

The Juno Project This is Me Programme

Supporting girls with poor mental health to improve their self-esteem and raise aspirations

The Juno Project works with schools across West Sussex to support young women dealing with poor mental health that manifests itself in a number of ways – from poor school attendance to self-harm and eating disorders. The This is Me 12-week programme aimed to give girls aged 14 to 15 the tools to improve their confidence and self-esteem, engage more fully with their education, raise their aspirations, manage their relationships and mental health, and empower them to deal with the challenges they face.



METHODOLOGY

The Juno Project held workshops for groups of up to six girls over 12 weeks at the four West Sussex schools – Oathall Community College, Tanbridge House School, Worthing High School and Oriel High School. Those taking part were identified by the schools as struggling to engage with education due to emotional dysregulation, mental-health challenges, risk-taking behaviours and other complex vulnerabilities.

During the workshops, The Juno Project's facilitators helped the young women explore issues such as recognising harmful patterns in their life, poor self-esteem, setting boundaries and taking responsibility, with the philosophy throughout being to Encourage, Enthuse and Empower. The programme examined three key areas: our relationships with ourselves, our relationships with others, and self-management skills and aspirations, with each school having a slightly different focus depending on the learners' needs and issues.

The Juno Project's team created a calm and safe space for the young women to reflect on their behaviours, attitudes and responses. The girls received personal journals containing exercises and tools that they could use beyond the life of the programme. They also completed written and visual work as part of the group activities, but this hasn't been shared more widely due to the personal nature of the programme's themes.

At the end of the project, the young women met with visitors from local community projects who offered opportunities to get involved in ongoing, positive activities.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Context

According to a 2017 Mental Health Foundation policy briefing, young women today are three times more likely than young men to experience common mental health problems such as anxiety or depression, and rates of self-harm among young women have tripled in the last 10 years. Young women and girls from disadvantaged groups face the greatest risks, and those who have more than one risk factor bear a particularly complex set of challenges.

Duration

November 2022 to March 2023

Funding source

SLN Community Fund

To evaluate their progress, during the first group workshop the participants were asked to self-score on the following five areas, and this benchmarking exercise was repeated over the final two sessions:

- Confidence and self-esteem (how I see myself)
- Aspirations and goals (what I want)
- Relationships and communication (how I relate)
- Responsibility (what I'm willing to accept/change)
- Contribution (what I give to the wider school and community).

The Juno Project's team also ask students and teachers for detailed feedback on their experience of the sessions – what worked and what didn't – so it could make improvements to the programme.

IMPACT

The programme started with 24 young women but, due to family issues, two students had to withdraw. The results were transformative, with the benchmarking data revealing that:

- across all the school groups, 50% to 66% reported improved school attendance
- 54% of the learners reported higher scores for confidence and self-esteem
- 72% recorded higher scores for aspirations and goal-setting
- 50% reported higher scores for relationships and communication
- 68% recorded higher scores for responsibility
- 77% reported a significant improvement in their contribution.

None of the participants recorded a drop in scores but the data reflected no change for some students.

Consistent themes in the anecdotal evidence (see quotes below) included an increased ability to cope with negative emotions and handle difficult situations and relationships. Teachers often commented that the young women were more well-regulated and trusting after the programme, and there were improvements in their behaviour and school attendance. All this is extremely positive in terms of improving their ability to learn and their educational and life outcomes.

Through the programme, The Juno Project has developed deeper relationships with all four schools involved and it will continue to provide programmes for them in the next academic year.

Student feedback:

"You have to be willing to change in order to change. This is Me made me realise I have to care for myself."

"You've helped me accept myself more and learn how to handle toxic relationships. I've opened up about the bullying, spoken to my parents and asked about counselling."

"I respect myself and others more now. I've become more assertive and better at communicating how I feel."

50% to 66%
of school groups
reported improved
school attendance

Teacher feedback:

"After the sessions, the students felt more valued, sought less pastoral support and have been more engaged with their lessons and mock exams." Oathall Community College

"Some students appear to be having fewer friendship issues than previously. The programme helps them understand how to tackle issues in a different way." Tanbridge House School

"This invaluable programme is teaching them the importance of internal discipline and how to care for themselves at the same time." Oriel High School

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a correlation with the longevity and stability of The Juno Project's relationship with each of the schools, as the way in which they support the programme is extremely influential in terms of its success. The Juno Project will work on building positive, trusting relationships with existing and new schools and students.

Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that after forming trusting relationships with the programme's facilitators, participants are more likely to seek further professional help for their mental health concerns in the form of counselling or therapy. Teacher comments also indicated there had been improvements in the number of students seeking help or sorting out their problems independently without support from pastoral staff. This illustrates that different outcomes are indicative of positive progress for individual students.

Quantitative data for the schools suggests that 'confidence and self-esteem' and 'relationships and communication' were the areas where there was less progress was made. More typically, historically, benchmarking for these has demonstrated the greatest impact and the project sees this as the cornerstone of its work. The project will continue to monitor this and adjust the programme accordingly.

Recent evaluation suggests that there has been an overall drop in impact over the last year which corresponds with the increasing difficulty of engaging with schools, and poor pupil behaviour and attendance due to the negative impact of Covid on emotional maturity and mental health among young women. To deal with this, the project has carried out a school-scoping exercise. This will inform its programmes design, content and delivery in the next academic year (2023/24) to include:

- earlier intervention (in Years 8 and 9)
- new themed workshops to address specific areas of concern
- one-to-one interviews at the start and end of the programme, including post-programme action planning.
- flexible delivery to reflect the different academic pressures faced by each year group, for example, group delivery for Y8 and 9, and one-to-one coaching for Yr11 students at strategic points in the year.
- a more holistic approach to working with individual pupils, so that the project can work with them throughout their school life, if appropriate
- shorter timescales for overall delivery, but longer sessions, for example, six weeks of two-hour sessions rather than 12 weeks of one, which fits better with school terms.
- a more holistic approach to school liaison and set-up with a focus on the designated safeguarding lead, headteacher and heads of wellbeing rather than heads of years, and a collaborative approach with a clear rationale around suitability for the programme
- the support of a child, adolescent, and family psychologist expert in overseeing the work
- a greater focus on trauma-informed approaches to content and delivery
- the ability to track student progress over school years, including their post-16 destinations.

“
... participants are
more likely to seek
further professional
help for their mental
health concerns...
”

Sussex Learning Network
University of Brighton
Exion
Crowhurst Road
Brighton
East Sussex
BN1 8AF

Tel: 01273 641091
admin@sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk