



Growing2gether Youth Social Action Impact Report (July 2024)

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Summary

Growing2gether Youth Social Action empowers young people to design and deliver youth-led community projects, on issues that matter to them, supported by community mentors. It was requested by young people on our Growing2gether Nursery Mentoring programme (where young people mentor a nursery child requiring additional support) because they wanted to build on the skills they gained and to continue giving back to their community. Growing2gether Youth Social Action forms a key part of a Growing2gether Community, a supportive peer community which gives young people a voice, led by our Youth Participation Board (12 young people with lived experience). Growing2gether Community also includes: Young Leader training to build skills to co-deliver our projects; regular communications and events at Findhorn eco-village, where we are based.



Throughout the process of designing and implementing youth social action projects to improve their community, young people acquire valuable skills that will help them in their future careers as well as their personal lives. Furthermore, by setting small individual achievable goals as well as achieving group goals, participants develop the self-efficacy and confidence in achieving what they set out to achieve. This leads to raised aspirations, enhanced wellbeing and connectedness in their community and strengthened relationships with peers and family. This is a systemic approach where young people are encouraged to discuss ideas with their families. The programme has been developed to promote psychological growth by allowing young people to feel in control of setting their own goals and group projects (autonomy), by helping them to build confidence through the acquiring of new skills in order to achieve these personal and group goals (competence) and through providing positive reinforcement and facilitating connectedness with others (relatedness). Young people will be more motivated to achieve their goals if they are supported by others and feel a sense of belongingness to the group as well as to the wider community. This report focuses on three main outcomes of the project(s):

- Improved life and employability skills
- Improved aspirations and wellbeing
- Positive relationships and connectedness with the community.

The results indicate that the project had a significant impact on the young people's mental health (improvement of **19%**) in terms of increasing wellbeing (as measured by YP-CORE). Young people's skills relating to employability (Listening, Problem Solving, Teamwork, Efficiency, Positivity, Communication and Leadership) showed a significant improvement by the end of the programme. Other outcomes include, improvement in willingness to seek advice on careers (**49%**), increased confidence in setting and carrying out goals (**63%**) and increased happiness to be in the group (**27%**). Post -Programme feedback suggested that the

intervention had made a positive impact on the participant's confidence (**83%** agreement), made them feel proud (**89%** agreement) and increased their self-efficacy (**90%** agreement). Overall, the young people enjoyed building relationships with others (**94%**) as well as connecting and working with other people (**90%**). They felt that working in the community was a valuable experience (**94%**) that gave them a sense of pride, (**89%**) while encouraging them to become more self-aware (**83%**). Consequently, they feel more confident in getting a job (**100%**) and are encouraged to be more involved in the community in future (**94%**). Anecdotal evidence, as well as case studies support the evidence that the programme was well received by the young people involved.

Introduction

Adolescence

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. It is therefore important that teenagers who are struggling are targeted and intervention is offered. Growing2gether programmes are youth led and are facilitated by professionals who are sensitive to these changes as well as to the young person's psycho-social background, and who tailor their approach in order to maximise the experience for young people. Many young people recruited onto the programme lack the support and encouragement from others to achieve their aspirations and goals. In some situations, they feel a lack of connectedness to others, which has impacted on the mental wellbeing and reduced their motivation to achieve their goals.

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory assumes that people are actively driven towards growth and development. Gaining mastery over challenges and taking on new experiences are vital for developing an individual's self-identity. To encourage a person to pursue a particular goal, there are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to a person's engagement in a particular behaviour that is personally rewarding to them, while extrinsic motivation refers to one's engagement in certain behaviour because of external outcomes, such as social recognition and financial benefits (Williams. 2012).

According to self-determination theory, psychological growth is facilitated by autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to an individual's need to feel in control of their own behaviours and goals. Competence refers to the ability to gain mastery of tasks and the acquisition of new skills in order to achieve desired outcomes. Relatedness refers to the need to be feel a sense of belonging, acceptance and connectedness with others, as well as to love and provide care for others and for this to be reciprocated (Deci & Ryan 2000). The absence of relatedness is likely to result in failure to achieve intrinsic motivation which can

also negatively impact on a person's mental wellbeing. However, offering positive encouragement and feedback on a person's performance on a task can increase intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 2000). The programme has been developed to encourage psychological growth by allowing young people to feel in control of setting their own goals and group projects (autonomy), by helping them to build confidence through the acquiring of new skills in order to achieve personal and group goals (competence) and by providing positive reinforcement and facilitating connectedness with others (relatedness). Young people will be more motivated to achieve their goals if they are supported by others and feel a sense of belongingness to the group as well as the wider community. It is hypothesised that the interpersonal skills developed on the programme, combined with the novelty of creating totally youth-led projects can encourage young people to strengthen relationships at home.

