

Community Growing2gether Impact Report September 2019 - February 2020

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Summary

Growing2gether in the Community comprises of two programmes; Growing2gether, where young people mentor a nursery child requiring additional support, and the new Growing2gether community projects, created by young people and supported by community mentors. This project was designed in response to young people's anecdotal feedback from the programmes and evidenced in findings from a recent marketing survey, (undertaken in December 2019) which revealed that out of 63 graduates, 76% wanted a programme in the community.

A mixed methods approach was administered in order to obtain information on the young people's perceptions of their community and how they wanted to proceed in undertaking an intervention to tackle these issues. Initially, a focus group led by the facilitators was implemented. While in some cases this is useful, in the current cohort the young people reported that the process felt intimidating and an alternative strategy was implemented. Our facilitators are flexible, reflexive (reflexivity refers to the process of continual reflection upon the process by a facilitator in trying to extract information) and trained to adapt and tailor their approach in order to meet the groups needs. The group felt it would be a more engaging process to discuss ideas over activities which will be detailed in this report. The latter part of this report combines the feedback from young people participating in cohort 1 (ending in July 2019) and cohort 2 (ending in February 2020) in order to generate a greater sample size, providing a more robust method of reporting.

The results suggest that the project has a positive impact on the young people's mental health in terms of reducing anxiety and depression (as measured by The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale). The impact of these workshops benefitted the wider

community and helped spread positive messages regarding domestic abuse, self-harm, mental health and homelessness. The involvement from other local organisations and charities, equipped the young people new skills as well as provide a sense of connectedness amongst the community. This report will discuss the outcomes from the project.

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period characterised by multiple changes in virtually every aspect of an individual's life. The prefrontal cortex (front part of the brain) is responsible for teenager's ability to plan and think about the consequences of actions, solve problems and control impulses when making decisions (Lang et al., 2016). This developmental phase continues until early adulthood and consequently, when making decisions, teenagers are more likely to rely on the amygdala which is associated with emotions, aggression and impulses (Lang et al., 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that these dramatic physiological, social and cognitive changes may exceed the coping abilities of young people, leading to maladaptive coping mechanisms and behavioural problems such as substance misuse, engaging in unprotected sex as well as experiencing mental health problems (Galván, 2012). Research indicates that adolescents use different coping mechanisms to deal with problems compared to adults, suggesting that interventions need to be sensitive to these developmental changes (Vanucci et al 2018). The findings illuminate *when* and *how* associations between specific coping strategies and depressive symptoms may emerge and change across developmental age. Growing2gether programmes are youth led and facilitated by professionals who are sensitive to these changes as well as the young person's psycho-social background, and tailor their approach in order to maximise the experience for young people.

Community programmes targeting younger adolescents are important as it gives young people a chance to respond and learn from their experience, potentially modifying their behaviours (for example not being confident to ask for help, not resolving problems and turning to drink/drugs, showing aggression etc.) before they become established and more difficult to change. Facilitating this process is connectedness, which refers to the emotional attachment and commitment an 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). Findings from a study on youth work illustrated the importance of an ecological approach to

reducing adolescent sexual risk behaviours through the engagement of parents and increased school connectedness (Caderbaum et al 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 in the Community understand that many of the young people in the community come from unstable and ever-changing environments. Providing an opportunity to work with other young people and adults in their own community to achieve a shared goal provides a sense of stability, connectedness and empowers the individuals involved.

