point scale (0=never, 1=sometimes, 2=often and 3=always). This measure is intended to assess children's symptoms corresponding to selected *DSM-IV* anxiety and major depressive disorders and is considered to be a suitable instrument to assess anxiety levels across adolescence (Mathyssek et al, 2013). Global scores were calculated before and after the programme. Low scores correlate to better mental health (i.e., lower depression and anxiety).

Programme's impact on growth of mindset is evaluated using one measured before and after the programme. The question is scored on a 1 (Strongly Disagree) -10 (Strongly Agree) scale. Higher scores represent greater growth of mindset.

Programme's impact on health This section asks young people to rate on a scale of 1-5 the extent to which the programme has helped them view their mental and physical wellbeing for example encouraging them to think about the consequences of their actions and encouraging them to look after their health. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale (1=Not at all, 2=Not much, 3=Unsure, 4=A little, 5= A lot). These questions are measured at the end of the programme only.

Programme's impact on attitude relating to their community. This section consists of questions relating to the young people's attitudes regarding school, confidence and community. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree). These questions are measured at the end of the programme only.

Satisfaction and feedback. This section asks for feedback on young people's experiences on the programme. (e.g., enjoyment, relationships, community, engagement with school, confidence in abilities). This section also allows for young people's comments. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree).

Analysis

Standard descriptive analyses were performed to report the respondents' ratings on feedback questions using SPSS version 28. T-tests and Bivariate correlations were conducted to detect any differences in respondents' answers. Significance levels for all tests were 2-tailed.

Findings

Table 1 displays information on the number of young people who started and finished the programme, the retention rate and number of people who completed their portfolios for their SCQF.

Table 1: Starting, completion and awards data					
STARTED	FINISHED	RETENTION	AWARD	Award retention (those choosing to continue and completing)	Pass rate
78	70	90%	70	100%	100%

Teacher's Questionnaire....

Table 2 displays percentages which have been converted from mean values at Time 1 and Time 3, standard deviation, percentage change, t-value and significance value. **Table 3** displays the percentage agreement for statements relating to the programme.

Table 2: Teacher Questionnaire Outcomes						
Overall, the student is.	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Percentage Change	t-vale	Sig
engaged and interested	12.2	58	4.818	35%	-7.287	p = <0.01
	16.5	58	3.341			
achieving grades, they are capable of	12.1	58	4.338	35%	-8.090	p => 0.01
	16.3	58	3.523			
making effort to achieve potential	12.1	58	4.681	36%	-8.601	p = <0.01
	16.5	58	3.510			
making an effort to do well	10.2	58	4.123	58%	-11.029	p => 0.01
	16.1	58	3.454			
achieving grades, they require for further education	12.8	58	4.945	30%	-7.069	p = <0.01
	16.7	58	3.181			
confident in attempting new tasks (self-efficacy)	12.1	57	4.127	40%	-9.167	p => 0.01
	16.9	57	2.790			

Results from the teacher questionnaires reveal a significant improvement in engagement and interest in learning (**35%**), students are achieving grades they are capable of (**35%**), student's effort to reach their potential has improved (**36%**), effort to do as well as they can has increased (**58%**), perception of the student achieving the grades they need to further their education has increased (**30%**) and self-efficacy has increased (**40%**).

Graph 1: Teacher's perception of the young people's efforts and attitudes regarding education.

