# LITTLE GREEN ACADEMY EVALUATION REPORT

Written by

**PENAL REFORM SOLUTIONS**

**Research Team:**

Sarah Lewis

Madi  Levy

## CONTENTS

## WHO WE ARE

Penal Reform Solutions (PRS) is an organisation that focuses on transforming penal culture, creating spaces that are meaningful, trusting and nurturing. PRS strives to change the conversation around punishment, working with practitioners and pupils, making them central to the change process. It is an evidence-based organisation, which draws on academic research, practitioners' expertise, and the experiences of people who have served a prison sentence. PRS has extensive experience in growth, professionalism and relationship work in correctional environments and specialises in service user involvement, supporting a variety of institutions within the criminal justice system. PRS's work is informed by research carried out in the Norwegian prison system, and it uses this knowledge to support organisations to promote humanity, relationships and hope, in order to reduce social harm and promote social good, for all.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Grow2Go programme consists of twelve 1.5 hour-long groupwork sessions, delivered weekly by two facilitators to up to 8 pupils aged between 14 and 16 years.  Sharon Burt (Chief Executive Officer at Solent Academies Trust) signposted Penal Reform Solutions (PRS) services to Louise Isa-Grada (Head Teacher at Littlegreen Academy) to support her growth work with at-risk pupils within Littlegreen.

In the first instance, two assemblies we delivered by two PRS staff members with lived experience to share their experiences and learnings, around prison and the criminal justice system to pupils at Littlegreen Academy. Pre-group 1:1 sessions were offered to pupils allocated to the programme in order to build rapport, explore the pupils' needs and expectations and provide opportunity for pupils to feel safe with facilitators.

The Grow2Go groupwork programme was developed by PRS(1) as a crime prevention, early intervention measure (research with British twins suggested that contact with the justice system is more likely to promote future offending, Motz (2)).  This work will continue in the future under the new Community Interest Company, Grow Transform Belong CIC to increase the opportunities for funding.  The programme is psychodynamic in nature, designed with a strengths-based approach that looks to empower pupils to reach their own conclusions and develop their skill set, while supported within a safe environment.  The programme was designed to equip and enable young people most at risk of entering the criminal justice system, with key skills to overcome difficulties, grow and flourish.  Expected outcomes were as follows:

• **Building Meaningful Relationships**

 – to understand reciprocal relationships and mutual needs

 – to understand why ruptures happen in relationships and how to overcome them to grow.

• **Identity Capital**

 – To adapt and grow  identity capital in positive ways

 - To understand the labels that others place on us are not for us to have to live up to or mould ourselves into

 –  To recognise and acknowledge that whilst stigma may exist it does not need to define us.

• **Adopting a Growth Mindset**

– To understand the difference between growth and fixed mindsets; the benefits of a growth mindset and the drawbacks of a fixed mindset

– To identify thinking patterns associated with both fixed and growth mindsets and how to disrupt a fixed mindset thought pattern.

• **Core Goals to Life Choices –** To identify core goals to life choices - finding meaningful, pro-social ways of achieving their core goals through goal setting.

• **Meaning and Belonging**

– To understand what brings meaning/ sense of belonging

– To identify what groups pupils might belong to and what they gain from being part of those groups

• **Capital Resources and Strengths**

 – To acknowledge personal resources as well as hazards, learners can understand ways that will support their personal growth.

• **Acceptance –** To distinguish between what we can and can't change and recognise the benefits of letting go and self-acceptance.

• **Challenging unhelpful thinking**

– To identify unhelpful thinking and effective ways in which these thoughts can be challenged and recognise the pressures we place on ourselves and the virtues of self-compassion.

• **Pro-Social Ways of Coping –** To introduce the concept of post-traumatic growth and their realities. To introduce mindfulness, visualisations and self-talk as effective coping strategies.