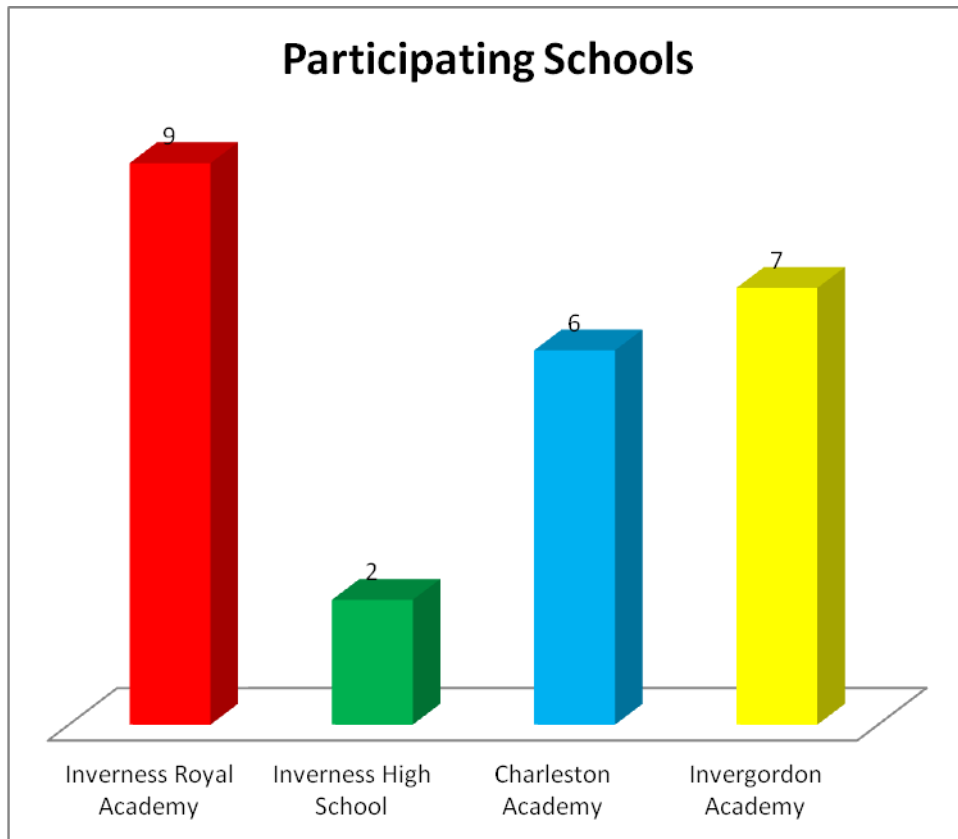
Thanks to The Scottish Government Aspiring Communities Fund, we have been able to extend our programmes in order to facilitate the implementation of community groups and third sector organisations to improve the most deprived and fragile communities. The development of the community programme is necessary as it impacts on education, health, recreation and employment. It is an opportunity for young people to be empowered and motivated by creating a better standard of living for the community while reducing inequalities.

Method

Participants

In total, 24 young people started the programme and 18 completed it (75% retention). Participants were divided into three groups. In groups consisting of 8 or more, young people divided themselves into two smaller 'sub-groups' to ensure they could work more efficiently. See Graph 1 for participating schools.

Graph 1: Participating schools



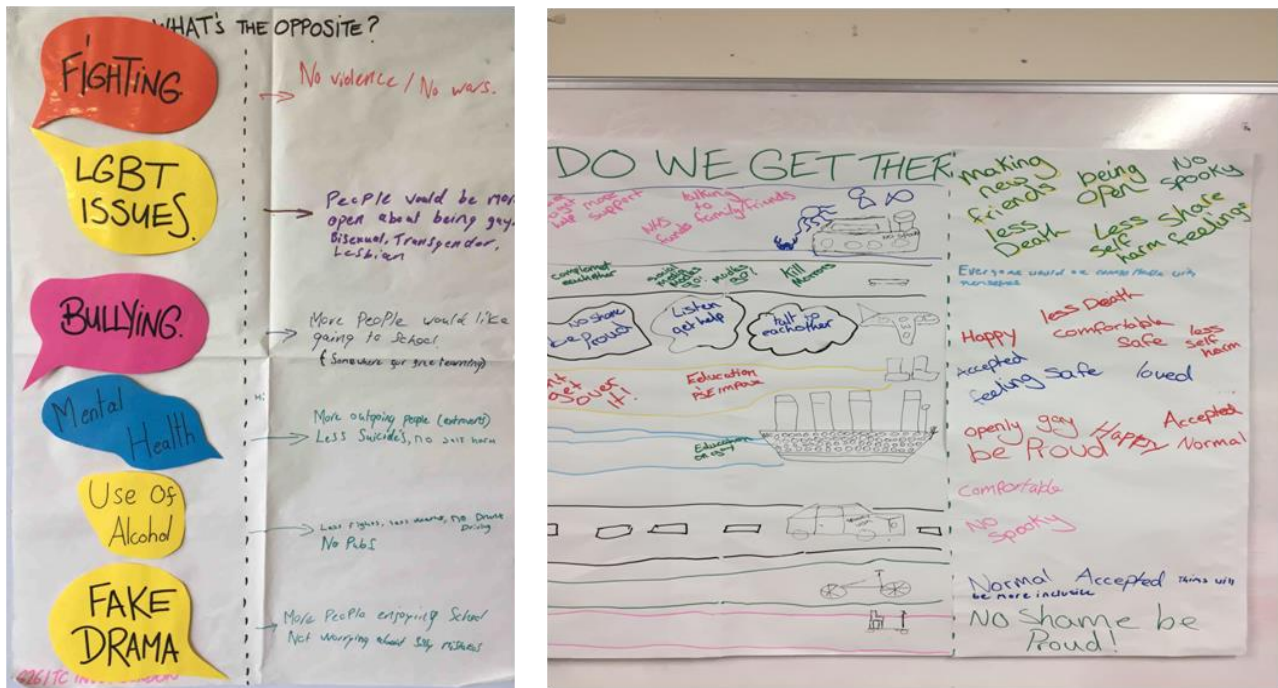
The sample were predominantly female (58%) participants, 63% described themselves as being heterosexual and 37% as bisexual. The age range was 14-16 years old (Mean = 14.2, SD = .5).

