



# The Impact of Youth Work

Providing low-level mental  
health support in schools

in Dumfries and Galloway

**November 2023**



University of  
St Andrews



"The most significant change that occurred for me after support from my youth worker was probably a boost in my confidence, both in a mental and physical manner and my mental health... The support led to the change in my confidence and mental health because before getting the support I got I never felt like getting out my bed in the mornings, and felt like just staying there all day, mainly, every day. My confidence was at a very low point, and I couldn't even talk in front of a room with about more than six people in it without having a panic attack as I felt everyone was judging me as a result of my social anxiety. I hated how I looked in every mirror I looked in and every photo but after getting the support that I got from my youth worker I began to feel better about how I looked, and I felt more comfortable talking in front of groups of people. As a result of my confidence, I've applied for junior house captain and done my interview for it, roughly about three hours before doing this and I've just found out I've got this role. Although I still have days where I don't feel confident, they are nowhere near as much as they used to be nine or ten months ago"

**ZEE, AGED 14**

**(STORY 6)**



"Zee was referred to the service to help with their mental health and feelings of 'worthlessness.' Zee attended thirteen sessions and had set targets with the Youth Information Worker; Zee hoped the sessions would help them feel more confident in their self and help reduce their over thinking. Zee engaged well in all of their sessions. Zee's confidence began to grow, and they started to attend different groups within the school. They said that although at times they would still over think, they were more easily able to distract themselves from this or talk through their thoughts and try to rationalise them. Zee came back to see their Youth Information Worker to let them know that they had the confidence to apply to be Junior House Captain and managed to secure this position within their school. Zee has commented that they feel happier in their self and have higher self-esteem. Zee has had the confidence to join other youth groups and push their self out their comfort zone when they set a goal that they wish to achieve"

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER'S COMMENTARY**



# **The impact of youth work providing low-level mental health support in schools in Dumfries and Galloway**

**November 2023**

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# Foreword

"As we aspire towards a Scotland where young people realise their full potential, we first need to understand why many young people feel sad, lonely, have low confidence and struggle with their mental wellbeing and then seek new models of practice to support them. We need to give them hope of better days ahead. The Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project demonstrates the effectiveness and impact of combining a youth work and counselling skills approach in working with young people. This report adds to the evidence base of the key role that youth workers play in building the health and wellbeing of young people, effectively partnering with educational psychology and school. YouthLink Scotland in partnership with Northern Star and University of St Andrews were pleased to lead the external, independent evaluation of the project using a robust and collaborative evaluation methodology. It's important to learn from the success of this project and consider how similar model could be replicated across Scotland".

**TIM FREW**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE, YOUTHLINK SCOTLAND**

"Dumfries and Galloway Council are committed to ensuring that young people get the right support at the right time. The Low Level Mental Health in Schools Project was successfully piloted over a 2 year period across all 16 secondary schools in the region before expanding its offer and reach to young people from 2020 onwards. The initiative has worked with thousands of young people over the last 5 years and in 2022, YouthLink Scotland, Northern Star and University of St Andrews were commissioned to carry out an external, independent evaluation of the programme. This research evidences the impact of the project and highlights the challenges facing many of our young people throughout Dumfries and Galloway. We have adopted a person-centred approach to supporting young people's mental health and well-being and this findings report demonstrates the effectiveness of the Low Level Mental Health in Schools Project model."

**RICHARD BRODIE**  
**CHAIR OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING COMMITTEE**  
**DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY COUNCIL**

"The Low Level Mental Health in Schools Project is an excellent example of innovative partnership working between the Youth Work Service and Educational Psychology. This collaborative approach has ensured the success of the project throughout the implementation, delivery and monitoring phases. Dumfries and Galloway Council are immensely proud of the work undertaken by the Youth Information Workers across the Secondary Schools and wider Youth Work Team, and Lead Officers with oversight responsibility. With the project expanding its reach in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the partnership was able to adapt to the needs of young people at pace, ensuring young people were able to be supported across the length and breadth of Dumfries and Galloway."

**IAN BLAKE**  
**CHAIR OF COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY COUNCIL**





# Executive summary

The Dumfries and Galloway Youth Work Service and Educational Psychology Service jointly deliver a project to provide young people with access to low-level mental health support in schools across Dumfries and Galloway. In 2022 [YouthLink Scotland](#), [Northern Star](#) and [University of St Andrews](#) were commissioned to conduct an external, independent evaluation of the programme.

## **The evaluation sought to answer two questions:**

1. What impact did the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project have on young people?
2. How was that impact achieved?

## **To answer these questions this study used both statistical and qualitative methods.**

The qualitative and statistical findings highlight the complex issues and challenges faced by young people and deterioration of their wellbeing that led to the need for this project. Issues included, difficulties at home or in relationships, caring responsibilities, substance abuse, low confidence and self-esteem, risk-taking behaviour, anger management issues, behaviour in school, bereavement, anxiety, stress, and low mood.



### Through the qualitative analysis, the evaluation found that the impact of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project on young people included:

- Developing skills for wellbeing – including learning how to open up and share feelings, self-awareness and learning coping strategies and tools
- Improving health and wellbeing – including increased confidence and self-esteem and feeling listened to
- Positive change – including improved relationships, improved attitudes about and attendance at school.

### The study found that these impacts on young people were achieved through:

- A youth work approach – including a relationship with a youth worker, young person-centred approach, regular, frequent, consistent contact, a safe space and active listening
- A counselling skills approach – including discussion and self-exploration, solution focused, coping strategies and healthy relationships.

### Wider impacts of the project included:

- Schools viewed the project as a really valuable part of the support they are able to offer young people
- A deep and mutually enhancing partnership between Education Psychology and Youth Work
- Alongside the qualitative analysis, the statistical analysis showed that it is possible that the project contributed to changes in the CAMHS referrals but this is difficult to determine within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery.

### Possible future developments

- At a minimum, continuing with the current Low-Level Mental Health in Schools project
- Expanding the service by having more Youth Information Worker days and a wider remit for the project including more group work
- More feedback to schools of how the project is working
- Resource support for Youth Information Workers, including welcoming physical spaces for them to work from
- Improved awareness of the mental health continuum/pathway and links to other professionals providing mental health services.



# Introduction

The Dumfries and Galloway Youth Work Service and Educational Psychology Service jointly deliver a project to provide young people with access to low-level mental health support in schools across Dumfries and Galloway.

## HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

### The Pilot

In 2015 the Scottish Government launched the [Scottish Attainment Challenge](#) with the mission of closing the poverty-related attainment gap, recognising that 'education remains one of the most effective means we have to improve the life chances of all of our young people'. Among the twelve key areas identified within the challenge were early intervention and prevention, and social and emotional wellbeing. In response to the Challenge in August 2018 Dumfries and Galloway Council recruited Youth Information Workers as part of a two year pilot. These Youth Information Workers were offered specific training and embedded within the 15 main secondary schools across the region. 1:1 support, group sessions and drop-ins were offered to the pupils as part of the pilot. In the first year, 1,216 pupils engaged with the Youth Information Workers around diverse topics including internet safety, poverty, drugs & alcohol, and social skills. The number of pupils engaging with the service doubled in the second year.

### Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project

As a response to increasing concern about the mental health and wellbeing of children, in 2018 the [Scottish Government](#) allocated £60 million over four years to ensure that all secondary school pupils in Scotland had access to professional counselling services. Based on the impact of the pilot project Dumfries and Galloway Council discussed with local Partners including NHS Dumfries & Galloway and Children Services Partnership the best approach to take to this work within Dumfries & Galloway. Due to the importance of the link with Educational Psychology Services and Youth Work and the impact of the pilot it was agreed to use the funding to train the Youth Information Workers as counsellors to expand the previous project for another three years (2020-2023). The Youth Information Workers completed an accredited counselling skills training course through COSCA (The professional body for Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) and PDA (Professional Development Award) training in Youth Work. In the first year of the counselling programme (2020-2021), 462 referrals for 1:1 support were received with 351 of those young people receiving support, and 111 on the waiting list.

## **An evaluation of the project completed in June 2021, outlines:**

“This work is targeted at closing the poverty related attainment gap and supporting young people’s emotional, behavioural, and mental health and offers a confidential, non-judgemental, and holistic approach to support young people’s social and emotional wellbeing. The project promotes early detection and intervention strategies that can help improve young people’s resilience and ability to succeed in school and in life. The expected outcome is to prevent mental health problems developing in the first place and reducing the number of young people requiring mental health support from NHS or other more formal mental health services”.

## **Project delivery**

The project trains and provides Youth Information Workers for every secondary school (16 secondary schools) in Dumfries and Galloway.

The Youth Information Worker uses various approaches to support young people in schools on a 1:1 basis as part of the ‘blether’ programme. This includes using a person-centred approach and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to help a young person to develop an understanding of their feelings and experiences and explore coping strategies. For some young people this may lead to a referral for more specialist support.

## **Reasons for referral may include:**

- Concerns surrounding a young person’s well-being including mental and emotional health
- Struggling with a loss/bereavement or significant change
- Struggling with low self-esteem or confidence
- A young person is considered to be vulnerable
- A young person is at risk of offending

The 1:1 support programme lasts between 6–8 weeks, meeting once a week for 45 minutes per session. All school staff can refer a young person for 1:1 support and a young person can also self-refer. Most support is delivered through 1:1 sessions although group work is also available where appropriate. There are groups which focus on overall health and wellbeing and are flexible to the needs of the young people. There are also issue-based programmes such as, building resilience of young people who are dealing with significant loss or change.

## Youth Work Service priorities

Council Youth Work Services in Dumfries and Galloway deliver universal provision whose targeted work is aimed at the most vulnerable young people across the region in response to locally identified needs and priorities.

