

Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support

Action To Prevent Suicide (CIC)

King Edward VI Community College

June 2021-July 2022



**ACTION
TO PREVENT
SUICIDE**



**Goodwill in Action
To Prevent Suicide CIO**



**KING EDWARD VI
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

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Introduction

This report will focus on evaluating and telling the story of the *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Support* programme which took place at King Edward VI Community College (KEVICC), in Totnes, Devon, from June 2021-July 2022 and was delivered by Action To Prevent Suicide CIC (ATPS).

What is the Natural Helping P2P Support programme?

*“If every young person in the world could do **this programme** it would make such a huge impact on people’s lives”*

— Year 12 Peer Helper

The *Natural Helping P2P Support* programme focuses on the power of peer-to-peer support and learning. The simple premise of the programme centres around the fact that within a school, an informal ‘helping network’ already exists. Students who are experiencing challenges naturally seek out other students—and also adults—whom they trust. This programme taps into, enhances and uses this helping network to share skills, information and supportive resources with the school community.¹ The *Natural Helping P2P Support* programme has been inspired by elements of the *Natural Helpers®* programme, a curriculum initially developed by the Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (C.H.E.F—Seattle, Washington), and a wide range of universal peer-to-peer research.

The *Natural Helping P2P Support* programme begins with a unique selection process that ensures all subgroups of the school are represented by a Peer Helper—an anonymous, school-wide survey asks staff and students to nominate those they’d feel happy approaching when in need. From here, the nominations are reviewed and the Peer Helpers are selected, resulting in a diverse cohort of approximately 20-25 students and 4-6 staff, known as ‘Sponsors’.

Throughout the programme, which begins with a training retreat, they regularly meet to bond, learn new skills and share their experiences. After the initial retreat, the meetings (which, depending on the school, happen weekly or bi-monthly) focus on the themes such as: empathetic listening, compassionate communication, helping skills, suicide prevention, noticing warning signs, making referrals and expressing concern, boundaries and limits, self-care, stereotypes and more. The Peer Helpers are also asked what the main topics of concern are within their school, such as racism or bullying, so the most relevant training can be delivered. The nominees are also encouraged to deliver a series of ‘service projects’ throughout the year to respond to the direct needs of the school community.

¹ JoAnn Sartorius’ Peer-to-Peer Helpers Sponsor Training materials (2016), ‘Peer Helpers’, *Peer-to-Peer Helping Program for Youth Suicide Prevention: Program Information Pack*, pg. 3

Natural Helping P2P Support also responds to the fact that young people are already involved with supporting their peers. The programme gives students what they need in order to support their peers more proficiently, whilst taking better care of themselves. Peer Helpers are trained to be listeners, observers, supporters, referrers, empathetic communicators and advocates—not counsellors. Forming connections with trusted, supportive adults and forming an accessible network of support is at the centre of the programme.

“Being a Peer Helper has helped me in reaching out to a child with suicidal thoughts and it has allowed me to best know how to handle the situation.”

— Year 9 Peer Helper

Key Themes and Guiding Principles

Student voice and leadership are at the heart of the programme, a main focus being the creation of a space where students feel safe enough to express themselves—the students are the one who are deeply embedded in the school environment, they live it and they have the answers. Another core value of the programme is fostering **intergenerational, non-hierarchical** connections in order to create a reciprocal school community which utilises the power of **peer-to-peer relating, learning and collaboration**. Another pillar of *Natural Helping P2P Support* is **learning experientially** through connective, practices, play and embodied forms of education—**listening, helping, self-care and communication skills** are central to the curriculum. Teaching the young people about their own personal limits, boundaries and needs is a cornerstone of the project and it’s made clear from the offset that **students are not counsellors** and do not replace professional therapists—they are showcasing everyone’s ability to **naturally help**. Alongside this, there is a strong emphasis on **referrals** and making the safeguarding process more accessible and integrated—a whole school, **community-minded approach** is key to suicide prevention. **Life-long, transferable skills** are learnt throughout the programme, all of which will continue to positively impact many areas of the participants’s lives.

Natural Helping P2P Support also follows the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach, a researched strategy with roots in preventative care. It centres around youth leadership and empowerment, protective factors, wellbeing education, building sustained and healthy relationships and establishing shared responsibility within the community. The main elements of this approach are²:

- **Asset-based** working which focuses on strengths and support

² Guerra, E. & Apex Education, Inc. (August 2021), ‘Overview: Positive Youth Development (PYD) Approach’, *Peer-to-Peer Helper Program FY 2020-21 Final Report—New Mexico Department of Health—Office of School and Adolescent Health*, pg. 3

- **Place-based**, responding to the needs and assets of the local community
- **Working holistically** and incorporating heart, mind, body and spirit
- Informed by **youth voice** and supportive of all young people, not discriminating by age, gender, culture, risk-level, ability etc.
- **Intergenerational, community-focused, non-hierarchical collaboration** where young people and adults work together as a team
- **Malleable to suit the needs of the school and wider community**—the model can shift to accommodate the budget available, the unique challenges within the community and the ideas of the Peer Helpers

The PYD approach, which is a paradigm shift and cultural change, focuses on seeing young people not only as future citizens, but as today's leaders. A core value is the understanding that, when given the adequate support and opportunities, young people can create positive change³.

Desired Outcomes of the Natural Helping P2P Support Programme⁴

Peer Helpers can:

- Demonstrate helping behaviours
- Make helping contacts during the school year
- Are involved in creating more caring, accepting and healthy school and community environments
- Engage in service projects at their school and in their community
- Recognise warning signs and are competent in responding to peers with problems
- Demonstrate that they recognise warning signs
- Report successful helping interactions with peers
- Connect other students to helping resources
- Recognise helping limitations
- Make helping referrals to Sponsors or other professional resources
- Reduce stigma regarding mental health
- Increase their knowledge about suicide prevention
- Take care of themselves
- Make conscious efforts for healthy choices and self-care
- Use self-helping skills to deal with their own problems and personal stress
- Prevent suicide and suicidal behaviours

³ (Cited paragraph and above bullet points) Guerra, E. & Apex Education, Inc. (August 2021), 'Overview: Positive Youth Development (PYD) Approach', *Peer-to-Peer Helper Program FY 2020-21 Final Report—New Mexico Department of Health—Office of School and Adolescent Health*, pg. 3

⁴ JoAnn Sartorius' Peer-to-Peer Helpers Sponsor Training materials (2016), 'Desired Outcomes for Peer Helpers Youth Suicide Prevention Program', *Peer-to-Peer Helping Program for Youth Suicide Prevention: Program Information Pack*, pg. 4

Benefits of Participating in the Natural Helping P2P Support Programme⁵

The first peer counseling program was created by students at Stanford University in the late sixties. Called "The Bridge", this group was concerned about the drug problem on campus and they attempted to offer their peers "alternatives to drug use." They set up a crisis intervention, information, and counseling center that "devoted itself to the welfare of others." Secondary to this *primary* theme, the following excerpt outlines the gains peer helpers attained from their participation. An important goal of NHs is to facilitate the same gains amongst our members.

Another strong theme of The Bridge has been affiliation—coming together as a group for a common purpose. Through such affiliation comes mutual support, heightened individual confidence, sharing of information, and collective action.

A third theme has been the gaining of a better and clearer sense of self through participation in counselor training. One of the results most commonly reported by counselors has been that they feel a clearer sense of self and a heightening of self-esteem. Through practicing openness and self-disclosure, through the ongoing support of the group, and through fulfilling a valued role in the group, many have found the experience of being a peer counselor an important one in going from youth to adulthood.

A fourth theme within The Bridge is providing meaningful adult roles for young people, something that our society seldom does. A meaningful role is one that involves responsibility for others: the adult is expected to assume such responsibility, whereas the youth generally is not. For those who are interested in careers as teachers, counselors, psychologists, or doctors, or in other professions that involve responsibility for another person, the peer counseling experience offers a chance to fulfill an adult role.

A fifth theme of The Bridge is providing greater social and interpersonal skills. For some, the peer counselor training is "intimacy training" that might be important in their own personal lives. For others, it teaches social skills that might be useful at work. Through training and interaction, peer counselors have achieved a better understanding of individual psychology, group process, and ways of facilitating communication and interaction.

A sixth and last theme in The Bridge is learning adaptive and coping intrapersonal skills. These coping skills, as formulated by White (1974), involve cognitive, intrapsychic mechanisms and behaviors for dealing with both environmental situations and emotional and maturational states. The peer counselors learn these skills from others—by observing, by identifying, by learning precepts, by training, by following examples, and by coaching. Most people learn such skills as a part of everyday life, but in peer counselor training we feel there is a heightening of this "normal" process.

Dorosin, D'Andrea and Jacks. Peer Counseling: Skills, Ethics and Perspectives, A Peer Counseling Training Program: Rationale, Curriculum, and Evaluation. 2nd edition. Eds. Vincent J D'Andrea and Peter Salovey. Ph.D., 1983.

⁵ Image: Dorosin, D'Andrea and Jacks (1983), 'Peer Counseling: Skills, Ethics and Perspectives, A Peer Counseling Training Program: Rationale, Curriculum and Evaluation, 2nd Edition, Eds. Vincent J D'Andrea and Peter Salovey, Ph.D.

The Role of a Peer Helper⁶

- The participants are taught that they are **members of a larger helping team** made up of themselves, adult helping resources and the community as a whole
- Representing a **cross-section of all the subgroups** within the school, they learn to **see beyond social barriers and stereotypes** through working together. They move from **tolerance and acceptance to appreciation of differences**
- Students gain **knowledge of helping resources and how to refer peers** to the appropriate helping adult
- Members will be able to use their skills to **help themselves**
- They will learn to **recognise the limitations** of their ability to help themselves and others
- Participants will become familiar with ways to **take care of their own mental and emotional health while helping others**
- As a group, the Peer helpers will build an **effective team**—trust and understanding will develop among the group, including the adults
- Importantly, these students will **recognise when people need help** and will attain and develop the helping skills needed to aid a friend with a problem. Peer Helpers will regularly practise these skills to become comfortable with using them when the need arises
- Students will learn the essential helping skill of **being an effective listener**
- Members will participate in **service project planning and implementation** that promotes a healthier, accepting and caring school and community environment
- Peer Helpers will **continuously reflect** on their roles as Helpers, their personal and unique qualities that benefit the helping process and their individual importance and part in making the programme a success
- Participants will be provided with **accurate and important information on topics of concern to youth**—they will be able to use this information to better inform their peers
- As a group, these students will **assess the norms in their school and/or community** and determine how their team or an individual can not only reinforce positive norms but discourage negative ones as well

The Role of a Sponsor⁷

- Two Sponsors, who are seen as **trustworthy, enthusiastic and caring**, should be carefully selected to work with the Peer Helper programme—**the quality of the Sponsors will make or break the programme** and should ideally be chosen through the school survey

⁶ Bullet points from JoAnn Sartorius' Peer-to-Peer Helpers Sponsor Training materials (2016), 'The Peer Helper Roles', *Peer-to-Peer Helping Program for Youth Suicide Prevention: Program Information Pack*, pg. 6

⁷ Bullet points from JoAnn Sartorius' Peer-to-Peer Helpers Sponsor Training materials (2016), 'Expectations for Sponsors', *Peer-to-Peer Helping Program for Youth Suicide Prevention: Program Information Pack*, pg. 10

- **Sponsors need to make sure that their staff are behind the programme**, a presentation to staff and administration is important. Continuing PR is essential for success—**your staff need to know who you are, what we do, why we do it and how they can help**. The Peer Helpers will need recognition within the school, their own homes and the wider community—this should happen at the beginning, throughout the year and at the end. **Sponsors should also meet with parents** to explain the programme and explain what their child is going to accomplish
- Sponsors will conduct a minimum of **two on-going training meetings per month**
- To conduct a minimum of two service projects throughout the year and attend, support and facilitate in workshops/booster sessions away from the school site
- Keep an **accurate and complete record** of things such as attendance, activities, anecdotal records of moments where the Peer Helpers exhibit their helping skills, demographics and time spent on the program. They must also make time for students to fill out **surveys, logs and other evaluation measures**
- To gather the past cohort of Peer Helpers to **carefully select the next group**, which will represent the diversity of the school in every way

Action To Prevent Suicide CIC

Action To Prevent Suicide CIC, originally founded by Chukumeka (Chukes) Maxwell in 2017, is a Community Interest Company with a collective vision of “creating a life-affirming world freer from suicide”. We focus on **“Action to Prevent”** by offering a range of prevention, intervention and postvention services such as training, consultancy, briefings, signposting and support. ATPS CIC is not a crisis service, but we endeavour to share powerful, invaluable, life-long skills with a view to support and educate a wide demographic of people. We’re dedicated to reducing the stigma and taboo round suicide whilst creating **suicide safer communities**—the more people are educated about suicide and are confident to ask ‘the question’ (“have you been thinking about suicide?”), the more protected our communities will become. Since the COVID pandemic we have evolved our vision into being a holistic health and well-being organisation working with greater collaboration and cooperation to address the issues that cause members of society to have thoughts of suicide and behavioural actions, which may result in suicide attempts and suicides.