Process in order to capture important topics

Young people were asked to write each 'community issue' on coloured paper and cut them out with the view that they would use them in other activities. The facilitators were able to work with each group, coaching the young people to enable them to write down their ideas and share their findings with the whole group. The second process, 'opposites' was designed in order to encourage them to imagine what their community might look like in the absence of these issues. Their expectations were managed by acknowledging that the group won't solve all these issues completely, however, can certainly have an impact. Young people were then asked to place their 'positive' issue on one side of a large sheet of paper

and their 'negative' issues on the other side with a large space between them. The final stage was to establish how to progress in order to travel from the negative side to the positive side. Once the major themes were identified, young people were then able to think about some of the ways they can help their community. Figure 1 illustrates this process.

Figure 1: An example of the process; creating themes, identifying opposites and solutions



Measures

Growing2gether in the Community Questionnaire

At the end of the intervention, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about their experience of the Community Growing2gether programme. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions where participants were asked to mark their responses on a scale of 1-5 (for example, 1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree).

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 a suitable instrument to assess anxiety levels across adolescence (Mathyssek et al, 2013). Global scores were calculated before and after the Growing2gether in the Community project. Low scores correlate with better mental health.

Findings

Workshops were facilitated by the Community Partnerships Officer and the Community Facilitator who ran workshops over 18 weeks. Young people met once a week in the afternoon at their school, to work on their project.

The groups identified the following areas.

- ***Domestic Abuse***
- ***Self-Harm***
- ***Mental Health***
- ***Homelessness***

Domestic Abuse (Invergordon Academy)

Pupils from Invergordon Academy designed their project around domestic abuse. In order to increase their knowledge in this area and further support the work of domestic abuse services, young people contacted Ross-shire Women's Aid. The young people envisaged designing and delivering an "awareness raising session" on domestic abuse for their school with the support of Ross-Shire Women's Aid staff. Although the staff had initially agreed to support the young people, they subsequently informed the group that this would no longer be possible, due to staff shortages. Fortunately, the group discovered that the service was already scheduled to deliver three awareness raising sessions at Invergordon Academy. They invited the young people to work with them in a supporting role during the sessions, with a focus on assisting them in the delivery of the 'quiz' element. They asked the young people to familiarise themselves with both the content of the PowerPoint presentation as well as the questions and answers to the 'quiz' to enable the young people to deliver this element. The group were keen to take on this challenge, they were both shocked and pleased about how much information on domestic abuse they had retained. This project reached **328** people.

Homelessness (Charleston Academy)

The young people from Charleston Academy were very keen to explore the issue of homelessness in Scotland for their community project. After some initial research on their own, they prepared a series of questions and approached Highland Homeless Trust (Gateway) to find out more about homelessness. Staff at Gateway invited the young people to meet with them and discuss what their service provides. Primarily, the organisation aims to encourage their service users to develop 'life skills' to enable them to retain their own tenancies once they leave Gateway. The young people were extremely motivated by this notion and decided to utilise the skills within their group, particularly those of one young person whose parents own a bakery, and invite people experiencing homelessness to come to the school, learn the skill of baking and at the same participate in an 'event' that would raise awareness in the school around of the issue of homelessness.