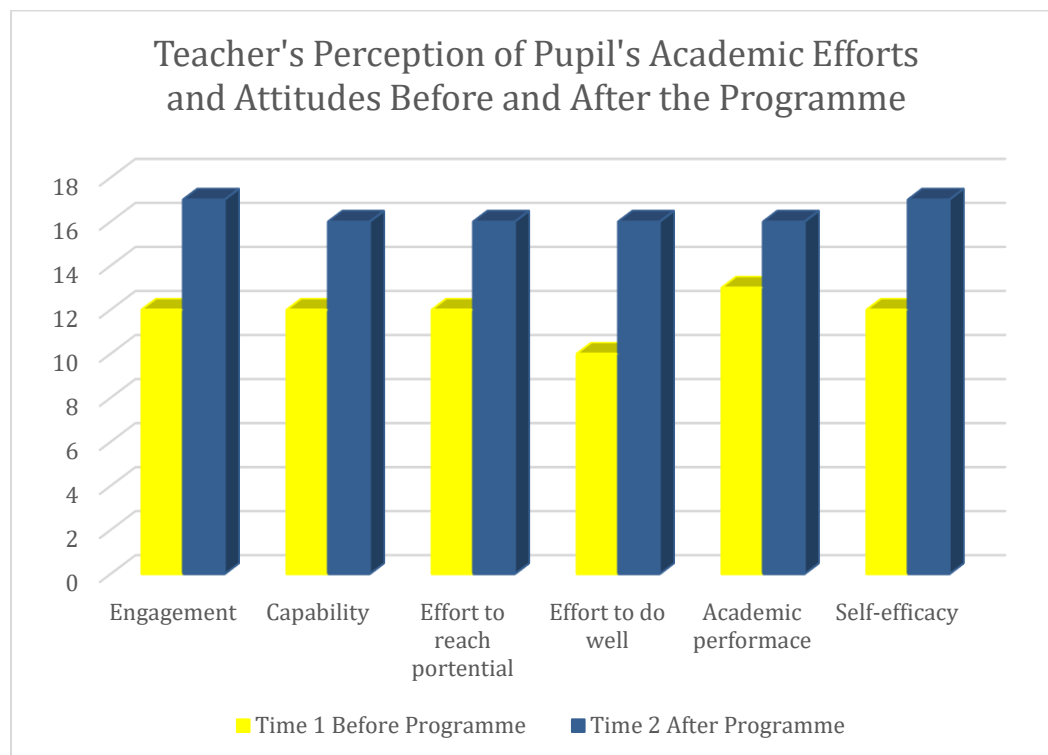


Table 3: Teacher's questionnaire

<i>Since completing the programme....</i>	N	% Agreement
the student appears to be more confident	58	91%
the student appears to be happier	58	93%
the experience has helped them emotionally	58	95%

The high percentages for teacher's perception of their student's confidence, happiness and emotional wellbeing were encouraging.

Teacher's comments.....

At the end of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to make comments regarding the young person's behaviour....

"X's attendance has considerably been above 90% since he started Growing2gether. His attitude to his learning has dramatically improved and he now has the confidence to stand up at a number of whole school events to speak in front of everyone."

“X has absolutely grown in confidence. She has shown a real commitment in attending the programme and seeing it through to the end. She is able to articulate her needs and emotions following the programme. Growing2gether has definitely helped her confidence.”

“He has really enjoyed the experience and it has made him re-think his future. His confidence in himself has grown and he is more aware of the communication and social skills that he has.”

“Positive changes in reports - he was below target and since Growing2gether he is on track. He seems more confident in general. Keep doing what you are doing! Great project!”

“X has really enjoyed this course. He has significant challenges surrounding his education but this has been a rare successful intervention for him.”

Participant questionnaires

Impact on mental health and connectedness

Young people’s comments reflected their wellbeing and sense of connectedness to others.

“I enjoyed my time in the nursery and creating strong bonds with the children”

“Doing the check ins made me feel like they cared about my home life”

“I learnt that I am good at working with others, despite my reluctance to”

“I learnt how to empathise with people and to connect with the little ones”

Most young people felt that the programme was influential in relation to valuing the support received on the programme, reflecting on what is good in their lives and helping them to feel connected to others. (n =62).

- **89%** of young people agreed that the programme helped them to reflect on what they are good at and what is important in their lives
- **95%** of young people agreed that they valued the support they received on the sessions
- **97%** agreed that the programme helped them to understand others better
- **91%** agreed that the programme made them more aware of themselves and the consequences of their actions
- **89%** agreed that the programme helped them gain confidence in their abilities
- **86%** agreed that the programme can influence young people like me to make healthy lifestyle decisions and avoid risk (For example substance misuse)
- **87%** agreed that the programme helped them to see their potential to reach their goals

- **87%** of young people agreed that the programme has encouraged them to want to become more involved in their community and help others
- **92%** felt that the experience has made them feel more connected to others

The results indicate that there was a significant improvement (**24%**) in young people's mental health, measured by RCADS ($t = 3.22$ (60), $p = <0.01$) and a significant improvement (**12%**) in self-esteem, measured by Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($t = -4.66$ (61), $p = <0.01$). There was no change with positive affect scores.

Table 4: Mental Health Outcomes						
Scale	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Percentage Change	t-vale	Sig
RCADS Score Time 1	55.0	61	29.1	24%	3.22	$p = <0.01$
RCADS Score Time 2	41.6	61	22.9			
Positive Affect Time 1	34.7	63	5.9	0.5%	-0.26	$p = >0.05$
Positive Affect Time 2	34.9	63	7.6			
Self Esteem Time 1	25.5	62	4.7	12%	-4.66	$p = <0.01$
Self Esteem Time 2	28.5	62	4.7			

Growth of Mindset and Attitude to Education

Most young people felt that the programme was influential in relation to teaching them about the importance of education and having a positive mindset.

- **95%** agreed that education provides them with more opportunities in the future.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement of **22%** in Growth of Mindset ($t = -3.95$ (61), $p = <0.01$)

Table 5: Mindset Outcomes						
Scale	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Percentage Change	t-vale	Sig
Growth of Mindset Time 1	5.9	62	2.05	22%	-3.95	$p = <0.01$
Growth of Mindset Time 2	7.2	62	1.59			

Satisfaction and feedback

Young people were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the programme (n = 62).

- **97%** found the subjects that were covered informative
- **95%** enjoyed building a relationship with their toddler
- **91%** enjoyed working with others
- **94%** would recommend the programme to other young people

Below are some comments made by the young people on the programme.