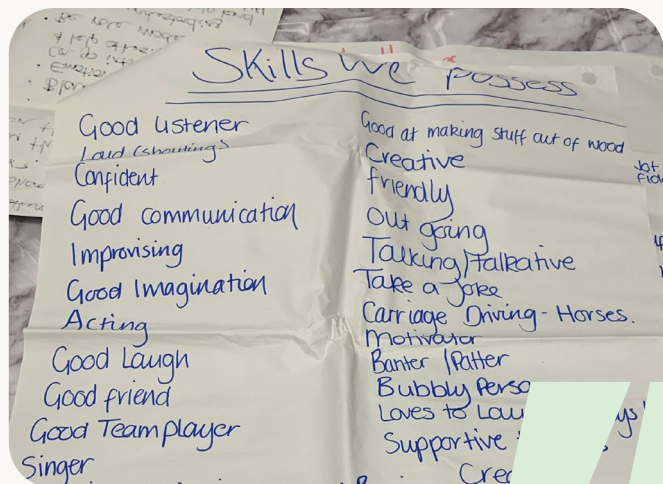
### **The Youth Work Service has five key work areas:**

- **Community Based Youth Work Opportunities:** delivery of local youth groups, projects, and opportunities in evenings and weekends with the most vulnerable and marginalised young people and to support young people's health and wellbeing.
- **Youth Work in Schools:** delivery of accredited Qualifications and Youth Awards in schools and low-level mental health support through Youth Information Workers.
- **Youth Participation and Volunteering:**  
Opportunities for young people to become involved in decision-making through projects including Regional Youth Council, Champions Board and Young Volunteers.
- **Wider Achievement:** Creating opportunities for young people to achieve accredited Youth Awards including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement and John Muir Awards.
- **Collaboration with Third Sector Youth Work:** Training, advice and support to Third Sector partners and practitioners' forums.

Whilst this is the offer of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Youth Work Service, the Youth Enquiry Service is also embedded within this delivery model and acts as the Council's Youth Information and Support Hub. The team within the Youth Enquiry Service are highly trained and qualified Youth Information Workers who provide specialist one-to-one support, group work and peer education opportunities for young people, linking back to the five key work areas for Youth Work in the region.

**Note:** The Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project is also supported by Youth Workers in primary schools, who have completed basic mental health training. This study focuses on the support delivered by Youth Information Workers in secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway.





# Purpose of the research

Dumfries and Galloway Council Youth Work Service and Educational Psychology have completed evaluations of the project since the pilot in 2018. In 2022 the Youth Work and Educational Psychology Services commissioned [YouthLink Scotland, Northern Star](#) and [University of St Andrews](#) to complete an external, independent evaluation of the project.

The evaluation aimed to enable the Youth Information Workers to have an objective opportunity to reflect on their practice, understand what works and identify the difference their practice had on the young people they work with.

## **The evaluation sought to answer two questions:**

1. What impact did the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project have on young people?
2. How was that impact achieved?







# Methodology

To answer the two research questions, this study used both statistical and qualitative methods to identify common themes across the different approaches to explore the impact of the project on young people in Dumfries and Galloway.

## STATISTICAL APPROACH

The University of St Andrews took the lead on the statistical methods in two parts.

### Part One

#### KIDSCREEN-27 questionnaire/survey

This involved collecting cross-sectional data from pupils aged 16 plus using the validated KIDSCREEN-27 questionnaire to find out about the wellbeing of pupils and engagement with the Youth Information Workers. The age appropriate European KIDSCREEN-27 health questionnaire for children and young people provides five domain scores related to physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, family, school and friends [see references 3-5]. KIDSCREEN was a European research project to develop a questionnaire to assess the quality of life of children and adolescents. Children, adolescents and researchers from the following countries were involved: Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. KIDSCREEN-27 is a shortened version of the original questionnaire, it comprises 27 questions each of which has five possible answers (see table in Appendix 1 for domain scores and definitions). The answer options either relate to the frequency or level of agreement with the statement or feeling. As KIDSCREEN is validated and widely used across Europe we were able to compare participant scores with norm data for children of the same age living in the United Kingdom. For each of the five domains a lower score means that the participant has lower quality of life in that domain, and using the norm data we are able to identify those whose scores are markedly higher and lower than you would expect for their age and country of residence.

**Survey responses were sought from three groups of young people:**

1. those currently working with the Youth Information Workers,
2. those on the waiting list for support,
3. the other pupils in the schools.

Responses were sought from groups 2 and 3 to provide a comparison with group 1. The waiting list group (group 2) would have a need for the service but had not been able to access it yet. Their responses to the questionnaire could tell us about what wellbeing is like before you access the service. The third group represented those young people who might not have needed the service so their responses would tell us what wellbeing should be like for this cohort of young people. We planned to compare scores across the three groups listed above to understand whether those in group 1 report similar outcomes to those in groups 2 or 3, using standard statistical methods.



With the Youth Information Workers introduced in 2018, those aged 16 were able to access their support for their entire secondary education to date, making them a valuable population for this evaluation. The data were collected in October 2022 using an online survey, which was promoted in schools and by the Youth Information Workers. In total, 376 responses to the KIDSCREEN-27 survey from pupils aged 16 years plus with analysable data were received from 12 different secondary schools. Table 1 presents a summary of the participants and their contact with the Youth Information Workers. Participants were aged between 16 and 18 years, with more female than male participants, and around 12% of participants reporting another gender. Eleven percent of participants reported receiving free school meals, but only 2% identified as minority ethnicity.

TABLE 1 – KIDSCREEN-27 SURVEY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Variable		number	%
Age in Years	16	233	61.97
	17-18	143	38.03
Gender	Female	214	52.71
	Male	138	33.99
	Other	48	11.82
	Missing	6	1.48
Minority ethnicity	Yes	8	2.13
	Missing	3	0.80
Free school meal recipient	Yes	42	11.17
	Missing	56	14.89
School	Annan Academy	31	8.24
	Castle Douglas High School	27	7.18
	Dalbeattie High School	40	10.64
	Douglas Ewart High School	71	18.88
	Dumfries Academy	27	7.18
	Kirkcudbright Academy	45	11.97
	Langholm Academy	6	1.60
	Lockerbie Academy	8	2.13
	Moffat Academy	44	11.70
	Sanquhar Academy	22	5.85
	Stranraer Academy	33	8.78
	Wallace Hall Academy	22	5.85
Youth Information Worker contact	None	222	59.04
	Group	65	17.29
	One to one support	55	14.63
	Drop in	34	9.04
Timing of Youth Information Worker contact	Current	32	20.78
	Within 1 year	57	37.01
	More than 1 year	30	19.48
	Missing	35	22.73

Note: surveys were sent to all schools in Dumfries and Galloway but some young people chose not to participate and those schools are not included in the table.



## Part Two

### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) data analysis

To evaluate the wider impact of the Youth Information Workers, the second quantitative study involved the analysis of the monthly aggregate anonymous statistics on [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Waiting Times](#) published by Public Health Scotland. These are monthly data for each of the 14 Scottish Health Boards on the number of CAMHS referrals, patients waiting to be seen, patients being seen, patients who did not attend and open cases. The analysis focused on the referrals and waiting lists data as these were considered most likely to be influenced by the introduction of Youth Information Worker service. Statistical modelling methods (interrupted time series) were used to determine whether CAMHS referrals and waiting lists changed in NHS Dumfries and Galloway following the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project, compared to the other health boards.

### Qualitative Approach

YouthLink Scotland and Northern Star delivered the qualitative research gathering data from two main groups:

- Young people who had access support from the project
- Stakeholders involved in the project – project leads, senior teaching staff and Youth Information Workers



## **Gathering data from young people - Transformative Evaluation**

The Transformative Evaluation methodology used for part of this research was developed by Dr Sue Cooper (2012). The methodology is based on a reflective conversation between a young person and their youth worker. The methodology enables practitioner engagement through the analysis of stories and seeks to provide both evidence of impact and development of practice through the process of evaluation.

This methodology is consistent with the values and approach of youth work, as it provides an opportunity to listen to the stories of young people about what they think they have gained from taking part in youth work. It is a method which encourages practice development:

- Youth Workers receive authentic feedback from young people about how their practice has impacted on their lives;
- Both youth workers and stakeholders have an opportunity to reflect on what is working and therefore improve and develop practice accordingly;
- It facilitates wider development of organisational learning and knowledge creation in the longer term; and,
- It creates a culture of evaluation built on collaboration and trust between all stakeholders which supports organisational learning and sustainable practice.

In August 2022 nine Youth Information Workers who covered each of the 16 secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway were trained by YouthLink Scotland in how to collect stories from young people who had experienced significant change as a result of accessing the 1:1 service.

Following the training, the Youth Information Workers identified young people who they had developed a meaningful relationship with, who had accessed the 1:1 service, were aged 11-18 years, and who had experienced some kind of change through their engagement. They collected written consent (including parent/guardian consent for under 16) and arranged a time to meet them in a safe, quiet space. They asked the young person 2 questions:

1. Looking back what do you think has been the most significant change that occurred for you as a result of accessing support from a Youth Information Worker in your school?
2. What is it about this support that has led to the change?

In total 29 young people shared their stories. Their Youth Information Workers then provided a commentary to help contextualise each young person's story, as well as provide an opportunity for them to reflect on their own practice and what they felt led to the young person's change. This then created a co-authored significant change story. The young person read the co-authored story to check they were happy with it and gave their consent again for their story to be analysed and shared in the final report. The stories were anonymised before analysis and the young person chose a pseudonym to use in their story.

## **Coding and analysis**

Four Youth Information Workers took part in two coding days, facilitated by YouthLink Scotland and supported by Northern Star. The process of analysis included reading significant change stories and identifying key themes known as codes. This process of 'coding' identified:

- 14 impact codes that described the difference engagement with Youth Information Workers in school had on young people
- 9 process codes that described how the support provided by Youth Information Workers led to that impact.

Youth Information Workers then grouped all of the identified codes for impact and process into domains (an overall group name). A domain has a number of codes attached to it and helps describe the findings from the study. All of the data and codes were checked and verified by the independent researcher from Northern Star. This process ensured that the codes were applied consistently across stories, that there is enough evidence for application of codes and that the initial codes contribute to the relevant final domain.

## **Stage two – interviews with practitioners**

The researchers from YouthLink Scotland and Northern Star conducted interviews with three teachers in leadership positions, two Youth Information Workers, and two key practitioners who were part of the team that helped develop the approach.