*“Anything that **preserves life** is suicide prevention”*

— Chukes Maxwell

We believe that everyone can benefit from these life-long, transferable skills. Mental health and wellbeing is a universal experience and, sadly, suicide can touch anyone at any time—every 40

seconds, someone dies from suicide⁸ (approximately 700,000 per year). Even if suicide hasn't touched us directly, it's highly likely that we all know someone who has.

Our Values⁹



Instilling life-saving skills throughout communities will protect everyone (adults and children) where they live, work, play, and learn



Creating a community-based approach to suicide prevention will result in a "suicide safer" community



Enabling everyone to play a role will create powerful safety networks to support those in need



Believe that suicide is preventable

The ATPS CIC Natural Helping P2P Support Team

Action To Prevent Suicide (CIC) were blessed to have a wide demographic of people working alongside the *Natural Helping P2P Support* participants. We were lucky to have three Kickstarters working with us from the Kickstart Scheme—a government program which provides funding to create new jobs for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long term unemployment¹⁰—and a Year 2 Social Work placement student from Plymouth University. Our core team was made up of:

- **Chukumeka (Chukes) Maxwell:** Founder and Director of Action To Prevent Suicide CIC
- **Lucy Chenery:** Coordinator and Facilitator
- **Heidi Rose:** Facilitator
- **Jade Metcalfe:** Co-Facilitator and Student Support (Year 2 Social Work placement student, October 2021-April 2022)
- **Yaz Varol:** Co-Facilitator and Student Support (Kickstarter, December 2021-May 2022)
- **Jan Pritchard:** Counsellor
- **Maddie Moss:** Coordination, Design and Support (Kickstarter, March-August 2021)

⁸ Ghebreyesus, Dr T.A. (September 2019), 'Suicide: one person dies every 40 seconds', *World Health Organisation*, <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-09-2019-suicide-one-person-dies-every-40-seconds>

⁹ Image: Action To Prevent Suicide, 'Our Guiding Beliefs', *Action To Prevent Suicide*, <https://www.actiontopreventsuicide.org/>

¹⁰ Department of Work and Pensions (September 2020), 'Kickstart Scheme', *GOV.UK*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme>

- **Aurelia Chilvers:** Coordination, Design and Support (March-August 2021)
- **Sam Kouzarides, Davide Barnett, Allie Barnett, Jonny Rids, Rosie Fellows (On The Hill), Jo Clark (On The Hill):** Co-Facilitators

ATPS CIC deeply values collaboration, partnerships and cross-pollination of skills and, alongside our core *Natural Helping P2P Support* team, we've been lucky enough to receive support, creative input and direction from many invaluable sources.

ATPS CIC's Natural Helping P2P Support Journey

Natural Helping P2P Support's journey began in December 2020 when Chukes connected with JoAnn Sartorius, MSW, Founder of Prevention New Mexico. JoAnn has worked in youth suicide prevention, beginning with the *Natural Helpers®* curriculum, and developed peer-to-peer helping programs over several decades. JoAnn, willingly and generously, shared knowledge and experiences with us, helping us to initially shape the *Natural Helping P2P Support* programme. Initially, we began using the name *Natural Helpers®* but decided to transition to our own name, *Natural Helping P2P Support*, due to the organic development of our own curriculum and way of working as we responded to the culture and needs of the school community whilst pulling on our unique areas of expertise.

The delivery was then made possible by generous donation from a family who lost their father to suicide—they wanted to make a difference and approached Action To Prevent Suicide CIC and Goodwill in Action To Prevent Suicide CIO and, after selling a Banksy painting at Christie's Action House, offered us a percentage of the sale. Their wish was that part of the funds were used to deliver the programme at King Edward VI Community College in Totnes. ATPS also received funding from aspects of the Co-op Foundation #iwill fund, Devon Community Foundation fund and Torbay Crematorium. Chukes then connected with Alan Salt, the KEVICC Headmaster, and Kirsty Matthews, the KEVICC Deputy Head and Safeguarding Lead—with their support, we began setting up the programme.

Natural Helping P2P Support: KEVICC Timeline

The *Natural Helping P2P Support* pilot ran at King Edward VI Community College throughout the 2021/2022 academic year with an introduction towards the end of the 2020/2021 academic year.

Selecting Peer Helpers¹¹

Many students could enjoy or benefit from participating in a peer-to-peer programme. However, programs thrive or fall apart based on member involvement, thus making the selection process a crucial step towards its year-to-year success. Ideally, group members are selected by their peers, but it is the responsibility of the Sponsors to ultimately put together a group of students that will be effective Peer Helpers, work well together and contribute towards the goals of the programme.

- **A Peer Helper is good for the programme**—a Helper must be mature, caring, empathetic, dependable, responsible, shows integrity and has a natural affinity for helping themselves and others
- **A Peer Helper fills the role of caregiver**—the job of members is to provide services, not need services. “This would give him needed self-esteem” is not a good justification for including a member. A healthy young person is one who can benefit the programme
- **A Peer Helper can recognise their personal limits**—Helpers need to be supported by their peers and Sponsors to fulfil the role on top of school commitments. Making the role manageable and the referral process accessible is key

Surveys and Selection

Early June 2021: Surveys were initially sent out to parents and guardians, members of school staff, teachers and governors to decipher whether a peer-to-peer programme would be supported—the majority agreed that *Natural Helping P2P Support* was a positive and necessary addition to the school. Letters were then sent out to all parties explaining the *Natural Helping P2P Support* programme in more depth.

Google Form surveys were also sent out to staff and students via ClassCharts for students (as homework) and via email for staff, this included a section on nominations where everyone was asked to select two students and a member of staff who they feel would fit the role of a Peer Helper. Students also had an assembly explaining the process and briefly introducing the programme. We chose not to include Year 7s in the nomination process due to their recent introduction to the secondary school environment.

Mid June 2021: Kirsty Matthews and the Sponsors sorted through the results and reduced the list down to 17 Peer Helpers and 7 Sponsors (2 x teachers and 6 x members of the Pastoral Team). A ‘parent’s concerns’ video was also sent out to address some of the worries which were fed back from the initial parent/guardian survey from mid June.

¹¹ Image: from JoAnn Sartorius’ Peer-to-Peer Helpers Sponsor Training materials, ‘Selecting Natural Helpers’, *Peer-to-Peer Helping Program for Youth Suicide Prevention: Program Information Pack*, 2016, pg. 11

Mid July 2021: The nominated students and sponsors were then invited to an assembly introducing the programme and the upcoming retreat, scheduled for the 9th-11th September 2021—some students consented to participate then and others reflected over the summer holidays. The ATPS CIC team also offered parent and guardian Q&A sessions via Zoom.

