



Growing2gether Impact Report September 2021 – July 2022

Kirsty Humphrey, Research Health Psychologist

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 1330 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 recognizing 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 small 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 Unit), giving young people a sense of achievement and encouraging them to re-engage in education.

Growing2gether, a novel intervention

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

Findhorn Hive, 567 West Whins, The Park, Findhorn, Forres. IV36 3SH

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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 and reducing inequalities in mental health

Research suggests that 75% of adults who experience poor mental health in adulthood first experience these difficulties before the age of age 18, (Kim-Cohen et al, 2013) resulting in subsequent issues with relationships, wellbeing, educational attainment (Brännlund, Strandh & Nilssotn, 2017) and employment (Sadler et al, 2018). The current policy in the UK emphasizes 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 wellbeing, 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 wellbeing.

The experience of being part of a group and receiving positive appraisal and unconditional positive regard from facilitators, staff and even small children, coupled with coaching and mentoring, are powerful elements in helping to reduce anxiety and depression in young people. Growing2gether routinely evaluate mental health through a battery of clinical, robust measures selected carefully by a Research Health Psychologist. Recent analysis (2022) revealed that in nearly a sample of 400 participants, anxiety and depression, measured by RCADS significantly improved (22% increase in mean scores) from baseline to the end of the programme, ($t = 10.06$ (392), $p = <0.01$), suggesting that Growing2gether has made a positive impact on young people's mental health. Furthermore, results indicate that young people ($n = 300$) with borderline baseline scores in depression and anxiety (as measured by The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale) showed significant improvements (31% improvement) by the end of the programme. Only 7% of youth in the general population score borderline and over, however this represents 46% of the Growing2gether sample, suggesting that Growing2gether are recruiting many young people who have mental health issues. Growing2gether use 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. Young people's ($n = 313$) PAS baseline scores were dichotomised into those who scored below threshold (29.7) at baseline and those who scored above it. For those scoring below threshold (hence displaying less positive affect) there was a significant improvement of **39%** in positive affect. The evidence strengthens the programme's efficacy with regards to delivering a programme that can

improve adolescent mental health, hence reduce mental health inequalities in young people living in Scotland.

Growing2gether and Social-emotional learning

On Growing2gether, there is a high component to social-emotional learning in the curriculum, 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 Connectedness

Connectedness, or bonding, refers to the emotional attachment and commitment a child/adolescent makes to social relationships in the family, peer group, school, community, or culture (Visser, 2017). 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). Connectedness has been linked to many of the influences of suicidal behaviour and suggests that it may be a powerful tool in preventing suicide (Walsh et al, 2019). A recent 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).