The focus of the interviews was exploring young people's mental health, impact of youth work and mental health in schools and the future of the approach.

After the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber, the researcher from Northern Star coded and analysed all of the interviews.

## **Ethics**

The research undertaken for this report was reviewed and approved by the School of Medicine Ethics Committee, acting on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) at the University of St Andrews (Approval code MD16479). All young people provided written informed consent and practitioners provided verbal consent.

## Strengths and limitations of the study

### Strengths

A real strength of this study is bringing together both the qualitative and statistical data to understand both the impact and process of the project. The statistical approach brings together both data from young people in Dumfries and Galloway engaging and not engaging in the project, and NHS CAMHS data. This combined with the significant change stories from young people who have taken part and interviews with practitioners, provides an insightful evaluation of what can be learned from the project.

The research methodology was reviewed and approved by the University of St Andrews. This has provided the research team with the confidence to ensure that this study is being conducted ethically and robustly. It should also be noted that the research team are independent from the programme, ensuring that the evaluation has been conducted objectively.

### Limitations of the statistical approach

As part of the research ethics review process the Ethics Committee stipulated that young people under 16 could only contribute to the KIDSCREEN-27 questionnaire with written parental/guardian consent. The research team in consultation with Youth Work Services, decided this was not practical as the Youth Information Workers would be supporting young people to complete the survey in a school setting. The decision was taken to only offer 16 years plus the opportunity to contribute as they could provide their own informed consent. This approach reduced the number of pupil's who could participate in the project, but was necessary to ensure the collection of the questionnaire was both feasible and ethical.

The Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project is unlikely to have been the only influence on CAMHS referrals and waiting lists during the study period. In particular the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns had a significant impact, which needed to be considered within the second qualitative study. The policy context which led to the funding for the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project also means that other interventions are likely to have been implemented in other health boards. But the methods we used allowed us to include routinely collected data on important outcomes for this project.



### Limitations of the qualitative approach

For the transformative evaluation approach, the young people selected to share their story were identified as having experienced some significant change as a result of their participation in the service. This research did not seek to measure the proportion of young people who had experienced significant change or the young people who had experienced no change. Instead, it looked to understand impact and how the Youth Information Worker's approach contributed to this impact. The research findings cannot be applied to all young people who engaged with the service.

"Having a youth information worker in school has made me realise that I'm braver than I think and that there's someone other than friends, family, and staff members of the school that I can talk to. When I put my mind to anything I can achieve anything... My youth information worker taught me that avoiding anxiousness just makes it worse in the background even if it's going to give you some short-term relaxation... When I first came to you, I was very anxious about being in classes, and I felt like everybody would just be looking at me and that just made me overthink everything. But in the two years I've known you I've managed to go through two jobs, two college courses, and leave school being confident and proud of myself".

**HARRY, AGED 16**

**STORY 1**

"YP 'Harry' was referred by pupil support due to their attendance in school. YP's anxiety had caused their attendance in school to deteriorate so drastically that school were considering telling them that they wouldn't be able to stay on for fifth year (something they really wanted to do).

I worked with YP on the living life to the full resource, this helped YP understand their anxiety and find ways to cope with it. YP engaged really well with this and slowly started taking baby steps into their classes. Within eight sessions of working together, YP was back in their classes full time.

YP was allowed to stay on until fifth year which they completed successfully. YP has now left school full time and is studying at college and working part time"

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER'S COMMENTARY**



# Young people's referral to the service

The reasons for young people's referral or self-referral to the service are multiple and diverse. The Youth Information Workers and staff involved in the service noted that very often the initial reason for referral was not what the Youth Information Worker and young person ended up working on in the support sessions. Young people felt safe with Youth Information Workers and shared how they felt which helped the Youth Information Worker to understand some of the deeper causes of the young people's feelings and behaviour.

The issues the young people were experiencing included difficulties at home or in relationships, caring responsibilities, substance abuse, low confidence and self-esteem, risk-taking behaviour, anger management issues, behaviour in school, bereavement, anxiety, stress, and low mood.

In the interviews we asked practitioners, teachers and project staff to reflect on the levels of support required and what might be driving that need. They thought that there has always been a need for low-level mental health support for young people particularly in their teenage years. They also thought that this need seems to have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and young people in particular have struggled with the loss of control experienced during COVID-19, isolation, the lack of face-to-face education and limited activities out of school. The lockdown period often meant that young people and families were doing what they needed to do to get by, but for some young people that meant there wasn't a clear structure to their day, or boundaries to operate within and coming back to school (which is by nature, structured) has been particularly difficult. Some young people have been unable to take part in full time face to face education and are either on part-time timetables or have not returned to face-to-face education at all. Some of the schools included in this study have support arrangements in place to help young people transition back to full time education in school out with the Youth Information Workers.

Teachers and youth workers expressed concern about the impact social media and the 24/7 digital world is having on young people. They noted that there is no respite in the online world and due to algorithms showing young people more of what they've already viewed there is no break from negative news around poverty, cost of living crisis, environmental breakdown and conflict. There was also a concern about the impact of screen time on young people's sleep patterns.

Increased access to information in a digital world has also had the effect of making people more aware of mental health which was seen as a good thing but led to some young people incorrectly self-diagnosing themselves with a mental illness or condition.

The quantitative data from the KIDSCREEN-27 survey (part 1) added further insights about which young people had contact with Youth Information Worker in schools, the type of contact and the wellbeing of those who had and had not been in contact with a Youth Information Worker.

Among the 376 responses from young people to the KIDSCREEN-27 survey, the most common type of contact with Youth Information Workers was in groups (17.3% of responses), followed by 1:1 support (14.6%) and the drop in sessions (9.0%) (Table 1). Only 4 responses were received from people who reported being on a waiting list, which unfortunately meant this group was too small to use to make comparisons about the wellbeing of those waiting to see a Youth Information Worker with those in the process of being supported by a Youth Information Worker. Survey participants who had contact with a Youth Information Worker were asked if that contact was ongoing at the time of the survey or in the past. Around 20% were currently working with a Youth Information Worker, while for 37% the contact was within the year, and a further 20% had contact with a Youth Information Worker more than 1 year before the survey. However, 23% of those who were in contact with a Youth Information Worker did not tell us whether that contact was current or not. This information gives us an idea about the extent and nature of engagement with the project. But also helps us understand whether the project helps resolve the situation which led to the referral and leads to sustained impacts for the young people.

Within the KIDSCREEN-27 survey we also collected some data on sociodemographic characteristics. Subsequently, we could test whether young people with certain characteristics were more or less likely to make contact with a Youth Information Worker. We did not identify any statistically significant differences in terms of the age, gender, ethnicity or free school meal status in terms of contact with a Youth Information Worker. Based on the survey responses it seems that the sociodemographic background of young people is not influencing whether they engage with the Youth Information Workers, who appear to be making themselves equally available to all young people.

Moving on, we compared the wellbeing of respondents who had and had not been in contact with a Youth Information Worker across the five domains within KIDSCREEN-27: physical wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, autonomy & parent relation, social support & peers and school. The first notable finding from the KIDSCREEN-27 domain scores is that the proportion of participants whose responses were considered low for their age was markedly higher than the UK norm data. The UK norm data were published in the KIDSCREEN manual in 2006 so predate that time, and this finding highlights the deterioration of young people's wellbeing, which led to the creation of the Low-Level



Mental Health in Schools Project. All five wellbeing domains showed higher numbers of poorer wellbeing scores and lower numbers of good wellbeing scores than would be expected for young people of this age in the United Kingdom, including those young people who had no contact with Youth Information Worker. Furthermore, across all survey responses, 71% reported low scores on two or more of the five wellbeing domains, meaning that more than two thirds of this age group of young people are facing challenges in two or more areas of their lives. This emphasises the need for redesigned services, like the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project to support young people's mental health and wellbeing.

In terms of the physical wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, autonomy & parent relation and school wellbeing domains those working 1:1 with a Youth Information Worker reported the highest number of low scores. A low physical wellbeing score indicates that the young person could be physically exhausted or unwell, while a low psychological wellbeing score indicates a lack of enjoyment in life and low-self-esteem. A low score for the autonomy and parent relation domain relates to feelings of restriction and under appreciation, while a low school domain score indicates that the young person has negative feelings around school and may not be doing well at school. This aligns with the multiple reasons for referral identified through the qualitative methods. Among the survey respondents who had 1:1 contact with a Youth Information Worker, 84% reported a low wellbeing score for two or more of the five KIDSCREEN-27 domains.

The social support and peers domain was found to be fairly poor regardless of whether you had contact with a Youth Information Worker or not. Only those young people engaging with the groups organised by the Youth Information Worker reported more average and high scores for this domain, which is understandable as those who are experiencing more difficulties with friends and peers would not be best supported in group sessions. When looking at whether Youth Information Worker contact was current or more historical, there was some indication of improvement in the psychological wellbeing and autonomy & parent relation domains for those whose Youth Information Worker contact was more than 1 year ago. This may be an indication that the Youth Information Worker support helped address the situation. However, with the small number of responses and the lack of consistent findings across all five wellbeing domains, we need to be cautious and not draw conclusions from this finding.

Together the qualitative and quantitative findings confirm the need for the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project, and illustrate the breadth of reasons young people engage with the Youth Information Workers and provide some evidence that the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project is reaching those who need help.

"Well, since I was referred in S4, I was referred for my anger and anxiety, and because of this I went through booklets such as the anger gremlin to help me get through and to gain some strategies and ways of how to cope with and manage my anger and anxiety, and an example is when I was pulled out by a bunch of teachers and I didn't get angry or blow up, I stayed calm and talked through it and managed to keep a level head through the whole situation... It was very difficult... Definitely the consistent appointments every week, eh building a good relationship, I've known you about two years now, and I just feel very listened to and can trust you and you understand me. So just kind of like building up a bond where like I can feel comfortable to expel anything that's been bottling up".