July/August: Over the summer holidays, Lucy, Maddie and Aurelia focused on organising the retreat and designing/ordering the merchandise—hoodies, t-shirts, tote bags, lanyards, badges and stickers—and coordinating how the Peer Helpers would transition back into school and start their ongoing training post-retreat.

The Retreat

9th-11th September 2021: The retreat is the backbone of the programme as it creates a foundation for the unfolding of the year. The nominated students were invited to an assembly which introduced them to the project, what being a Peer Helper entails and the details of the retreat; this served as an informal invitation to the programme, they then had the summer to reflect on their decision.

The retreat was focused on experiential learning, giving the young people an immersive experience of the core elements of the programme: empathetic listening, communication skills, helping skills, self-care and the simplicity of what ‘naturally helping’ feels like. Connecting with nature and engaging with each other outside of the school environment was key for the residential experience. We collaborated with **On The Hill**, a community interest company who focuses on land-based, experiential learning (<https://www.onthehill.camp/>) on a beautiful piece of farm land located outside of Exeter.



On The Hill's main focuses, which align with the core values of *Natural Helping P2P Support*, are purposeful work, connection to the natural world, building community and developing resilience. To engage the young people in experiences of these themes, we spent a lot of time

working as a community. The Peer Helpers, Sponsors and staff did everything together—everyone was treated equally and considered a participant. We spent time cooking, sitting in Council and Listening Partnerships, cleaning, working the land, doing Sit Spots and participating in activities such as drumming, gardening and felting.

Over 2.5 days, we facilitated a number of workshops on nervous system regulation, stress and the adolescent brain and discussion about ORACLES (7 Steps to enable you to have the awareness and ability to respond to someone with thoughts of suicide). We also hosted two workshops, one a 'world café' session (a method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter) and the other an 'action map' session responding to the main challenges faced within KEVICC and exploring our feelings, ideas and responses. The 5 main topics selected were: *academic pressures, future prospects, relationships, depression/anxiety/stress and gossip/rumours.*



Reflection, self-inquiry and storytelling played an important role in the retreat and was central to the ongoing meetings back at school—this was often experienced through Council circles. All participants sit in a circle and are invited by the facilitator, by offering 'prompts' to the group, to share their stories around various topics. Each participant has an equal chance to share their truth and is invited to share when the 'talking piece' reaches them—participants always have the freedom to pass their go if they don't want to speak. Some of the core values of Council include:

- What is spoken in circle stays in circle (confidentiality)
- Speak succinctly, spontaneously and from the heart (communication skills, deep listening and finding individual voice)
- You don't have to speak if you don't want to (boundaries and choice)
- Have respect for others and put judgements aside (kindness and non-judgement)

- Empathetically and actively listen when someone else is speaking (listening skills)

*“**Council** is a way of supporting group interaction, conflict resolution, storytelling, decision-making, co-visioning, and informed action. It provides a tool for building connected, compassionate communities. Its roots are found in many indigenous, earth-cherishing cultures around the world, as well as in classical Greek culture. Increasingly, **Councils** are being used in a variety of settings, such as communities, schools, prisons, churches, groups of healing professionals, families, couples, and businesses. It provides a context for exploring both differences and commonalities without the pressure to come to agreement or even consensus.*

***Council** offers a partnership model for group action, rather than one based on hierarchy or dominance. It evokes a state of devout, non-judgmental listening and authentic sharing that encourages sensitivity, patience, and empathy. In **Council**, we learn to release the egotistical sense of having to “do it all” ourselves, without abdicating our individual responsibility and power to do “what is ours to do” and to step forward or back depending on the needs of the group. Over time, the practice of **Council** gives rise to a sense of “interbeing,” as we come to appreciate that we are ourselves and, at the same time, we are each other.”¹²*



The retreat closed with a celebratory meal including everyone who participated in the retreat with an extended invitation to those in the local community connected with the initiative—school governors, collaborators, ATPS CIC Facilitators and friends. The participants also received hoodies, t-shirts, tote bags, badges and a certificate of completion.

¹² Abridged from Ojai Foundation, ‘What is Council?’, *Circlewise*, <https://waysofcouncil.net/what-is-council/>

Goals of the Retreat¹³

- Create **pride in selection to the programme**, the unique gifts they each bring to this event and to the **mission of the programme**
- Help each member of the group **to look within to discover who they are** and find their best self—advance awareness of personal attitudes, behaviours and values
- Inspire participants to make **positive changes in their lives**
- Connect the group to each other and the adults—**to bond as a team**
- Model and provide a **safe place for a deep level of human, authentic dialogue, connection and sharing**—instil value in trusting relationships
- Promote **tolerance, acceptance and understanding of all people**—to value differences
- Bring to the foreground the **serious problem of youth suicide**, provide information, training and present **safe space for discussion** needed around their own experiences
- **Teach participants helping skills** for responding appropriately to friends in need, to recognise their limits in helping situations and to make sure troubled friends receive the help that's needed
- Show students the **value of self-care**
- **Motivate the group to do service work**, helping create a more healthy, accepting and caring school environment
- **Supply fun and rest** interwoven with **significant learning and meaningful experiences**



¹³ **Image:** from JoAnn Sartorius' Peer-to-Peer Helpers Sponsor Training materials (2016), 'Peer-to-Peer Retreat Goals', *Peer-to-Peer Helping Program for Youth Suicide Prevention: Retreat and Program Planning Pack*, pg. 8

An excerpt from the Retreat Welcome Pack¹⁴

Celebrating You

You've been nominated for this programme because your peers have recognised your compassion, kindness and empathy—your sensitivity is one of your greatest strengths! These are qualities you already have, and the *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* programme is here to give you a space to acknowledge, celebrate and enhance them.

During your time here, we will be exploring some key areas:

- **Self care and self awareness**—listening to your individual needs and learning to prioritise your own wellbeing
- **Team bonding**—building the Peer Helper community, engaging in activities and getting to know each other
- **Listening skills**—learning about active listening and exploring how to cultivate a non-judgemental, empathetic and safe space
- **Communication skills**—practicing compassionate communication, authentically sharing with others and learning how express your boundaries
- **Helping skills**—learning about suicide prevention, your support network and how to appropriately respond
- **Planning**—designing how the programme will operate at KEVICC

Alongside our experiential activities, there will be time to relax, digest and have space—we appreciate that we all have different needs, and will always respect your choices.