The group approached a company called, "My Cup Cake Toppers" who make edible rice paper discs for cakes and asked them to print a series of homeless facts onto discs which they would place onto each cake, hence raising awareness and educating members of the public about homelessness. Highland Homeless Trust approved the facts proposed by the group. These included, '*700 people sleep rough on a typical night in Scotland*' and '*In 2017 people lost their homes every 18 minutes in Scotland*'. Furthermore, the group designed a poster to advertise their event and asked Gateway to provide them with resources, so pupils could be signposted if they had any concerns about experiencing these issues themselves. This project reached **830** people, including 100 hits on Facebook.

Figure 2: Cupcakes produced by the young people



Mental Health (Inverness Royal Academy)

Pupils from Inverness Royal Academy partnered with Creativity in Care and Birchwood Highland, who both support people with mental health problems. After exploring numerous possibilities for their community project, the group decided to create an artwork that would highlight the issue of mental health in their community and that would somehow reflect positively the recovery process. The contact from Creativity in Care facilitated a creative workshop whereby the group could work with people experiencing enduring mental health issues in order to create a series of statements or affirmations that could be used in an artwork. The group were keen on the idea and used their budget to fund "Tote Bags" made with the printed affirmations they had created in the workshop. The group approached Birchwood Highland proposing that they could sell the bags in their shop in order to raise awareness of the issue of mental health, while raising money for the charity. Birchwood Highland were delighted and agreed.

Figure 3: Tote bag produced by the young people



On the day of the workshop, pupils met with staff from Creativity in Care and worked together with 7 people experiencing enduring mental health issues to create their affirmations. The event was a great success and had a significant impact on both the service users and the young people. One service user expressed how impressed she was that a group of young people were willing to engage in a project that was so beneficial to people experiencing mental health problems. The group recognised that two disparate groups had come together on the day to create a new group who shared similar concerns and they made plans to bring the group together again in the future to work on another project. The contact at Birchwood Highland estimated that the young people's project will have reached **940** people through their website and a forthcoming event where the bags will be on sale.

Self- Harm (Inverness High School)

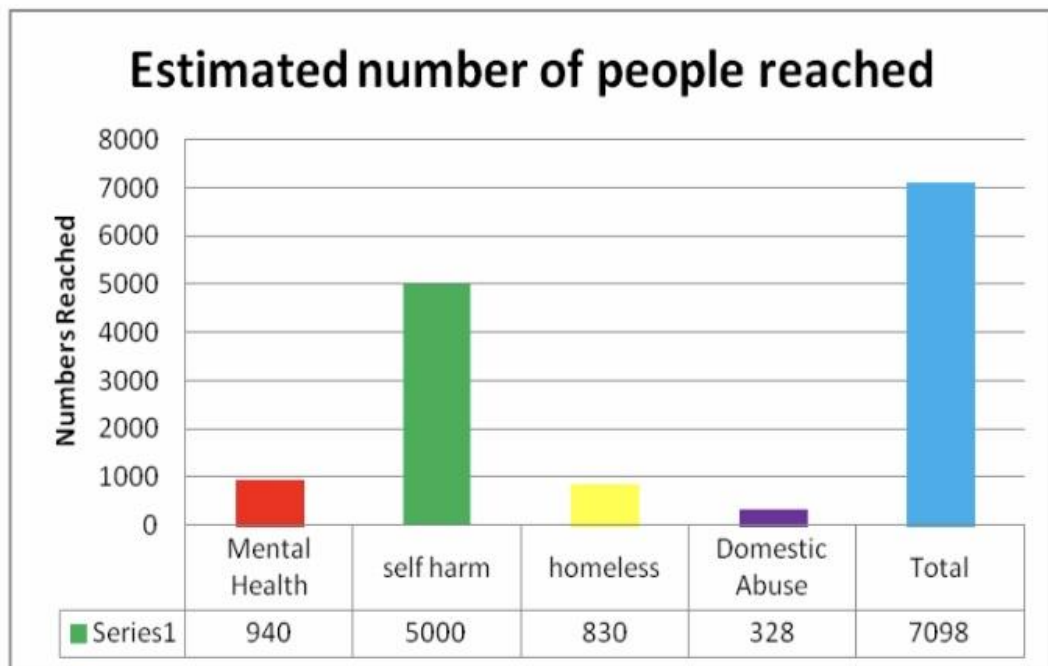
This project was a very personal project for the two young people, who had experience of self-harm and used this opportunity to tackle it. The two pupils felt that self-harm was very misunderstood in their community and that it would be beneficial to educate family and friends about self-harm in order to facilitate better understanding by creating a book. The aim of the book was to define self-harm and provide information and supported by statistics. It was hoped that the book would help reduce the stigma attached to this issue and would demonstrate what an important role the creative process can play in helping people find an outlet for their thoughts and emotions. The group agreed that the book would have a signposting element for people affected by self-harm.

