



# Northern School

of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy



## Growth Mindset in Social Care

Summary Report  
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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.



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[2].

Residential care may be the most appropriate initial response for a young person who has faced multiple traumas and can therefore be a positive option for some children, though, ‘Too often, children’s homes do not get the recognition they deserve for the significant role they play in some children’s lives’ [3]. For residential care staff, ‘finding ways to help children manage their emotions in a constructive way is one of the many challenges of the job’.

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

Therefore, those who care for or work with them require appropriate training, development, and support to allow them to best support the particular environments and influences of the young people in their care further recognising that the workforce operates in challenging conditions.

[1] Haimovitz & Dweck, (2017) [4] Steels and Simpson, (2017)  
[2] Glasgow City Council (2019) [5] Seligman, (1972)  
[3] Schooling, (2018)



## MINDSET IN SOCIAL CARE

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].

This may involve helping young people to overcome a sense of learned helplessness [7]. Without such training, the impact on young people may include[8]:

- Young people suffer detriments because of the adversities they have experienced, including low expectations and mental health issues.
- That things mitigate against young people achieving their potential.
- That the young person's behaviour can be a barrier to progress, they can be unfairly treated, especially in the workplace.
- That they are at a disadvantage without the support of positive family and social networks.

Thus, training teachers and by implication, 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.

## 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 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.

- **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.

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

# ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

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

Residential Care Worker

The programme was advertised widely, initially with a cost, attracting significant interest (100+ people) but no sign ups due to a lack of resource. When offered fully funded, 99 registered.

The majority of those registered were female and most had over 10 years of service. Participants all worked with a different age profile of children and young people, ranging from the perinatal period (pre-birth/ 0) up to 25. A core of 36 people attended regularly over a 4-month period.

## LEARNER FEEDBACK

The Growth Mindset in Social Care programme was highly rated by participants indicating that it was relevant and valued, with **91.5%** of participants stating that growth mindset principles had relevance to their area of work, meeting the needs of this diverse professional group.

It was seen as relevant personal and professional development, perceived as a means of empowering participants to achieve their potential, to better meet the needs of the young people, whilst enabling others to develop growth mindset approaches at team and organisational levels.

The impact evaluation established that it was evident, following the programme 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 to apply this learning.

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

*“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.”*

Social Care Worker.



## KEEPING 'THE PROMISE'

8 questions were developed to create a 'Practical experience of The Promise' scale with items scored on a scale of 1-5. Scores for all 8 questions were then added together to create a 'Promise score' for each participant.

Pre course responses recorded a 'Promise Score' of 33.1, however post course responses identified an increase to 35.4, indicating a very strong trend, 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.

### Transfer of Training into Practice

Participants considered how well the learning transferred into their working practice. Using an amended NSCAP Impact of Training Scale, that identified changes in cognitive behaviours (thinking, decision-making, translation into practice), participants returned a mean score of 18.3 indicating that 74% of learners on the course transferred their learning into the workplace.

The ease with which participants were able to translate the learning into practice at work indicates how closely the training related to their work and demonstrates a significant return on investment.

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',**
- **Improved mental wellbeing of care staff,**
- **Improved parental/ carer self-efficacy,**
- **Improvements in participants' perceived ability to manage role-related stress.**

The programme employed a practical model, encouraging participants to envision how growth mindset would fit into their ways of working, optimising the degree of training transfer into the workplace and enabled learners to develop their critical self-reflection skills and to learn from experience. This type of experiential learning reflects a transformational or life-long learning approach[1] allowing learners to embrace wider perspectives on life. The success of the programme is also underlined by the number of participants who 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.

In applying their learning, care staff established projects to positively impact the young people they care for, these included:

- **A Good Childhood:** Improve the experience of young people to achieve good outcomes.
- **Supporting the workforce:** Develop growth mindset skills across staff and organisations.
- **Moving On:** Support for Foster Carers to creating transition plans for independent living.

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 focused 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.



## PARTICIPANTS' MINDSETS

*"I thought I always had a growth mindset, however when at the course, I became aware that at times in my own personal life that I have at times had more of a fixed mindset in relation to achieving or not achieving a particular personal goal in that I felt I cannot do it, I don't have the ability.*

*'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."*

*"It's difficult to put a timescale on how long this takes and the work that's carried out is hard to record, small changes, leading to bigger changes."*

*"Building relationships are key to help moving from a fixed mindset, in order to build confidence, offer support with new opportunities to build new skills, offering guidance and reflection."*

*"From what I have learned from this training, I have been making a conscious effort to change the way that I give praise in order to praise efforts instead of [outcomes]. I hope that this will help young people feel motivated to do well instead of worrying about failing."*

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