Community Programmes and Connectedness

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).

The ability to connect to others and build positive relationships are among the most commonly listed employability skills in job advertisements and is in demand across most industries, disciplines and professions. Not only is it a desirable quality, but it allows people to build positive networks and consequently opens up and broadens employment opportunities. Connectedness and feeling a sense of belonging promotes mental wellbeing, and increases people's confidence to talk to others, allowing them to practice and develop on their communication skills. Through the Growing2gether in the Community programme, young people are encouraged to communicate with peers, family, facilitators and other agencies as part of their project, allowing them to confidently seek advice regarding their health as well as employment. 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.

Positive Psychology and Growing2gether in the Community

Growing2gether in the Community is underpinned by transpersonal psychology, which provides a holistic psychological approach focusing on enabling individuals to access more of their potential; on developing self-awareness and personal responsibility and on recognising

the importance of meaning as requirements for wellbeing 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). Positive psychology has added scientific rigour and has become more established over the past decade. More recently, a systematic review of 36 papers concluded that interventions using Positive Psychology led to reductions in anxio-depressive symptoms as well as increases in wellbeing (Sitbon, Shankland, & Krumm, 2018). These interventions are extremely useful and popular, considering their large-scale development and low cost. Growing2gether in the Community 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.

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. Although the tool has been adapted over the years, some key indicators remain consistently high such as low self-esteem, (75%) being socially isolated or withdrawn or affected by bullying, (75%). In total, 25% are at risk or had previously been excluded and 43% had behavioural problems. Poverty indicators include, families on benefits (38%), income support (50%) and eligible for Free School Meals (30%).

In total (based on returned paperwork), 19 young people (12 from Inverness and 7 from Alness) participated on the programme (11 Female and 8 Male). The mean age of participants was 14.3 (SD = 1.54) ranging from 11-17 years old. The majority of participants (74%) described themselves as "White Scottish" 5% as "White Polish, 5% described themselves as "Mixed" and the remaining 16% as "White Other"

Intervention

Growing2gether Youth Social Action centres around the concept of choice, whereby young people lead the process in terms of how they run the project. During the research process, the young people must research the needs of local residents, which involves communicating with their parents and other disadvantaged young people, hence facilitating connectedness and improving relationships with others. Through a democratic process, all ideas are assessed in terms of what they believe would make the biggest contribution. The facilitators encourage lateral and free thinking, which enhances creativity as well as maintaining interest. This continues with exploring various ways that they might address their community topic (a film, an event, posters, social media, talking to the community etc.). Facilitators ensure that each participant is included and valued for their thinking and contributions. The process of this positive reinforcement encourages the participants to share more ideas, thereby increasing their confidence. Once the means of delivery for their projects is chosen, a project planning tool, designed for use by young people, allows them to plan their work and how they will deliver their community project. Each participant expresses what they love to do and, where possible, their passions are actively engaged with project planning. Each member takes on a delivery task (e.g., managing the budget, writing copy, artistic design, distribution of the project) as their responsibility, hence acquiring valuable life skills in the process. Depending on the project subject, the group searches for an expert local community mentor and enrolls them for support.

Throughout delivery of the project, each session begins with a 'check-in' where every young person is consulted on how things are developing. This includes the group dynamic and what is needed to continue working together in a positive, inclusive way. Young people self-assess

that they are using their skills in the way that they intend. Where necessary, short-term goals for increased participation are established. Leadership of the check-in is rotated to enable each participant to have this experience. Once the community project is complete, the young people develop further distribution to the target audience to ensure maximum reach (e.g., social media/press/within school). Through a de-briefing session, the young people assess what worked and what they would do differently, providing a sense of closure and a reflection on learning from experience. Facilitators ask questions and empower young people to find their own answers. Respecting their needs and choices, they help them to set personal goals and build skills throughout design/delivery of their project, and to exercise their personal power of choice in a positive way; They are building this capacity for their future.

Procedure

The youth led sessions were conducted face-to-face, once a week for 16 weeks.

Measures

Life Skills

Facilitators encouraged young people to identify a major goal in relation to their employability and rate it on a scale of 1-10 (1 = not confident in achieving the goal and 10 = very confident in achieving their goal). Goals were reviewed at the end of the programme. In addition, participants were asked to identify 10 important skills that are valuable for future employment and to subsequently rate on a scale of 1-10 how weak or strong (1 = very weak and 10 = very strong) they are for each skill. The skill sheet was completed before and after the programme. Young people were asked a series of questions relating to skills in the post programme questionnaire. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree).

Aspirations and wellbeing

The Young Person's Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (YP-CORE; Twigg et al., 2009) is a measure of psychological distress designed for use with young people in the 11-16 age group attending counselling or therapy. The measure comprises 10 self-report items relating to wellbeing, symptoms/problems, functioning, and risk (to self). Research into the reliability and validity suggest that the YP-CORE satisfies standard psychometric requirements for use as a routine outcome measure for young people (Twigg et al 2015). All items address the same time period (the preceding week) scoring from 'Not at all' (0) to 'Most or all of the time' (4). The total clinical score is obtained by adding together scores for each item (range 0 to 4) so the possible scores range from zero to 40. Although a clinically validated cut-off has yet to be determined for the YP-CORE, a score of 11 or above on the CORE-10 indicates clinically significant distress. In addition, scores on the CORE-10 can be divided into categories of distress: Healthy (0–5), low (6–10), mild (11–14), moderate (15–19), moderate-to-severe (20–24), and severe (25 and above). These cut-offs were established by asking a large sample of the UK population to complete the questionnaire and comparing their scores statistically with those for large samples of clients in therapy (Connell and Barkham, 2007).

Young people were asked a series of questions relating to aspirations in the post programme questionnaire. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree).

Positive relationships and connectedness

Young people were asked a series of questions regarding connectedness and relationships in relation to employment, for instance who supports them, how confident they are in their ability to support them to seek employment, how likely they are to ask other organisations for help and advice. Answers were represented on a “happy face scale” whereby each number 1-10 corresponded with a face (sad to happy),

Case studies

This report contains observational case studies written by the facilitators of the projects as well as quotes from the young people.

Young people were asked a series of questions relating to relationships and connectedness in the post programme questionnaire. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unsure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree).

Description of the projects

Self-Care Soothe boxes



Inverness Youth Social Action was our largest and most diverse group with 19 young people (5 boys) beginning the programme from across Inverness High School, Millburn Academy and Tain Academy, with 14 finishing (3 boys). Due to the scale and size of the group we had 2 people (Young Leaders) who we train to work each week, supporting 2 Growing2gether facilitators. The group decided to develop their project on Self Care through the creation of individualised soothe boxes. The personalised boxes were created for positive mental health, supporting the reduction of anxiety and panic.

Each box was unique and individual; the young people shared various sensory items, such as something to smell, touch, look at, and taste. This helped members of the group to feel grounded and relaxed. Self soothe boxes can be a useful coping mechanism for anyone of any age and can be used in any situation. One participant explained, ***"It's like making a first-aid kit for your mental health. Having everything in one place means that when I don't feel great, I can go straight to my self-soothe box."***

The group created a survey for schools which they intend to use in the next Youth Social Action group in September 2024 to broaden the impact for more young people.

[Alness created three powerful short films](#)

Young people from Alness created three powerful short films addressing Bullying (cohort Sept 2023) and Community Violence (cohort January 2024). The young people were involved in the direction, development and production of these projects. Their youth led focus and strength of voice was paramount to the overall production. The films included spoken word poetry and music pieces created by the young people overlaid with imagery of bullying, shadow puppetry and manga animation, supported by the Community mentor, the Care in the Community (CIC) organisation, making them both emotive and visually stunning, allowing the young people's creativity to shine. The 'Manga' animation was created by one of the young people specifically for this project; both themes told the story of traumatic experiences endured by the young people. These safe mediums allowed communicating their fears of safety and retribution more fluidly. This created powerful projects for change and awareness in community engagement and safety.