• **Considered Decision Making and Self Control**

– To learn how to evaluate the decisions we make and the consequences, both long and short term, exploring how our decisions today may move us closer or further away from our "Future Me" and understanding healthy decision making through the exploration of options.

• **Meeting Core Growth Needs through Pro-Social Me**

 – To introduce them to the principles of growth and establish how they can develop through growing these principles.

• **Confidence Building** – To instil hope in the future and consolidate the learning outcomes from the programme to magnify their strengths.

## 3.0 SETTING THE CONTEXT

The link between risk of exclusion and criminal behaviour is evident, providing scope for the design of a youth crime prevention intervention within PRS. There has been a 70surge in permanent exclusions in England since 2012. An analysis of around 100 teenage males involved county lines revealed that all had been permanently excluded or spent time in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), according to the St Giles Trust charity. 90% of young males in young offender institutions have been excluded from school, making exclusion the most common factor among incarcerated male youths (3).

A pro-active intervention, the Grow2Go programme is also considered a cost-effective approach in tackling crime and promoting inclusivity and social bonds, with the National Audit Office estimating a total cost to the UK economy of offending by young people at around £11 billion a year (2020). Heckman (2006) stated, *"the financial returns to society from early intervention greatly exceed those from later interventions, such as those available to the criminal justice system"* (4). Duncan and Magnuson (2004) stated, *"principles of developmental science suggest that although beneficial changes are possible at any point in life, interventions early on may be more effective at promoting well-being and competencies compared with interventions undertaken later in life"* and that, *"early childhood may provide an unusual window of opportunity for interventions because young children are uniquely receptive to enriching and supportive environments…. As individuals age, they gain the independence and ability to shape their environments, rendering intervention efforts more complicated and costly"* (6). In addition, Gottfredson (2017) says, *"because major causes of crime originate in early childhood, there is considerable promise in programs that direct resources toward child care among high-risk populations"* (7).

Pupils are supported by trained facilitators to build life skills (relational (8), social (*"implementing social-emotional curricula has also been shown to improve student behaviour outcomes, such as decreasing emotional distress and conduct problems, and increasing academic scores"* (Durlak et al., 2011 (9); Payton et al., 2008 - (10)), coping (*"the prevalence of post-traumatic stress among delinquent youths is up to 8 times higher than in community samples"*, Wolpaw & Ford, 2004), goal-setting (Strain Theory (11)), self-control (12) and decision-making (13) in order to foster resilience, confidence and ability to establish positive, pro-socially-oriented futures.

Constructing a positive identity, through recognising personal strengths (Labelling Theory, (14)) and promoting conscious decision-making, where a healthy sense of belonging and social ties are cultivated, also feature heavily throughout the programme. Maria Shea-Michiels (2018) states, *"one of the most important ways schools can support student success is by supplementing academic instruction with programs that foster strong social and emotional skills"* (15)

The Grow2Go sessions are delivered using strengths-based methods (16), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (17), Motivational Interviewing (18) and Strategy of Choices to empower pupils to take ownership of their own growth in order that change is embedded.

The Principles of Growth (Figure 1) underpin the design of all programme material (Lewis and Hands, 2022). Building on these principles fosters personal growth, positive environments within which pupils can develop and social connections to strengthen social capital.

*Figure 1: The Principles of Growth*

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

Participants were invited to complete a pre and post questionnaire before and after the Go2Grow Programme. These were analysed alongside comments from two facilitators and session output. Seven participants completed questionnaires in total, but the post-questionnaire was only completed by five pupils.

## 5.0 RESULTS

*5.1 Participant feedback and learning*

From analysing the session outputs, it was clear that the pupils demonstrated a good understanding of the follow areas:

*5.1.1 Relationships*

Pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of positive and negative relationships, defining negative (red) relationships as "abusive", "disrespectful", "cheating" and, "bullying" and positive (green) relationships as "respectful", "looking out for you", "makes me feel happy", "trustworthy", and, "loyal".

