

'We Matter'

Programme Evaluation



We Matter Programme

Programme Outline

‘We Matter’ was a youth work programme for care experienced young people, delivered by three youth work teams across four schools in Edinburgh between November 2024 and April 2025. The programme offered support to 25 young people, aged 12-to-15, whose attendance in school had been identified by schools as a cause for concern.

The design of the ‘We Matter’ programme was different in each local context, and activities were shaped by the needs and interests of each group. In all settings, the programme was underpinned by youth work values and approach - focused on building strong, trusted relationships so that young people could build confidence to participate in new learning experiences and develop new skills.

Evaluation Approach

The National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework provided the structure for the programme impact evaluation and the Youth Work and Schools Partnership Team at YouthLink Scotland supported evaluation planning and data collation. Youth workers across all settings worked together to set the focus for their work, based on four key youth work outcomes:

- Young people build their health and wellbeing.
- Young people develop and manage relationships effectively.
- Young people participate effectively in groups and teams.
- Young people are more engaged in learning and education.

Young people, youth work and school partners then tracked progress in relation to six key skills and associated indicators:

Skills development focus for the ‘We Matter’ Programme	Behavioural indicators
Confidence	I can take part in new experiences I can recognise and seek out positive relationships I can manage my friendships I can express my thoughts and feelings to appropriate adults I can show respect towards others I can see things from another person’s perspective I can work with others on group tasks I can keep going when things get difficult I can learn from my mistakes I can ask for help if I need it I can seek out opportunities and support I can identify goals for my physical and mental health and take steps to achieve them
Resilience	
Building relationships	
Communication	
Decision making	
Teamwork	

Youth work practitioners and schools also wanted to assess how far the programme might support young people's 'readiness to learn', so alongside skills development, they set out to track:

- Participation and engagement in the youth work sessions.
- Engagement and attendance in school.
- Engagement in new learning experiences in their communities (outwith the scope of the 'We Matter' programme).

Methods used to gather evidence of impact included:

- A short personal assessment survey and accompanying conversation with young people in the early stages of the project, and again as the programme came to a close.
- Direct feedback from young people, gathered informally, week-on-week.
- Observations by the youth work team, week-on-week.
- Reflections on weekly group goals.
- Individual goal sheets to monitor progress (goals set by young people).
- Feedback from school partners at the end of the programme.
- Feedback from delivery partners after they engaged with the group.

Evidence of Impact: Skills Development

- 84% of participating young people became more **CONFIDENT** as a result of taking part in the programme. Most notably, they overcame anxieties about taking part in new learning experiences.
- 88% of young people made progress in **BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS** – with one another and with adults connected to the programme. A number of young people also commented on improved relationships outside of the group, particularly with family members and with school teachers which they attributed to the support they received through 'We Matter'.
- 88% of participating young people made progress in **TEAMWORKING** skills, in particular working effectively with peers outside of their friendship group, and supporting others to engage in group tasks.
- 92% of participating young people made progress in their **COMMUNICATION** skills. In particular (linked to relationship-building above), they are more confident to articulate their thoughts and feelings which, in turn, helps them to regulate their emotions.
- 68% of participating young people became more **RESILIENT** as a result of taking part in the programme. They developed a greater awareness and understanding of the qualities they already have that support resilience. They overcame fears, and they set and followed through on goals they had set themselves.

Young people's perspectives:



"[The youth workers] just get me."

"I feel I can trust adults more."

"I am reaching out to my family."

"I am being more honest with my family."

"[I realise] I am not the only one who feels like this."

"I'm more confident to ask for help if I need it."

"I really didn't want to take part...but I did, and I was actually good at it."

"I am opening up more about my mental health during the group."

"I am expressing thoughts on the future."

"I feel I can get my opinions across."

"I have more respect for my own boundaries."

"I am reaching out for support during our mental health chats."

"I stopped chasing friendships and kept going into school."

"I'm better at calming myself down and telling people before I get angry."

"I feel like I can speak about my problems about people more."

"I can talk to someone before I say something I regret."

Evidence of Impact: Readiness to Learn

Across all four settings:

- 80% of young people participated consistently in the youth work activities offered.
- 64% of young people showed improvement in school engagement and attendance whilst involved in the 'We Matter' programme.
- At least 8 young people are known to have engaged in new learning opportunities in their communities since embarking on the 'We Matter' programme.

School perspectives:



"I have noticed J's confidence grow."

"P has built positive relationships with adults."

"S looks forward to sessions and has loved trying new activities, even though admitting to being nervous to try most at the start."

"M was extremely disengaged within school, however [in the youth work programme] she felt more comfortable. This has led to M becoming more focused on what qualifications she would like to achieve for her chosen career. I have noticed her confidence grow too."

"G and N really enjoy the sessions and get a lot out of it. The programme has successfully engaged them in more positive activities and choices."

Young people's perspectives:

"I have got better at talking to teachers."

"I show up to school more often."

"I stay in classes instead of storming out."

"I have shown more respect to teachers and the youth workers."

"I stayed and listened in English and PE instead of leaving."



Evidence of Impact: The Value of Peer-to-Peer Support

Youth workers observed the value of building safe spaces where young people could support one another, as well as being supported by adults in the group:

"Two young people shared experiences of anxiety and from this they realised that others could feel how they feel and that they can support each other. Youth workers were able to provide tailored support to help them address these issues, but the peer support played a key part." Youth Worker

"After a difficult start, relationships developed. Key to this was young people listening to each other and showing similar levels of vulnerability and recognising they could learn from each other." Youth Worker

Next Steps

Evidence gathered from young people, schools and through youth work observations suggest that the youth work approach employed through the 'We Matter' programme in the 2024-25 school session had a positive impact on young people's wellbeing and skills development. 80% of young people consistently attended the programme. Schools recorded positive impacts on attendance, and importantly, also engagement in learning in more than half of the young people involved. Young people, teachers and youth workers recognised that building trust and relationships to support these changes take time, and would like to see a longer term investment in the approach in the future.

Youth work perspectives:

"Young people were very vocal about not wanting [the group] to end."

"Building positive relationships is something the young people continue to work on. We had lots of discussion about what makes a good friend. With more time, we could support the young people to navigate their friendships."

School perspectives:

"Mixed success for our group – we felt it could have been more impactful if longer."

"We feel this has been a successful intervention and would be keen to run this again next session. Having attended recent transition meetings for our P7, we have a number of care experienced young people transitioning where attendance is already noted as a potential barrier."