

## Growing2gether Evaluation Report (January 2023- February 2024)

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### Introduction

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Growing2gether is a targeted youth intervention, which specifically selects young people facing disadvantage who are at risk of exacerbating current psychosocial, behavioural and educational difficulties. 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 children in a nursery/primary school who require extra support. Young people receive an accredited personal development qualification. Since January 2017, the charity has reached 2004 children and young people across the Highlands and helped them to improve their mental health and enhance their educational/community engagement. The intervention is underpinned by transpersonal psychology, which provides a holistic psychological approach and focuses on enabling individuals to access more of their potential. 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 well-being, educational attainment and long-term life chances, 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 WorkForce.



## **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 & Nilssotn, 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.

## **Child and Teenager Interaction**

The child and teenager dyads are central to the intervention's success. This kind of mentoring is a unique form of peer mentoring that matches an older youth mentor with a younger youth mentee to promote positive outcomes on mental health. Growing2gether 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 or primary school who require extra support. Growing2gether facilitators work closely with schools and nurseries to gain an understanding of the young person and child participating in 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 creates a wider field for them to grow and develop within and to know themselves, their strengths, and weaknesses.

### **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 result in 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 ea 2023) suggested that by providing an intervention (life-styles training) increased self-esteem through helping individuals to 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 equals and must learn to communicate effectively and openly with one another. Positive appraisal and unconditional positive regard, 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. Promoting social problem solving, (for example, creating role play scenarios on how to best deal with a problem) and self-acceptance, encourages 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 an 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 hypothesised to extend to their community and home life, whereby relationships are strengthened through positive communication, respect and understanding.

### **Growing2gether and Growth of Mindset**

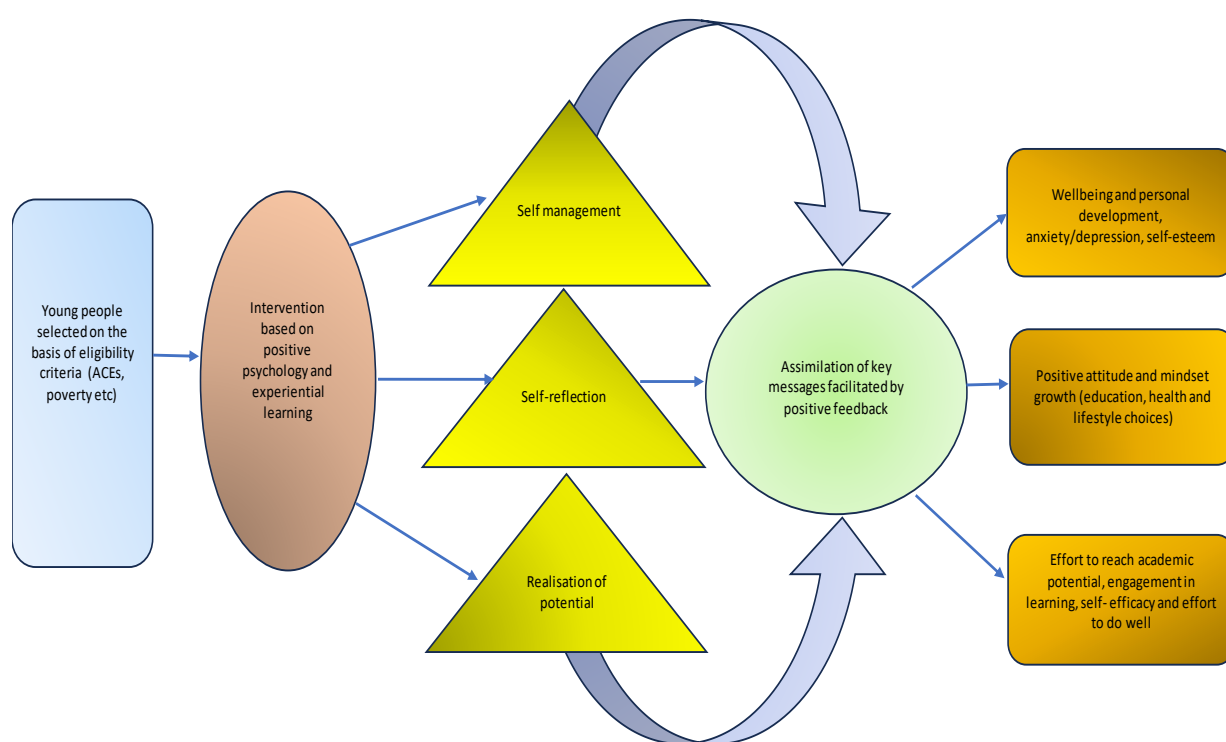
Some researchers suggest that individuals who believe intelligence is malleable (a growth mindset) are better able to bounce back from failures than those who believe intelligence is fixed, (Dweck, 1986). With regards to the latter, these people tend to feel helpless after encountering failures and this 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 refers back to growth of mindset and encourages young people to perceive this as being malleable, hence realising their own potential to achieve goals.