Pupils were able to identify the skills needed to create and maintain positive relationships, highlighting the need to "listen", "understand", "consider the needs of others", "give people space" and see people as "equals".

*5.1.2 Negative thoughts and consequences to decisions*

Pupils identified how they were able to identify negative thoughts and the consequences of these in decision making as well as generate strategies to deal with anger, for example; "walk away, "take a breath," and "go to the gym".

*5.1.3 Understanding the importance of belonging*

Belonging was a key feature from the Programme and pupils demonstrated a sound understanding of what it meant to belong. Belonging was described by pupils as "fitting in", "feel comfortable", "achieve goals", feeling "accepted", and being in a space whereby they can be themselves. This understanding was deepened by a discussion around responsibility and the group was able to recognise that they had a "part to play" in belonging, through the need to build ownership.

*5.1.4 Stress and challenges*

Pupils were able to identify those aspects of their lives, which brought them stress, as highlighted in the word cloud below;



*Figure 2: Aspects of life that are stressful to the pupils.*

Pupils also explored how they would manage stress and challenges in their lives and generated the following strategies.



*Figure 3: Stress management techniques generated by the pupils*

*5.1.5 Growth and articulating the strengths in others*

Finally, pupils were able to articulate characteristics that can them grow, through "determination", "trusting", "self-belief", "problem solving" and "communication".

Growth also emerged from staff observational feedback and peer to peer feedback, utilising positive affirmations of one another, to instil hope and promote greater self-worth. This task was taken seriously and pinpointed key progress for each pupil, using humour to lighten the exercise, as documented in the table below.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Participant 1* | Willing to learn and try new things. |
| | Active listening |
| | He's mature- he acts better than the older ones. |
| | Proper legend, maturing slowly. |
| | Open to try new things to see if they work for him. |
| *Participant 2* | Always thinks about others first |
| | Focused on his goals |
| | He has his own mind. |
| | Shows real insight |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Participant 2 (cont.)* | His resilience during what has been a difficult time for him. He has grown into a very calm and considered young man with a great sense of humour. |
| | His physical capabilities, no one faster, or more agile. His ability to surprise us with both his determination and intelligence. |
| *Participant 3* | Ambitious, Determined |
| | Very funny, has your back |
| | Able to challenge others and help them grow. |
| | Fantastically dry sense of humour. He's a kind and engaging and has developed real listening skills. J has a new confidence this year which means he's doing better than anyone expected in his schoolwork but also outside. |
| | He can bench press 60kg. He has a cheerful have a go attitude which means students and staff really get on with him. |
| *Participant 4* | Matured so much in the 10 years I've known him |
| | Determined to get a job and has one now. |
| | Deals well with problems he might have |
| | Passionate about what he believes in |
| | He has real strength of character- knows who he wants to be and works hard to achieve it. |
| | He is open, friendly, and sociable and never stays miserable for long. He's friendly and well liked without losing sight of who he is. |
| | He has tried and succeeded to become better at things he's found hard. Sitting his English exam is a genuine achievement. |

| Participant 5 | Engaged and Goal Orientated |
| | Sexy |
| | Able to see bigger picture and consider his long-term goals |
| | He's been here most sessions; he's matured and funny. He has determination and ambition |
| | His humour and ability to turn a negative into a positive. His kindness and empathy towards others (even if he doesn't feel it's warranted) is a lovely trait. |
| | His ability to be honest with himself is a sign of his maturity. He can see other people's negativity for what it is and not take it personally which is rare in a teenager. |
| Participant 6 | Polite |
| | Considerate of others |
| | Good listener |
| | Passionate about what he believes in |
| | Considerate |
| Participant 7 | Listens to others |
| | Funny, geezer, proper legend |
| | Focused and dedicated to reach his goals |
| | Ladies' man, ready to move on |
| | Ambitious and determined- capable of achieving what he sets his mind to. |
| | R has remarkable resilience. Nothing keeps him down for long. He is emotionally intelligent and isn't afraid to be himself. He's been a welcomed into what was an established class because it's impossible not to like him. |
| | Whatever he has put effort into this year has demonstrated what he is capable of. His maths, English and football have all been impressive this year. |

## 5.2 Qualitative Data from pre and post evaluations

Qualitative data was collected from those that completed the pre and post questionnaires. The general themes emerged from these findings.

