

9 June 2020

Growing2gether New Services Update

Growing2gether Online, Small Group Youth Led Counselling and One to One Counselling

Overview

At the end of April, a comprehensive survey was carried out by Growing2gether with over 100 current programme participants; we derive from the results that one third of Growing2gether participants are decidedly struggling at this point in time. Whilst only about 30% say their situation has worsened since the onset of COVID-19, almost 75% of young people experience some form of worry, anxiety and/or loneliness. This outcome has been confirmed by other youth surveys in the field, and shows that mental health issues will be increased by the ending of lock down and the return to school.

Many of our participants lack self-confidence and find social and academic pressures at school challenging. We may assume that 23% of respondents say they are doing better, or much better, at this point in time because those pressures have lessened and we anticipate an increase in the need for support for these individuals when schools reopen. The high rate of participants using video calling, (nearly 70% find support in speaking to their friends, suggests that working online would be available to, and suit, our young people.

To address this increased need and to adapt to the current situation, we have developed Growing2gether using digital technology. This includes: a new Growing2gether Online programme, with the added value of one-to-one counselling for young people that request this; and, depending on funding, new one-to-one and group counselling options for young people with deeper issues. We will of course, resume our core programme of young people mentoring children in a nursery setting, whilst gaining valuable work experience and earning an accredited award, as soon as possible.

Our commitment to serving disengaged young people for early intervention/prevention remains high and our passion undaunted. It has emerged that the Growing2gether digital services that we are creating will enhance our work and most likely be a provision that we will continue long term, alongside our core programme – a counselling hub, both on line and when appropriate, face to face with small group counselling and individual counselling where needed.

Covid 19 has precipitated a radical change in the world today and one which is constantly changing, in small and more dramatic ways. We who work with young people, have a responsibility to adapt our interventions to address the changing and urgent current needs of those we serve. Furthermore, there is an intensification of the previously existing needs, that have consequently become more urgent.

Growing2gether has actively researched, surveyed our own participating young people as well as our schools, created a youth advisory team, spoken with colleagues and other third sector organisations with a view to how we can best address young people's emergent needs in a transformative and grounded way. We have redesigned our intervention(s) to be offered digitally online during this interim period and in schools when possible and eventually back to our flagship Growing2gether mentoring programme delivery in partner nurseries.

We will offer:

Growing2gether Online

Although unable to go back into nurseries for young people to mentor a small child, the Growing2gether curriculum offers solid and congruent personal development work for young people in a similar way as previously. A major and important part of Growing2gether is the relational skills young people develop through interaction with the nursery staff, our facilitators and each other. In an action research way, in the revised programme, new behaviours will be tried out on existing important relationships in the young persons' life, brought back to the group for processing, further integrated and tried out again in these significant relationships. Young people will continue to earn a Personal Development: Awareness, (SCQF level 4) Unit. We are working in smaller groups of 3-4 young people for 50-minute sessions once a week to enable us to give the individual attention needed. One Growing2gether programme will be delivered in two small groups over 12 weeks.

Growing2gether Youth Led Counselling groups

Dependent on funding, to address increased needs, we also plan to offer youth-led counselling groups. These 12-week groups, also small for individual attention, will be totally open to and determined by the young people for each session, in terms of what is psychologically/emotionally foreground for them, their current situation and what issues need to be addressed in that session (i.e. bullying, sex, anger, social media issues).

Much research has shown that counselling in a small group can be extremely beneficial for young people.^{1 2 3} Growing2gether has both expertise and a proven track record in the area of group work with adolescents. This youth led service will be offered to small groups of young people (3-6). The value of group counselling is that young people lead the way with relevancy to their lives; learn from each other; discover that there are others *like them* with similar, if not the same issues, which leads to an awareness that they are *not so different after all*. Self-esteem and self-belief are enhanced by this discovery.

Additionally, young people supporting young people, in a safe setting, allows their inherent wisdom and life experience to be present and carries gravitas with each other. It also fosters a sense of belonging and *community*.

1 YouthLink, Scottish Youth Parliament and Young Scot, The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

2 Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S, Texas A&M University

3 Dr. Bob Connolly, Psy.D, Founder, Connolly Counselling and Assessment, The Wellness Institute, Issaquah, Washington

Additional benefits of group counselling are that it:

- helps young people realise they're not alone and develop a sense of belonging
- facilitates giving and receiving support
- helps young people find their "voice"
- supports the learning of relational skills with others and self empathy
- provides the additional support both socially and individually that a young person may need (a safety net) and a support network
- allows individuals to develop self-awareness by listening to others with similar issues
- provides a safe space to try new strategies without being judged
- is cost effective, whereas individual counselling can be expensive

Our team

Besides all being highly experienced at working with groups for many years, the Growing2gether staff team are all enrolled on an on line Counsellor Diploma Programme connected with Glasgow Caledonian University, 40 credit points, SCQF Level 8. Additional to this, our Director Diana Whitmore founded the Psychosynthesis Trust, has trained counsellors for 30 years, is accredited by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy and as a senior supervisor by the British Association for Counselling. Two of our core team are qualified as counsellors at Post Graduate level. As a team, we are well placed to offer counselling.

One-to-one Counselling

On an as needed basis, one-to-one counselling can be offered to individual young people if they ask for additional support (self-referral) and will be woven into the Growing2gether online intervention.

Additionally, we will work with Guidance teams and the schools 4 Tier Mental Health system of the Primary Mental Health Worker Service⁴ for referrals of young people who would benefit from a bespoke intervention that addresses their specific needs. The counselling would be short-term solution focused for a series of 6 one-to-one sessions with the possibility of extending for another 6 weeks if the young person needs this.

Signposting

By July 2020, Growing2gether will have a new website with signposting to youth-led specific services that young people have ascertained that they need and want. An advisory team of Growing2gether graduate young people will guide us on what works for young people and lead the way with the content and some design of the signposting page(s) on the website.

Supported by:



4 ASN Needs system, Primary Mental Health Worker Service