Both groups in total were 14 strong with a 50/50 split of girls and boys. 7 young people from across both Alness groups have joined as Young Leaders, who we train to co-deliver future Youth Social Action programmes, and will also become members of the Youth Participation Board. This gives young people a voice, helping them drive forward systemic change to improve their lives. The young people will also be joining the next Youth Social Action Group in their area

[Bullying Film](#)

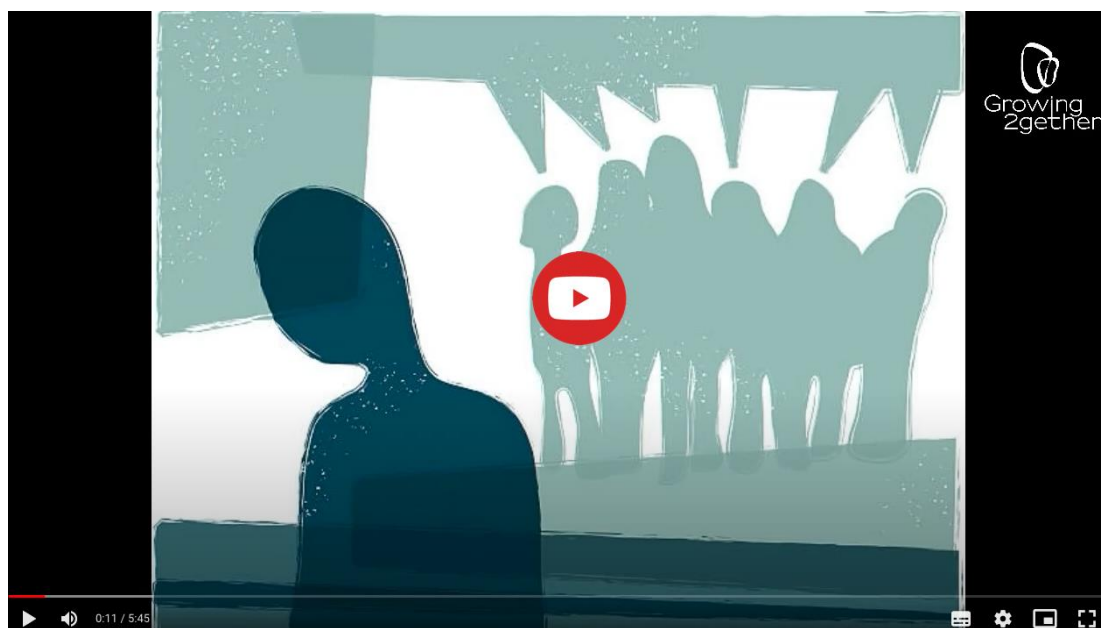
[Violence in the Highlands Film](#)





Bullying video

Alness (CONFIDENTIAL) also chose the difficult topic of bullying, reflecting both community and school experience. Their [video](#) represented true experiences of the group and was a deeply challenging process for them to work through. The [video](#) demonstrated the harsh realities of bullying that today's youth experience. The group chose to remain anonymous in both videos (by altering their voices) as well as their group location - due to their concerns of repercussions being identified.



The Tain YSA began with 3 young people and finished with 1 highly engaged and active participant. Tain created a Recruitment Plan for wider YSA recruitment drives which included a graphic of how to stage the recruitment process. This Plan is already being used in our new pilot cohorts in Moray. The active young person worked closely with our community Anchor in Tain (Tain & District Development Agency) and attended street markets where they shared the Recruitment flyer with young people. The young person also coordinated with Tain Academy dates for PSE visits to discuss Growing2gether and the YSA work.

[Flyer](#)
[Recruitment Plan](#)

Reaching the Wider Community



The projects culminated in a special event where the groups from Inverness, Alness, and Tain proudly unveiled their incredible Youth Social Action projects at Eden Court, Inverness. Families, teachers, and other guests gathered for an evening event filled with lived experience, creativity, community spirit, and meaningful impact. For most of the young people, this was the first time they had been listened to, their suggestions taken into action and been at an event which showcased them and their work. For some, it was a huge step out of their comfort zone and one which helped them feel special, unique and more confident despite their anxiety about the evening.

'I felt really nervous, but then felt ok once everyone began to talk. I wanted to keep saying how amazing it was!' I felt I had so much to say in the end, and wasn't nervous!

It was heartwarming to hear the young people share their personal developments, and wider experiences throughout the evening. Their strong sense of belonging and increased self-esteem has been a catalyst for change. The night culminated in the participants receiving Certificates of Achievement for completing the 18-week Youth Social Action Project as part of the Growing2gether Community Programme.

Findings

Life Skills

All analyses are usually performed using SPSS 29 for Windows, with the significance level set at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). It is encouraging to observe the mean values increase from pre-test to post-test. **Table 1** displays Mean at T1 and T2, standard deviation, percentage change, t-value and significance. There were significant changes in all skills, other than relationships, initiative and creativity.

