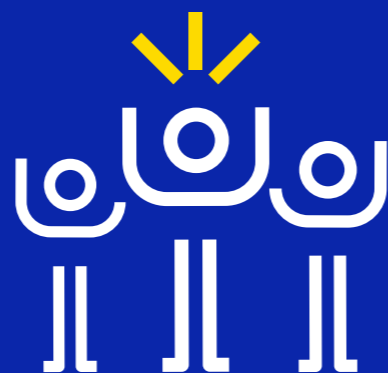


Key Evaluation Findings



Active in Mind Key Evaluation Findings

This document was prepared by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) Research and Insight Team in April 2023. It synthesises evidence from the YST Active in Mind programmes that have been delivered between 2017 and 2022. The aim of this synthesis is to capture and demonstrate the reach and outcomes achieved.



Background and Rationale

Concerns about young people's poor mental wellbeing are increasing. The effects of poor mental health and wellbeing are also well-known and far reaching.

In 2022, almost 1 in 5 children aged 7 to 16 had a probable mental disorder ([NHS Digital](#)) whilst referrals to children's mental health and wellbeing services increased by 39% in 2022 compared with 2021 ([NHS Digital](#)). This also follows a 35% increase in referrals in 2020 compared with 2019 ([NHS Digital](#)).

In turn, almost two thirds of young people report that feeling lonely makes them lose confidence in themselves ([Co-op Foundation, 2022](#)) and 69% of 13–19-year-olds feel lonely 'often' or 'sometimes' ([Mental Health Foundation, 2022](#)).

The cost-of-living crisis has additional impacts such that the gap in happiness between children from the most and the least affluent families has widened ([Sport England, 2022](#)).

Moreover, two thirds of young people believe that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a long-term negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing ([Young Minds, 2021](#)). Similarly, 37% of parents/carers reported that COVID-19 had had a negative (or very negative) impact on the happiness of the children in their household and 53% reported a negative (or very negative) impact on the education of children in their household ([The Children's Society, 2022](#)).

Nonetheless, physical activity can have as good, if not greater, effects than medication alone on reducing depressive symptoms

in children and adolescents ([Recchia et al., 2023](#)). In turn, adolescents spending less time being sedentary are also found to have reduced depressive symptoms ([Kracht, Pochana and Staiano, 2023](#)).

Though 'sport' is contextually different to 'physical activity', participating in sport has been shown to lead to fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety. This may be because participating in sport can not only offer physical activity but also relationships and friendships, which also likely influence mental health and wellbeing. The participation in sport can not only offer physical activity but potential for social relationships and friendships, which also likely influence mental health and wellbeing ([Graupensperger, Sutcliffe and Vella, 2021](#)).



The Solution: Active in Mind

Active in Mind is an Athlete Mentor and peer-led programme, designed around the importance of looking after the body, mind and environment. The aim is to improve mental health and wellbeing issues present in schools through physical activity.¹

The programme engages a minimum of 20 young people per school: 15 young people ('mentees') are in the Nurture Group, and 5 young people ('mentors') are Young Mental Health Champions. As part of the programme, the mentors plan and deliver a '6-week' intervention for the mentees to take part in.

Methodology of the Synthesis

The synthesis combines survey data collected at the beginning of the programme (Baseline Surveys) and at the end of the programme (End of Programme Surveys) from mentors and mentees across academic years 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22. It also combines all data from End of Programme Surveys from Lead Practitioners from across academic years 2018-19 and 2021-22².

Engagement in the Programme

Since the launch of the programme in 2016 until summer 2022:

- **472** schools have participated in Active in Mind
- **4,477** mentors have been trained by Active in Mind
- **16,739** mentees have been supported by Active in Mind
- **692** practitioners have been trained through Active in Mind

Demographic data was available for a total of 9,522 mentees. Of these, 12% were from Ethnically Diverse Communities (EDC). 34% of mentees were female and 22% had special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Demographic data was available for a total of 2,641 mentors. Of these, 16% were from EDC, 54% were female and 14% had SEND.

