



Growing2gether Impact Report January 2022 - February 2023

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Introduction

Growing2gether

Growing2gether is an experiential learning programme which supports disengaged young people to develop confidence and self-belief. Since January 2017, Growing2gether has reached 1470 children and young people across the Highlands, building their mental health and educational/community engagement. Growing2gether is underpinned by transpersonal psychology, which provides a holistic psychological approach and focuses on enabling individuals to access more of their potential; on developing self-awareness and personal responsibility and on recognising the importance of *meaning* as requirements for well-being and positive engagement with society. Combined, we find a congruent pedagogy with transpersonal psychology and positive psychology, a branch of mainstream psychology which was founded 1998 by Seligman (Seligman 1998). These interventions are extremely useful and popular, considering their large-scale development and low cost. Growing2gether focus on bringing out the unique potential of young people, rather than seeing them as a 'problem', empowering them with life skills, work experience and a deeper understanding of who they are. There is increasing evidence that interventions based on positive psychology enhance wellbeing which has been recognised by The Scottish Government. This has further created many initiatives to address the significant challenges that children and young people in Scotland are facing today: Closing the Attainment Gap, getting it Right for Every Child, the Curriculum for Excellence, and Developing Scotland's Young Work Force.

Growing2gether programmes aim to address these issues by working with young people facing disadvantage and children who are in need of additional support. Young people become mentors to children, supporting their development, which provides the young people with work experience, responsibility and a respected role in their community. The programme builds on learning from Growing2gether, covering skills such as re-engaging in school, communications and setting future goals. It leads to an accredited Level 4 SCQF interpersonal skills qualification (Self Awareness and Self in the Community), giving young people a sense of achievement and encouraging them to re-engage in education.

Growing2gether is a targeted youth intervention, which specifically selects young people who or are at risk for exacerbating current psychosocial, behavioural, and educational difficulties. Cross-age peer mentoring is a novel form of peer mentoring that matches an older youth mentor with a younger youth mentee to promote positive outcomes on mental health. Our intervention is novel in that it is the only early intervention programme in Scotland to target two sets of vulnerable children simultaneously, raising the aspirations of young people from disadvantaged areas by pairing them as a mentor and role model to a child in a nursery who require extra support. Growing2gether facilitators work closely with schools and nurseries to gain an understanding of the young person and child participating on the programmes. Children act as an indirect and non-threatening tool to explore the young person's opinions and beliefs. Facilitators are trained to be flexible, non-judgemental and facilitate young people

to flourish, by encouraging the young person to reflect on their own behaviours through asking specific questions about their assigned child's interactions and behaviours, enabling them to extrapolate what they learn and apply it to themselves. Facilitators are crucial to this process and are trained to have bifocal vision, an ability to hold a perception of the young person which includes what is, as well as what could be (their potential). From this perspective, a young person can receive challenge and nurturing in a way which engages rather than alienates them and create a wider field for them to grow and develop within and to know themselves, their strengths, and weaknesses.



Growing2gether and reducing inequalities in mental health

There is an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of early life experiences for long-term mental health problems. Research suggests that 75% of adults who experience poor mental health in adulthood first experience these difficulties before the age of age 18, (Kim-Cohen et al, 2013) resulting in subsequent issues with relationships, well-being, educational attainment (Brännlund, Strandh & Nilssotn, 2017) and employment (Sadler et al, 2018). This highlights the necessity for early intervention to address the mental health needs of young people in order to prevent lifelong problems. The latest 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.

The experience of being part of a group and receiving positive appraisal and unconditional positive regard from facilitators, staff and even children, coupled with coaching and mentoring, are powerful elements in helping to reduce anxiety and depression in young people. Growing2gether routinely evaluate mental health through a battery of clinical, robust measures selected carefully by a Research Health Psychologist. Recent analysis (2022) revealed that in nearly a sample of 400 participants, anxiety and depression, measured by RCADS significantly improved (22% increase in mean scores) from baseline to the end of the programme, ($t = 10.06$ (392), $p = <0.01$), suggesting that Growing2gether has made a positive impact on young people's mental health. Furthermore, results indicate that young people ($n = 300$) with borderline baseline scores in depression and anxiety (as measured by The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale) showed significant improvements (31% improvement) by the end of the programme.