## Theory of Change

The model below illustrates Growing2gether's Theory of Change model. Our primary outcomes are positive mental health, (a reduction on anxiety and depression) self-esteem, positive mindset and academic potential. Emotional wellbeing is positively correlated with academic attainment (Jirdehi et al 2018). Through experiential learning and an approach/curriculum underpinned by positive psychology, young people are better able to self-reflect, self-manage and self-regulate, meanwhile enhancing relationships with others. Growing2gether work in partnership with Highland Council to achieve our long-term aim of young people reaching a positive destination, which include higher education, further education, employment, training, personal skills development and voluntary work. Recent research on Growing2gether graduates (N233) undertaken by Highland Council, revealed that 92% of young people reached a positive destination. See **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1:** Summary of Growing2gether



## Method

### Participants

Young people are selected for the programme on the basis of psychosocial (including poverty) and behavioural disadvantage, via an eligibility tool which is completed by school contacts. Teachers must tick three of the criteria as a minimum, in order for the young person to be eligible. In this cohort, 100% had ticked three or more indicators. Although the tool has been adapted over the years, some key indicators remain consistently high such as low self-esteem,

(91%) being socially isolated or withdrawn or affected by bullying, (65%) being a recipient of psychological intervention (CAHMS), (32%) and had experienced parental abandonment through separation, divorce or death (48%). In total 63% of young people experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These are highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. Poverty indicators include, families on benefits (30%), income support (30%) and eligible for Free School Meals (39%).

The following data is based on starting figures. The programme has reached 208 participants with a retention rate of 83% and from those who complete, 100% gain an accredited Level 4 SCQF interpersonal skills qualification (Self Awareness and Self in the Community). The sample were predominantly female, (113, 54%) the remainder were male (91, 44%) and non-binary 4, 2%). The age range was 13-15 years old, (Mean = 13.8, SD = .47) 9% had a disability and 7% were religious. See **Table 1** for participating schools and **Table 2** for ethnicity breakdown.

School	Number of participants recruited	Percentage	Number of groups per school
Inverness Royal Academy	30	14	5
Golspie High School	8	4	1
Inverness High School	20	10	4
Dingwall Academy	16	8	3
Charleston Academy	25	12	4
Alness Academy	14	7	2
Thurso High School	14	7	2
Tain Royal Academy	14	7	2
Kingussie High School	9	4	1
Millburn Academy	16	8	3
Fortrose Academy	18	9	3
Craigie High School	6	3	1
Turriff Academy	10	5	2
Elgin Academy	8	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>34</b>

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
White Scottish	156	75
Asian	1	0
Black	1	0
Mixed	3	1
Other	9	4
White Polish	12	6
White British	24	12
White Other	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>100</b>

## Intervention

### **Growing2gether Programme**

The programmes run for 16-18 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 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 and 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 29. T-tests. Repeated Measures ANOVA's and Bivariate correlations were conducted to detect any differences in respondents' answers. Significance levels for all tests were 2-tailed.