**GREENCAT, AGED 17**

**STORY 18**



"They have recently reached out and self-referred for support, this is following on from previous engagement with the service. This saw them address what was described by them as 'anger issues' this had also been flagged up by the referrer. They wanted to change how they responded to others as they had previously been perceived as aggressive in their responses. We worked through some psychoeducation in particular anger/anxiety using the Anger Gremlin tool kit. Through discussion and exploration, they realised that it was their anxiety that was often underlying in their aggressive behaviour. We worked through coping strategies, and they were able to come up with the ones that best worked for them and use them effectively when the need arose. They also used the sessions to talk through any other issues that were coming up for them. They responded well to a mix of solution focused and person-centred approaches. This was achieved through 12 sessions".

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKERS COMMENTARY**





# Key findings

The following findings will draw on the data from both the statistical and qualitative research.

## The impact of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project on young people

There was a total of 23 initial codes identified across the 29 stories – 14 impact codes and 9 process codes.

During analysis the 14 impact codes were grouped together into 3 impact domains. Table 1 below shows the percentage of stories that the impact codes and the impact domains are applied to. Please note that codes can only be applied to stories once. The same applies to domains, each domain can only be applied to a story once. For example, if a story has both the 'Attitude to school' and 'Improved relationships' codes applied, this will only count as one application of the 'Positive change' domain. For this reason, the percentage of stories in which the impact domain is present (final column of the table) can be lower than the sum of the impact code percentages (second column in the table).

All of the impact codes were categorised into three domains:

- Developing skills for wellbeing
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Positive change





Code	Count	% of stories	Domain	Count	% of stories
Learning how to open up and share feelings	25	86%	Developing skills for wellbeing	29	100%
Self-awareness	23	79%			
Learning coping strategies and tools	19	66%			
Self-regulation	7	24%			
Social and communication skills	7	24%			
Increased Confidence and Self Esteem	19	66%	Improved mental health and wellbeing	28	97%
Feeling listened to	18	62%			
Self-acceptance	3	10%			
Improved relationships	10	34%	Positive Change	21	72%
Improved attitude about school	8	28%			
Improved attendance at school	7	24%			
Changing behaviour	6	21%			
Achievement	5	17%			
Positive transitions	5	17%			

When reading this findings section, it is important to remember that rarely do the codes or domains occur in isolation. The impact of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project on young people is multi-faceted and multi-layered with many connections between codes and domains.

### **A note on resilience**

All the stories showed that young people improved their mental health to varying degrees. They were better able to cope with problems through learning new coping strategies and techniques and having a trusted adult to talk to. We have not used the term resilience as an impact code but rather have broken it down into constituent parts – using coping mechanisms, self-regulation, changes in behaviour. This helps us to better understand what is driving change rather than using the overall term ‘resilience’.

Using the term resilience places the responsibility for responding to adverse or difficult circumstances on to young people. For some of the challenges young people face this is relevant, however some of the drivers of poor mental health amongst young people are systemic issues such as structural inequality and poverty and a focus on resilience does not tackle the root causes of the problem.

### **Developing skills for wellbeing**

All young people developed one or more skills that contribute to wellbeing. These skills are the direct outcome of young people’s engagement with the Youth Information Workers.

### **Learning how to open up and share feelings**

The majority of young people who shared their stories were able to open up and share their feelings with Youth Information Workers. Over time they were able to talk about issues that were affecting them and how that made them feel. For some young people this was the first time they had been able to do this as they were not able to, or were unwilling to talk to friends, family members or teachers. A youth work approach helped to create a safe space that encouraged young people to express how they were feeling. A youth work approach involved voluntary participation by young people, spending time getting to know the young person, starting the sessions where young people were at, and delivering the sessions at a pace that worked for the young people. Youth Information Workers delivered tailored support based on the specific needs and situation of the young person which meant spending time building a relationship and trust with young people.

“ I think the most significant change for me was being able to open up to someone easier as it’s something I really struggled with...I think it was the calm environment and the reassurance from yourself that has led to this change as well as the regular appointments.”

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 16**



## Self-awareness

In the stories, young people demonstrated an ability to reflect on and understand the situation they were in, the drivers and triggers of their own mental health and how they have changed and developed through engaging in the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project.

"Recognising that I lack self-confidence. It's been helpful coming here once a week and be able to talk things through, sort things out like what's been bugging me that week"

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 27**

Being able to recognise and understand their mental health enables them, in partnership with their Youth Information Worker, to learn strategies that they can implement on a day-to-day basis to help them manage challenges.

## Learning coping strategies and tools

An important part of the project is enabling young people to develop the skills to effectively manage the challenges they face. Youth Information Workers support young people to learn coping tools, tips and strategies. This approach is evident in the young people's stories with them either mentioning specific tools that they have been able to use or discussing how they are better able to manage themselves and their emotions because of what they have learned through their Youth Information Worker. Some of the tools include the Anger Gremlin resource, Positive Self Talk Journal, DNA – V, Sleep Routine and Vicious Cycle. This upskilling approach is important in helping young people to take control.

"The support that I got which led to change was that (Youth Information Worker) was very good at listening and a good counsellor. The use of planning and timelines really helped me move forward and organise the thoughts in my head."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 26**

"Pandora used the sessions to work through these feelings and difficult situations, identifying new strategies. Pandora used a journal to write down their thoughts and feelings and plan the week/days to try and challenge themselves and face their fears. Pandora worked through a timeline to spot patterns and roots of problems."

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER**

**STORY 26**

## Self-regulation

Closely linked to learning coping strategies and tools was young people's ability to regulate their emotions and behaviour. Young people were able to put what they had learned into practice and use these tools to help them manage emotions when they threatened to overwhelm them. In particular, young people mentioned being able to manage anxiety and control anger and frustration.

"I have like learnt how to control my anxiety and I've been able to like expand like what I do outside from school. Become more confident when doing new things and to not make myself panic and have learned how to stop any conflict inside my house."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 3**

## Social and communication skills

Some young people reported improvements in their social and communication skills. These skills are separate from the ability to open up and share feelings with the Youth Information Worker. Social and communication skills refer to the ability to communicate in class, with friends, in groups or to speak in front of other people. Some young people found that they were more confident and more able to go and speak to others and share their opinions. They and the Youth Information Workers reflected on the difference this had made in their lives whether this involved participating more in group discussions in class or getting involved in opportunities that they didn't think they were capable of prior to attending the sessions with the Youth Information Worker.

"Since support I have been more calm and been in less fights in and out of school. I feel like I've been getting on better with my friends, I've been getting on well with my work in class and being useful in group discussions."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 12**





## Improved mental health and wellbeing

In almost all of the stories young people described some positive progress in how they were feeling. The nature of the research is such that we specifically spoke to young people who had experienced change as a result of engaging in the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project so this finding is to be expected. There were a number of different ways in which young people felt better, in particular those who felt anxious described feeling calmer, as a result of the sessions. Other young people were more optimistic about the future which involved planning and participating in opportunities.

It is important to note that some of the mental health issues that young people are facing are linked to broader systemic issues that the project is unable to tackle such as poverty, the cost-of-living crisis, young people who are carers and young people who live in difficult home environments. Whilst the Youth Information Workers support young people they cannot fully tackle these systemic issues that are driving some of the mental health issues.

## Increased confidence and self-esteem

Although the terms confidence and self-esteem mean different things, young people often use them interchangeably in their stories which is why they are grouped together in the findings. Self-esteem refers to how young people think about themselves and value themselves, whereas confidence is situation specific, for example having confidence to do something, take part in something or to attend something. In two thirds of the stories young people reported improvements in confidence and/or self-esteem. They feel better about themselves and more confident to speak to and in front of others. They are more confident to manage their mental health.

"I feel that it has made me less lonely and more confident, sure of myself as I am able to come to sessions and speak about things I can't talk to other people about."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 28**

"We worked on self-esteem and confidence, with [the] young person finding it easier to talk to people outside of their friend group and reconnecting with old friends."

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER**

**STORY 25**

"Once I met the youth worker a few times, built up a trusting relationship, I feel confident enough to explore my thoughts ...and how they were making me feel."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 22**

In the support sessions, a focus on healthy and positive relationships helped young people improve their self-esteem. The Youth Information Workers helped young people to understand what positive relationships look like and what behaviours are acceptable within relationships with friends and family.

Through developing skills and tools to help them cope in difficult situations, young people reported feeling more confident. Young people also recognised that they weren't able to do this 100% of the time and they needed to keep working on these skills.

## — Feeling listened to

Having someone to talk to and feeling listened to was really important for young people. Being able to share how they were feeling and have the time and space to process those feelings with an adult at their own pace was important in improving their mental health and wellbeing.

"I became a lot happier and more relaxed and less stressed overall. I felt like I could get all my feelings out and it lifted a weight. And it made me feel overall a lot better

...Speaking to someone about the problem and then having like a second opinion made me realise my actions and what I should do with people and how I should be treated overall... well like we spoke about all my problems that I hadn't told anyone, fully, about, and then I got a second opinion on it then afterwards I realised what had to happen. It was nice to come and speak to someone about day-to-day life and keep up the positivity".

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 2**

"I knew there was someone to come to and someone to speak to and I wasn't really alone. I just felt like I could come to someone to talk if I needed it"

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 4**

Opening up to an adult they trusted coupled with the tailored support that Youth Information Workers provided helped young people feel better and more able to deal with their problems.

"Having a familiar face is better than a stranger or someone you don't know well as it's easier to talk to them and be more open. Youth workers can help more than teachers and give advice. It being informal helps me feel relaxed and allows me to talk more."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 27**

## — Self-acceptance

In three of the stories young people specifically talk about accepting who they are and accepting that they are struggling with their mental health.

### Positive change

In the stories we saw that developing skills and improving mental health and wellbeing led to a number of positive changes in young people's lives.

### Improved relationships

Young people reported seeing improvements in relationships with their friends/peers, with their families and a reduction in isolation. The Youth Information Workers were able to support young people to understand their own thoughts and feelings and where appropriate talk to friends or family members, coaching them through the ways they may do this. Sessions also helped young people to understand the steps they can take to improve relationships.

"We also looked at healthy relationships and looked at placing healthy boundaries to protect [the] young person's mental health."