### 5.2.1 A broader perspective

When asked what things they currently have in their lives, that support their growth, it was noted that the participants were able to generate more forms of support and more detailed answers, between pre and post measure. For example, in the pre-evaluation pupils noted immediate family, were unsure, college and one participant stated "nothing". In the post measure, participants noted both immediate and more indirect family members, the gym, family friends and revision. It was clear that family and education played a vital role in the growth of the participants overall.

### 5.2.2 A brightening of strengths

When asked how the participants would describe themselves, strengths had brightened in most participant responses. To illustrate, one participant stated they were "decent at boxing" though described themselves as "amazing" in the post measure. Qualities also deepened somewhat, with strengths such as "kind" and "thoughtful" emerging from the post evaluation, compared to descriptors such as "friendly" or "funny." When specifically asked about the strengths of the participant, more hopeful statements were evident. For example, one participant stated, "I can do anything I put my mind to" and another commented "I am good at making friends". This was compared to short answers in the pre-evaluation, with comments such as "strong at art" and "treat girls right". Strengths generally featured specific educational topics or music in the pre-evaluation, with strengths focusing more on characteristics and attributes in the post evaluation, for example "listening" and "intelligent".

### 5.2.3 A deeper insight

The participants were asked what things might get in the way of them growing as a person. Interesting, participants demonstrated a clearer insight into the challenges they may face, with respect to their own personal growth. For example, one participant stated that drugs would get in the way of their growth, but this evolved to "bad influences". Responses were more detailed in nature, specifying specific people or areas that were problematic for them.

*5.2.4 Healthier coping strategies*

Participants were asked the reasons and situations where they might find themselves in conflict with others. Responses reported positive coping strategies to conflict in the post evaluation, which were not present in the pre-evaluation. For example, one participant stated "say something back that they don't like" in the pre-evaluation, whereas in the post-evaluation, responses ranged from "talk it out/ deal with it like an adult" to "not interested in ongoing drama" and "choose your battles". This suggests that new skills have been developed, to support the participants in dealing with conflict and managing their emotions.

*5.2.5 Holistic Goal Setting*

Goal setting was also explored with the participants and the pre-evaluation data highlight a focus on earning money, being successful and job ambitions. In the post evaluation, ambitions moved away from work and money and included "renovating my own house", "having a family of my own", "gardening" and "leave a footprint on the earth (not co2), leave a legacy". This highlights a real shift in perspective, which incorporates a more holistic view around goal setting and "giving back". There was a similar trend when participants were asked what they would like more of in their life. In the pre-evaluation, participants focused on money and making sexual comments, whereas participants in the post-evaluation noted terms such as "courage" and "opportunities".

**5.3 Quantitative Findings**

Participants were asked several quantitative questions at the pre and post evaluation stage. Average scores were created considering the difference in participants at the start and end of the programme, though it should be noted that in order to get a clearer picture of the impact of this programme, more post evaluations would be needed (N=4).

The following graphs highlight that;

Participants were happier with the opportunities they had in their life to grow (Fig. 4)

Participants reported they felt that they were less likely to get involved with the police (Fig. 5)

Participants were more confident that they had the skills in cope in a difficult situation (Fig. 6)

Participants felt more confident that they had the skills to manage strong emotions (Fig. 7)

Confidence increased over the course of the programme (Fig. 8)



*Figure 4: A line graph representing the participants' responses to: How confident are you hat you will be happy in your future?*
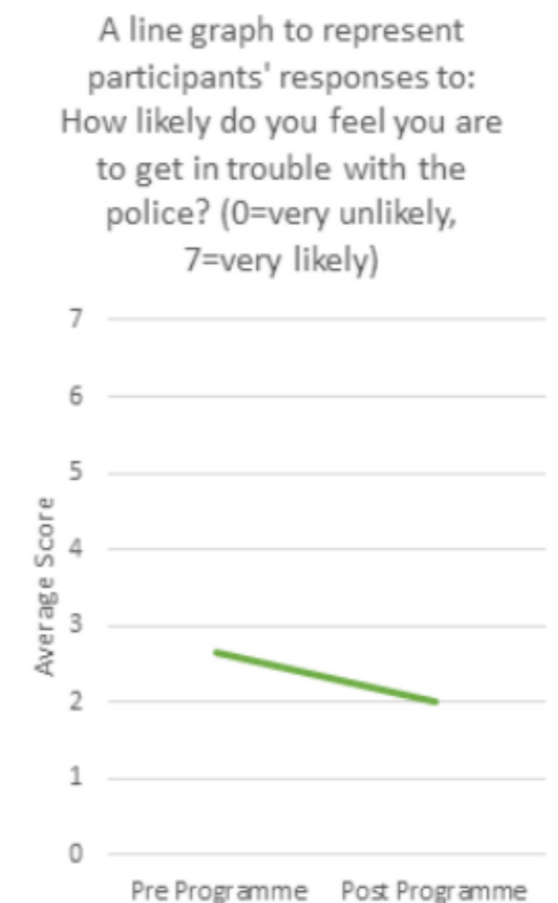


*Figure 5: A line graph to represent participants' responses to: How likely do you feel you are to get in trouble with the police?*
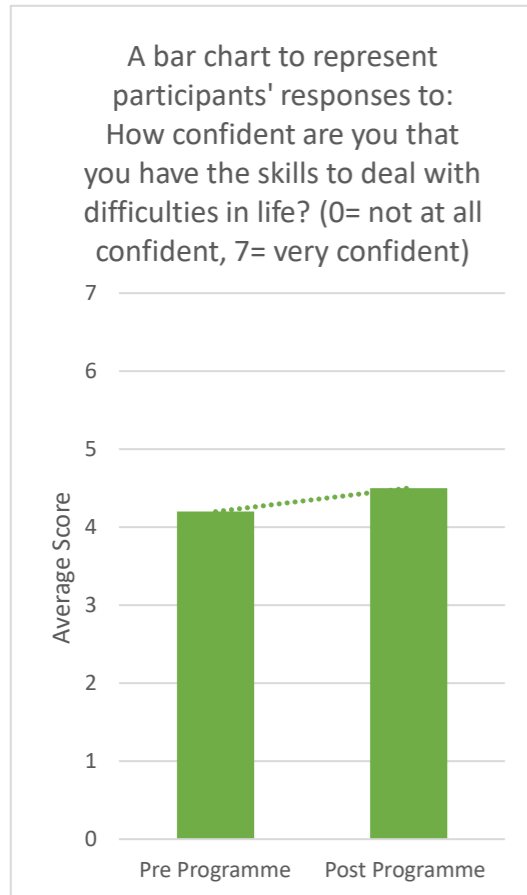
Figure 6: A bar chart to represent participants' responses to: How confident are you that you have the skills to deal with difficulties in life?
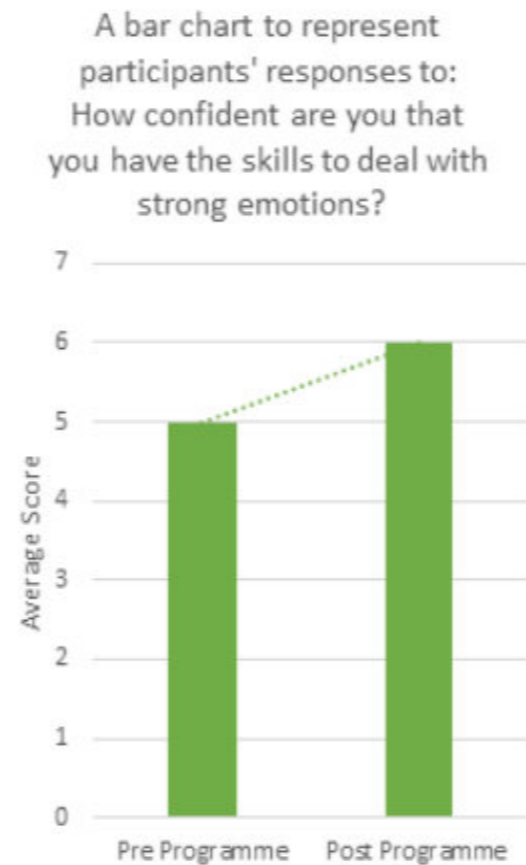