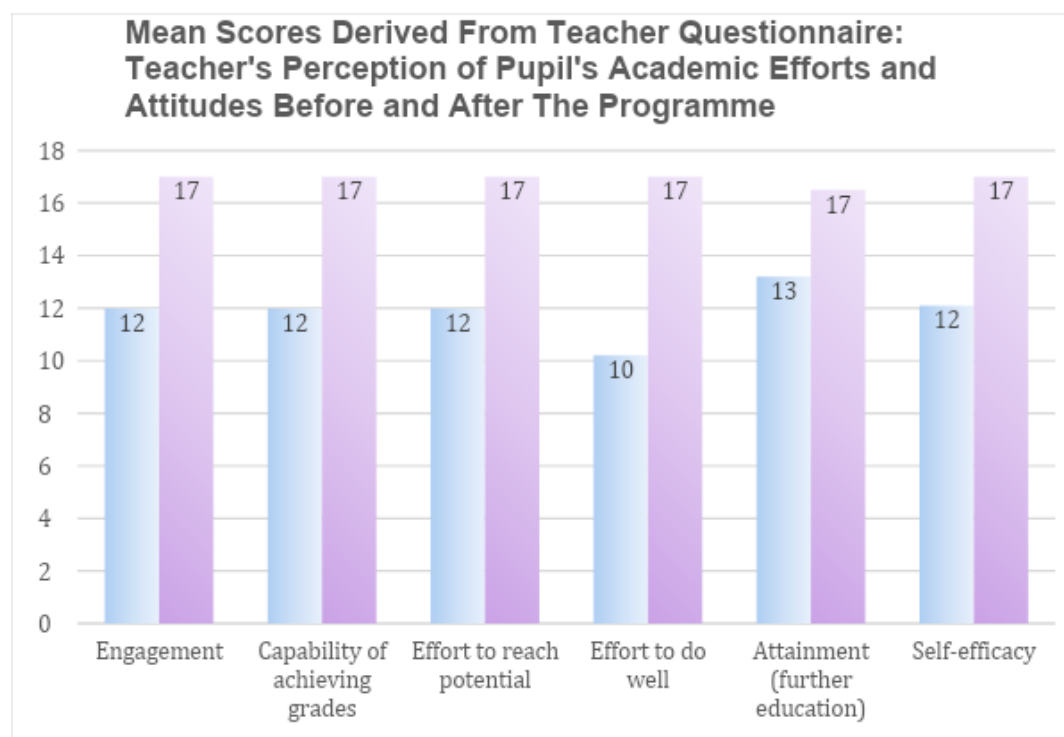
## Findings

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### Teacher's Questionnaire....

**Table 3** displays Mean, sample, Standard deviation, t- value, significance and Cohen's d. Cohen classified effect sizes as small ( $d = 0.2$ ), medium ( $d = 0.5$ ), and large ( $d \geq 0.8$ ). The table below reveals large effect sized and significant improvement in engagement and interest in learning (**42%**), students are achieving grades they are capable of (**42%**), student's effort to reach their potential has improved (**42%**), is making the effort to do well (**70%**) perception of the student achieving the grades they need to further their education has increased (**31%**) and self-efficacy has increased (**42%**).

Table 3: Teacher Questionnaire Outcomes						
Overall, the student is.	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Cohen's d	t	P
engaged and interested	12	132	5.01	<b>1.0</b>	-11.6	p = <0.001
	17	132	3.39			
achieving grades, they are capable of	12	132	4.56	<b>1.2</b>	-13.0	p = <0.001
	17	132	3.30			
making effort to achieve potential	12	132	5.01	<b>1.0</b>	-13.2	p = <0.001
	17	132	3.41			
making an effort to do well	10	132	4.68	<b>1.7</b>	-12.46	p = <0001
	17	132	3.41			
achieving grades, they require for further education	13	132	5.00	<b>0.9</b>	-12.4	p = <0.001
	17	132	3.45			
confident in attempting new tasks (self-efficacy)	12	132	4.81	<b>1.2</b>	-13.1	p = <0.001
	17	132	3.33			

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

\*Blue = Time 1 and purple = Time 2

**Table 4: Teacher's questionnaire**

<b>Since completing the programme....</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% Agreement</b>
the student appears to be more confident	131	<b>91%</b>
the student appears to be happier	131	<b>87%</b>
the experience has helped them emotionally	131	<b>92%</b>

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....

***"This has been instrumental in helping X. She is so much happier and enjoying school. It has been fab for her!"***

***"X's confidence has grown massively since joining. She has struggled socially to deal with peers at times and now she seems much more included and positive. Her physical***



***appearance has changed. She is taking more time over her appearance and is even standing taller!”***

***“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!”***

***“I have noticed changes in her and she seems more content at school. However, a significant event happened out of school and so this has had a huge impact on her mentally, emotionally and physically. I know she has loved this experience and valued it. It has reinforced this is the career path for her.”***

### Participant questionnaires

#### Impact on mental health and connectedness

Global scores were calculated before and after the programme. The table below displays Mean, sample, Standard deviation, t- value, significance and Cohen’s d. Cohen classified effect sizes as small ( $d = 0.2$ ), medium ( $d = 0.5$ ), and large ( $d \geq 0.8$ ). For RCADS, low scores correlate to better mental health (i.e., lower depression and anxiety) and for self-esteem, higher scores indicate better mental health. The results indicate that there was a significant improvement (**25%**) in young people’s mental health, measured by RCADS ( $t = 6.7 (168)$ ,  $p = <0.01$ ) and a significant improvement (**7%**) in self-esteem, measured by Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ( $t = -3.4 (101)$ ,  $p = <0.01$ ).

