

Case Study: Growing2gether

The Power of Volunteering



Across Aberdeen, Highland and Moray schools report increasing numbers of young people experiencing low confidence, trauma, disengagement from learning and limited connection to their community. Teachers highlight that statutory provision is stretched, reactive and often unable to offer the time, relational depth or continuity required to meet these needs early.

Schools consistently report that they need early intervention approaches that offer time, trust and meaningful experiences, not just additional academic support. They developed a youth work partnership with Growing2gether to support young people.

Teachers describe pupils entering the programme with very low self-belief:

"Many students experience significant adversity outside school. Their self-esteem and self-confidence are extremely low. They don't believe in themselves or aspire for more."

-Teacher



An impact review involving 22 teachers in 2025 highlighted significant improvements with young people involved in the programme across various educational measures. The top three themes emerging were :

- 1) Growth in confidence, pride, and emotional regulation.
- 2) Real, visible changes observed in student behavior.
- 3) Growing2gether seen as a critical emotional and developmental support.

About The Programme

Growing2gether is a youth work led early intervention programme that places young people in a position of volunteering responsibility by supporting them to mentor younger children, who have been identified by their teachers as having social/communication and personal challenges, in local nurseries and primary settings. Alongside this practical placement, participants take part in structured group sessions focused on reflection, wellbeing, relationships and personal development.

Growing2gether is the only charity in Scotland to use the therapeutic approach of transpersonal, positive psychology to transform young lives using a [Theory of Change Model](#). The project uses positive experiences (mentoring/community projects) to coach young people to recognise their strengths/values, manage emotions, build resilience/mental health and create positive relationships within supportive small groups. This reduces negative behaviours, connecting them to their community.

Delivered over a 16-week period, the programme offers:

- Consistent, trusted adult relationships.
- Small group work in non-judgemental spaces.
- Real world responsibility and contribution.
- Time for reflection and coaching.
- Recognised qualifications in personal development.

Growing2gether is a targeted early intervention. Young people are identified by school staff using an eligibility tool based on psychosocial, behavioural and economic disadvantage. Teachers must identify at least three risk factors for eligibility. Young people are supported to remain connected to education while learning in a different, more relational environment. They can still choose whether to engage or not.

Schools describe participants as young people who may have:

- Experienced trauma, poor mental health, bullying or other adverse childhood experiences.
- Struggled with attendance, truancy, exclusion, confidence or motivation.
- Feel disengaged from traditional classroom learning.
- Care experience or young carer responsibilities.
- Faced financial hardship.



"Youth work brings relational capacity that schools often cannot provide within curriculum pressures, helping young people feel seen, trusted and capable."

-Teacher

"Pupils who may have otherwise not engaged have really connected with the programme and talk with knowledge and enthusiasm about their involvement."

- Teacher



Youth Work in Action: Why This Approach Works

Teachers consistently attribute the programme's success to its youth work approach:

This combination mirrors core youth work principles: voluntary participation, relationship-based practice, empowerment and learning through experience.

Learning through doing: Mentoring younger children provides purpose, pride and a sense of being needed.

Relational, not reactive: Rather than responding to crisis, Growing2gether builds relationships over time, allowing issues to surface safely and be addressed early.

Consistency and belonging: Working with the same facilitators and peers each week builds stability and emotional safety.

Voluntary engagement and trust: Young people choose to engage and quickly recognise the authenticity of facilitators.

Strengths-based practice: Young people are recognised for what they contribute, not defined by their difficulties.

"I love coming... it's my best day in the whole week because I know what I am doing is positive and the child I am working with runs up to me smiling when I arrive. I feel I am making a difference."

-Young person



"We have seen notable positive changes... improved attendance, more confident individuals, higher attainment and improved self-worth."

- Teacher



The Power of Volunteering

The programme places young people in weekly placements supporting children in nurseries or primary schools, alongside reflective group sessions and a SCQF Level 4 qualification.

Volunteering gives young people:

Real responsibility.

A sense of being needed.

Opportunities to practise empathy and communication.

Purpose and pride.

"This is not just a programme that works, it's one that the system cannot afford to lose."

- Teacher



Impact

Between 2017 and September 2025 the programme supported 2,740 young people and used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Health Scale (SWEMWBS) to measure the impact on them.

- 87% gained confidence in their abilities.
- 85% felt more connected to others.
- 91% improved self-awareness and the consequences of their actions.
- 88% better understood others.
- 80% more motivated to contribute to their community.
- 83% said the programme helped them reflect on their strengths.
- 85% agreed that the programme helped them to see their potential to reach their goals.

Across the full sample, scores on the SWEMWBS showed a significant improvement (14%), alongside a significant improvement in the Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) (21%). Among participants with clinically elevated baseline scores, improvements were larger, with significant improvement in SWEMWBS (24%) and in RCADS (30%).



It gave me a lot of confidence... I realised it was not about myself, but about other people as well."



- Young person

"Growing2gether gave me confidence and made me know for sure that I want to work in a nursery when I am older. I know I will have to work hard at school now if I want to get there."



- Young person

Conclusion

Growing2gether demonstrates the unique role youth work approach can play alongside schools. By prioritising trusted relationships, consistency and meaningful volunteering, the programme supports young people to reconnect with themselves, others and their education.

Volunteering is the catalyst for change, giving young people purpose, trust and the experience of being valued by others whilst transforming confidence, wellbeing, future pathways and benefitting the school and wider community.