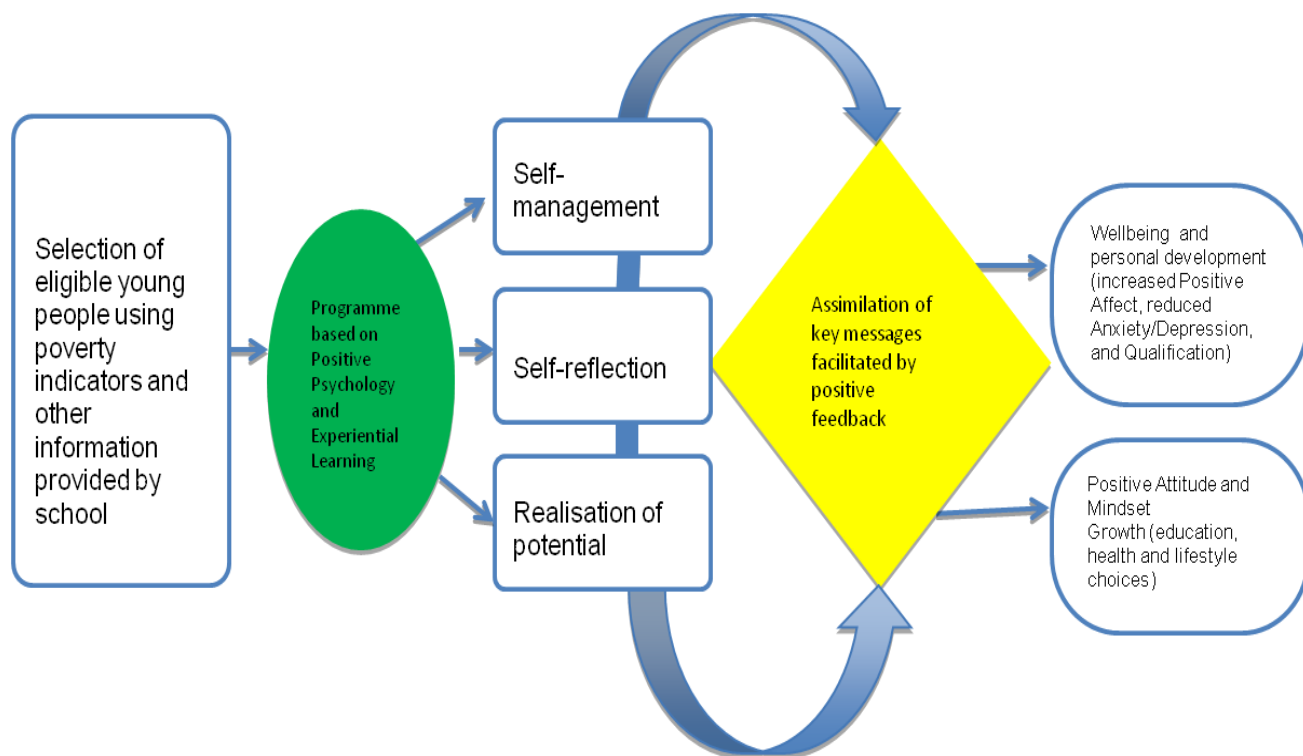
Growing2gether and growth of mindset

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

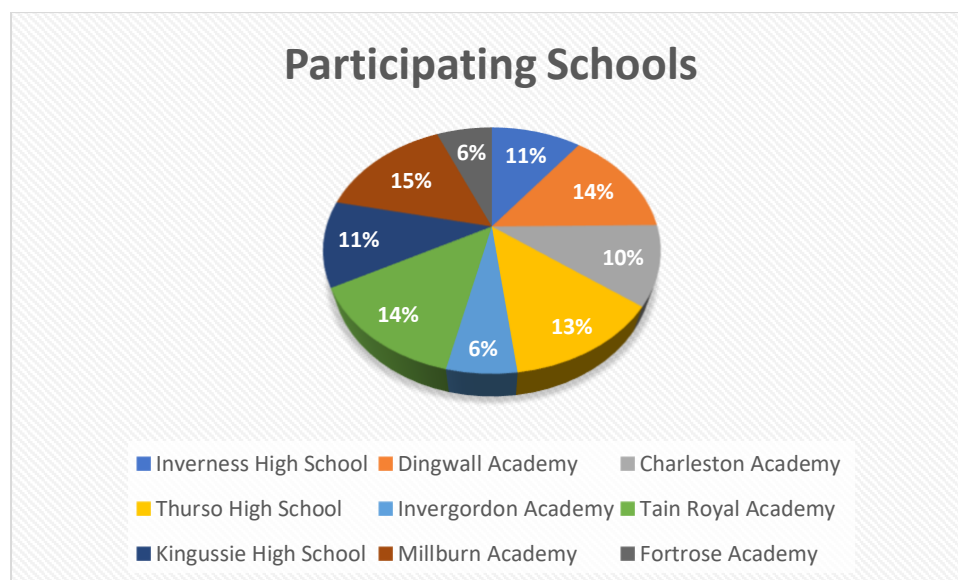
Participants

Young people were selected for the programme on the basis of one or more of the following criteria indicated in **Table 1**.

Table 1: To be eligible for the programme, the young person may...	
be eligible for Free School Meals	have difficulty interacting with peers
be involved with Guidance	appear unhappy and disengaged
come from a troubled family/have poor family support	appear to have low confidence
be in care/ LAC	have poor attendance or a truanting record
be bullied or is a bully	be known to engage in risky behaviour
be withdrawn or socially isolated	appear to feel disinterested about their future
have received counselling or psychological intervention	have behavioural problems (including anger and acting out behaviour)

The following data is based on starting figures. The programme consisted of 131 participants who were predominantly female (77%) the remainder were male (19%) and non-binary (4%). The age range was 13-15 years old (Mean = 13.8, SD = .46). In total, 79% described themselves as being White Scottish, 4% as Other, 2% White Polish, 14% as White British and 1% White Irish. See **Figure 1** for participating schools.

Figure 1 displays participating schools 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. High scores are indicative of high positive affect and therefore greater subjective wellbeing. 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.