“I learnt how to be confident with myself when meeting people. I enjoyed helping the children”

“The experience taught me that the kids love me and the group is really kind”

“My confidence has gone up so much more! I feel like I can talk about how I am feeling and I just feel safe and if I have something to say, I can just say it.”

“I can see a very big difference! At first, I was quite shy around my friends and found it hard to get close with new ones, but since the programme, I have made loads of new friends and have good relationships with everyone.”

“I learnt to see people see things differently to me sometimes. I really enjoyed getting closer to my little buddy.”

Case Study: Young Person’s Journey

Facilitators were asked to provide a brief narrative of a young person’s journey. Names were removed to protect the identity of the young person.

“Tom appeared very nervous on the first day. On the first worksheet, there is a question which asks “What is it that you want to get out of doing Growing2gether?” He wrote: “I want to speak instead of avoiding it.” I realised that doing Growing2gether would be a big challenge for him. I picked up early on that every now and then he would stammer as he spoke if he was trying to express his own ideas.

He worked as an ‘assistant’ in Primary 1 and looked a bit at sea when I looked over to see how he was doing. I moved closer so that I could hear what and how he was talking to the children. His expressive language was clear, spoken with an authority so that they followed his suggestions. He spoke fluently with good eye contact and showed he was listening to them as he repeated back to the children what they were saying.

Over the weeks, he became one of the main contributors in the group and was keenly interested, asking lots of questions. In one particular session, he listened to the facilitator and then paraphrased what she was saying and went on to ask more highly relevant questions. Tom has highly developed language skills, but it seemed he had not had an opportunity to use them fully until now.

The week we explored anger, he asked if he could have some time on his own. He spoke about how he lost control a lot and he couldn't control himself and flew off the handle and was full of rage. I asked if he would be willing for me to coach him, and for four weeks and we took 15 minutes to work on this. He was very engaged and was quick to grow more awareness and insight into his anger.

He concluded that: "I bottled up a lot over time as I did not feel confident to speak up and I used to stammer, so little things would build and build and I would swallow it without saying how I felt. Then it would take one tiny little thing and I just lost it."

Each week after mentoring the children, we acknowledged his ability to talk to the children and interact so well that he was building good relationships with many of Primary 1. He realised that despite being provoked, he never felt any anger or rage. This insight was a massive turning point when he realised that he needed to tell people how he was feeling as it happened."

"The combination of having new opportunities to speak and to discover I was a good communicator gave me a huge boost to my self-belief. By the end, I felt a lot happier about things generally."

Discussion and Conclusion

Anxiety and depression, measured by RCADS significantly improved (by **24%**) by the end of the programme, suggesting that Growing2gether has made a positive impact on young people's mental health. The intervention aims to reduce mental health inequalities by selecting "at risk" teenagers to enrol on the programme and provide them with an opportunity to build their confidence through helping them to establish positive connections and experiences, therefore, it is encouraging that self-esteem, measured using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, (RSS) significantly improved by the end of the programme (**12%**). High self-esteem is related to the fulfilment of interpersonal relationships and the ability to implement adaptive coping strategies hence leading to better mental health and wellbeing; therefore, it is not surprising that both RCADS and RSS showed a significant improvement. Growing2gether uses Positive Affect Schedule (PAS) to measure young people's propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others positively, even though the challenges of life, before and after the programme. PAS is a proxy of the young people's mental wellbeing as well as their connectedness and engagement with others. The results revealed no change in positive affect by the end of the programme.

Growth of Mindset, a construct linked to academic resilience, improved significantly (**22%**) by the end of the programme. Not only does mindset have implications for educational outcomes but recent research suggests that stressful life events depression, substance use, and motivations for non-suicidal self-injury were weaker among those with more of a growth mindset relative to those with more of a fixed mindset (Schroder et al, 2017). Throughout the curriculum, Growing2gether refers back to growth of mindset and encourages young people to perceive this as being malleable, hence realising their own potential to achieve goals. It is encouraging to observe that some of the young people's comments reflect this growth.

When conducting research, it is more reliable to have multiple informants report on the young people's progress which is why Growing2gether routinely ask teachers to complete a measure for the students, especially as teachers are good informants of young people's behaviour. It was encouraging to observe that teachers felt that Growing2gether increased young people's confidence, appeared happier and the experience helped them emotionally. Teachers were asked a series of questions regarding the student's academic performance. Pre and post tests revealed significant improvements in all areas including improvement on engagement

and interest in learning, achieving grades they are capable of, making the effort to reach their potential, making a conscious effort to do as well as they can, achieving the grades they need to further their education and self-efficacy. The comments accompanying these scores was exceptionally pleasing to observe.

The feedback ratings measured at the end of the programme only were extremely encouraging with regards to the programme's efficacy in encouraging self-reflection, helping people to empathise and understand others, increasing self-confidence, self-efficacy, connectedness and sense of community. Overall, it is clear from the high retention rate, feedback percentages, case study and comments made by the young people and teachers, that the programme was well received.

Acknowledgements

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