Only 7% of youth in the general population score borderline and over, however this represents 46% of the Growing2gether sample, suggesting that Growing2gether are recruiting many young people who have mental health issues. Growing2gether use Positive Affect Schedule (PAS) to measure young people's propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others positively, even though the challenges of life, before and after the programme. PAS is a proxy of the young people's mental well-being as well as their connectedness and engagement with others. Young people's ($n = 313$) PAS baseline scores were dichotomised into those who scored below threshold (29.7) at baseline and those who scored above it. For those scoring below threshold (hence displaying less positive affect) there was a significant improvement of **39%** in positive affect. The evidence strengthens the programme's efficacy with regards to delivering a programme that can improve adolescent mental health, hence reduce mental health inequalities in young people living in Scotland.

Growing2gether and social-emotional learning

On Growing2gether, there is a high component to social-emotional learning in the sessions, for example helping young people to realise the skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, feel and show empathy for others (through their child), establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions as well as setting goals. Through promoting social problem solving (for example, creating role play scenarios on how to best deal with a problem) self-acceptance and care, enabling individuals to respond appropriately to various situations, such as avoiding drug use and having unsafe sex (health/risk). The programme aims to improve young people's decision-making ability through teaching how to consider consequences of their choices and encouraging them to make appropriate (and less risky) decisions. Positive appraisal (by child and facilitator) within a supportive environment enhances individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy. This, coupled with the strong emphasis on choice, enhances the effect on their school behaviour as well as raising future aspirations. These effects are hypothesized to extend to their community and home life, whereby relationships are strengthened through positive communication, respect and understanding.

Growing2gether and connectedness

Connectedness, or bonding, refers to the emotional attachment and commitment a child/adolescent makes to social relationships in the family, peer group, school, community, or culture (Visser, 2017). Research places great importance of connectedness in relation to positive youth development programmes and claims to protect young people from sexual risk



taking as well as performance in school (Visser, 2017). Connectedness has been linked to many of the influences of suicidal behaviour and suggests that it may be a powerful tool in preventing suicide (Walsh et al, 2019). A recent study examined the potential protective role of school connectedness in the relationship between cyberbullying and suicide risk behaviour. Findings indicated that being a victim of cyberbullying, was associated with increased risk of suicide and that connections to school moderated this relationship in that, among victims of cyberbullying,

those more connected to school were less likely to report suicidal behaviour (Walsh et al, 2019).