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 and managing emotions is evaluated using one measured before and after the programme. Each 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. 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).

Parent questionnaire

During the graduation ceremony, parents were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their child.

Analysis

Standard descriptive analyses were performed to report the respondents' ratings on feedback questions using SPSS version 27. T-tests and Bivariate correlations were conducted to detect any differences in respondents' answers. Significance levels for all tests were 2-tailed.

Findings

Table 2 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 (Qualification, Personal Development: Awareness, Level 4).

Table 2: Starting, completion and awards data					
STARTED	FINISHED	RETENTION	AWARD	Award retention (those choosing to continue and completing)	Pass rate
131	112	85%	112	100%	100%

Teacher's questionnaires

The statistics are based on teacher's answers to the questionnaire relating to the participant's profile. Only "Yes" and "No" answers were used in analysis and "Think so" and "Don't Know" answers were removed from analysis.

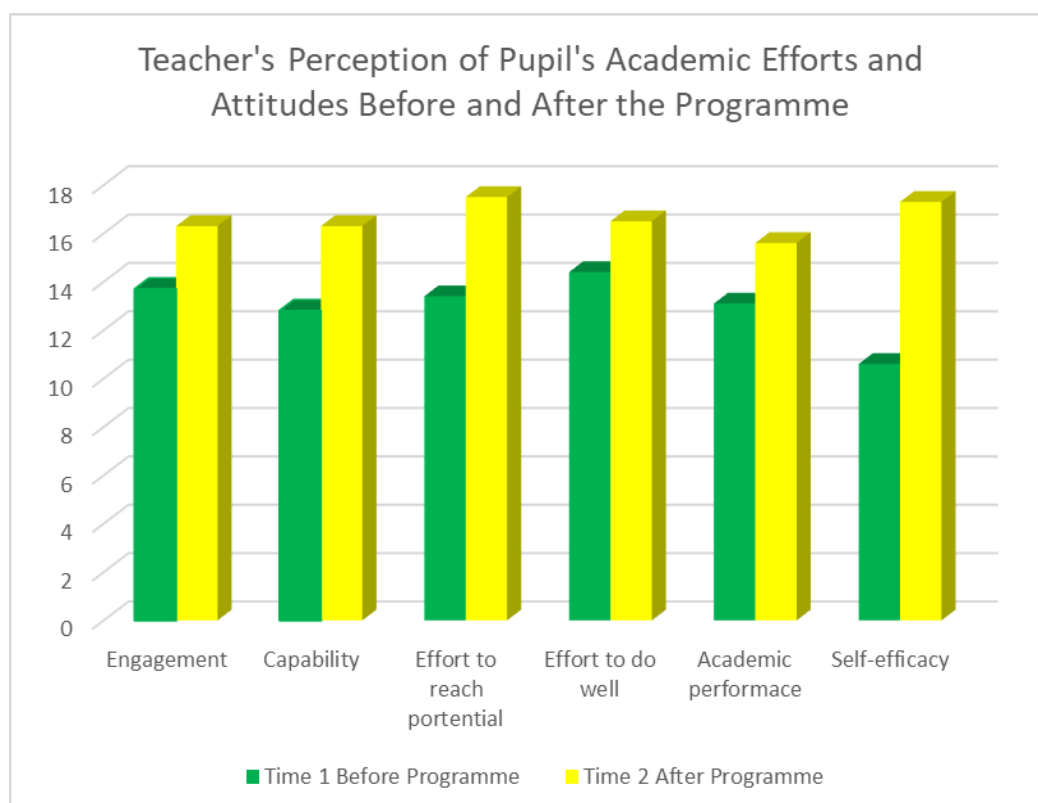
Table 3: Risk Profile		
	%	N
Eligible for Free School Meals.	26	98
Involved with Guidance.	83	98
Come from a troubled family/have poor family support.	38	98
Have been in care/LAC.	12	98
Bullied or is a bully.	52	98
Withdrawn or socially isolated, not be taking part in class activities.	62	98
Have received counselling or psychological intervention.	38	98
Have difficulty interacting with peers.	59	98
Have low self- confidence.	81	98
Have behavioural problems (including anger and disruptive behaviour).	31	98
Have poor attendance or a truanting record.	41	98
Seem to be dis-interested in their future.	34	98
Known to engage in risky behaviour, frequently use alcohol or drugs.	17	98
Comes from a single parent family.	35	98
Parents receive income support.	28	98

Teacher's Questionnaire....