Figure 4: Displays one of the young people reading the book they created



The pupils wanted to combine these factual and informative elements with poetry, drawings and people’s stories. Over the weeks the young people worked closely with a graphic designer, who assisted them by showing them how the book could be presented and how to make it more visually appealing. Throughout this process the pupils acted both as authors and editors of the content, collecting and editing stories from people in their community who had experience of self-harm. The result is a both a hard hitting and beautiful publication that shines a light on the issue of self-harm and demonstrates not only how harrowing an experience this can be, but that with support and care from people and services in the community individuals can recover and perhaps even find some peace. According to the contact at Creative Care, it is estimated that the books will reach **5000** people attending the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival, where the books will be featured and available to buy.

Graph 2: Summary of potential numbers reached (approximately).



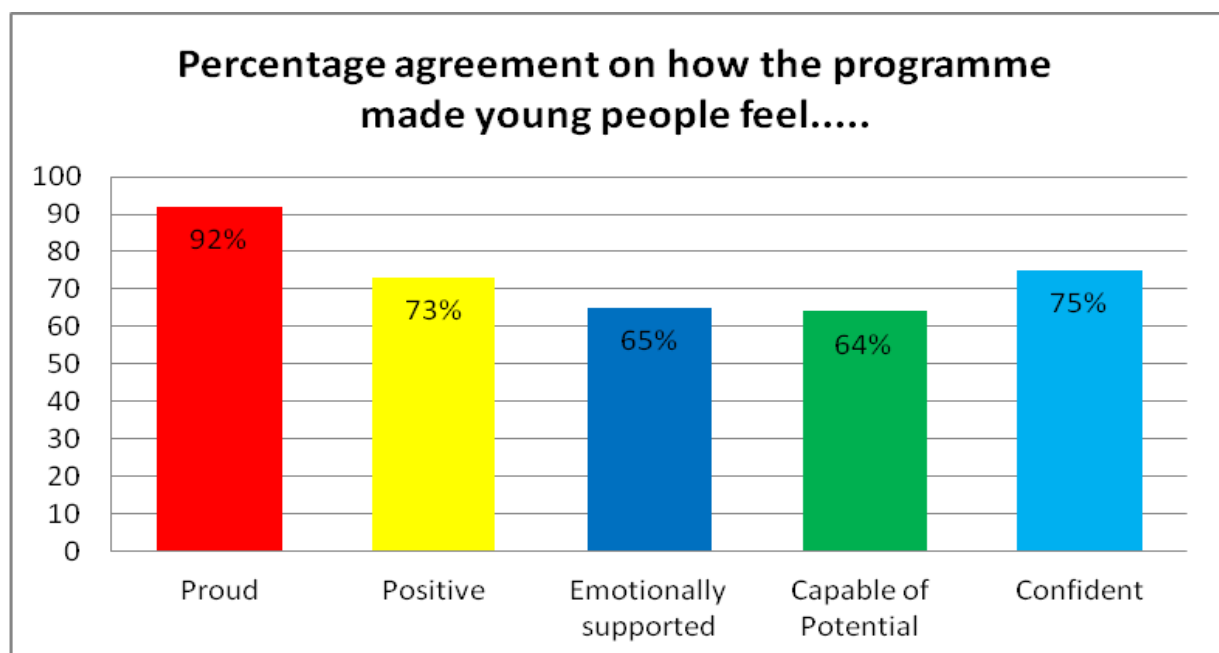
Statistics based on both programmes

To generate a larger sample size, the statistics below incorporate previous Growing2gether in The Community participants (who completed earlier projects on mental health, substance misuse and teenage pregnancy).

The table below provides feedback from the young people about the programme.