Figure 7: A bar chart to represent participants' responses to: How confident are you that you have the skills to deal with strong emotions?



Figure 8: A bar chart to represent participants' responses to: How happy are you with the opportunities that currently have in your life for personal development and growth?

These findings indicate an increase in confidence, hope and optimism in the future, with consistent progress across all measures.

## 6.0 FACILITATOR REFLECTIONS

*6.1 Achievements, observations and successes*

The following achievements and learning were collated from two facilitators, who delivered the programme. The following themes emerged.

*6.1.2 Challenging behaviour in a pro-social way*

Both facilitators highlighted that behaviour could sometimes be challenging during the sessions, with pupils not adhering to the group agreement, dipping in and out of the session, disengaging and distracting one another. Several strategies were used to address these challenges and facilitators documented that the most successful strategies included:

- Rolling with resistance in a motivational way
- Using the group to re-engage the pupil
- Co-creating and utilising the group agreement to get pupils back on track
- Using affirmations and humour and
- Being responsive

This allowed the facilitators to address behaviour in a pro-social manner, to ensure that pupils gained the most the material.

*6.1.2 Effective co-facilitation*

Facilitators stated that effective co-facilitation proved vital when delivering this programme. The relationship between facilitators should be equal, supportive, collaborative, pro-social and aligned. This helped to maintain boundaries, provide a better quality of delivery, and ensure pupils felt safe within sessions.

*6.1.3 Communication*

Facilitators commented that communicating with staff and checking in with pupils helped maintain engagement. There were occasions when pupils left early because of their anxieties (these were predominantly the younger group members). Facilitators stated that discussing this with the teachers provided a space to feedback any concerns and collaboratively problem solve.