Table 4 displays percentages which have been converted from mean values at Time 1 and Time 2, percentage change and significance value (n =85). **Table 5** displays the percentage agreement for statements relating to the programme.

Table 4: Percentage scores before and after the programme				
Question	Time 1	Time 2	%Age	Significance
Overall, the student is....	Before Programme	After programme	Change	
engaged and interested in learning	13.7	16.3	19%	P < 0.05
achieving grades, they are capable of	12.8	16.3	27%	P < 0.01
making the effort to reach their potential	13.4	17.5	31%	P < 0.01
Making a conscious effort to do as well as they can	14.4	16.5	15%	P < 0.05
likely to achieve the grades they need to progress to further education	13.1	15.6	19%	P < 0.05
Is confident in attempting new tasks and seeing them through (self-efficacy)	10.6	17.3	63%	P < 0.01

Graph 2: Teacher's perception of the young people's efforts and attitudes regarding education.



Results show a significant positive 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.

Table 5: Teacher's questionnaire		
<i>Since completing the programme....</i>	N	% Agreement
the student appears to be more confident	87	80
the student appears to be happier	87	80
the experience has helped them emotionally	87	82

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. Below is a selection of comments....

"I have seen an improvement in X's confidence in the fact that she appears happier and more relaxed. She also appears to be more comfortable around her peers and I have noticed her looking more confident when interacting with friends."

"I see huge improvements in X's approach to school, for her attendance and motivation. She is in a much better place moving forwards."

"There has been a huge impact in X in the actual programme in terms of his confidence. There have been improvements in school and he seems to have found his voice."

"X attendance has improved slightly. His ability to speak to staff and parents when struggling has improved. He is more confident in recognising when his emotional state is heightened and can act on this now."

Participant questionnaires

Impact on mental health and connectedness

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 = 101).

- **72%** of young people agreed that the programme helped them to reflect on what they are good at and what is important in their lives

- **88%** of young people agreed that they valued the support they received on the sessions
- **75%** agreed that the programme helped them to feel more connected to others
- **71%** agreed that the programme made them more aware of themselves and the consequences of their actions
- **61%** agreed that the programme encouraged them to look after their health
- **64%** agreed that the programme had influenced them to make good decisions and avoid risk

The results indicate that there was a significant improvement (**12%**) in young people's mental health as measured by RCADS ($t = 3.15$ (95), $p = <0.05$). However, there was no significant improvement in Positive Affect or Empathy initially. One of the most important components of Growing2gether is the experience young people receive from mentoring children. Unfortunately, of the 16 projects only ten gained access to the nursery. Consequently, it is hypothesised that perhaps the outcomes may be compromised by the fact that not all groups were able to mentor young children. Once analysis was undertaken with the removal of this group, there was a significant improvement (**28%**) in Empathy, ($t = -3.29$ (54), $p = >0.05$). There was no difference in Positive Affect scores regardless of whether they received the full Growing2gether experience or not.

Table 6: Mental Health and connectedness Outcomes						
Scale	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Percentage Change	t-value	Sig
RCADS Score Time 1	60.6	96	25.3	12%	3.15	$p = <0.05$
RCADS Score Time 2	53.3	96	24.3			
Positive Affect Time 1	32.7	97	7.96	2%	.563	$p = > 0.05$
Positive Affect Time 2	33.3	97	8.90			
Empathy Time 1	5.4	55	1.9	28%	-3.29	$p = <0.05$
Empathy Time 2	6.9	55	2.4			

The Mean Score in Positive Affect was 33.0 ($SD \pm 7.2$). We wanted to dichotomise the sample into those scoring below the Mean and those scoring above it to explore if there was an impact on participant's scores. Once individuals scoring below the Mean (less than average Positive Affect at baseline) were selected, there was a significant improvement (**15%**) by the end of the programme, ($t = 3.70$ (58), $p = <0.05$).

Young people's comments reflected their wellbeing and sense of connectedness to others as well as their mental health.

"I have learned to be confident and understand others"

Growing2gether taught me to look after my mental health" "I enjoyed getting closer to the group and it was the highlight of my week"

"The programme has taught me to put myself in someone else's shoes"

"I enjoyed that it was a calm and quiet place where I got to talk to other people who won't judge."

"What I liked most, was the community we built here on the programme"

"I enjoyed making new connections with others"

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.