Table 1: Skills Outcomes						
Skill	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Percentage Change	t-value	Sig
Listening	6.368	19	2.54	17%	-2.207	$p = <0.05$
	7.474	19	1.68		-2.567	
Problem solving	5.789	19	2.55	25%	-2.440	$p = <0.05$
	7.263	19	1.66		-3.196	
Communication	4.632	19	2.63	27%	-2.758	$p = <0.05$
	5.895	19	2.54		-1.655	
Teamwork	6.263	19	1.82	32%	-2.666	$p = <0.05$
	7.737	19	1.73		-2.233	
Relationships	5.842	19	2.27	14%	-1.603	$p = >0.05$
	7.684	19	2.03		-2.204	
Initiative	5.842	19	2.32	20%	-2.207	$p = >0.05$
	6.684	19	1.73		-2.567	
Efficiency	5.684	19	2.26	21%	-2.440	$p = <0.05$
	6.842	19	2.09		-3.196	
Positivity	5.421	19	2.8	21%	-2.758	$p = <0.05$
	6.526	19	2.59		-1.655	
Creativity	6.842	19	2.52	8%	-2.666	$p = >0.05$
	7.421	19	2.57		-2.233	
Leadership	6.526	19	2.65	9%	-1.603	$p = 0.49$
	7.737	19	1.97		-2.204	

Young people were asked to create specific goals, such as improving their communication skills, their confidence in expressing their opinions as well as other skills they felt required work. At the beginning of the programme, they rated (on a scale of 1-10) the extent to which they felt they currently were, in pursuit of this goal and repeated this at the end. Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement of **63%** in Goals ($t = -5.77 (16), p = <0.01$).

The table below provides feedback from the young people regarding the programme's impact on their skills and future employment.

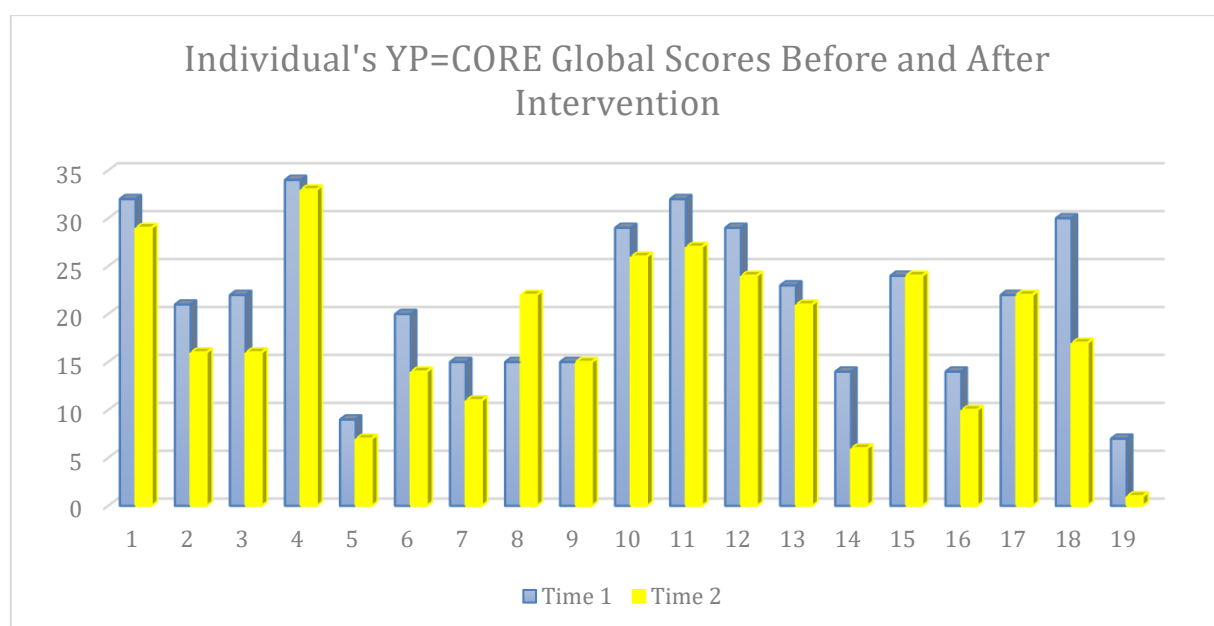
Table 2: Responses to programme evaluation

	Percentage Agreement	Frequency
I am more confident in communicating with others	67%	18
The programme has made me feel more confident in my abilities	90%	18
The programme has increased my chances of getting a job	100%	18

Aspirations and wellbeing

YP-CORE baseline scores that are below 5 represent a “healthy” response and all participants scored above this threshold (as recommended above under “measures”). A score of 11 or above on the CORE-10 indicates clinically significant distress and with average scores remaining above the threshold of 11. Results show that **89%** young people would be approached and signposted to Growing2gether Mentoring. Results show that **79%** of individuals showed an improvement in pre and post test scores. Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement of **19%** in mental wellbeing ($t = 3.7 (18), p = <0.01$) See **Graph 1** for individual pre and post-test scores.

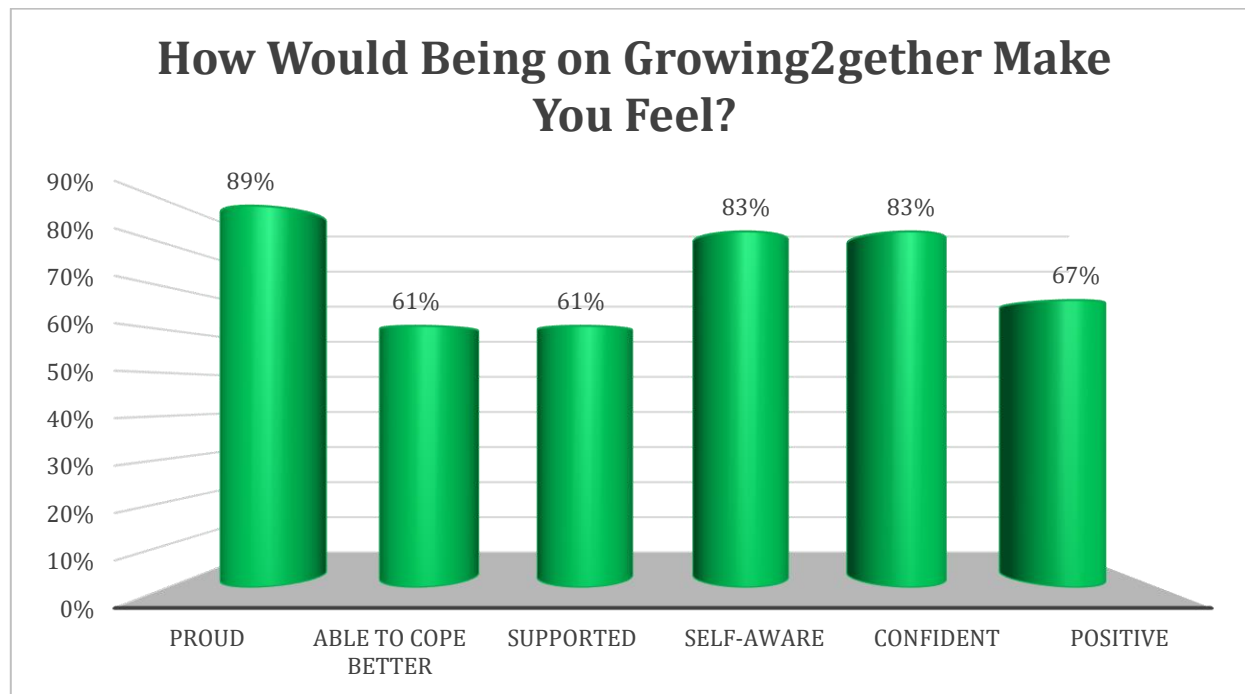
Graph 1: Individual Pre & Post-test YP-CORE scores



In total, **89%** of participants agreed that the programme had made them feel proud, **67%** reported that it had made them feel more positive about themselves. **61%** agreed that it taught

them how to cope better with their problems and **61%** reported that the experience had supported them emotionally. **83%** felt that they learned more about themselves/how to reach their potential and **83%** reported that it had increased their confidence.

Graph 2: Displaying how the programme made participants feel.



“Growing2gether has helped me with a lot of things – being more confident and this group has helped me talk to people.”

“Love you all and thank you for everything you have done for me. You have made such an impact in my life!”

Positive relationships and connectedness

The table below displays pre- and post-programme outcomes relating to relationships and employment. More specifically, it shows positive increases in willingness to ask for help regarding career advice, confidence in asking for advice from others and happiness to be working as part of a group. There were significant changes in Happiness to be in the group ($t = -3.4$ (17), $p = <0.05$) and willingness to ask for help ($t = -3.7$ (17), $p = <0.05$) however, confidence in significant others with employment was not significant. ($p = 0.08$). The table below displays mean values, standard deviation and percentage change.