¹⁴ Image: Action To Prevent Suicide (September 2021), 'Celebrating You', *Retreat Welcome Pack*, pg. 3

Meetings and Workshops

On return from the retreat, the Peer Helpers met in their year group clusters—Year 8/9, Year 10/11 and Year 12/13—every other week on Week B of the school timetable. These took place from 10:50am-11:40am during the student's tutor time and morning break in Room 39. There were approximately six Peer Helpers in each group with an average of two facilitators. These meetings were used for continued training, Council and team connection. The main topics we covered over the course of the academic year were:

- Agreements for creating safety, confidentiality and working together as a community¹⁵
- Active/empathetic listening
- Words that heal and words that hurt (Nonviolent Communication)
- Mindfulness
- Helping skills
- Approaching those who need help and asking questions
- Boundaries and putting ourselves first
- Self-care
- Embodiment and nervous system regulation
- Personal support and resourcing
- Noticing warning signs in others
- The referral process
- Self-love, self-esteem and self-worth
- Our unique gifts, talents and individual offerings
- Suicide prevention training (a continuation of ORACLES with Chukumeka Maxwell)
- Art therapy (with art therapist and storyteller Samantha Rose)
- Mystery questions (inviting the young people to anonymously share their questions about life, worries or curiosities)







These topics were explored experientially through sharing in Council, Listening Partnerships, activities, videos, role-play and workshops. Games snacks and time for connection were also key to these gatherings, creating an oasis in the middle of the school day. After every half term, we also spent time reflecting and visioning into the experience of *Natural Helping P2P Support* so far, what was working and what needed to shift. Some of the models we wove into the curriculum were:

P.L.A.C.E¹⁶: The P.A.C.E model of Playfulness/Acceptance/Curiosity/Empathy, developed by Dr Dan Hughes, is central to the way we choose to interact with young people—ATPS CIC chose to add an 'L' for 'Love', making it P.L.A.C.E. This method aims to find safety, regulation and connection when engaging with vulnerable young people, proving to be invaluable when working with helping skills and peer-to-peer relating—ATPS CIC believes that when young people feel safe, they flourish.

¹⁵Action To Prevent Suicide (September 2021), 'Natural Helpers Agreement', *Natural Helpers Agreement*

¹⁶ Image: Young, J., 'P.A.C.E', Twitter: @Juliet_Young1, https://twitter.com/Juliet_Young1

“**P.A.C.E** is an approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes, an American psychologist who works with traumatised children. **P.A.C.E** stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. These principles help to promote the experience of safety in your interactions with young people. Children need to feel that you have connected with the emotional part of their brain before they can engage the thoughtful, articulate, problem solving areas.”¹⁷

	Playfulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playfulness in interactions can diffuse conflict and promote connection e.g. Maintaining a relaxed 'lightness' and can involve making a joke (though this has to be done carefully) 	
	Acceptance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting needs and emotions that drive behaviour (not necessarily the behaviour) without judgement 	
	Curiosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being curious to where a behaviour has come from (in your head or out loud.) 	
	Empathy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Really connecting with how they are feeling and showing compassion 	

P.A.C.E is an approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes aimed at supporting recovery from developmental trauma. However, it can be a useful attitude to adopt with anyone who is emotionally dysregulated

Illustrated by Julie Gray

5 Ways to Wellbeing¹⁸: Throughout the programme, we've focused on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing as a guiding principle—a principle which ATPS CIC uses throughout all its work with young people.

- **Connect:** the young people consistently practised authentic connection with each other, their environment and the wider aims of the programme. Learning how to empathetically and actively listen, compassionately communicate and regulate their nervous systems, the young people increased their capacity to connect. Practices such as Listening Partnerships,

¹⁷ Riviere, Dr H. and Evered, Dr R., 'What Does Work', *Using PACE in School*, <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/children-and-families/PACEforteachers.pdf>, pg. 5

¹⁸ Image: Wellbeinginfo, '5 Ways to Wellbeing', *Wellbeinginfo*, <https://wellbeinginfo.org/self-help/wellbeing/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

Council and Sit Spots aimed to increase the young people's connection with themselves and the world around them—we gave a lot of time to connection with our feelings, our histories and personal stories. Recognising our support network and those we can connect with during times of struggle is a cornerstone of the programme.

- **Be active:** movement was woven into the programme in the form of 'embodiment drop-ins' before every meeting, working with the land on the retreat, walking to workshops at The Glade, education about the importance of physical activity and the benefits of actively engaging in life and exploration through Council of how to include movement in self-care.
- **Take notice:** mindfulness, sensory awareness, inquiry and meditation were present within every connection with the young people—regular guided meditation and embodiment practices created opportunities for them to notice what's 'here'. The participants were encouraged to orient themselves to their surroundings and engage their senses in each meeting, even through the snacks they were eating or the aromatherapy spray that was used in the space.
- **Keep learning:** further training on suicide prevention, video training, role-plays, activities, Council and workshops (such as art therapy) encouraged the Peer Helpers to experientially learn new skills in a range of ways. There was also a focus on reflection—"reflective practice has huge benefits in increasing self-awareness, which is a key component of emotional intelligence, and in developing a better understanding of others. Reflective practice can also help you to develop creative thinking skills, and encourages active engagement in work processes"¹⁹.
- **Give:** the Peer Helpers regularly had the opportunity to give their time, attention, care, presence and listening ears to their peers, their surroundings and themselves. We also explored sharing our gifts and personal talents with the world, how to find our voices and how to express our boundaries—learning to recognise our limits in giving, knowing that we must give to ourselves in order to give to others.



¹⁹ Image: SkillsYouNeed, 'Reflective Practice: The Benefits of Reflective Practice', *SkillsYouNeed*, <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/reflective-practice.html#:~:text=Reflective%20practice%20has%20huge%20benefits,active%20engagement%20in%20work%20processes>

Peer Helper Agreement

- I agree to strive for kindness, care and honesty in all my actions
- I agree to be compassionate to myself and others
- I understand that whilst I have a responsibility to my peers, my own wellbeing is equally important. I therefore acknowledge the need to develop healthy boundaries and recognise my limits as a Peer Helper
- I understand the importance of asking for help when I am struggling and will reach out to my support network when necessary
- I will participate in the ongoing training sessions, meetings and projects that are there to help me develop my peer helping skills and support my own wellbeing
- I will maintain confidentiality and will not gossip or inappropriately disclose any students personal information that is shared with me. However, I understand the importance of communicating with the team if I have safety concerns
- I understand the importance of referrals and agree to refer any necessary situations to the support available
- I agree to acknowledge my prejudices and personal fears to help create a safe, non-judgmental environment
- When away from school on *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* business, I will represent the programme and my school community appropriately and respectfully
- If I'm feeling unhappy as a Peer Helper, I will communicate with the team and they'll fully support me in adjusting the role to meet my needs or exiting the programme

Alongside the bi-monthly 'cluster' meetings, we endeavoured to meet as an entire team in 'all years' meetings. We often visited The Glade (<https://thewoodland.co/the-glade/>), a space in the North Woods on Dartington Estate (above right), to offer the Natural Helpers a change of scenery and some time in nature. Five of these sessions took place between February-July 2021:

- **January 18th:** an after-school session including games, food and a Council reflecting on the first term of Natural Helpers®
- **February 16th:** a trip to The Glade focusing on nature connection and managing stress

²⁰ Image: Action To Prevent Suicide CIC (September 2021), 'Peer Helper Agreement'

- **April 29th:** a Tree of Life workshop, a narrative therapy session which focuses on our personal history, experiences and resilience
- **June 24th:** a trip to The Glade with storyteller Phil Barber exploring public speaking, communication and confidence with a focus on closing the year
- **July 11th:** a closing circle to end the year



We also decided to run two Support Circles where the Peer Helpers had the chance to invite a student they felt needed nourishment and support—these happened in the final term of the academic year.