¹Athlete Mentors help to deliver YST programmes by using their experiences to inspire young people and promote personal development through their journeys and stories.

²Data from lead practitioners was not collected in 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to COVID-19.

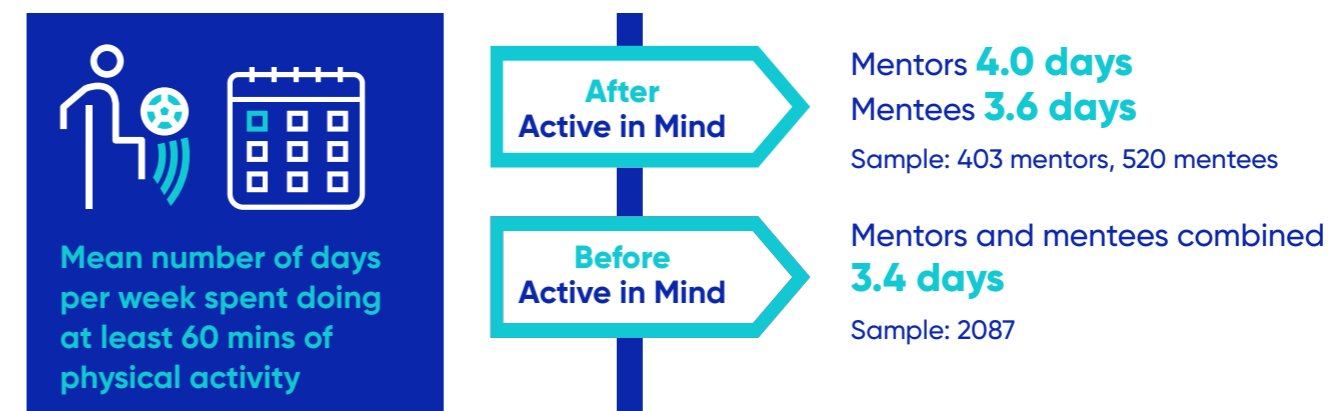
Outcomes – Young People¹

Mentors are provided with a training day, delivered by Athlete Mentors at the start of the programme. The training aims to develop their mentoring skills and develop their ability to promote health and wellbeing to mentees.

Key takeaways – physical activity:

Small increases in physical activity levels were seen for both mentors and mentees, as shown below:

Physical activity levels



In addition:

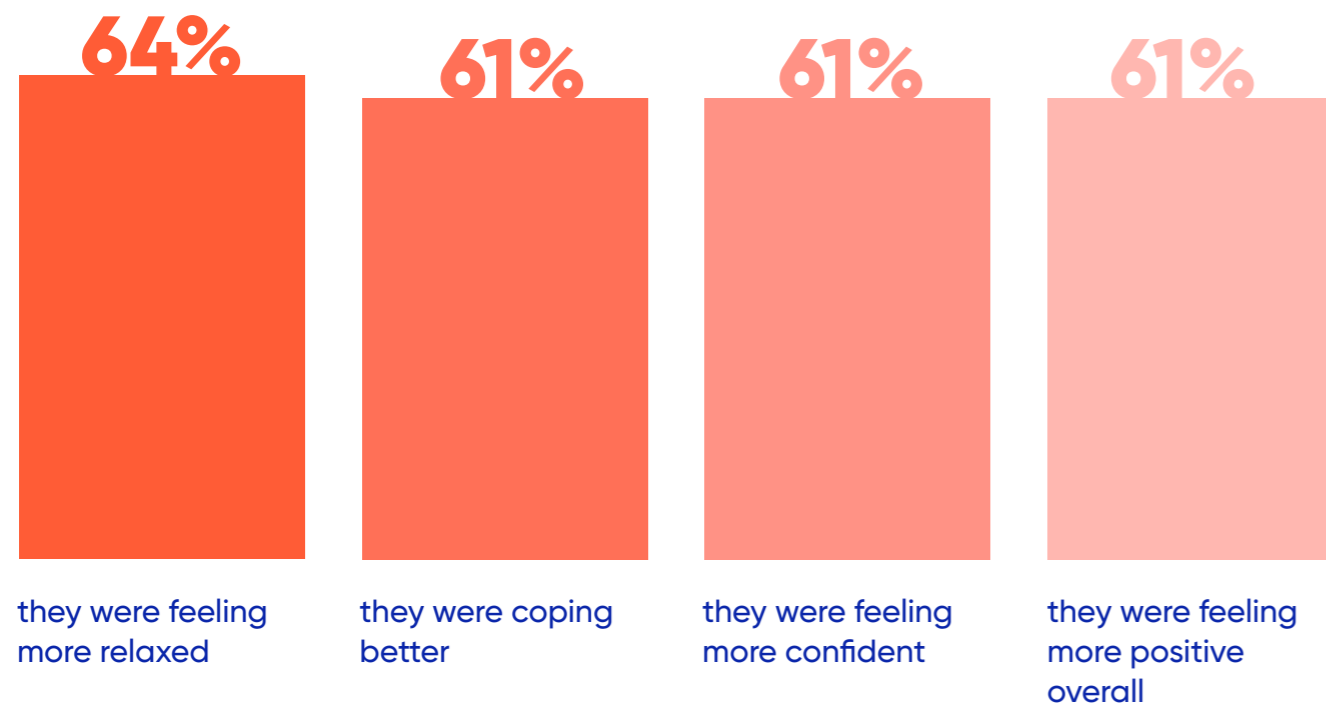
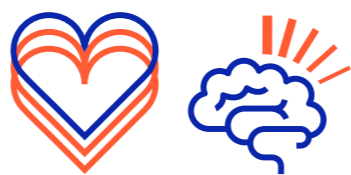
- 65% of mentees and 62% of mentors reported increases to their physical activity levels following the programme.
- The programme increased mentees' physical activity levels more so than mentors' levels, though mentors were still more active than mentees both before the programme and after the programme.
- The programme improved mentors' perceptions that others should be 'doing more physical activity to help them feel better'. Mentors also agreed to this more so than mentees did both before and following the programme.
- Following the programme, 90% of mentors agreed that they feel good when doing physical activity and agreed that physical activity was an important part of their life. Mentors also still agreed this to a significantly greater extent than mentees did both before and following the programme.



Key takeaways – mental health:

Mentees reported improvements to their mental health as a result of the programme, as shown below.

Following the programme, the below proportions of mentees agreed that...



In addition:

- Before the programme began, mentees were lonelier than mentors.
- Small improvements in loneliness were seen following the programme for mentors.