Table 3: Relationships and Connectedness				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	% Change
Happiness to be in a group	6.67	18	2.00	27%
	8.44	18	1.76	
Confidence in significant others to help with employment	6.72	18	2.40	14%
	8.00	18	2.00	
Willingness to ask for help	4.39	18	2.12	49%
	6.56	18	2.43	

Table 4 displays post programme evaluation percentages in relation to relationships.

Table 4: Responses to programme evaluation		
	Percentage Agreement	Frequency
I enjoyed building relationships with others	89%	18
I enjoyed working with others	90%	18
Contributing to the community has been a valuable experience	94%	18
I feel encouraged me to be more involved in my community in the future	94%	18

Case study

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.

Craig is a 15 year old male with learning difficulties. He is popular in the group because of his ability to laugh about himself and willingness to have fun. In the initial sessions Craig didn't take sharing seriously and repeatedly contributed his highlight of the week was that it was the weekend. He often said he didn't have any 'struggles' for that section of his sharing and he seemed to want minimal attention when it came to expressing his feelings. Initially Craig was the joker of the group and he initiated boisterous play with other male members of the group he felt safe with. He sought attention even if it was at his own expense. He was often made fun of by the others but maintained that he didn't care and it didn't bother him. It felt like this was Craig's way of feeling accepted and finding belonging in the group.

Craig had been in the Growing2gether nursery programme prior to being in the Youth Social Action programme. It was felt that Growing2gether was his first experience of being listened to, acknowledged, seen or praised.

He was not on a full time table whilst at school and began going to college at the end of the programme. He would talk about skipping school and how it was not for him.

He struggles to inhibit his behaviour or reactions, so in a group he was highly disruptive but not intentionally or with malice.

He has some awareness of how people see him and he has been bullied in Primary and Secondary schools.. In his starting questionnaire he revealed that he cuts himself and says that he is depressed and on a scale of wellbeing he rated himself as a 1.

In week 6, he had a problem with a family member and needed to leave the session early. He was very quiet and subdued and needed to speak on the phone to find out what was happening. The next week when he attended the session he opened up in the sharing to say his Uncle had been hospitalised from an injury incurred whilst drunk and that they didn't know what was wrong with him. He expressed that he was really close with his Uncle and was worried about his well-being as he was in a coma. The group listened respectfully and expressed concern for Craig. It felt that expressing his vulnerability and being shown concern by the group made him feel safer to share, as each week after, he was more open and willing to have the attention on him in a positive and authentic way. He was able to share that he used alcohol as a way to feel better even if that meant that he was getting in trouble with the police.

Once the group decided on the theme of violence in Alness, Craig opened up to share his experience from childhood that had obviously caused trauma for him. He recounted his experience of going to the local park at 6 for the first time without his parents and being tied to a climbing frame by older boys. Craig tells how this meant he would never go to a park alone and never returned to the park where the incident took place. He felt safe and supported enough to share his experiences and be vulnerable initially in a smaller group and then in a later session, with the entire group. He was honest about how scared he felt and was able to be very open about how the experience impacted him. He trusted the group to allow his story to be the focus of the project.

As the Community mentor, the Care in the Community (CIC) organisation were invited along to teach the group about shadow puppetry. Craig felt safe enough to share his traumatic experiences with people he'd never met, within the safety of the group. There was a huge transformation in Craig as he was relied upon to direct his story and was shown empathy and respect by members of the group. Craig demonstrated he could be highly focused and serious and took an active role in creating the film of the shadow puppetry. He was praised by the facilitators from CIC for his bravery in sharing. He also experienced positive support from his peers and the whole group contributed in respectfully bringing his story to life. Craig appeared to feel empowered by being taken seriously and having his story told so powerfully and there was a reduction in his disruptive behaviour.

In his reflection in his questionnaire he went from a 3 to a 10 for Teamwork and a 4 to a 10 for relationships. His last quote of the questionnaire is "I like being near people that I think care about me". Overall Craig has undergone a noticeable change during the programme he has gone from someone who was fixed in his role as the clown and would settle for any type of attention from the others in the group to not relying on only this role for interacting with his peers and being able to gain positive feedback for who he is. He is displaying a positive attitude to his new college placement and was excited at the prospect of rejoining the programme when it recommenced.

