



Northern School

of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy



Growth Mindset in Social Care

Winning Scotland
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#Keepingthepromise using Growth Mindset

Independent impact evaluation by Dr Lerleen Willis, Research and Development Lead from the Northern School of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy (NSCAP).



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INTRODUCTION

“To be blunt, we let too many of them [young people in care] down. They pay the price of that for the rest of their lives. And in too many instances, the price can be a life cut short.” Former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

Every child or young person who finds themselves being looked after by the care system[1] is an individual with hopes, dreams, ambitions and interests.

This research does refer to children and young people with care experience as a collective and we recognise that this will not be a universal experience. We are sharing our learning with the aim that it will contribute to collective efforts to #keepthepromise in Scotland.

About Growth Mindset

Extensive and robust research shows that individuals who believe that they (and others) have innate and fixed skills and talents which cannot be changed can be said to have a ‘fixed mindset’ and face life differently to people with ‘more of a growth mindset’, that is, the belief ‘that they ‘can develop their abilities through hard work, good strategies, and instruction from others’[1] .

Mindset is both a spectrum and a practise. While people may tend towards one or another, everyone is a mixture of both dependant on circumstances, and growth mindset behaviours can be learned.



About this research

For the past 15 years, charity Winning Scotland have created impactful and practical programmes of learning for professionals in Scotland, helping them to apply the principles and practise of growth mindset to their work, building confidence and resilience in children and young people.

In 2023, Winning Scotland received funding to extend a pilot providing bespoke and tailored support for residential care and social workers. A full external impact evaluation was conducted by Dr Lerleen Willis, Research and Development Lead from the Northern School of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy (NSCAP) and is [available here](#).

Why workforce development?

Winning Scotland has a track record of providing professional development for sports coaches, parents, teachers and early years practitioners. Evidence shows there are multiple benefits realised when we support those adults who are most influential on our young people including:

- Improved wellbeing for the adults we train, and the children they support.
- Often increasing benefits each year as the adults continue to develop their growth mindset practise and strategies, meaning that multiple year groups benefit from the single training intervention.
- Young people learn how to face challenge by example, often more effective than the ‘do what I say, not what I do’ practise by adults with fixed mindsets themselves.

[1] Care-experienced is defined as an umbrella term used in education and means children / young people who are; looked after at home (Compulsory Supervision Order), looked after away from home (residential house, foster placement, kinship placement) or previously looked after. (Glasgow City Council).

[2] Haimovitz & Dweck, (2017)



MINDSET IN SOCIAL CARE

Given the significant influence that adults working in residential care have on their young people, it is important that they are best supported both in how they deal with their own challenges, and the messages they communicate to their young people about both what they are capable of, how to overcome challenges and manage their emotions.

'I think that there is something important in social care around expectations – there's lots of research showing that kids are really influenced by our expectations of them, so having a growth mindset about talent and ability should encourage us to raise those expectations'

The workforce face multiple challenges including workload, stress and anxiety and uncertain funding and 'too often, children's homes do not get the recognition they deserve for the significant role they play in some children's lives' [3].

Young people they work with may have been affected by neglect, trauma and deprivation, impacting their self-esteem and mental health, often requiring interventions[4] or developing a sense of learned helplessness [5], sometimes re-enforced by unconscious bias from care staff.

It is therefore important that those who work with or care for care-experienced children and young people receive appropriate training, development and support which will enable them to better support young people and build constructive personal relationships with them[6].

'Within social care, it's crucial to have an understanding of how an individual's mindset can not only impact them emotionally but have a physical response that can impact them when trying new experiences. This will enable us to support them to try new experiences and achieve positive outcomes.'

For example, by helping young people to overcome a sense of learned helplessness, where they feel they cannot change their situation[7], staff can proactively mitigate some of the risks people face:

- Low expectations and mental health issues.
- Not achieving their potential.
- Facing further barriers at school or work.
- Poor behaviour impacting on relationships.

Thus, training social care workers, in growth mindset principles is likely to be a sustainable model through which to positively impact on all young people with whom practitioners come into contact throughout their careers.

'Within my 15 years of working in social care, this is one of the most interactive and informative pieces of training I have undertaken.'



[3] Schooling, (2018)

[4] Steels and Simpson, (2017)

[5] Seligman, (1972)

[6] Cahill et al., (2016)

[7] Seligman, (1972).

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The Growth Mindset in Social Care pilot programme (2022-23) was built on previous positive experience of training teachers in growth mindset principles. It provided dedicated training in the principles of growth mindset for a range of social care.

- **Session 1:** explored the principles of fixed and growth mindsets, encouraging participants to explore the nature of their own mindsets and those of the young people in their care.
- **Session 2:** encouraged participants to consider how growth mindset principles might be used to support young people.
- **Session 3:** provided space to think about how implicit theories of intelligence might apply to the Care Review and the recommendations of The Promise.

Workers who care for, or support children, young people, and families with experience of the care system and it aimed to explore the relevance and application of growth mindset principles for this workforce. The curriculum development was supported by experienced leaders and practitioners from across the social care sector. Consisting of 2 face-to face sessions and 1 online session, along with 3 related online learning modules to further embed mindset principles.

OUR LEARNINGS

Relevance

91.5% of participants said that growth mindset principles are relevant to their work with young people. It was seen as relevant personal and professional development and perceived as a means of empowering participants to achieve their potential, to better meet the needs of the young people.