- **82%** agreed that education provides them with more opportunities in the future.

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

"I learned that I can achieve anything when I put my brain and thoughts into it."

"Being on Growing2gether has helped me because when I am in a difficult situation, I can think back to this and find a way to solve it."

"I really enjoyed working as a team"

"I learned that there are consequences to my actions"

Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement of **22%** in Growth of Mindset ($t = -5.97$ (94), $p = <0.01$)

Table 7: Mindset Outcomes						
Scale	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Percentage Change	t- vare	Sig
Growth of Mindset Time 1	5.9	95	1.94	22%	-5.97	.000
Growth of Mindset Time 2	7.2	95	1.90			

Satisfaction and feedback

Young people were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the programme (n = 101).

- **97%** found the subjects that were covered informative
- **85%** enjoyed building a relationship with their toddler
- **91%** enjoyed working with others
- **90%** would recommend the programme to other young people

Below are the responses to the parent questionnaire. The sample is small; however, the comments are encouraging.

Table 8 Parent questionnaire		
<i>My child.....</i>	N	% Agreement
appears happier and more fulfilled	17	76%
has gained a sense of clarity with regards to their future	17	88%
seems more engaged with school (wanting to try harder)	17	77%
appears more open and communicative	17	87%
has become more responsible	17	71%
appears more confident in their own ability	17	77%
I would recommend other parents to encourage their children to participate	17	88%

“Happy X seemed to enjoy this class and always seems happy and eager to get to class”

“X has gained more confidence, has more concentration about what she is doing in school and more sense of fun. My child has really grown in confidence. Thank you!”

“We are so delighted she has had this opportunity as she has been able to share all her positive learning”

“It is great to see her showing more confidence and looking forward to Fridays”

“X has more confidence when speaking to others”

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.

Case study 1

"Stuart is severely dyslexic; he gets frustrated easily and lacks self confidence in the learning situation. Often in school he will use abusive language and vent his frustration when he feels that others are needling him. He is not always able to focus in class as he becomes very easily distracted when using his laptop in lessons because of his literacy challenges. Sometimes he acknowledges that he would 'zone out' and hear almost nothing.

Over the course, Stuart gained a huge amount of self-awareness regarding his tendency to zone out and negative behaviour in school. He says he can definitely help himself to concentrate more in class now that he has seen the young children in their learning environments. They responded very well to his gentle and caring manner. Stuart was mostly based in the nursery but helped a couple of times in the P1/2 class. He coped very well with the new situation and was able to work 1:1 and then used his initiative and re-issued one of the teacher's instructions to the whole class with a positive outcome. She was impressed.

Stuart has been a delight to have in the group: interested, committed, polite, considerate and able to participate fully in all of our discussions where he displayed confidence. He has a great ability to think in all directions and is not afraid to voice his ideas. Increasingly, he has been more in control of his need to lash out with his tongue and school report hearing a lot less inappropriate language from him. They feel the programme has helped him emotionally and improved his confidence. All the staff were most impressed by Stuart's willingness to step well out of his comfort zone with literacy matter and take his turn to read the story to the small group. He was mostly unfazed and now knows and appreciates (because I have checked) the difference between being able to read words from a page and be a successful storyteller. He is settled in school now, working hard in all of his subjects and aiming towards a potential next step."

Stuart's Comments

"Passing on your knowledge and experience is very helpful as the children look up to you. I feel quite proud that I am helping the child I am paired with to get better at showing her feelings."

Case study 2

"This group started when masks were still mandatory in the classrooms. At this time it was yet unclear whether the group would be able to access work experience in the Nursery. Simon was given the opportunity to join the group to help him grow in confidence and self-esteem and build new contacts within his peer group. He has a visual impairment which contributes to him feeling self-conscious and leads to his tendency to keep himself apart from his peers. A history of being bullied was also mentioned. He was known to be wearing a black scarf mask over his neck to nose and a black jumper with his hood permanently up, his eyes were downcast so as to avoid any eye contact. He was usually seen on his own during break times, ensuring that he was staying out of the way of the main throng of pupils - his hood up whenever possible.