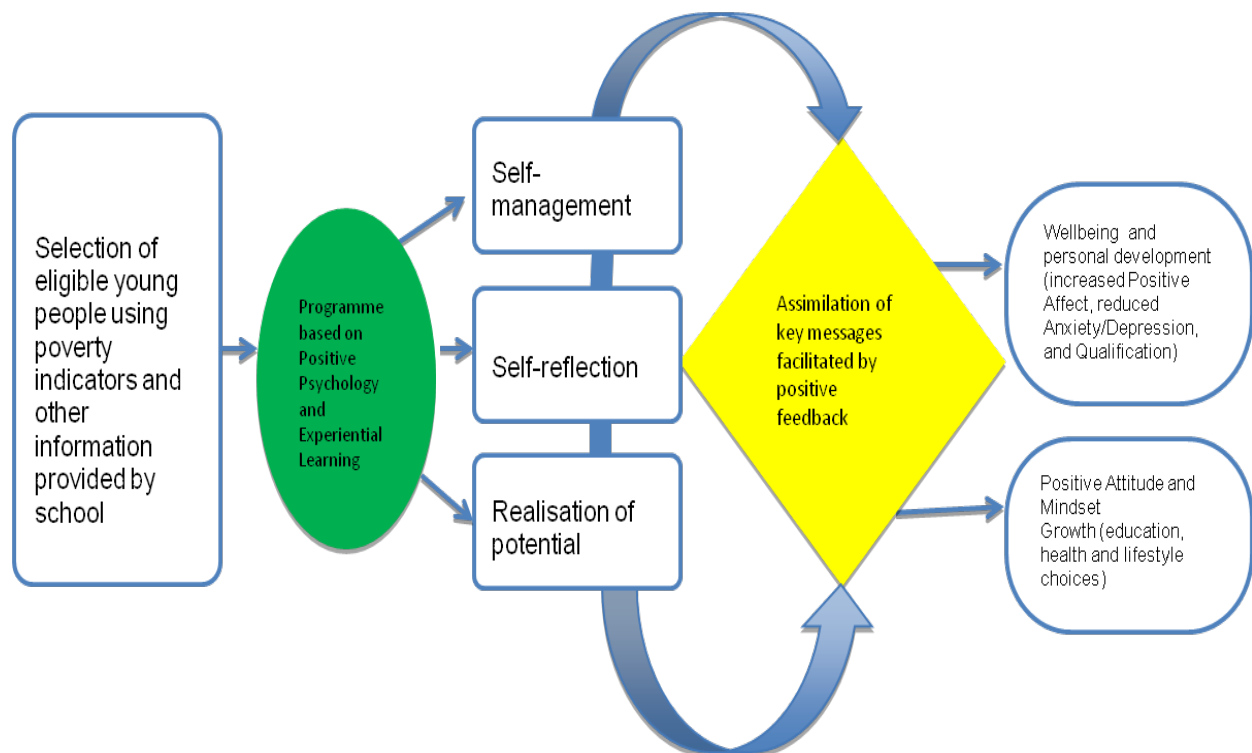
Growing2gether and growth of mindset

Some researchers suggest that individuals who believe intelligence is malleable (a growth mindset) are better able to bounce back from failures than those who believe intelligence is fixed, (Dweck, 1986). With regards to the latter, these people tend to feel helpless after encountering failures and this can have profound effect on learning achievement, skill acquisition, personal relationships, professional success, and many other dimensions of life (Dweck, 1986). Not only does mindset have implications for educational outcomes but recent research suggests that stressful life events, depression, substance use, and motivations for non-suicidal self-injury were weaker among those with more of a growth mindset relative to those with more of a fixed mindset (Schroder et al, 2017). These findings suggest that anxiety mindsets function in a similar way for mental health resilience as how mindsets of intelligence function for academic outcomes (Schroder et al, 2017). Throughout the curriculum, Growing2gether refer back to growth of mindset and encourage young people to perceive this as being malleable, hence realising their own potential to achieve goals.

Theory of Change

The model above illustrates Growing2gether's Theory of Change model. Our primary outcomes are positive mental health (a reduction on anxiety and depression) and positive mindset. Through experiential learning and an approach/curriculum underpinned by positive psychology, young people are able to better able to self-reflect, self-manage and self-regulate, meanwhile enhancing relationships with others. See **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Summary of Growing2gether