Some learners felt empowered to develop growth mindset approaches at team and organisational levels and all completing learners said a useful next step would be to ensure this sort of support was available to colleagues in their setting so that the language and approach could be more easily embedded and not seen as simply another short-term initiative.

'It's strange, as with young people I work with and even with my own son, I feel I promote a growth mindset and am always encouraging them to try their best in all aspects of life. Think it's maybe time I take my own advice.'

Learning Styles

The course was co-produced with potential learners and, as a result, took a blended approach. This was valued by learners, although not without challenge. All learners reported finding time during work hours to do the online learning difficult, and almost everyone who completed the course reported doing most of the self-study at home in their own time.

"There are a few advantages of studying on line as you can work at your own pace, repeat sections and also copy and paste notes whilst saving useful link as you are on your laptop anyway. This allows you to refresh your memory when needed"

"All course content very informative however due to job role, finding the time in work diary to read up and complete tasks."

"Online learning in the work place is very difficult as due to you being in attendance you are frequently disturbed and often loose your thread of thought and have to go back hence why I ended up doing it at home."



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

This shows the value the course was giving, as well as the dedication of these learners, but finding time at home would simply not be an option for many people, and it beyond what we require of many other types of worker.

The in-person days were seen to be an important part of the learning process, allowing time for discussion and reflection, but being able to take a day out of the workplace was often problematic with last minute cancellations due to staffing issues at the learners places of work.

“I liked that the course was face to face and you could chat about how you would apply growth mindset with workers out with your local authority”

‘Face to face learning as group discussions and talking through all aspects of the modules with peers was good.’

This type of experiential learning reflects a transformational or life-long learning approach[8] allowing learners to embrace wider perspectives on life.

CHANGING CULTURE

In pre course work, the learners shared their fears and hopes for the young people they work with, and recognised the importance of the role they play.

“I hope that the young people I work with feel that they are as important as the next person, that they can do whatever they want to do and that we are here to support them in this.”

“I want them to aspire to have positive experiences and relationships and feel happy and loved.”

In reflections during the live sessions, some participants shared scepticism from colleagues about change, trying new things or changing relationships with the young people. There was even reported cynicism with The Promise itself, and UNCRC – both of which are viewed by some in the sector as irrelevant or things which are going to make these jobs even more difficult.

This is a hard reality of any diverse workforce, but our learners talked about creating culture change in their homes and if only one or two people are training in a particular environment his becomes harder to do. Winning Scotland have had success in education by taking a ‘teams’ approach and although this is harder to logistically manage in a Children’s House, it would be worth exploring.

KEEPING ‘THE PROMISE’

The evaluation included questions that aimed to establish; Participants’ awareness and practice of ‘The Promise’, wellbeing scores, parental/carer self-efficacy scores and parental/carer perceived stress scores, creating a bespoke ‘Practical experience of The Promise’ scale. Responses were then collated to create a ‘Promise score’ for each participant.

Comparison of the pre and post course responses strongly indicated that the Growth Mindset in Social Care training programme not only improves participants’ awareness of growth mindset principles, but also raises their awareness of The Promise and empowers application in their daily practice.

LEGACY

74% of learners on the course said they had transferred their learning into the workplace and it was clear to the evaluator that an array of good practice was beginning and would continue to emerge gradually as social care professionals have time to reflect on the learning they have received and how it might be applied to their different work contexts.

71% attributed improvements in their practice directly to this programme, a high rating, given the group were experienced to begin with. Having applied this learning into their practice, quantitative data indicated improvements on four key measures:

- Knowledge and practice of 'The Promise',
- An improvement in mental wellbeing of care staff,
- An improvement in parental/ carer self-efficacy,
- Improvements in participants' perceived ability to manage role-related stress.

A significant number of participants described multiple ways in which they had begun to think differently, embed growth mindset principles into their practice and were sharing principles more widely with others within their organisation.

The independent evaluation concluded that participants recognised areas of growth in their own lives, gaining insights into their own mindsets. Many identified personal challenges as for the first time they recognised they were much more focussed on developing others than developing themselves. The professional learning empowered participants to achieve their potential, to better meet the needs of the young people they work with, as well as to enable others to develop growth mindset approaches at team and organisational levels.

"It makes you realise that there will be times where you feel confident and resilient and even times when you don't; this is okay, you haven't failed, you are on a journey."

FUNDING

The programme was advertised through Winning Scotland's existing networks of local authorities and attracted significant interest (100+ people), but ultimately no sign ups, with the cost (£199) cited as an issue. When offered fully funded, 99 people registered.

Investing in this development of this workforce beyond mandatory training is an essential part of #keepingthepromise and training such as this, which focusses on aspiration and improvement rather than risk and mitigation, could play an important role in recruitment and retention.



THANKS

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APPENDIX

Questions	Score(Out of 5)
Did the Growth Mindset in Social Care programme meet its aims and objectives?	4.4
Was the pre-course information helpful and appropriate?	4.6
Were the reading and support materials helpful and appropriate?	4.6
Was the blended learning format (face to face and online) helpful and appropriate?	4.4

When asked how appropriate for their professional development, learners stated the following.

Questions	Score(Out of 5)
The level of the development programme was appropriate	4.1
The reading materials have helped me to understand the subject and about myself	4.4
The group discussions helped me to understand about the subject and about myself	4.6
The teaching and learning helped me to understand more about Growth Mindset.	4.4
I have learned more about myself as a result of attending this development programme	4.4