*“It makes you all feel as one, **you sit as a collective**, as one kind of consciousness. Holding the talking piece feels grounding and I know it’s my time to talk and that I’m being listened to.”*

— Year 10 Peer Helper on Council

Reflective Practice and Evaluation

After each half term, the participants took part in reflection through sitting in Council circles. In the final half term of the academic year, Peer Helpers and Sponsors filled in feedback forms to track their experience and how things may or may not have changed since they began.

*“**I no longer see suicide as taboo** and after finding out people close to me had taken their own life I don’t know how well I would have taken the information without this support.”*

— Year 13 Peer Helper



Extras

Alongside working with the Peer Helpers, we engaged in other interventions throughout the school including 1-1 with certain students which needed extra support—which came to our attention through referrals—and also with students in the Personalised Learning Centre (PLC). Jade (Social Work student) and Yasemin (Kickstart) took on the pastoral role of Student Wellbeing Support and supported students with their work, emotional regulation and welfare whilst at school.

Through connecting with On The Hill, one of the Sponsors—who works closely with the SEND Team—applied for a separate batch of funding to create a Peace Garden, inspired by their experience of the retreat. This wasn't directly connected with *Natural Helping P2P Support*, but was born from our collaboration and will continue to be a therapeutic space which Peer Helpers, staff and students can use.



Simplified Timeline

When?	What?
May/June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos to parents, students and teachers Handed out nomination surveys to school
July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collated survey results and selected student participants and sponsors Assembly for nominated Peer Helpers and Q&A sessions for parents Shared relevant information ahead of retreat (consent forms etc)
July/August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned Retreat Designed merchandise
September 2021	<i>6th: start of autumn term</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8th: Retreat assembly 9th-11th: Retreat 27th/28th/29th: meetings (signing agreements)
October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11th/12th/13th: meetings <i>21st-1st November: autumn half term</i>
November 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st/2nd/3rd: meetings 15th/16th/17th: meetings 29th/30th/1st: meetings
December 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13th/14th/15th: meetings <i>17th-5th January: Christmas holidays</i>
January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10th/11th/12: meetings January 18th: after school meeting 24th/25th/26th: meetings
February 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7th/8th/9th: meetings 16th: workshop at The Glade <i>18th-28th: spring half term</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28th/1st/2nd: meetings
March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14th/15th/16th: meetings 28th/29th/30th: meetings
April 2022	<i>8th-25th: Easter holidays</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25th/26th/27th: meetings 29th: Tree of Life workshop
May 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9th/10th/11th: meetings 17th: support circle (by invitation) 23rd/24th/25th: meetings <i>27th-6th June: summer half term</i>

June 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13th/14th/15th: meetings • 20th: support circle • 24th: storytelling workshop at The Glade • 27th/28th/29th: meetings (evaluations)
July 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11th: meeting (evaluations) 20th: end of term

Budget (June 2021-June 2022)

Retreat			
Expense	How many people?	What did this include?	Cost
Venue hire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 x KEVICC students (11 participated) • 5 x KEVICC staff • 4 x ATPS CIC staff Total attendees = 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire of On The Hill (camping facilities, workshop spaces and the land) — Facilitation (Jo Clark and Rosie Fellows) • Food for (3 x lunches, 2 x dinners, 2 x breakfasts and snacks) 	£5,000
KEVICC staff overtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Teachers • 3 x Teaching Assistants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers (40 hours each at £25 per hour) • Teaching Assistants (40 hours at between £11.50 - £14 per hour) 	£2,550
ATPS facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heidi Rose • Sam Kouzarides • Jan Pritchard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.5 days facilitation each 	£900 (£300 each)
			Total = £8,450

Costing Breakdown

Merchandise

Item	How many?	Where from?	Image	Cost
Hoodies and t-shirts	33 x hoodies 28 x t-shirts	https://clothingyourway.co.uk/		Hoodies = £781 T-shirts = £388
Lanyards and tote bags	50 x tote bags 30 x lanyards	https://www.totalmerchandise.co.uk/		Lanyards = £125 Tote bags = £160
Badges	30	https://www.stickermule.com/		£23
Stickers	60	https://stickersandthat.co.uk/		£43
				Total = £1,520

Staffing		
Role	Who/cost	Total
Coordinator	Lucy Chenery = £18,000 (£15 per hour, 100 hours per month)	£18,000
ATPS facilitators	Jan Pritchard = £960 Heidi Rose = £6,620 Sam Kouzardides = £120 Jonny Rids = £80	£7,780
External facilitators	Samantha Rose (Art Therapist) = £300 (£100 per session, 3 x sessions) Phil Barber (Storyteller) = £200 Neville Connor and Maja Lelandais (Tree of Life) = £350 (1 x workshop)	£850
		Total = £26,630

Meetings/Workshops		
Expense	Details	Cost

Snacks for regular meetings	Fruit, biscuits, crisps, juice and flowers	£310 (approximately £17 per block of meetings, 18 blocks)
Snacks for workshops	Fruit, biscuits, savoury snacks, crisps, juice and flowers	£60 (£30 per workshop, 2 x workshops)
Venue hire	Trips to The Glade, Dartington	£150 (£50 per ½ day, 3 x trips)
Misc	Gifts for staff, printing, equipment	£120
Total = £640		