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER**

**STORY 24**

### Improved attitude about school

For some of the young people who shared their stories, they or their Youth Information Worker identified a change in their attitude towards school and for some young people attendance improved. They were more motivated and able to participate in both their classes and other activities going on at school. The quote below talks about how, before their sessions with the Youth Information Worker, the young person used to start getting anxious on Sunday about the school week starting on a Monday morning.

"I don't stress out about coming to school as much as I did, I like a Sunday now. Coming to see [my Youth Information Worker] each week made things better because I could talk about how I was feeling. [My Youth Information Worker] listened and she helped by talking to my teachers for me and we practised me saying what I wanted to say to people but couldn't. I used to worry all the time about coming to school, I always felt sick but now I don't and if things do get too much I know how to deal with it now."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 21**



## Improved attendance at school

In seven of the stories, young people or their Youth Information Workers reported improved school attendance as an outcome of the engagement with the Youth Information Workers. Deteriorating attendance triggered referrals to the Youth Information Workers but as a result of their engagement in sessions there was an increase both in attendance at school and the ability to remain in class when at school. The fact the Youth Information Workers are based in schools provided an incentive for young people whose attendance had dropped to come into the school building to access support. From there the Youth Information Worker could work gradually with young people to get them back into class.

"It helped me to stay in school all day and it helped me to focus as I could get any bad thoughts out in the group. Now I know that there's other people I can talk to"

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 14**

"Definitely my attendance. My attendance used to be below 60% before I got support from my youth worker. I never used to enjoy school, I would miss more than two days a week at school... Working with my youth worker motivated me to try harder, it made me feel a lot safer at school knowing that if I didn't want to turn up that day I had someone to speak to without being judged."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 10**

Whilst we see improvements in attendance in these seven stories, schools were not able to confirm whether this was a broader trend.



## Changing behaviour

In their stories young people were able to identify where engagement with Youth Information Workers had led to positive changes in their behaviour. They were able to better manage anger and frustration and use the tools that they learned in the sessions to avoid losing their temper or lashing out.

"I think my mood and how are used to hate school and now I feel better because we talk about it. I like talking to you about it because you are actually, like, nice. My attendance is right back up. [We] talked about anything and everything. It kind of helped me not to lash out... [using the] anger gremlin and positivity tree."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 15**

## Achievement

Some young people's engagement in 1:1 sessions with Youth Information Workers led to a range of achievements - exam results, securing the position of junior house captain within the school, and being awarded certificates for improvement and achievement in school work.

## Positive transitions

In five of the stories young people were able to go on to gain part-time work or access other youth work in the community, demonstrating the skills and confidence they had learnt through their engagement with the Youth Information Workers. The Youth Information Workers are part of the wider youth work service in Dumfries & Galloway, smoothing the transition between support in school and community youth groups for young people.

"Through these sessions, young person started attending the Oasis Centre where they attend music night every Thursday and perform on karaoke. This newly developed confidence has led them to making new friends, applying for and being accepted into college and [singing in public at an event]."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 7**

## How was the impact on young people achieved?

In this section of the report we look at the elements of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project that were identified as contributing to the impact outlined in the previous section. During the analysis process any themes that emerged relating to how the project works, Youth Information Worker practice and project delivery were recorded as process codes. Process codes describe what it is about the project that generates impact. There were 9 process codes identified which were then grouped together into 2 process domains:

1. A youth work approach – how the project and support is delivered
2. A counselling skills approach - content of the sessions and tools that the Youth Information Workers use

The impact on young people was delivered through the combination of a youth work approach and the counselling skills gained from the enhanced Youth Information Worker training. Both these elements are important; the youth work approach makes the support non-stigmatising and approachable for young people whilst the counselling skills provides concrete tools and focus.

Code	Count	% of stories	Domain	Count	% of stories
Relationship with Youth Worker	25	86%	A Youth Work Approach	27	93%
Young person-centred approach	24	83%			
Regular, frequent consistent contact	24	83%			
Safe Space	23	79%			
Active listening	17	59%			
Discussion and self- Exploration	23	79%	A Counselling Skills Approach	29	100%
Solution focussed	21	72%			
Coping strategies	19	66%			
Healthy relationships	6	21%			

## A youth work approach

Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project is a collaboration between Education Psychology and Youth Work. The content of the sessions the Youth Information Workers provide is based on psychological support through counselling but the way the project is delivered and the way the Youth Information Workers engage with young people is based on a youth work approach. This means seeing young people as partners in the process, young people participating voluntarily and tailored support. There were 5 key attributes of a youth work approach identified through the stories.

## Relationship with the Youth Information Workers

The relationships that the young people were able to develop with the Youth Information Workers were really important in the impact that we saw in young people. Each young person worked with one Youth Information Worker. Youth Information Workers spent time with young people, getting to know them and their lives, gradually building up trust over time. The Youth Information Worker were able to engage with young people in a way that other adults weren't able to because of the youth work approach.

"So I was referred to [Youth Information Worker] during a hard time in my life when my mum first started aggressive cancer treatment, she [the Youth Information Worker] helped me build up a relationship with her and learn to trust her. During my weekly meetings with her I learned to open up and that nothing would be judged when I was with her".

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 11**

The Youth Information Workers provide both support and constructive challenge to young people to help them to understand and develop.

"Being able to talk and feel listened to. Also being given advice on situations when I needed it. Also sometimes the Youth Info Worker tells me things I need to hear even if its not exactly what I want to hear."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 13**



## Young person centred approach

The support provided to the young people by the Youth Information Workers was tailored to the specific situation of each young person. The Youth Information Workers spend time getting to know each young person at the start of their work with them and this allows them to select relevant tools and strategies. Young people are active partners in the process.

Feedback from the interviews showed that the young person-centred approach was balanced with a clear understanding of the role and remit of the Youth Information Workers and where they sit in the Mental Health Pathway/Continuum in Dumfries and Galloway. Youth Information Workers, project staff and schools all clearly articulated where the project fits, avoiding overlap and duplication.

## Regular, frequent, consistent contact

The Youth Information Workers were based in each secondary school for two days a week. Youth Information Workers had allocated schools they worked in and this did not change (apart from a limited number of circumstances like illness). Young people only saw one Youth Information Worker on a weekly basis enabling them to develop a trusting relationship. This regular frequent and consistent contact supported the young person to progress and would have been unavailable in the region without the project.

## Safe space

The positive relationships between young people and Youth Information Workers also helped young people to feel that the sessions they attended were a safe space. The sessions were confidential unless there were child protection reasons for sharing information with other agencies (young people were made aware of information sharing) or that the young person needed a referral to other specialist service like CAMHS.

"So I found it really helpful just having someone to talk to, someone to listen and it was like a real safe space for me to let my feelings out."

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 8**

Young people thought that the Youth Information Workers wouldn't judge them, regardless of what they said in the sessions and this helped them to feel safe and comfortable to share how they were feeling. The space was informal yet purposeful with young people having a hot drink and a chat with the Youth Information Worker at the start of the session which helped put them at ease.

## Active listening

As noted in the section on impact above, young people felt listened to by their Youth Information Worker. A key feature of the youth work approach is actively listening to the young people to develop a nuanced understanding of their lives and issues they face in order to best support them.

## A counselling skills approach

The Youth Information Workers all had to complete their COSCA Counselling Skills Qualification to be able to work in this role. The skills and knowledge gained through this qualification were evident in their approach to the sessions with young people.

## Discussion and self-exploration

The space for discussion and self-exploration that the project provides has a significant impact on young people. The discussions with the Youth Information Workers helped young people to be more aware of and better understand their mental health and the challenges they face, within a safe space. The vast majority of discussions were on a 1:1 basis and this enabled tailored support for the young people engaging in the project. Young people were able to share their worries and concerns and share private and personal information about their home lives. For some young people the Youth Information Worker was the only person they felt able to have these discussions with.

The majority of the stories collected related to young people supported through 1:1 sessions with a Youth Information Worker. The challenges that young people were facing required individual confidential support. Young people really appreciated the 1:1 sessions, feeling that they were a safe space to be able to engage and share how they were feeling.

A small number of the stories collected related to young people involved in group sessions organised by a Youth Information Worker. These tended to be focused on a particular issue such as bereavement where there was a common experience amongst young people in the group.

## Coping strategies

The range of tools, tips and strategies that the Youth Information Worker was trained to use made a difference on young people. Young people talked positively about the tools that the Youth Information Worker shared with them to help them understand their response to stress, manage anxiety and/or anger, cope with bereavement and engage with others positively. The tools gave young people something practical and tangible that they could do when faced with difficulties and helped them to regain agency and control.

In six of the stories, Youth Information Workers were specifically focussed on helping young people to understand what healthy positive relationships look like, how to put boundaries in place to protect mental health, how to communicate effectively with others and deal with conflict.

## Solution focused

In 21 out of 29 stories the engagement with a Youth Information Worker was clearly focused on solutions and ways of helping the young person through the challenges they were facing. For some young people there were specific goals around improving attendance, managing anxiety in specific settings or improving relationships with key people in their lives. For other young people the sessions explored a range of solutions that might help them. Sometimes the reason why a young person was referred was a symptom of a deeper problem. The approach taken by the Youth Information Worker was tailored to the issues that the young person was experiencing and to do this the Youth Information Worker had to really get to know the young person.

Engagement with Youth Information Workers was time limited. Having a focus or goal was really important and young people were able to reflect on the progress they had made. The focus or goal of the session was negotiated in partnership with the young person.

"Young person engaged well with sessions, setting themselves a personal goal to work towards within sessions to receive help to stay in school classes longer and be able to support themselves with the daily challenges they face more positively."

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER**

**STORY 13**

"Young person has been bullied for their style and looks, having a significant impact on their self-esteem and mood. This has made it difficult for young person to make friends... We worked on self-esteem and confidence with young person finding it easier to talk to people outside of their friend group and reconnecting with old friends."

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER**

**STORY 25**

In the remaining eight stories the engagement was focused on providing a safe space for young people to open up and talk about what they were experiencing rather than working towards any specific goals or solutions.

## A note on delivery of the project through schools

All the young people who took part in this study received their support sessions with the Youth Information Worker in school. Both young people and stakeholders noted that delivery through school brought important benefits.