<b>Table 5: Mental Health Outcomes</b>						
<b>Scale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Cohen’s d</b>
RCADS Score Time 1	55.2	169	29.5	6.7	>0.01	0.6
RCADS Score Time 2	41.3	169	23.1			
Self Esteem Time 1	26.6	102	5.06	-3.4	>0.01	0.4
Self Esteem Time 2	28.5	102	5.66			

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 ( $n = 172$ ).

- **81%** of young people agreed that the programme helped them to reflect on what they are good at and what is important in their lives

- **93%** of young people agreed that they valued the support they received on the sessions
- **92%** agreed that the programme made them more aware of themselves and the consequences of their actions
- **81%** felt that the experience has made them feel more connected to others
- **89%** agreed that the programme helped them to understand others better
- **84%** agreed that the programme helped them gain confidence in their abilities
- **82%** agreed that the programme helped them to see their potential to reach their goals
- **76%** of young people agreed that the programme has encouraged them to want to become more involved in their community and help others

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

***"I made new connections with people and because we shared how we feel. I am more confident. I loved working as part of the group to explore how we can help support our children we worked with."***

***"I enjoyed my time in the nursery and creating strong bonds with the children"***

***"I feel more confident and I understand myself better. I have more faith in myself. I liked meeting new people and making memories. I formed a bond with a child. I think I have a better idea of a future career choice"***

***"I've got more used to being in a group and working with other people. I began to feel more confident. I like that it is organised and structured, for example having our day's plan on the wall each week. If I know what's happening, I don't feel stressed wondering what's coming."***

***"I made new connections with people I would not normally talk to and because we shared how we feel I am more confident. To make this better, it would be good to explore how we can apply this to school"***

### Growth of Mindset and Attitude to Education

Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement of **21%** in Growth of Mindset ( $t = -7.10$  (154),  $p = <0.01$ )

<b>Table 6: Mindset Outcomes</b>						
<b>Scale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Cohen's d</b>
Growth of Mindset Time 1	6.2	155	2.07	-7.10	$p = <0.01$	0.7
Growth of Mindset Time 2	7.5	155	1.66			

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.

### Satisfaction and feedback

Young people were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the programme (n =172).

- **95%** found the subjects that were covered informative
- **93%** enjoyed building a relationship with their toddler
- **92%** enjoyed working with others
- **95%** would recommend the programme to other young people

Below are some comments made by the young people's parents.

***“As a parent of a teenage boy, to see him take an interest and dedication to the program and children he has interactions with is amazing. He has made me so proud of him and his attitude towards his responsibilities is so positive.”***

***“I have been really happy for her. I have seen her eagerness to be part of something. She really looked forward to the days when she was going to Growing2gether. “***

***“I could see a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment in working in an environment outside school.”***

***“I'm so proud of x as I see how he has enjoyed this and the care he shows towards his role, he really has that in him, so great an opportunity to show it”***

Below, are some comments made by the nursery

***“We really liked having the pupils from the Academy here and we want to be as involved as possible. How can we help.”***

***“There was one boy who was excellent at talking to children, really listening and focused throughout the entire time he was with the children. All of us could see that he was a natural and we hope he would consider working with children as a career.”***

***“When the young people came, the children loved having them here. Some of them would ask on other days if they were coming and when it was a Wednesday, they looked out for them watching the door!”***

***“They were good at getting down to the child’s level and they listened to what the children wanted. They were very patient.”***

***”Some of our younger little boys (but not just boys) who face difficulty socially, form very strong relationships with the teens, especially the boys”.***

***“Growing2gether is a win/win for both the teens and the children and both parties get so much out of it – a wonderful exchange that benefits all”.***

***“There is no downside to our partnership with Growing2gether. Once the young people find their feet, their place in the nursery, (which happens within the first couple sessions), they are off doing a wonderful job. It is magical!”***