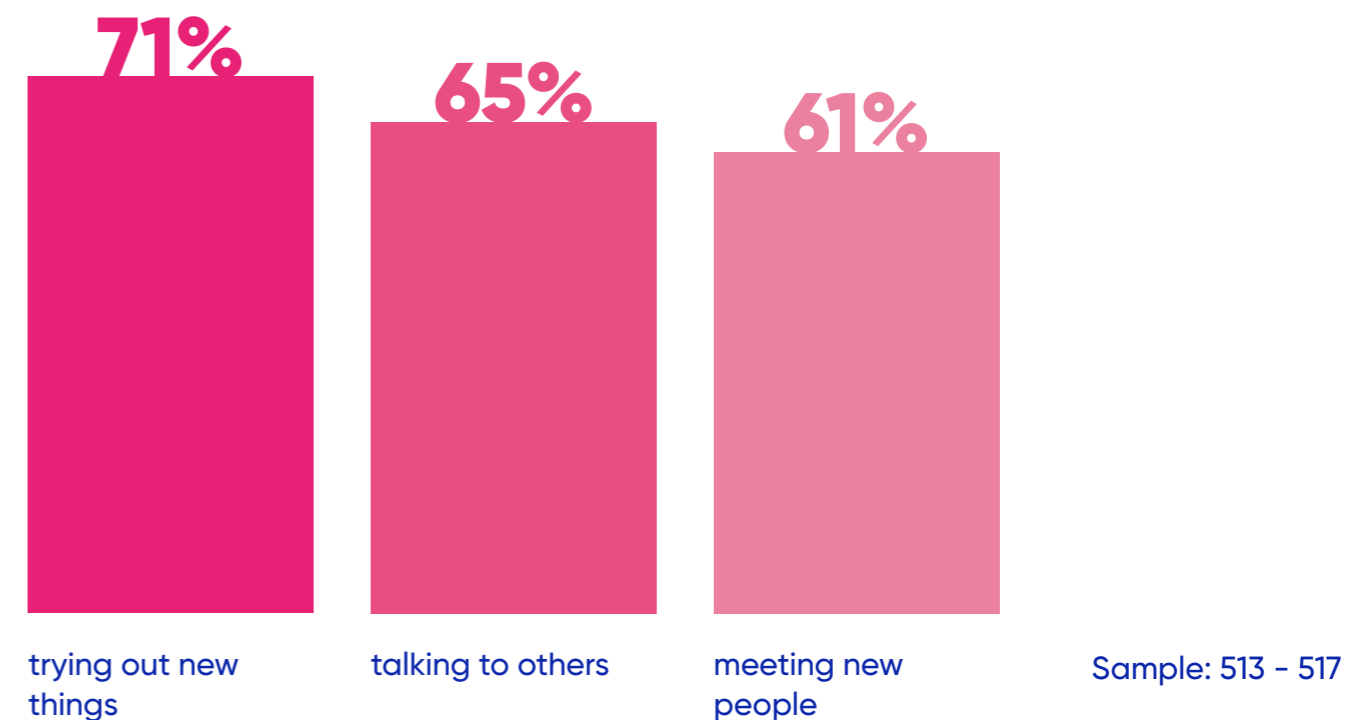
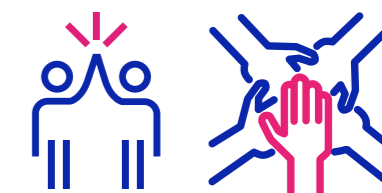
Sample: 515



Key takeaways – social wellbeing:

Improvements to mentees' social wellbeing as a result of the programme are shown below. The quality of relationship mentors had with mentees is also shown.

Following the programme, the below proportions of mentees agreed they were more confident in...



33% of mentors reported that their relationship with mentees was **'great'**



46% thought it was **'good'**



20% thought it was **'okay'**

In addition:

- Both mentors and mentees felt close to other people more often following the programme compared with before the programme, though mentors felt close to people more often than mentees following the programme.
- Mentors' confidence in forming social relationships improved following the programme. Mentors also felt confident in forming social relationships more often than mentees both before and following the programme.
- Over 60% of mentees agreed that following the programme, they were more confident in trying out new things, meeting new people and talking to others.
- 79% of mentors reported their relationship with mentees was either 'great' or 'good'.

Key takeaways – life skills:

Following the programme, most mentors and mentees reported improvements in life skills:



In addition:

- Mentors reported that the programme had improved their self-belief to a greater extent than what mentees reported.
- Over 60% of both mentors and mentees reported improvements in their happiness with relationships with friends/family following the programme.
- 63% of mentors reported improved progress at school following the programme.

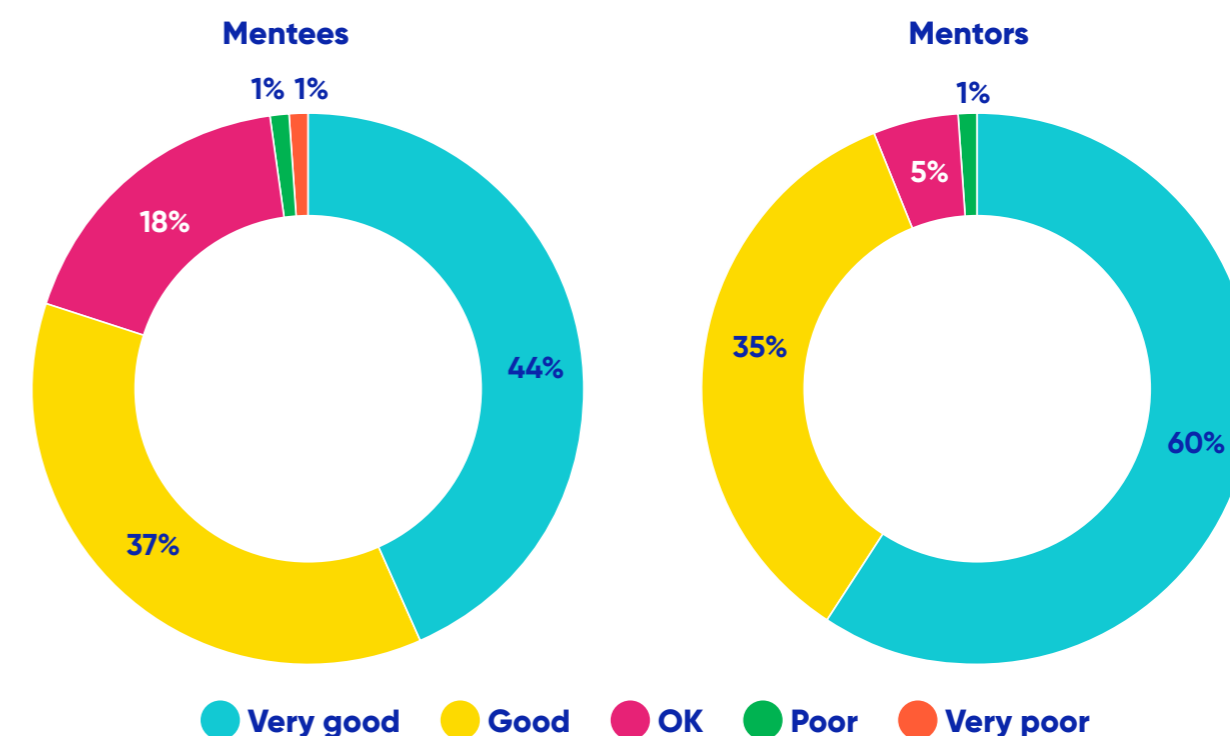
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Key takeaways – lifestyle changes:

- Overall, mentors and mentees believed they would increase their physical activity levels following the programme.
- Following the programme, both mentors and mentees also mentioned they would improve their diet, improve their sleep and relaxation as well as their mindset.
- Mentors also desired to participate in more leadership and volunteering activities following the programme, as well as having increased confidence, empathy and help for others.
- Mentees also mentioned that they would reduce their screen time following the programme and that they had increased empathy and connection with others, as well as being more likely to share problems and thoughts with others.

Young People's Views of the Programme

Both mentors and mentees rated the programme highly, but mentors rated the programme significantly more positively than mentees.

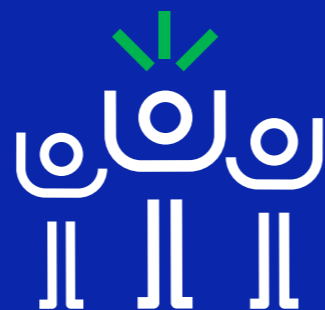


Overall, 94% of mentors thought the programme was either 'good' or 'very good', while 5% thought it was 'OK' and 1% thought it was 'poor'. 81% of mentees thought the programme was either 'good' or 'very good', while 18% thought it was 'OK' and 2% thought it was either 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Mentors' Training and Support

Mentors are provided with a training day, delivered by Athlete Mentors at the start of the programme. The training aims to develop their mentoring skills and develop their ability to promote health and wellbeing to mentees.

95% of mentors found their training either 'very useful' or 'useful'. Overall, 48% of mentors felt 'very supported', 48% felt 'supported' and 4% felt 'not very supported'.



Outcomes - Teachers

Over three quarters of teachers reported that the programme had positive effects on young people's:

- Overall health and wellbeing
- Amount of time spent participating in physical activity and sport
- Ability to achieve their potential
- Behaviour at school

In addition, over 9 in 10 teachers felt their competence, confidence and motivation in their role had improved following the programme.

In a subset of teachers (19), at least 9 in 10 of them reported that the programme improved their own, and their school staff's, awareness of the value of physical activity for mental health. Over three quarters of teachers had made improvements to their delivery as a result of the programme.

Conclusions

Together, these findings demonstrate a wealth of positive outcomes that benefit young people's mental and social wellbeing as well as their physical activity levels and the awareness of its value. It also demonstrates the benefits to teachers in terms of their ability to further support young people's mental health through physical activity.

This data supports the effective use of a physical activity-focused intervention, that also incorporates peer support and offers a whole school approach to sustainable change. It benefits the health and wellbeing of school-aged young people, through both direct benefits on young people as well as indirect effects through the wider school system.

This is particularly pertinent when young people's health and wellbeing are in worrying decline and given the current challenges schools are facing around young people's mental and physical wellbeing.

Success Principles

Overall, this synthesis of data demonstrates the effectiveness of the Active in Mind programme on the mapped outcomes for young people, teachers and schools. As a result of this, alongside the wealth of data evaluating the programme, there are a number of success principles that are likely responsible for the effectiveness of the Active in Mind programme. These are grouped into themes below.

Content

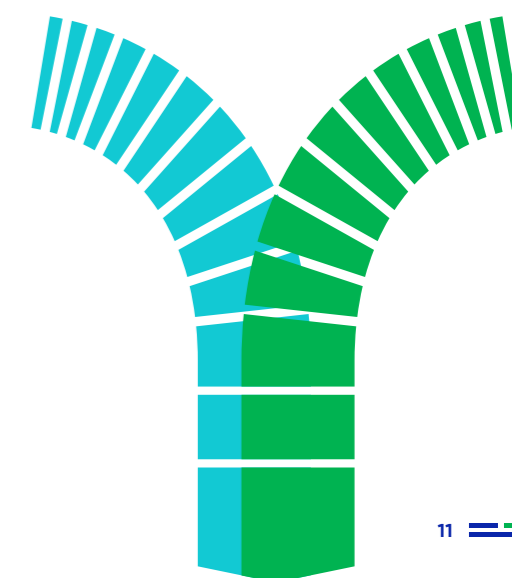
- Raise individual and staff awareness of the value of physical activity in addressing mental health
- Provide a safe environment for young people to talk about, and act on, their mental health challenges
- Use physical activity as a foundation for improving mental health and education outcomes of young people
- Empower young people to create their own prevention strategies
- Improve mental health through changes in body, mind, and environment
- Raise awareness of mental health issues and work to destigmatise poor mental health and mental illness

Networks

- Use deliverers (athlete mentors) with lived experience of poor mental health
- Use of peer mentors to engage, support and deliver the intervention
- Engage wider school staff and foster engagement e.g. Special Education Needs Coordinator, Governors, Pastoral, Senior Leaders
- Encourage family engagement in supporting young people's participation in physical activity and understanding its impact on mental health

Structure

- Provide opportunities to address mental health and wellbeing of students across the whole school and community
- Embed the principles of the intervention in Physical Education curriculum and school sport provision
- Incorporate the programme as a means to positively impact mental health with statutory services e.g. CAMHS, MHSTs
- Align intervention with other mental health programmes e.g. Mental Health First Aid, behaviour and attendance align with other parts of the curriculum e.g. Personal Social, Health and Economic Education, Relationship and Sex Education, Food.





Abbeyfield School - Young People Stories



Age: 13

School: Abbeyfield School

What I like doing... Playing football and video games



Age: 12

School: Abbeyfield School

What I like doing... Cooking



I was looking forward to being involved in the programme because...

I looked forward to certain activities and engaging in more conversations with friends in the morning, which helped prepare me for the day.



I was looking forward to being involved in the programme because...

I get to meet new people and get to try something different. My mum really wanted me to do this as it would be a good experience for me.



As part of this programme, I have done...

I took part in team building 2 mornings each week and got to try different forms of conditioning.



As part of this programme, I have done...

Exercise, activities, team building games and learned how to reflect on the sessions. I liked getting to know the 6th form mentors as they felt like teachers. The 6th formers made good mentors.



Because of the programme I feel...

Feel better during mornings, more awake, enjoy spending time with friends doing the activities.



Because of the programme I feel...

I got to be involved with a new group and I liked meeting during tutor and being out trying something new.



In the future the things I've learnt through this programme will help me to...

Have the confidence to join clubs and make friends.



In the future the things I've learnt through this programme will help me to...

I am more confident and more social. It helped me to understand this. I was able to work without knowing anyone and made new friends.

Hall Park Academy's Story

Active in Mind (2021-22)

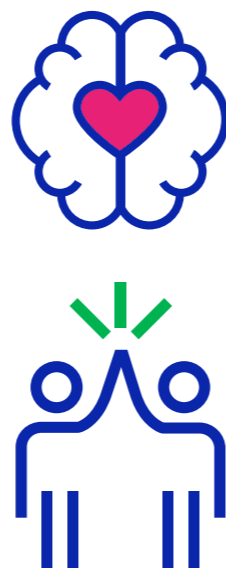


At Hall Park Academy, there were behaviour issues at lunchtime and anxiety-related attendance issues which the school wanted to use the Active in Mind programme to address. Hall Park Academy therefore wanted to be part of the Active in Mind programme to:

- Boost students' confidence
- Encourage students to make friends
- Reduce students' anxiety

As part of the programme, mentors delivered team building activities for mentees over 6 weeks. Teachers noticed the key benefits of the Active in Mind programme being improved attendance in students, as well as improved confidence, reduced anxiety and more friendships formed. The programme also allowed some respite for students during lunchtime, which was likely linked to a reduction in behavioural incidents at lunchtime.

Teachers also saw mentees and mentors socialising together in school outside of the Active in Mind sessions. The lead teacher was also impressed at how students would approach them to check the sessions were going ahead, showing their keenness to participate.



Top tips from Hall Park Academy:

1. Select the right mentors that you know will engage mentees
2. Be organised with planning sessions
3. Hold an induction day where mentors spend the morning planning their sessions before working with the mentees in the afternoon



I enjoy Active in Mind at lunchtime because it gives me something exciting to do.

YEAR 8 MENTEE



Active in Mind has boosted my confidence especially when we did the Ninja Warrior course at school.

YEAR 10 MENTEE

Ponteland High School's Story

Active in Mind (2021-22)



Ponteland High School wanted to promote students' understanding of the importance of being active and develop confidence and self-esteem.

Following their training, the 6 Year 10 mentors organised sessions and led activities to Year 7 mentees (identified as vulnerable) every Tuesday and Friday during form period for 15 minutes. They worked in small groups (1 mentor and 3 mentees) originally, and then gradually increased the group sessions.

The benefits that the teacher noticed included: increased confidence, improved ability to interact with and respect others as well as improved social and communication skills. For the school, it also raised awareness of health and wellbeing in schools, raised the profile of the PE Department and created links to the PE Curriculum.

Even though the programme finished, the students continued with their own ideas, which the teacher believes speaks volumes about the success of the programme. The teacher has also learned that the mentors are in a better position than teachers are to help other young people.

Top tips from Ponteland High School:

1. Engage SLT
2. Share awareness of the programme in assemblies and tutor meetings
3. Weekly emails to remind tutors and students
4. Short but weekly sessions to maintain consistency



I loved doing something different, working with others and building my confidence. I have now started to attend enrichment sessions.

YEAR 7 MENTEE



I have loved the independence and being responsible for giving students a positive experience and feel like I have helped them.

YEAR 10 MENTOR



It has been great to see students take ownership and watch the champions deliver this with enthusiasm. It has really benefited the students who have come down every week and I have been delighted with them all.

HEAD OF PE



Redhill Academy's Story

Active in Mind (2021-22)

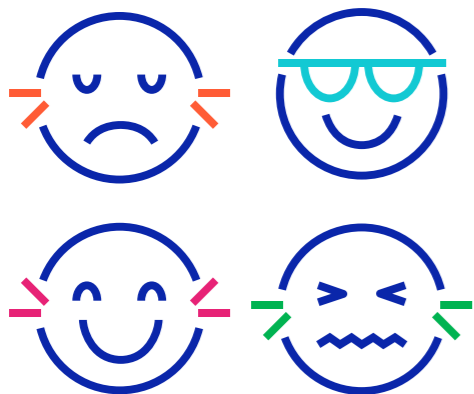


Redhill Academy continued their involvement in the Active in Mind programme to offer support to targeted students, to help them understand the link between physical activity and mental wellbeing.

Heads of Houses and teacher referrals were used to select mentees and mentors were selected through recommendations by tutors, followed by interviews by PE Staff (to ensure commitment to the programme).

Highlights of Redhill Academy's programme included the 'Healthy Habits Relay' and the 'Emoji Game' as they were fun and engaging ways to understand the benefits of healthy habits, as well as sparking productive conversations about feelings, emotions and responses to different situations.

Overall, social interactions between young people on the programme outside of the sessions were increased and the teacher noticed young people's confidence increase. Young people were also given different methods to boost mental wellbeing and develop healthy habits to support lifestyle. The teacher also noticed they became a main point of contact for mentees and acted as a mentor to the mentors.



Shireland Collegiate Academy's Story

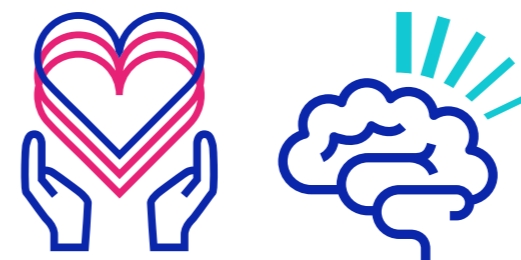
Active in Mind (2021-22)



Shireland Collegiate Academy wanted to provide better support for pupils demonstrating low self-esteem. Selection of these pupils was supported by the school's SEND Department.

Teachers noticed that as pupils were selected, they became more confident as the sessions progressed. In every session that was delivered, the group used an activity card to start, which the teacher believed helped to break the ice. As the sessions progressed further, the teacher noticed pupils enjoying the sessions more and more. The Athlete Mentor visits also helped pupils strengthen their relationships with others.

As a result, mentors became more confident in supporting mentees and a support network was created for some pupils who struggled with social skills. Pupils also began asking when the next sessions would take place, which was great feedback for the teacher knowing that they wanted to have more sessions.



When is our next meeting? I am gutted it was cancelled.

YEAR 8 MENTEE

I have really enjoyed working with the younger pupils.

YEAR 10 MENTOR

It is great to see so many happy faces today.

TEACHER AND CO-ORDINATOR OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Top tips from Shireland Collegiate Academy:

1. Working with SEND/Inclusion to select the correct pupils
2. Be consistent in running the sessions
3. Use a Microsoft Teams page to keep in touch with the group outside of sessions

Overall, I think that being involved and a part of the programme has helped me gain confidence as well as building on previous experiences with leading a small group. Whilst the programme has helped me as a leader, I also believe that the students have benefited from it. With the sessions we did, I saw the group become more engaged and eager to contribute to the conversation topics, opening up about feelings and sharing their opinions. The group also seemed keen to take on board some of the suggestions we made to help them build an active and healthier lifestyle.

YEAR 12 MENTOR

It has been great to see both the mentors and the mentees flourish throughout the programme. The students really took on board all the activities and made a continued effort to incorporate these into their daily routine. I have loved promoting the programme within school.

TEACHER OF PE



Youth Sport Trust

SportPark
Loughborough University
3 Oakwood Drive
Loughborough
Leicestershire LE11 3QF

T **01509 226600**
E **info@youthsporttrust.org**
W **www.youthsporttrust.org**

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