In a rural and dispersed population like Dumfries & Galloway, young people and their families would have had to travel significant distances to access support and counselling or access it online which is not as popular. Having the Youth Information Workers in school reduces barriers to accessing the service, minimises the time young people are out of lessons and supports attendance at the sessions. It also means that young people are able to drop by and see the Youth Information Workers on a more informal basis at break or lunch time which helps build a relationship between the young person and the youth worker.

“Definitely it being in school because I was able to access it easily. I didn’t have to go away to Dumfries or somewhere to get help, so it was just easy that it was in school.”

**YOUNG PERSON**

**STORY 24**

For some young people, whose attendance is very limited, the fact that they have to come into school to access the project helps them to take that initial step back into school.

Youth Information Workers thought that being based in school was really important in building relationships with young people and school staff. They developed a deeper understanding of what is going on in the school and community and this helped them have a common reference point in their discussions with young people.





## Wider impact of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project

As well as the impact on young people, the project has delivered wider benefits for schools and the Dumfries and Galloway Council.

### Impact in schools

The school staff interviewed for the research were not able to identify with any certainty the impact of the project on young people in their schools. They felt that without comparison to a control group they couldn't correlate the project inputs with impact.

However, the schools viewed the project as a really valuable part of the support they are able to offer to young people.

"I cannot say how much we value the input that we have from our [Youth Information Worker] in school. I don't know what we would do without it, to be perfectly honest. Trying to access other services, the waiting lists are huge. But also, most of them are online now, or the families have to travel a great distance to go and get them. Being in our position...our side of the authority everything's in the central area and it's just not feasible for some of our families to travel down to that...It's so invaluable, in that they're in-house, responsive to the needs of young people, they get face-to-face support."

#### SCHOOL STAFF

The project is providing support for young people but it is also freeing up capacity within pupil support staff in the school.

"I think the other impact that we've seen is on our own pupil support department, our staff, our capacity in school to support young people...And with the best will in the world, our pupil support staff are here for our young people for a whole host of reasons and can try and support a variety of needs but we need somebody based in the school that's able to deliver that level of service. It's absolutely crucial...Yes, where pupil support previously would have been trying to plug the gaps previously with whatever tools they had, at least now we know we have a specialist on site, even for advice if we're waiting in advance, so they're able to help us with increasing our skills as well."

#### SCHOOL STAFF

Schools also identified the informal sharing of information at a community or group level between schools and youth work so schools are up to date with issues that might happen in the community out with school hours.

"I think they're able to give us maybe information about, because they work in the communities, about issues that are happening in the communities, which can be quite good for informing our practice...And it just helps be a bit more joined up as well, in our tackling of issues...maybe the opportunities wouldn't be so great if they were based in the youth centre and you're just dipping in and out."

**SCHOOL STAFF**

## Partnership

Working together on the project has led to a deep and mutually enhancing partnership between Education Psychology and Youth Work. Both have an improved understanding of the other; youth work and the Youth Information Workers have a better understanding of schools, how they work and the role of Education Psychology. Education Psychology has a deeper understanding of youth work and the communities those youth workers operate in.

"until this project in terms of the partnership with ourselves and educational psychology, we also – I certainly never – realised how aligned we were in terms of our values and principles, and our thoughts in terms of delivery with young people...We work on a lot of projects together. There's an alignment that came from this project that didn't exist before. And I think that has been one of the things that probably will benefit young people long-term more as well, that relationship."

**PROJECT STAFF**

"And I feel that we're getting so much... we're getting the information from what's happening for young people, we're getting it so much quicker than we did when we had formal routes through schools and other agencies. Youth work know exactly what's happening and can tell me... And that allows us, as a partner agency to schools, to do a much more tailored approach to actual individual schools."

**PROJECT STAFF**

The partnership is leading to targeted and timely support for young people. When communities in Dumfries & Galloway experienced bereavements that had significant impacts on the school communities, the partnership meant they were able to respond quickly with support.

"An example is we've had a year of quite a few bereavements in schools, and we've been able to work with youth work instantly to make sure we've got a better coverage for young people....We were able to hit the ground running with our usual support for schools and speaking to other staff, and youth work were able to open up their space to make sure that they were bringing in young people or contacting young people that they knew would be affected...We've got so much better coverage by working together than we did separately. And because we've got that working agreement and that trust, really, previously, that would have been a much more formal route of, I wonder who might help, and making approaches to managers, and by the time you've done that you're a week in. For supporting young people at times like that that can be a real challenge. But I think we really do have benefits of the joint partnership now."

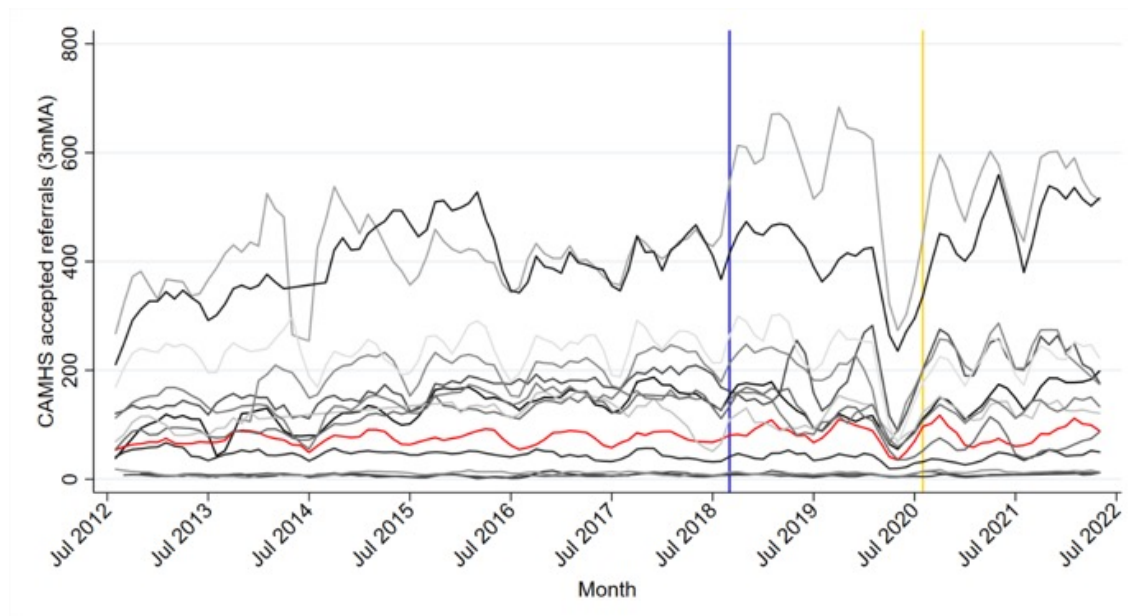
#### **PROJECT STAFF**



### **CAMHS waiting lists**

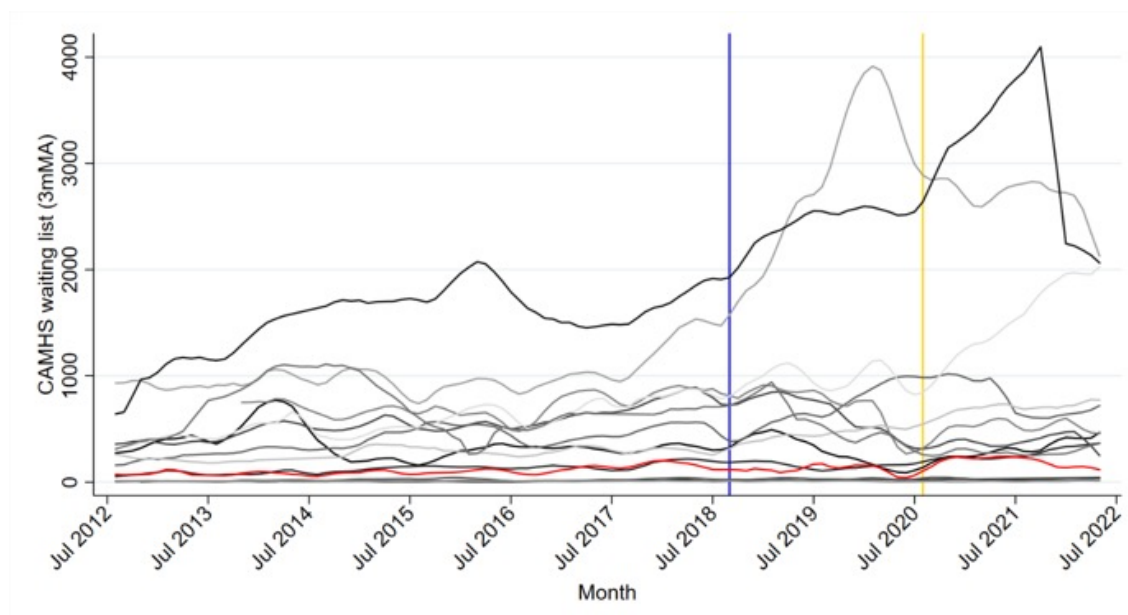
Part 2 of the statistical research allowed us to explore whether the project made an impact on referrals and waiting lists for CAMHS in Dumfries & Galloway. Data for NHS Dumfries & Galloway were compared with the 13 other Scottish Health boards to see if there were distinct differences that could be attributable to the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project. The referrals and waiting list data were plotted as time series by health board from July 2012 to July 2022 (Figures 1 and 2). To smooth the data a little, each plotted data point is an average of three months data, known as a 3 month moving average (3mMA). The data for NHS Dumfries & Galloway are in red, with the other health boards in grey tones. September 2018, when the Youth Information Workers were introduced is indicated with a blue line. August 2020 when the additional counselling training for the Youth Information Workers was rolled out is indicated with a yellow line.

**Figure 1 –  
Time series of CAMHS referrals accepted by each health board**



NHS Dumfries & Galloway is shown in red with the other health boards in grey tones. The blue line indicates when the Youth Information Workers were introduced in September 2018. The yellow line indicates when the Youth Information Workers received additional counselling training.

**Figure 2 –  
Time series of CAMHS waiting lists for each health board**



NHS Dumfries & Galloway is shown in red with the other health boards in grey tones. The blue line indicates when the Youth Information Workers were introduced in September 2018. The yellow line indicates when the Youth Information Workers received additional counselling training.



There is clear seasonality in the referrals data (Figure 1), with more referrals in the winter and fewer in the summer, which is not obvious in the waiting lists data (Figure 2). The impact of the first COVID-19 lockdown in Spring 2020 is also clear in the referrals data (Figure 1). Visually there are no particularly unusual patterns for Dumfries & Galloway around September 2018 or August 2020. Interrupted time series analyses were undertaken to test if any changes could be detected statistically. These analyses accounted for changes over time, by month (seasonality) and the first COVID-19 lockdown. Additionally, we sought to detect whether there was a step change or gradual change from September 2018 and August 2020. This was done for all the health boards to see if any changes in NHS Dumfries & Galloway were unique to that health board and might be attributed to the Youth Information Workers.

NHS Dumfries & Galloway, Lanarkshire, Shetland and Western Isles were the only boards where CAMHS referrals remained fairly level across the 10 year period analysed, apart from the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the other health boards were experiencing a rise in CAMHS referrals prior to September 2018, which then dipped during the lockdown and has levelled off or continued to rise after the easing of lockdown. Only three boards (Fife, Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and Highland) has a statistically significant drop in referrals in September 2018. Step reductions in referrals were more common in August 2020, but this is only 1 month after the easing of the first lockdown which is still likely to have been having an impact. The waiting list data did not reveal any obvious patterns aside from a rise due to the COVID-19 lockdown. There was no unusual pattern in the CAMHS waiting list data for NHS Dumfries & Galloway that would be consistent with an impact of the programme. However, taking these findings alongside the qualitative findings and the huge societal upheaval from COVID-19 in 2020 it is still possible that the project contributed to changes in CAMHS referrals and waiting lists in ways that cannot be disentangled from everything else taking place.

## Challenges

In the interviews we asked stakeholders to identify any challenges with the project which are summarised below.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 was a major challenge for the project. It was in the early stages when the first national lockdown in Scotland was introduced (the project had been going for 2 1/2 months at this point). Whilst staff felt that the project planning and groundwork was done as best it could be under the circumstances, the project was inevitably affected. The project suffered from the disruption that the lockdown created, the diversion of resources and energy to educating young people at home and the lack of ability to meet key stakeholders like head teachers and teachers face-to-face to fully explain the project and its purpose. When lockdown restrictions began to lift there was initially

confusion about whether Youth Workers were physically able to be in the secondary schools. This was quickly sorted out as the project had the commitment of senior staff within the Education Directorate and the Communities Directorate who were able to confirm that Youth Workers can and should be operating physically in schools.

As well as challenges, COVID-19 also offered opportunities to deepen understanding of what youth work could offer. During the first national lockdown the youth work team worked with social work and education teams within the council to develop youth work hubs. These were separate from the key worker hubs and were specifically for vulnerable children and young people in the region - one hub per school. The youth work team felt that these hubs helped to boost their credibility with schools as they could directly see the role that youth work could play in caring for and supporting vulnerable young people. The Youth Information Workers supported these hubs and the practical delivery of the service.

## Commitment from schools

At the beginning of the project there was a lack of commitment to and engagement in the project from some schools. There was a reluctance to allow Youth Information Workers into their schools possibly motivated by a lack of understanding of the nature and purpose of the project and also by a concern that the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project was taking funding away from schools' budgets for private counselling. This limited engagement in the project by some schools manifested itself in a lack of physical rooms and resources for Youth Information Workers. Youth Information Workers reported feeling unwelcome and having to change rooms frequently. The Youth Information Workers reported that this has shifted over time. Working with young people and delivering results has helped to shift perception of the project and the approach and schools now see the project as "a service that's needed and it's making a difference." (Youth Information Worker)

"At no point did I ever think maybe they don't need me in that school. At no point did I ever think that, even on really bad days... It was about letting folks see what we could do"

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER**

It is also important to note that it was a minority of schools that were sceptical about the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project and where Youth Workers were already working in schools prior to the project there was a much smoother implementation.

## Changes in Youth Information Worker staff

In a project so heavily focused on relationships, a change of personnel is difficult to deal with. As the service is so predicated on the Youth Information Worker and the relationships they build with young people and schools, changes in the Youth Information Worker staff because of sickness or because someone leaves are challenging for the schools to manage.

"So, when you go from person to person there is that change. And when this whole thing is about trusting relationships, it then takes a while for that to gather momentum. So, when there's a change of staff you're going to have that drop in buy-in."

**SCHOOL STAFF**

"I would agree I think consistency in staff's really, really important. And there was quite a lot of movement initially. But who we have at the moment's working really well. I would be fearful of that going."

**SCHOOL STAFF**

## — Role and remit of Youth Information Workers

The Scottish Government funding for the Youth Information workers came with certain parameters. Some schools found the restrictions on what the Youth Information Workers can and can't deliver within the school environment frustrating to work with.

Schools would like to be able to ask Youth Information Workers to address certain topics with a variety of young people, to provide inputs to staff around mental health and inputs to parents. When schools had asked if this would be possible, they reported that this wasn't within the project remit and therefore can't happen.

"The only thing for me is, we feel that there are limitations put on some of the supports that our youth worker could deliver for us. As I said earlier, I think we're lucky in that we've got a member of the service that is highly skilled and was willing to use her other skills, which still fit within the service, to offer us different things. But they weren't allowed to be put in place."

**SCHOOL STAFF**

"The things that we were asking for would have been sessions on Mindfulness, for example, where we wanted that to be something that, say, S4s all had in the lead-up to prelims, or something like that, just as an example...It's not about the 1:1 stuff. It was things that I would have thought would have helped everybody, for those that maybe didn't want to reach out and have that 1:1 or small group sessions, but would have really benefited from hearing it as part of a wider offer from somebody who was in the know. Because it's so difficult to get other services up to do sessions and talks and things on these things. But being able to utilise the skills that we've got in the building and not being able to do that was just a bit... didn't really make sense."

**SCHOOL STAFF**

## Training and development of Youth Information Workers

All of the Youth Information Workers have completed the Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland Counselling Skills course which trains people to use counselling skills and a counselling approach in the support part of their work. The Scottish Government now require those working in a counselling capacity, and therefore eligible for Scottish Government funding, to have completed a diploma in counselling. Youth Information Workers are undergoing this program of study at present but it is worth noting the significant cost and resource implication in terms of both course fees and staff time to complete this. Due to the importance of the project model to Dumfries & Galloway, funding was sourced to allow all project staff to go through this training. Whilst the additional training and qualification will be of added value to both the service as a whole and Youth Information Worker's individual practice, project staff expressed concern that the diploma may inadvertently encourage the Youth Information Workers to change their model and language. So rather than a conversation about a young person 'being stuck' they start to use more formal or medicalised language that would be associated with a counselling model but that is less engaging for young people who want to use the service.

"There is a challenge to ensure that with the enhanced levels of training that the youth workers don't lose the essential humanness and naturalness of the relationship they have with young people."

**PROJECT STAFF**

It will remain important to emphasise the youth work approach that has underpinned this project from the start

## Referral

Schools also identified problems with the referral process in the early stages of the project the referral form was too complex with too many questions. Schools also reported that the project took on board their concerns and have streamlined the referral form so that it just asks for basic questions and doesn't add to the paperwork burden for schools.

"it's a very easy referral. It wasn't originally a very easy referral. To begin with it was a bit... The questions were not good. But now it's a nice straightforward online referral."

**SCHOOL STAFF**

## Concerns about overlap with existing counselling services

Some private counsellors who were working with some of the schools expressed concern about the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project. Schools are able to have both Youth Information Workers and school counsellors working within the school environment and each have a distinct role. It is up to each school to decide whether they want a private counsellor working in their school.



## Future development of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project

### Maintain existing provision

"I have an aspiration that I'd like the project stay in its present format, and part of that is not medicalising it."

#### PROJECT STAFF

During the development of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project, consultation with young people revealed the need for a service that did not use medicalised mental health language and specifically did not use the term counsellor. The project in its current form, with a strong youth work ethos, is approachable and engaging for young people and non-stigmatising.

As a minimum schools want to see the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project continue. There is real value for young people and schools; and it forms an important part of pupil support.

"I think, overall, this development, youth working in schools, has been one of the most positive developments over the last few years in terms of helping our young people. And, like I said, particularly post-COVID-19, if we hadn't had that, we would have really, really struggled to support our young people. Yeah, I'm very positive about it."

#### SCHOOL STAFF

### Expand provision

School and project staff work to manage waiting lists so no young person has to wait long to see a Youth Information Worker. However, if schools have more Youth Information Worker days they have more young people who could benefit from the support.

"Certainly a full time worker would be very welcome."

#### SCHOOL STAFF

Schools also would like to see a wider remit for project and Youth Information Workers – more group work, inputs to secondary school staff to develop their knowledge and skills and inputs to parents to help them understand how best to support young people.

The interviews also identified an opportunity to do more group work with pupils in upper primary, helping to support the transition to high school, develop skills for wellbeing and tackle any issues at an early stage possibly preventing the need for 1:1 support at secondary school.

### Additional tier of support

School staff suggested that future development of the project could include the development of an additional tier of support between what the Youth Information Workers can offer and what CAMHS can offer to support young people with more serious mental health concerns.

“But we will still find that we’re missing that bit between the upper limit of what [Youth Information Workers are] able to deal with, even if you’ve got a multi-talented person and the stage at which CAMHS would agree to take a referral...And despite the fact that you’ve got a two-year waiting list to see CAMHS, there is nothing in the system to prevent those in need becoming those in crisis while they wait... If the four of us [schools] had access to one person who was offering that additional tier of support – so for Dumfries and Galloway that would be four workers, one in each of the four local areas – I think then we could potentially achieve a bit more. We kind of have a glass ceiling of a level of needs that the schools workers can help with, but not ultimately solve. And it concerns me that they need to become so serious before they get to the next point of support. It’s too wide a gap.”