Outcomes: The Youth-Led Perspective; Community Participation and Policy Manager

“As facilitators we noticed a change in the behaviour, demeanour and general engagement between the group members from the beginning through to the end of the projects. Young people told us that they had increased in their world view, their view of themselves as community enablers and as future citizens. They felt and held themselves with comfort and ease and engaged with each other in a mature and respectful manner.

“The increase in personal confidence and self-esteem was marked overall in all Youth Social Action groups, with the younger participants (13 years) increasing in positive sharing of experiences and ideas. We saw a general increase in wider thinking and aspirations being shared as ‘what are we doing next?’ once the project had completed. The calmness and centeredness witnessed each week, in particular with those young people with ADHD was marked. We saw 2 boys move from disruption to engagement.

“We are seeing that for the first time, young people from each cohort are choosing to stay for future cohorts in September 2024. This is the first time that across all cohorts we have witnessed this retention. It can only be seen as a positive outcome of the projects. In Alness the group spoke of feeling connected to each other and feeling safe in the group. This is a substantive positive outcome given their concerns for safety and community violence

“Each young person voiced and supported the idea that ongoing outcomes from their projects were required. The bedrock of all of the YSA projects were mental health and the challenge of inequalities faced by the young people in their communities. A large portion of the young people on our YSA projects tell us that they have experienced disadvantage and face increasing disadvantage due to mental health challenges, poverty, socio-economic disadvantage; this has increased their absenteeism, exclusion and challenges at school. One parent shared that her daughter has begun getting out of bed, attending school and lessons since being part of the YSA groups.

“Inverness YSA talked widely about bringing the unchosen topics into the next group and also building on their current project for widening Mental Health Awareness through a campaign they would take into schools across the Highlands, Highland Youth Parliament and the Scottish Youth parliament at Holyrood. The Tain group focused on wider community engagement methods in Tain. The Stereotypes video (produced in an eighteen-month project across cohorts [Stereotypes film](#)) is hoped to be shown in schools and wider influential areas in Highland and Moray by the Youth Social Action group.



Youth Social Action brings wider change not only for young people but also gives them the power to change their world.

“Engaging in their community makes young people feel included and respected. With the right support, young people can develop skills, which they can use throughout their lives.” Laura

Discussion and Conclusion

The results suggest that the experience made a significant impact on the young people's mental health in terms of increasing their wellbeing (as indicated by YP-CORE). The mean scores reduced by **19%**, hence showing an improvement in mental wellbeing. Although a clinically validated cut-off has yet to be determined for the YP-CORE, a score of 11 or above on the CORE-10 indicates clinically significant distress. In addition, scores on the CORE-10 can be divided into categories of distress: Healthy (0–5), low (6–10), mild (11–14), moderate (15–19), moderate-to-severe (20–24), and severe (25 and above). A score of 11 or above on the CORE-10 indicates clinically significant distress and with average scores remaining above the threshold of 11, **89%** young people would be approached and signposted to Growing2gether Mentoring. More importantly, **79%** of individuals showed an improvement in pre and post test scores.

Young people's skills relating to employability, increased significantly by the end of the programme and willingness to seek advice on careers significantly increased by **49%**. This is extremely encouraging as gaining confidence in their own goals through this supportive process enables the young person to feel more in control of their behaviours and goals, hence increasing their autonomy. Acquiring and mastering new skills increases the young person's competence which builds on their intrinsic motivation in relation to pursuing a career. The social recognition and positive feedback from peers and facilitators further increase their extrinsic motivation, hence encouraging them to continue with positive behaviours. Furthermore, the young people are more confident in asking others for help, hence indicating progression with regards to communication, connectedness and relationships.

Overall, the young people enjoyed building relationships with others (**94%**) as well as connecting and working with other people (**90%**). They felt that working in the community was a valuable experience (**94%**) that gave them a sense of pride (**89%**) while encouraging them to become more self-aware (**83%**). Consequently, they feel more confident in getting a job (**100%**) and are encouraged to be more involved in the community in future (**94%**).

A limitation of this study is that the sample size was very small which reduces the power of the study and increases the margin of error, nevertheless, the results are extremely encouraging. The programme has been successful in encouraging psychological growth by allowing young people to feel in control of setting their own goals and group projects (autonomy), building their confidence through acquiring new skills in order to achieve personal and group goals (competence) and by providing positive reinforcement and facilitating connectedness with others (relatedness). Young people will be more motivated to achieve their goals if they are supported by others and feel a sense of belongingness to the group as well as the wider community.

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