When he joined the group, he preferred to listen and he was so quietly spoken that when asked a question it was almost impossible to make out his words. He kept himself and his thoughts apart from the others. This was a small group, and as he got to know the other

participants a little better, he began to grow more comfortable and interested in sharing his opinions with the rest of the group. Realising that the others were also reluctant and not in the habit of participating verbally, he began to make use of the opportunity and took on a more active and leading role in small group discussions revealing his vast knowledge and insight into the topics and also his sense of humour. With time, his posture and body language became more open and his voice louder and clearer. The addition of younger, much more vocal and less mature participants helped him to realise his own strengths and knowledge and thus raise his self-esteem and in return they began to adjust their assumption they had made of him as a person.

After 5 weeks we were able to join the nursery. Simon realised that he wouldn't be able to wear his hood when working with the children. He spent the first couple of weeks observing and getting used to the busyness of the environment. He was very unsure of how the children and adults would receive him and stayed close to his peers. Within a couple of weeks, he started to noticeably relax and began to step further out of his comfort zone to initiate interactions with the children. Realising and trusting that the children and adults were keen to speak to him, interested to find out more about him and ask for his help resulted in a huge boost in confidence and he increasingly initiated activities and interactions which were enjoyed by big groups of children. Towards the end of the programme, he was asked to help with a picnic for the children - he no longer felt the need to wear a hood or a mask, his voice was clearly heard above the excitable chatter of around 40 children and 15 adults as he was offering food and drink to the children. His relationships with his peers have strengthened both with the boys from the group and in school and he is choosing to spend increasing time in their company during his breaks."

Quote from Simon

"I was resistant and hesitant at the beginning but as time went on, I got more adjusted and used to the people in the group and going, in general doing the talks and work at the beginning of every Thursday going over the events of the week. As the time went on in the nursery I was more independently working with the children. I could walk out and start helping without being asked to, although, however I still carried out any task set by members of staff it became "oh it's just another day in the Nursery". Towards the end of the group most of the staff were familiar with me and the others and we helped out with events like sports day practice and a picnic. The highlight of going to the Nursery was when Peter and I built something for the children for them to play with whilst staff watched and children played by throwing a ball and we made it land in a box every time. Growing2gether overall was a positive experience over 4 months of time every Thursday for a while heading into and helping the nursery staff for work experience and a qualification at the end of it by doing a portfolio."

Feedback from staff

"It's been fantastic having the boys in nursery! They have interacted so well and demonstrated such kindness to our children. It's is such a great opportunity for our boys in nursery to see two such kind young men as role models in the nursery setting"

"There has been a huge change in Simon in terms of his confidence over the course of the programme. In school, there have been some improvements with how he mixes with his peers. He seems to have found his voice."

Discussion and Conclusion

Anxiety and depression, measured by RCADS significantly improved (by 15%) by the end of the programme, suggesting that Growing2gether has made a positive impact on young people's mental health. Enhancing mental health and emotional wellbeing is extremely valuable as it correlates with academic, behavioural, social-emotional and motivational outcomes. This outcome is particularly important as depression in teenagers can be a particularly risky time as they may not be as open to seek advice or recognise the signs of depression, rather they are more likely to participate in high-risk activities. Positive Affect didn't show significance initially, however once we concentrated on individuals who started the programme with lower-than-average PA, the results showed that there was a significant improvement (15%) in pre and post test scores.

One of the most important components of Growing2gether is the experience young people receive from mentoring children. Unfortunately, one school was not able to gain access to the nursery. It is hypothesised that perhaps the outcomes may be compromised by the fact that not all groups were able to mentor young children. Once analysis was undertaken with the removal of this group, there was a significant improvement (28%) in Empathy. These findings were echoed by young people's feedback revealing that the programme had helped them to "*put themselves in other people's shoes*" and that the programme had taught them to carefully consider other people's feelings. It was interesting, however not surprising, that significance was found once removing participants who did not have the nursery experience, as the primary/nursery school children act as an indirect and non-threatening tool to explore the child's opinions and beliefs as well as their own. The young people are encouraged to observe the child's interactions, behaviours and empathise with their assigned child. For instance, there may be peer conflict and the young person will comfort and suggest strategies to resolve the issue. The nurturing received by the young person can help facilitate social learning and development in the child. Young people too are able to fulfil this, however on a more complex level and with the guidance of the facilitators.

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.

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 and parents 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.

Parental feedback matched that of the young people in that participants had gained confidence, improved communication and openness. Specifically for the young people, the programme had encouraged them to be more reflective on what they are good at and what is important in their lives, helped them to connect to others, influenced them to make good

decisions and avoid risk. They also valued the support they received. 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.

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