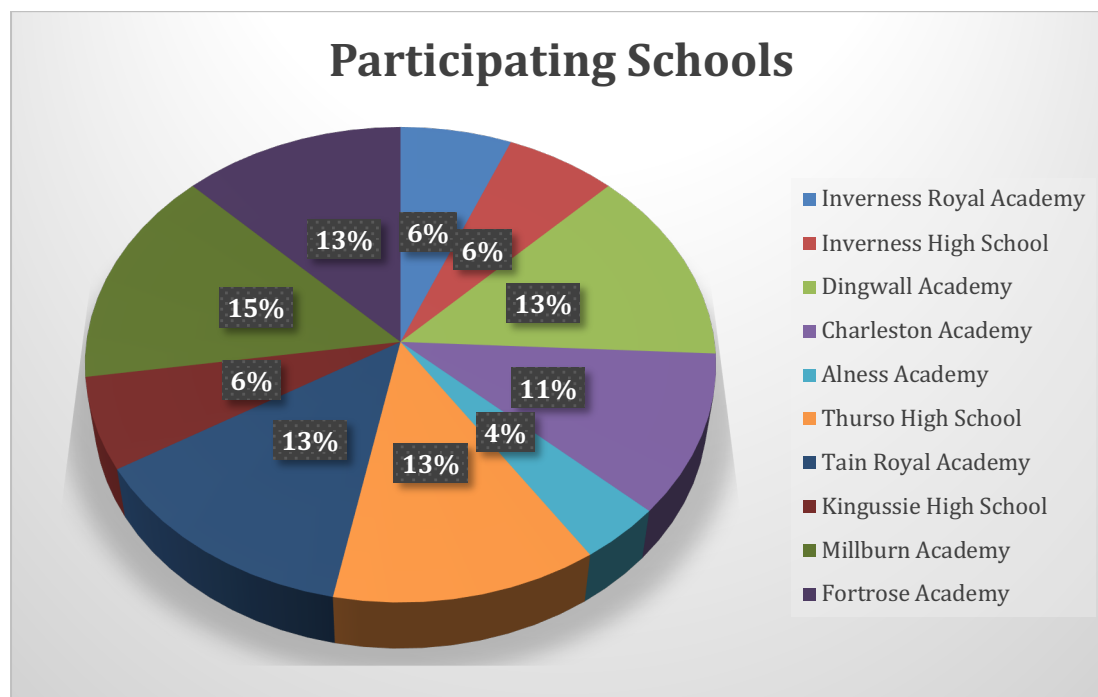
Method

Participants

Young people were selected for the programme on the basis of psychosocial disadvantage, (for example, the young person has been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, doesn't have many friends, has low self-esteem) economic disadvantage, (the young person has parents on income support, a parent in prison or parents on Universal Credit) and behavioural disadvantage (has a record of truancy or exclusion, behavioural problems or isn't making expected progress in education). In addition, those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) were selected. In total **61%** of young people have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These are highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. For example, **31%** had received psychological intervention and **35%** had experienced parental abandonment through separation, divorce or death. These can have a negative impact on young people's physical and mental health. **88%** were selected as they had low self-esteem, **66%** did not have many friends, **68%** were withdrawn or socially isolated, **57%** were bullies or had been bullies and **56%** weren't making expected progress in education.

The following data is based on starting figures. The programme consisted of 122 participants split into two cohorts. The groups mainly consisted of female participants, (72%) the remainder were male (24%) and non-binary (4%). The age range was 13-15 years old (Mean = 13.8, SD = .50). In total, 81% described themselves as being White Scottish, 2% as Other, 1% White Polish, 10% as White British, 1% as Mixed, 3% as White Other and 2% White Irish. See **Figure 1** for participating schools.

Figure 1 displays participating schools as a percentage



Intervention

Growing2gether Programme

The programmes run for 17-18 weeks and each session is divided into 1.5 hours of mentoring, whereby the young person mentors their assigned toddler, and 1.5 hours of classroom time, where young people work towards gaining a Level 4 SCQF Qualification in "Personal Development: Self in Community" and "Self-Awareness" units.

Measures

Teacher's check-list eligibility questionnaire

Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire prior to the programme's commencement in order to obtain basic information to assess eligibility.

Teacher's pre and post questionnaire

Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire on the student's behaviours and attitudes prior to the programme's commencement and at the end of the programme. Pre and post test scores were then analysed to measure impact.

Programme Impact of Emotional wellbeing

The Positive Affect Schedule (PAS) component of PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) is one of the most robust and widely used scales to measure mood and subjective wellbeing. The scale is comprised of 10 items, with 10 items measuring positive affect (e.g., excited, inspired). Each item is rated on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 = Very Slightly or Not at all to 5 = Extremely, to measure the extent to which the affect has been experienced. The responses range from 10 – 50, with higher scores representing higher levels of positive affect. Mean Scores: 33.3 (SD±7.2). Responses are evaluated before and after the programme in order to measure impact.

Programme Impact on mental health (Depression and Anxiety) The Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) is a 47-item self-report measure consists of questions relating to emotional wellbeing such as "I feel worried when someone is angry with me" and "I feel sad or empty". Each question is scored on a 4-point scale (0=never, 1=sometimes, 2=often and 3=always). This measure is intended to assess children's symptoms corresponding to selected *DSM-IV* anxiety and major depressive disorders and is considered to be a suitable instrument to assess anxiety levels across adolescence (Mathyssek et al, 2013). Global scores were calculated before and after the programme. Low scores correlate to better mental health (i.e., lower depression and anxiety).

Programme's impact on growth of mindset 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 28. T-tests and Bivariate correlations were conducted to detect any differences in respondents' answers. Significance levels for all tests were 2-tailed.

Findings

Table 1 displays information on the number of young people who started and finished the programme, the retention rate and number of people who completed their portfolios for their Level 4 SCQF in interpersonal skills qualification (Self Awareness and Self in the Community).