*6.1.4 Session Take Aways*

Facilitators reported that end of session "take aways" were really effective at the end of each session and enabled facilitators to review understanding and consolidate learning. One facilitator reflected; "I was overly impressed with the takeaway quotes the pupils provided in summary of what they had learnt and their overall engagement throughout the sessions and attention span gradually expanded over the course of the sessions".
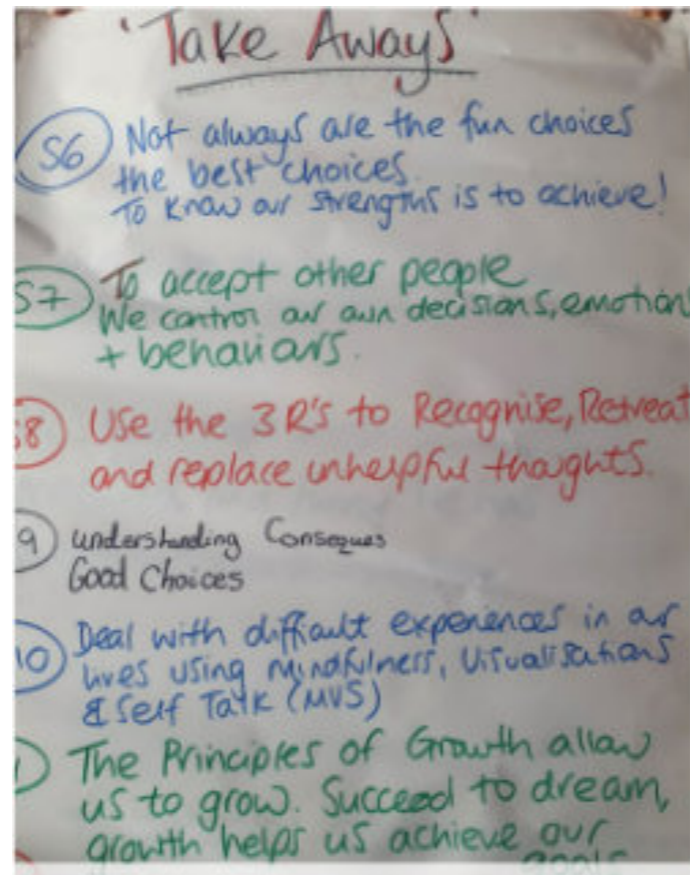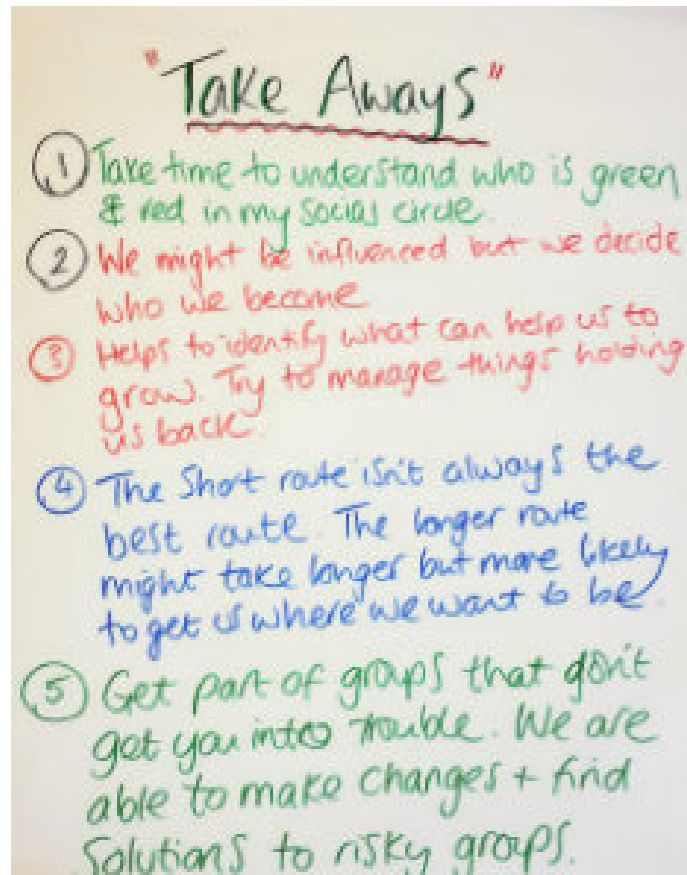


Session "take aways" slowing built on learning, which consequentially contributed to an end of Programme quiz. The use of metaphors, examples, acronyms and visual representations all appeared to support engagement and learning. When completing the review quiz in the last session, pupils seemed to draw on these representations to recall the concepts, skills and tools. One facilitator proudly outlined her experience, from her perspective;

> *"In our final session the retained knowledge from participants from the course was much better than expected. They appeared to have gained a clear insight into key topic areas such as positive relationships, the importance of setting future goals, processes of achievement, considering their own wellbeing and how aspects of their life benefit or hinder their development".*

*6.1.5 One to One support*

Facilitators reported that dedicating 1-2-1 time with each pupil during worksheet activities was an effective way to support the learning of the group. One facilitator commented;

> "This enabled us to guide them through and encourage them to consider how the skills applied to their own lives at a deeper level. From this approach we were able to obtain much more detailed worksheets and the pupils were able to really consider the skills within their own lives".