### **Case Study 1: 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.

*“One particular individual I wanted to focus on in this case study was a boy called Ryan, who was quite passionate when speaking about these subjects and would swear and become quite angry at times. He felt that there was not enough support from the school, that the guidance teacher didn’t understand what they were going through “we could kill ourselves and they wouldn’t care”. Despite this, he also showed some empathy and understanding toward the guidance teachers who ‘have a lot to do’. Ryan’s literacy is very poor and he doesn’t enjoy writing but he is clearly intelligent and a deep thinker. He can be quite down on himself and doesn’t recognise his own qualities and when others told him the qualities they saw in him he was quite surprised.*

*Over the course of the programme Ryan, who had been very quiet in the beginning, began to speak out more, although with lots of ‘Bro’ comments and swearing, which is something that causes problems in class. It was salient that when he felt he was being listened to by the facilitators, the swearing disappeared and he was much less agitated.*

*In the session on relationships, Ryan wrote in his worksheet that he needed to be dead to feel better about himself. We had a one-to-one chat about this as we had concerns. Ryan was quite open and willing to chat to me despite being a bit nervous at first. We talked about his family situation, more specifically, how he felt responsible for his dad and his younger siblings, as his mother was ‘a drunk’. His anger towards his mother was obvious and he was quite defensive about this, but calmed down when I reassured him that his feelings were perfectly valid. This conversation was definitely a turning point in Ryan’s relationship with the facilitators and there was definitely a trust that began to grow. He started to seek us out and chat to us*

on the walk back to school, asking us questions about ourselves. He seemed genuinely interested and so much more relaxed than at the beginning of the programme.

During the nursery time with the young children, Ryan was finding it difficult to connect with the children and seemed a bit scared of them. He would walk around the nursery a lot, finding it difficult to join in with the children and almost shut down at times. Eventually, about week 4, Ryan managed to connect with a little girl. This particular child was very social and mature in her speech and emotional development. She was almost acting as the mentor to Ryan, chatting to him and playing and making sure he felt at home in the situation. While very interesting to watch, it actually worked and Ryan became much more confident in his interactions with her, realising that he just needed to relax and sit and chat with the little girl. They spent a long time that day just sitting, pretending to drink tea, and chatting away to each other.

I was definitely watching a little bit of magic happening. From then on, Ryan was much more comfortable with the children and developed quite a close relationship with one particular boy, who disclosed something to Ryan during one of the sessions. Ryan behaved very appropriately and came to me about the information and his concerns. The situation was dealt with appropriately, staff were informed and Ryan continued to be with the little boy, supporting and chatting to him, being there for him. This wasn't an easy situation for any young person and Ryan showed real maturity and compassion during this situation. He definitely grew in confidence and self-assuredness and from that day, he was so much more comfortable and confident in the nursery.

Ryan is very interested in joining the next Growing2gether Youth Social Action project, where young people design and develop youth-led community programmes. He knows he has a lot to say about things he is passionate about and feels he has had a chance to see how he can help others through the nursery programme. It will be interesting to see how Ryan grows and develops.

Ryan reflected on the course and learnt from the experience.

***"I think I've realised that I am actually making a difference in the nursery, that the kids need someone to talk to... it's not just going in and playing. It feels a lot easier with everybody now, it feels like a good place to talk about your problems. I've realised we all have problems, nobody's life is perfect, even the little kids have things they are trying to deal with. It feels good to be able to help a little bit."***

***"I didn't think it would be this much fun and the facilitators are nice. They let you say what you think without being down on you, they are kind and help you if you find things hard, especially the worksheets. I've got more friends now, from the group and we have a lot in common and we have fun. It is easier to talk to them about stuff now. I don't think they will just laugh at me. When we went on the trip to the ecovillage, I loved it as there was so much nature stuff. The weird houses were cool - it's not like that where I live. I really want to bring my dad there and I hope he will want to come."***

## **Case Study 2**

*"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 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**

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Results revealed a significance level of less than 0.01, which is highly statistically significant, therefore indicating only a 1% risk of concluding that a difference exists due to chance. All measures revealed a moderate to large effect size, and coupled with significant changes, suggests a practical significance, hence adding value in practical terms. Anxiety and depression, measured by RCADS significantly improved (by 25%) 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 (7%). 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.

Growth of Mindset, a construct linked to academic resilience, improved significantly (21%) 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 were 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. Their parents, the nurseries and teachers, felt that the programme was well received.

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