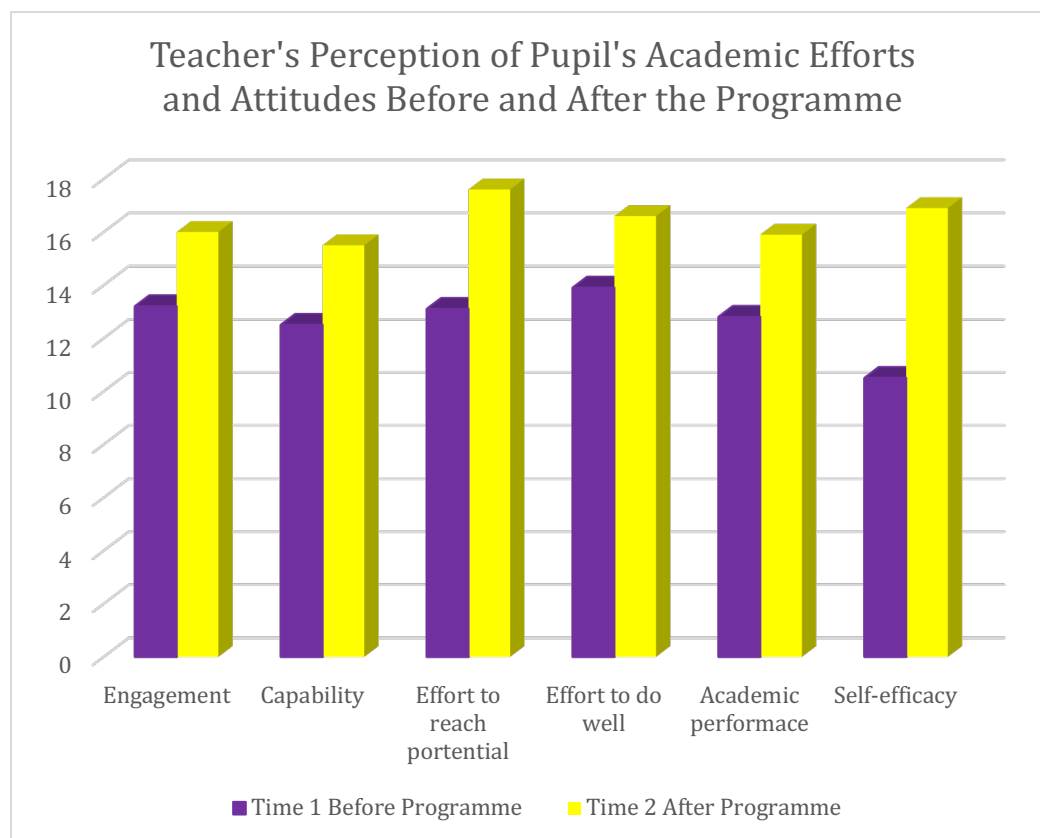
Table 1: Starting, completion and awards data					
STARTED	FINISHED	RETENTION	AWARD	Award retention (those choosing to continue and completing)	Pass rate
122	112	92%	112	100%	100%

Teacher's Questionnaire

Table 2 displays percentages which have been converted from mean values at Time 1 and Time 2, standard deviation, percentage change. t-value and significance value. **Table 3** displays the percentage agreement for statements relating to the programme.

Table 2: Teacher Questionnaire Outcomes						
Overall the student is..	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Percentage Change	t-vale	Sig
engaged and interested	13.2	84	3.56	23%	-4.38	p = <0.01
	16.3	84	5.8			
achieving grades, they are capable of	12.5	84	3.3	24%	-6.01	p => 0.01
	15.5	84	4			
making effort to achieve their potential	13.1	84	3.3	29%	-3.65	p = <0.01
	17.6	84	10.8			
making an effort to do well	13.9	84	3.3	22%	-5.52	p => 0.01
	16.6	84	3.5			
achieving grades, they require for further education	12.8	83	3.1	24%	-5.79	p = <0.01
	15.9	83	4			
confident in attempting new tasks (self-efficacy)	10.5	83	3.7	61%	-6.43	p => 0.01
	16.9	83	9.7			

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



Results show a significant positive improvement on engagement and interest in learning, achieving grades they are capable of, making the effort to reach their potential, making a conscious effort to do as well as they can, achieving the grades they need to further their education and self-efficacy.

Table 3: Teacher's questionnaire

<i>Since completing the programme....</i>	N	% Agreement
the student appears to be more confident	84	86%
the student appears to be happier	84	76%
the experience has helped them emotionally	84	86%

The high percentages for teacher's perception of their student's confidence, happiness and emotional wellbeing were encouraging.