#### SCHOOL STAFF

The enhanced training (counselling diploma) that the Youth Information Workers are undertaking may help with provision of support at this additional tier level.

### Provide more feedback to schools

Schools would like more feedback on how the project is working in their schools such as how many young people Youth Information Workers are seeing, how many sessions were attended/weren’t attended, outcomes of the sessions (without compromising confidentiality) to share with pupil support. Schools felt they were getting the ‘need to know’ information around child protection but not information on how the project is working.

### Resource Support for Youth Information Workers

Both schools and Youth Information Workers identified the need for welcoming physical spaces for the Youth Information Workers to work out of. Youth Information Workers thought it was beneficial for young people if they were able to operate out of the same space each session and could access a sofa and a kettle to help the young person feel relaxed.

## Mental health continuum/pathway and links to other professionals

Stakeholders want to see an improved awareness of the mental health continuum/pathway and continued collaboration with agencies providing mental health services.

"And I definitely think the pathway is probably something that's really crucial moving forward. Even from five years ago where our relationship was at with the other mental health providers [we now have] actual proper partnership, where we can just phone each other and be, like, what were you thinking about this? Honest conversation. I think that pathway is probably the next phase of that, so I think that is important for the future."

**PROJECT STAFF**

”

"I think that as far as this project goes, we'd like to see this project continue in its present form, because I think we're pitching at the right level. I would like to see an improved awareness of the mental health continuum, and an improved appreciation at school level, in particular, about what we can all do to create positive relationships and nurturing environments and the importance of that for young people. And as I say, we've started that journey but we're not there yet."

**PROJECT STAFF**

”



"Me and my mum started to get on better, I stopped being angry at home all the time, [the Youth Information Worker] talked me through how as I was getting older and how things change, I wasn't my mum's little girl, but I wasn't the adult I thought I was. Me and mum now talk about stuff and how I am feeling... [the Youth Information Worker] helped me look at things from my mum's side, I felt I could tell [the Youth Information Worker] anything and she would listen and be honest with me. I was also maybe a wee bit angry and now I recognise what to do when I feel like this".

**Z, AGED 16**

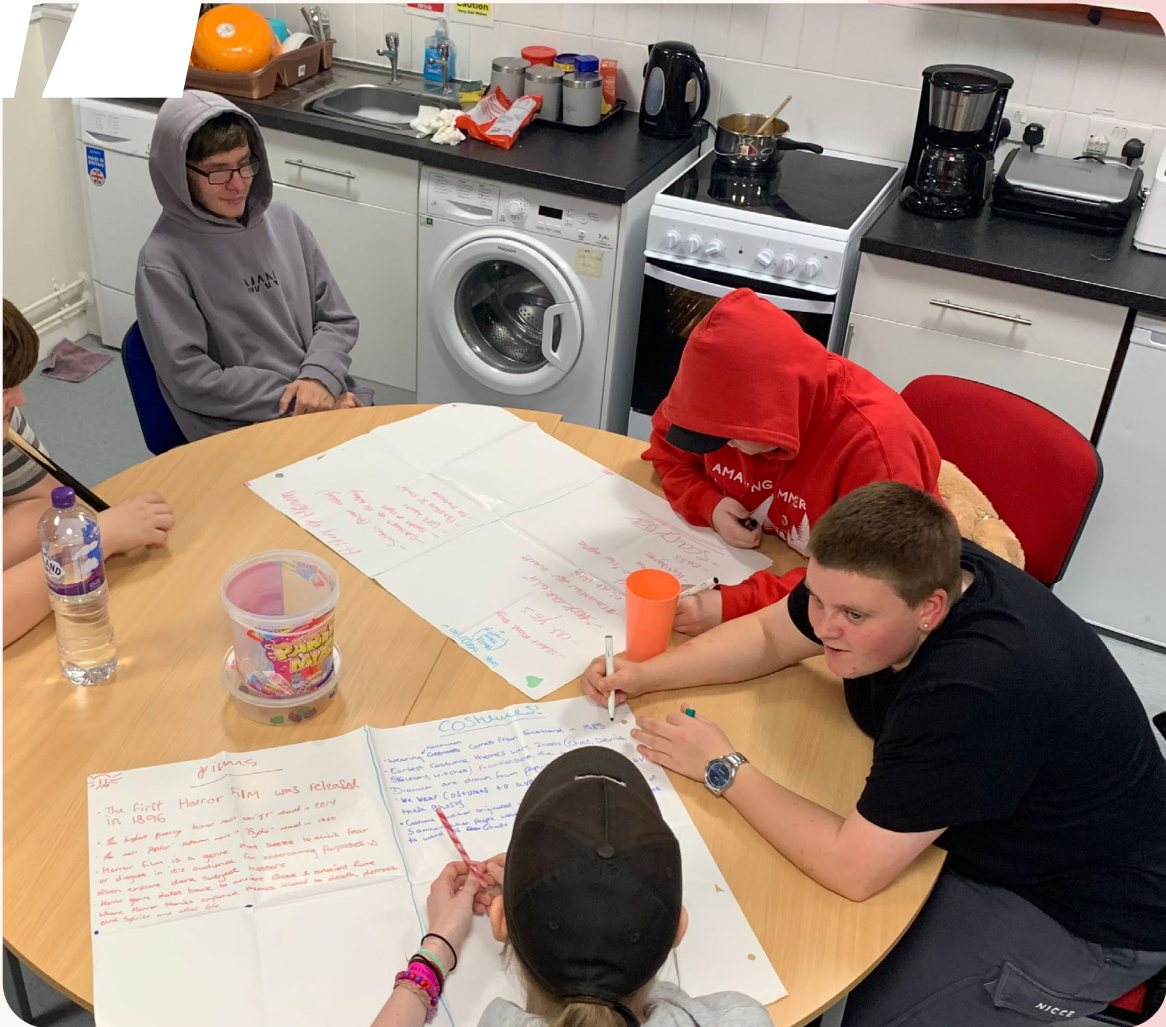
**STORY 20**



"Z was referred by mum, the school have never had any issues with Z, they are a "model student" but mum told the school that Z has been angry and aggressive at home on a number of occasions... I listened to Z and then talked about the different things that happen when someone is growing up, some parents find it difficult to stop looking at their children as a young child, Z was feeling the need to act like an adult. I suggested they talked about how they were both feeling, they started this through text and after a weekend of talking Z said they noticed a change for the better in the relationship".

**YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER'S COMMENTARY**







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**This evaluation was conducted by:**

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# Appendix 1

Domain description	Score meanings	Staked bar charts	
Physical wellbeing includes the level of the child's/adolescent's physical activity, energy and fitness as well as the extent to which a child or adolescent feels unwell and complains of poor health.	<b>Low</b> – Physically exhausted, physically unwell, feeling unfit, having low energy	Ref	UK data
		Information Worker contact	None
			Group
			One to one support
			Drop in
	<b>High</b> – Physically fit, active, healthy, energetic	YIW contact timing	Current
			Within 1 year
			More than 1 year
Psychological wellbeing includes the adolescent's positive emotions and satisfaction with life as well as the absence of feelings such as loneliness and sadness.	<b>Low</b> – No pleasure in life, feeling depressed, feeling unhappy, having a low self-esteem	Ref	UK data
		Information Worker contact	None
			Group
			One to one support
			Drop in
	<b>High</b> – Happy, viewing life positively, satisfied with life, emotionally balanced	YIW contact timing	Current
			Within 1 year
			More than 1 year

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Low ■ Average ■ High



Domain description	Score meanings	Staked bar charts																																														
Autonomy & Parent Relation includes the quality of the interaction between adolescent and parent or carer as well as whether the adolescent feels loved and supported by the family. It also examines the adolescent's perceived level of autonomy as well as the perceived quality of the financial resources of the adolescent.	<b>Low</b> – Feeling restricted, feeling overlooked, not appreciated, feeling finances are restricting life style	Ref	UK data	<table><tr><th>Group</th><th>Low (%)</th><th>Average (%)</th><th>High (%)</th></tr><tr><td>UK data</td><td>32</td><td>40</td><td>28</td></tr><tr><td>Information Worker contact</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>None</td><td>38</td><td>48</td><td>14</td></tr><tr><td>Group</td><td>42</td><td>48</td><td>10</td></tr><tr><td>One to one support</td><td>58</td><td>35</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td>Drop in</td><td>40</td><td>48</td><td>12</td></tr><tr><td>YIW contact timing</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Current</td><td>48</td><td>48</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>Within 1 year</td><td>55</td><td>32</td><td>13</td></tr><tr><td>More than 1 year</td><td>38</td><td>52</td><td>10</td></tr></table>	Group	Low (%)	Average (%)	High (%)	UK data	32	40	28	Information Worker contact				None	38	48	14	Group	42	48	10	One to one support	58	35	7	Drop in	40	48	12	YIW contact timing				Current	48	48	4	Within 1 year	55	32	13	More than 1 year	38	52	10
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More than 1 year	38	52	10																																													
<b>High</b> – Feeling positive about the relationship with parents and having enough age-appropriate freedom to choose (things for yourself in the relationship, good balance between parents), feeling satisfied with financial resources, feeling well-off		Information Worker contact	None																																													
		Group																																														
		One to one support																																														
		Drop in																																														
		YIW contact timing	Current																																													
	Within 1 year																																															
	More than 1 year																																															



Domain description	Score meanings	Staked bar charts	
Social Support & Peers explores the quality of the interaction between the adolescents and peers /friends as well as their perceived support.	<b>Low</b> – Feeling excluded, not accepted by peers  <b>High</b> – Feeling accepted, supported and included in peer group	Ref	UK data
		Information Worker contact	None
			Group
			One to one support
			Drop in
		YIW contact timing	Current
			Within 1 year
			More than 1 year
School explores an adolescent's perception of their cognitive capacity, learning and concentration and their feelings about school. In addition, the dimension explores the child's view of the relationship with their teachers.	<b>Low</b> – Disliking school, negative feelings about school, not doing well	Ref	UK data
		Information Worker contact	None
			Group
			One to one support
			Drop in
		YIW contact timing	Current
			Within 1 year
			More than 1 year

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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