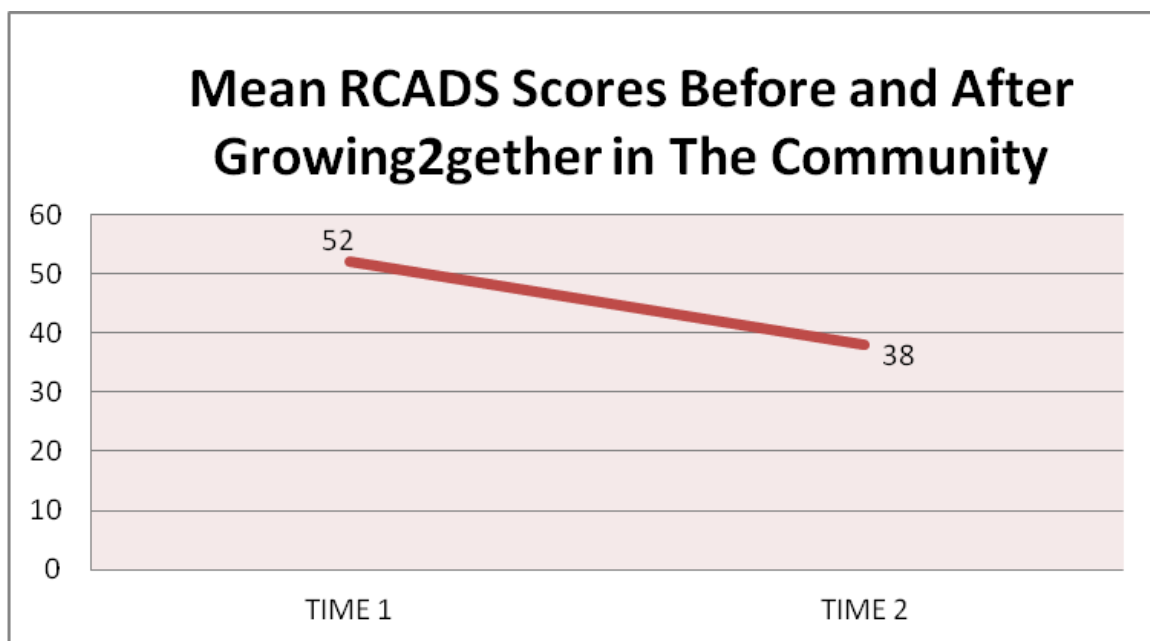
Table 1: Responses to programme evaluation		
	Percentage Agreement	Frequency
Growing2gether in the Community has given me a sense of purpose	75%	24
The programme has helped be to become more engaged with my community	76%	24
I have learned valuable skills that I can use in life	92%	24
Growing2gether in the Community has made me feel more confident in my abilities	76%	24
Contributing to the community has been a valuable experience	92%	24
Growing2gether in the Community has given me more focus in life	52%	24
Growing2gether in the Community has encouraged me to want to become more involved in my community in the future	76%	24

Graph 3: Illustrates the extent to which "Growing2gether in the Community" impacted on the young people's feeling about themselves.



The graph below illustrates The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) mean scores before (Time 1) and after (Time 2) Growing2gether in the Community. The lower scores in scores represents an improvement in mental health. The results suggest that the project has a significant positive impact ($t = -3.19$ (18), $p = <0.05$) on the young people's mental health in terms of reducing anxiety and depression by **27%**.

Graph 4: Mean RCADS scores measuring depression and anxiety before and after Growing2gether in the Community (n = 19).



Young people were asked to indicate the extent to how much they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding the programme (n = 23).

- **74%** enjoyed working with others
- **78%** enjoyed building relationships
- **77%** felt the experience made them more connected to others
- **96%** would recommend the programme to other young people

Conclusion

It is evident that the young people involved on the project had made a substantial contribution to their community and were able to promote discussions and raise awareness about important topics such as domestic abuse, mental health, homelessness and self-harm. They have worked with charities and organisations who have helped teach them new skills as well as increased their knowledge regarding these topics. They have managed to raise money for one charity and have reached approximately **7098** people. It is encouraging that despite the project consisting of these small groups, the impact from these programmes has the potential to raise awareness and help the wider community, which is extremely commendable.

The results suggest that the project has a significant impact on the young people's mental health in terms of reducing anxiety and depression. The evaluation revealed high satisfaction scores as well as increasing positive feelings, such as pride while providing the young people with a sense of purpose and facilitating connectedness by becoming engaged with their community.

Growing2gether in the Community understand that many of the young people in the community come from unstable and ever-changing environments. Providing an opportunity to work with other young people and adults in their own community to achieve a shared goal has provided the young people, third sector organisations and other members of the community with a sense of connectedness, which seems to be the secret ingredient to empowering the individuals involved as well as building relationships the wider community.

Acknowledgements

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