Teacher's comments.....

At the end of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to make comments regarding the young person's behaviour. Below is a selection of comments....

“He has really come out of his shell since working on the programme. He has established a new group of friends and is communicating with them. He looks included which is really nice to see. He seems more confident in himself. He gives eye contact and can hold a conversation with his head held high. I am so proud of X and think this course has helped him turn a huge corner.”

“X has come on leaps and bounds since working on the Growing2gether programme. I sense she feels a huge amount of responsibility and she has engaged well as a leader. She has grown in confidence and is certainly more focused and mature. She has spoken very positively about her experience and is now making plans for what is next in her future. Delighted to see the positive impact this has had on her. Well done!”

“X has been much more pro-active in thinking about life after school, having applied for a college course full time after summer. She is aware of the conditions of being accepted on the course and is working hard to meet these.”

“X has not been in to my office in tears all this term. This is a huge improvement and proves that her resilience is improving.”

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

Participant questionnaires

Impact on mental health and connectedness

Most young people felt that the programme was influential in relation to valuing the support received on the programme, reflecting on what is good in their lives and helping them to feel connected to others. (n = 95).

- **70%** of young people agreed that the programme helped them to reflect on what they are good at and what is important in their lives
- **88%** of young people agreed that they valued the support they received on the sessions
- **70%** agreed that the programme helped them to feel more connected to others
- **77%** agreed that the programme made them more aware of themselves and the consequences of their actions
- **70%** agreed that the programme made them more confident with their abilities
- **62%** agreed that the programme had influenced them to make good decisions and avoid risk

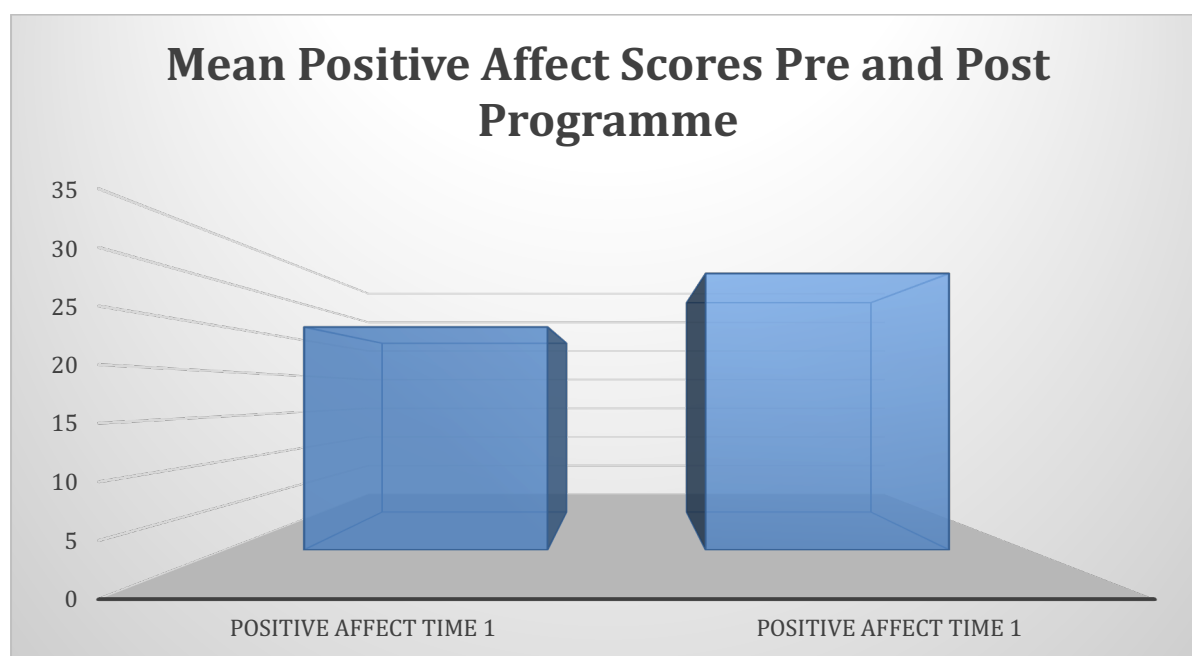
The results indicate that there was a significant improvement (**18%**) in young people's mental health as measured by RCADS ($t = 4.88$ (89), $p = <0.01$) and self-esteem (**21%**) ($t = -2.69$ (89), $p = >0.05$) by the end of the programme. However, although there was a slight improvement (**6%**) in positive affect, it was not significant.

Table 4: Mental Health and connectedness Outcomes

Scale	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Percentage Change	t-value	Sig
RCADS Score Time 1	64.3	90	26.1	18%	4.88	$p = <0.01$
RCADS Score Time 2	52.5	90	24.9			
Positive Affect Time 1	32.1	94	8.2	6%	-1.26	$p = .208$
Positive Affect Time 2	33.9	94	12.4			
Self Esteem Time 1	5.8	90	2.2	21%	-2.69	$p = <0.05$
Self Esteem Time 2	7.0	90	3.8			

There were significant differences in scores ($n = 47$) when PA baseline scores were dichotomised into those who scored below threshold (31.7) at baseline and those who scored above it. For those scoring below threshold (hence displaying less positive affect) there was a significant improvement of **24%** in positive affect ($t = -3.79$ (46), $p = >0.01$) by the end of the programme, compared to young people scoring above threshold (hence displaying greater positive affect at baseline).

Graph 2: Mean Positive Affect scores (pre and post Intervention) when data is dichotomised



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

“I enjoyed making a connection with the kids. It has been really lovely

“Growing2gether has really taught me how to overcome challenges and problems”

“I enjoyed the check ins to make sure everybody knows how everyone is feeling”

“I learnt how to engage with small children and to feel more confident and responsible”

“Being with the kids. They were all so lovely and they were so precious. I did enjoy being involved in their little worlds; it was fun.”

“You are not alone”

Growth of Mindset and Attitude to Education

Most young people felt that the programme was influential in relation to teaching them about the importance of education and having a positive mindset.

- **86%** agreed that education provides them with more opportunities in the future.

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

“I learnt that if determined enough, I can make friends and talk to people my age.”

“I learnt that I can achieve anything when I put my brain and thoughts into it.”

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

“I learned that there are consequences to my actions”

Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement of 28% in Growth of Mindset ($t = -7.12$ (89), $p = <0.01$)

Table 5: Mindset Outcomes						
Scale	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Percentage Change	t-vale	Sig
Growth of Mindset Time 1	6.0	90	2.3	28%	-7.12	p = <0.01
Growth of Mindset Time 2	7.7	90	1.9			

Satisfaction and feedback

Young people were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the programme (n = 95).

- 86% found the subjects that were covered informative
- 86% enjoyed building a relationship with their toddler
- 89% enjoyed working with others
- 95% would recommend the programme to other young people

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.

“Cherry was strongly disengaged from school and seemed to feel alienated from the possibility of being able to make any changes to this situation. When she spoke, she was quite anti-school and felt that some of her teachers held very negative opinions of her. To begin with, there was no way she could even listen to the chance that a) this might not be true or b) that it was within her power to change anything. Her demeanour was timid, almost cowed at times and she spoke very quietly as if not trusting herself to say anything of worth. She was very keen to miss classes, cared nothing about the fact that she would be missing important work and was very keen to work with the little children. In the nursery she was an instant natural with the children: very gentle, intuitive and patient. Cherry struggled to maintain her own standard of focus and group commitment when two other young people were in ‘outgoing and distracting’ mood. She was caught between her strong connection to 2 feisty characters and how she knew she wanted to be behaving in this group she had opted to join.



Developmentally she was struggling to achieve the standards of self-regulation deemed appropriate to S3 pupils in school and she told us that in class she was not one to behave well or to be brave enough to ask questions when she did not understand what was going on (which happened often). Cherry was also not always in her classes on the morning of our group and sometimes we knew she had been hiding in the toilets prior to our arrival.

Slowly, she opened up more about her concerns and feelings of inadequacy in classes, especially in English (she had literacy challenges) yet she produced reasonably detailed diaries every week and she made it clear that she wanted to put in the effort we expected. One week when only she and one other young person were present, we did in depth coaching conversations where we addressed these issues and Cherry explained how frustrated she felt at having to sit through ‘boring talks for senior pupils’ because she had elected (despite school's best efforts to persuade her otherwise) not to go on the year group residential trip. She was unable to express this at school so we rehearsed some ways she might try and offered to open the opportunity for her to make a reasonable request.