*6.1.6 Encouraging Empowerment*

Facilitators commented that empowering pupils to take control and ownership appeared to bring about a sense of hope and motivation from group members; a belief they could achieve and grow. This approach was consistent in the delivery, where obstacles were identified, and solutions or alternative routes considered. Facilitators commented that they were aware that many of the pupils may have complex issues and difficulties, and therefore appreciated that they were the experts in their own lives. One facilitator reflected; "From this, we were better place to judge when it was more appropriate to 'ease off' or take a different, more sensitive approach. I believe the pupils appreciated this and engaged more readily as a result".

Both facilitators commented that they felt a sense of empowerment grew over the duration of that course, as pupils were provided with positive and constructive feedback which was used to help participants grow in their learning. Peer reviews were also given which were well received.

## 7.0 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were outlined by facilitators and pupils on the Go2Grow Programme.

• Practical tasks and activities were extremely engaging for pupils, and it would be useful to incorporate more of these throughout the sessions. Pupils commented that they would like more "fun activities" Also, one pupil commented that they would like "less writing" and this aligns to the facilitator feedback, stated below.

• To gain maximum participation engagement it would be useful for sessions to run on an appropriate day of the week in which attendance would be more maximised. It was mentioned, by a support teacher, that Tuesdays were probably not the most suitable day to deliver the sessions as the pupils are in and out a lot. In future, further discussions to consider if there is a more appropriate day may assist in retention and engagement.

• Allowing more time at the beginning of the programme for participants to get to know the facilitators, would allow barriers to be minimised and pupils to feel more relaxed and open. This could be a question-and-answer session, where the pupils can ask questions and start to build trust. One to one sessions were organised but only two pupils (out of 7) agreed to this, and the focus was on the facilitators getting to know the pupils and introducing the programme. Due to low take up, facilitators offered a group session where pupils could gather the information they needed about the programme and be briefly introduced to us. On reflection, this could have been more comprehensive, with opportunities to ask us questions.

• We were encouraged to avoid offering a break half-way through the session to avoid non-returners. On reflection, the facilitators stated that breaks were needed due to the nature of the programme, even if pupils are asked to remain in the room. These could be ice breaker exercises that are physical, to get pupils out of their seats and refreshed before returning to the session material. Pupils also commented that they would have valued a break, reinforcing the need for some downtime, due to the nature of the programme.

• Having an opportunity to observe the pupils in their usual working environment may have also been helpful as a method of getting to know how they behave, respond and interact with others.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

This evaluation highlights the learning outcomes from the Programme, outlining how pupils gained a greater understanding of relationships, negative thinking, consequences, belonging, stress and challenge and the importance of feedback. The qualitative findings highlighted that participants gained a broader and deeper insight into their lives, were more able to recognise the strengths and themselves and others, adopted healthier coping strategies, and were able to holistically set goals to support their growth. The quantitative findings outlined that participants were happier the with opportunities to support their growth, and felt they were less likely to get involved with the police in the future.

Further to this, they reported heightened levels of confidence with respect to coping and managing strong emotions. The facilitator feedback acknowledged some effective practice principles, including challenging behaviour, facilitation, communication, session summaries and the need to encourage empowerment.

Overall the programme was successful in achieving it's objectives and it is the hope that this work can continue, to support the growth of pupils at Littlegreen Academy. Increasing engagement and drawing on the lessons learnt will increase the impact of this work, along with capturing the impact of this work with greater engagement with the research process.

**Dr Sarah Lewis Director**
e: info@penalreformsolutions.com
w: www.penalreformsolutions.com

P O Box 364
Romsey
SO51 1DZ