We took time to listen to her concerns about her lack of ability in English and how she might improve her relationship with her teacher. We noticed that Cherry had shifted to be able to listen and respond to open questions about possibilities. In the group she definitely made progress in sharing her views and observations of the nursery children although she was not

happy to share feelings. She found a slightly louder and more assured voice. Cherry was a very astute observer of both staff and children in the nursery. She came to realise that she was very good with the children and that they responded very positively to her, seeking her out for chats 'can you be my friend?' and hugs. This delighted Cherry and it was lovely to see her looking SO different in nursery, so very relaxed and smiley. She certainly gained confidence in her abilities and received good feedback from the staff which pleased her. School commented that they detect that she is trying to commit more and that attendance has improved slightly. Small but important steps for this lovely young person who has so much to offer herself and the world."

Case Study 2: Young Person's Journey

Tom appeared very nervous on the first day. He is a slim, rather jumpy boy who reddened in the face as he spoke. 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 and 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

Anxiety and depression, measured by RCADS significantly improved (by 18%) by the end of the programme, suggesting that Growing2gether has made a positive impact on young people's mental health. Furthermore, self-esteem significantly improved by the end of the programme (21%). Enhancing mental health and emotional wellbeing is extremely valuable as it correlates with academic, behavioural, social-emotional and motivational outcomes. This outcome is particularly important as depression in teenagers can be a particularly risky time as they may not be as open to seek advice or recognise the signs of depression, rather they are more likely to participate in high-risk activities.

Growing2gether use Positive Affect Schedule (PAS) to measure young people's propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others positively, even though the challenges of life, before and after the programme. PAS is a proxy of the young people's mental wellbeing as well as their connectedness and engagement with others. Positive Affect didn't show significance initially. There were significant differences in scores when PA baseline scores were dichotomised into those who scored below threshold at baseline and those who scored above it. For those scoring below threshold (hence displaying less positive affect) there was a significant improvement of **24%** in positive affect by the end of the programme, compared to young people scoring above threshold. The results suggest that a significant proportion of young people enrolling on the Growing2gether programmes have mental health issues. Those who score above the thresholds for positive affect make significantly greater improvements by the end of the programme. The evidence strengthens the programme's efficacy with regards to delivering an intervention that can improve adolescent mental health, hence reduce mental health inequalities in young people living in Scotland.

Growth of Mindset, a construct linked to academic resilience, improved significantly (**28%**) by the end of the programme. Not only does mindset have implications for educational outcomes but recent research suggests that stressful life events, depression, substance use, and motivations for non-suicidal self-injury were weaker among those with more of a growth mindset relative to those with more of a fixed mindset (Schroder et al, 2017). Throughout the curriculum, Growing2gether refers back to growth of mindset and encourages young people to perceive this as being malleable, hence realising their own potential to achieve goals.

When conducting research, it is more reliable to have multiple informants report on the young people's progress which is why Growing2gether routinely ask teachers and parents to complete a measure for the students, especially as teachers are good informants of young people's behaviour. It was encouraging to observe that teachers felt that Growing2gether increased young people's confidence, appeared happier and the experience helped them emotionally. Teachers were asked a series of questions regarding the student's academic performance. Pre and post tests revealed significant improvements in all areas including improvement on engagement and interest in learning, achieving grades they are capable of, making the effort to reach their potential, making a conscious effort to do as well as they can, achieving the grades they need to further their education and self-efficacy. The comments accompanying these scores was exceptionally pleasing to observe.

When conducting research, it is important to acknowledge areas on where we can improve. The data collection process is currently being reviewed so that we are able to collect data from all the participants from the programme. We have three new members of staff, who will receive training on approaching research and engaging young people. Growing2gether currently use paper questionnaires, however we are looking to change this to online in order to engage young people. We encourage the young people to be as honest as they can when completing the questionnaires, however the feedback from facilitators is that on occasion, (and particularly where the young people are at more risk than others) the young people are reluctant to be

truthful as they do not yet know the facilitators, hence leading to demand characteristics and wanting to please the researcher by providing what they deem to be the “correct answers”. Nevertheless, it is clear from the high retention rate, feedback percentages, case study and comments made by the young people and teachers, that the programme was well received.

Acknowledgements

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