Initial budget = £20,000
Overall total = £37,240

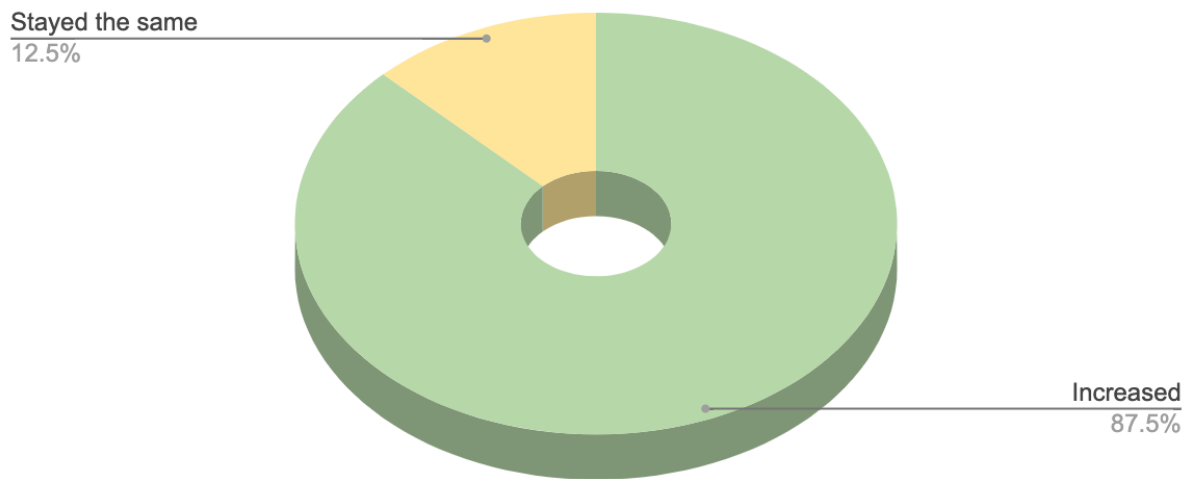
We believe that the budget for *Natural Helping P2P Support* is malleable and, after completing our pilot year, are aware of ways to minimise costs—within reason and in conjunction with thorough consultation, we’re confident that this programme can be tailored to meet the needs, funds and resources available to any given school.

Feedback

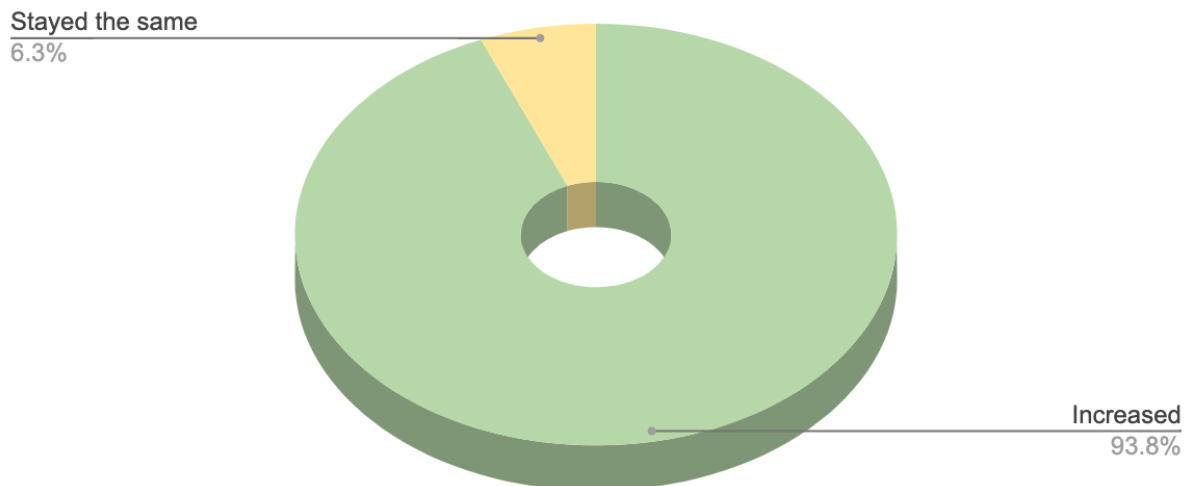
Evaluation is a key part of the *Natural Helping P2P Support* and has been completed with a view to further develop the programme and continuously improve it year to year. The data and testimonials below have been collected from 16 of the 17 Peer Helpers (between 12-18 years old).

Peer Helper Feedback

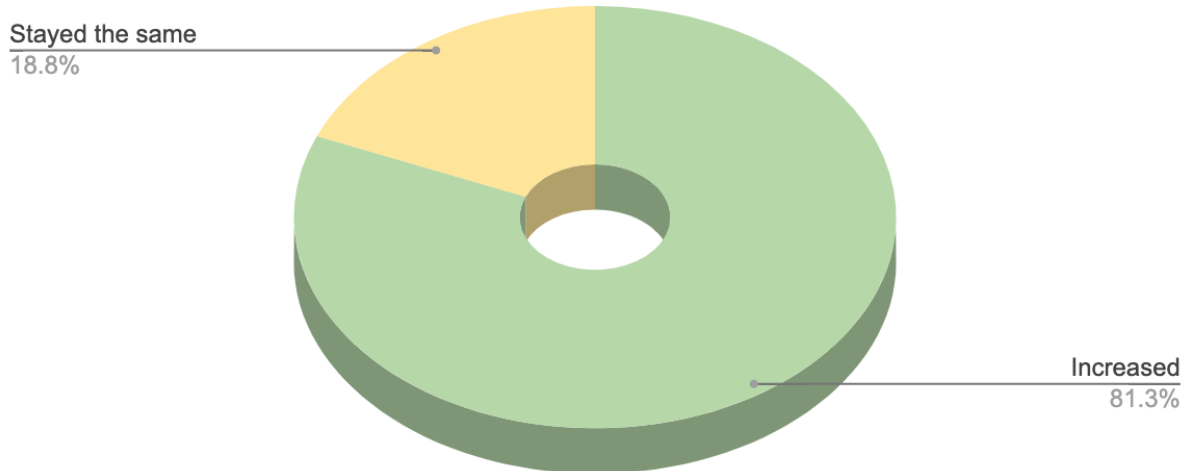
Has your ability to support yourself increased, decreased or stayed the same?



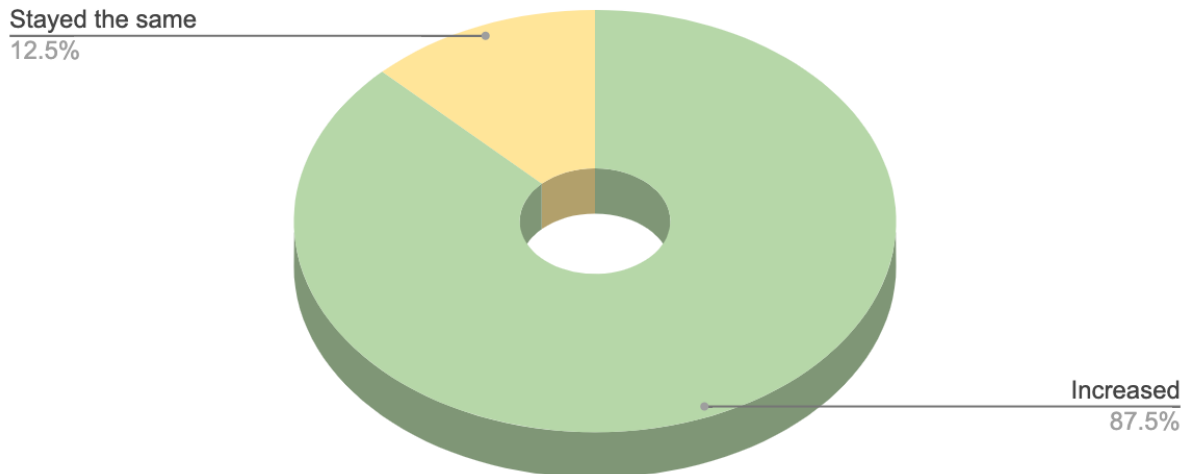
Has your ability to support others increased, decreased or stayed the same?



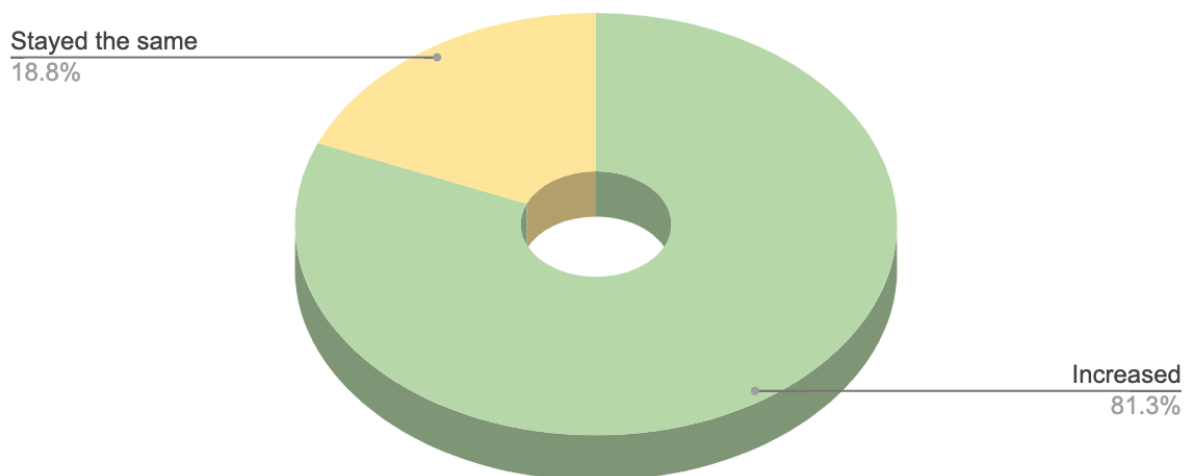
Has your ability to approach students, beyond your circle of friends, who may be in need increased, decreased or stayed the same?



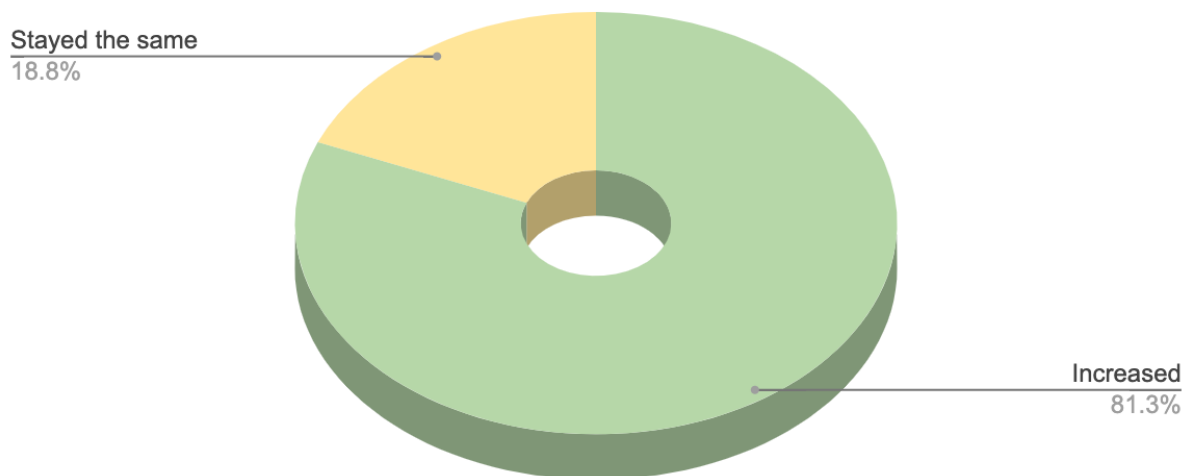
Has your ability to recognise warning signs of suicide increased, decreased or stayed the same?



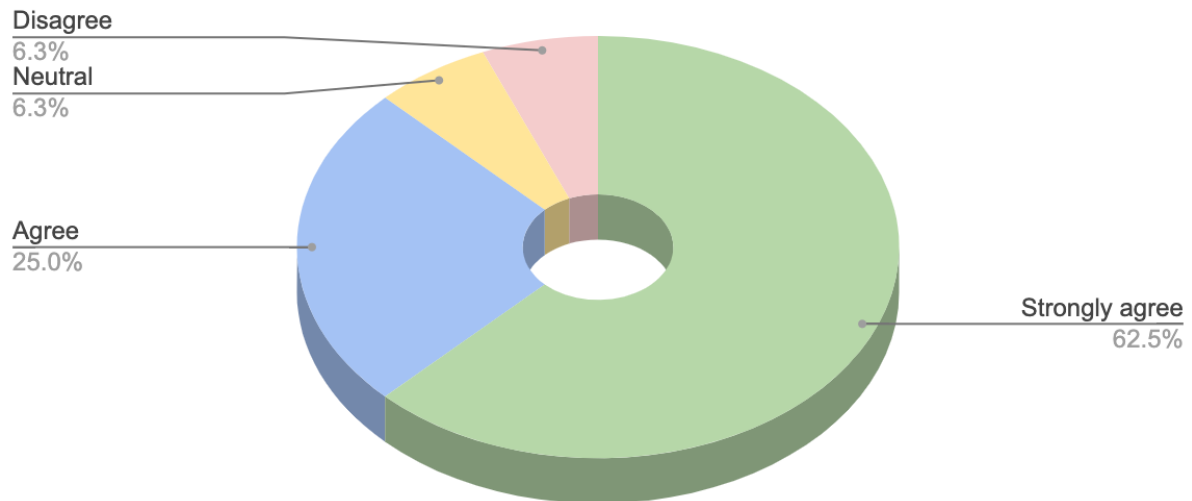
Has your ability to approach teachers at school—if you have a problem—increased, decreased or stayed the same?



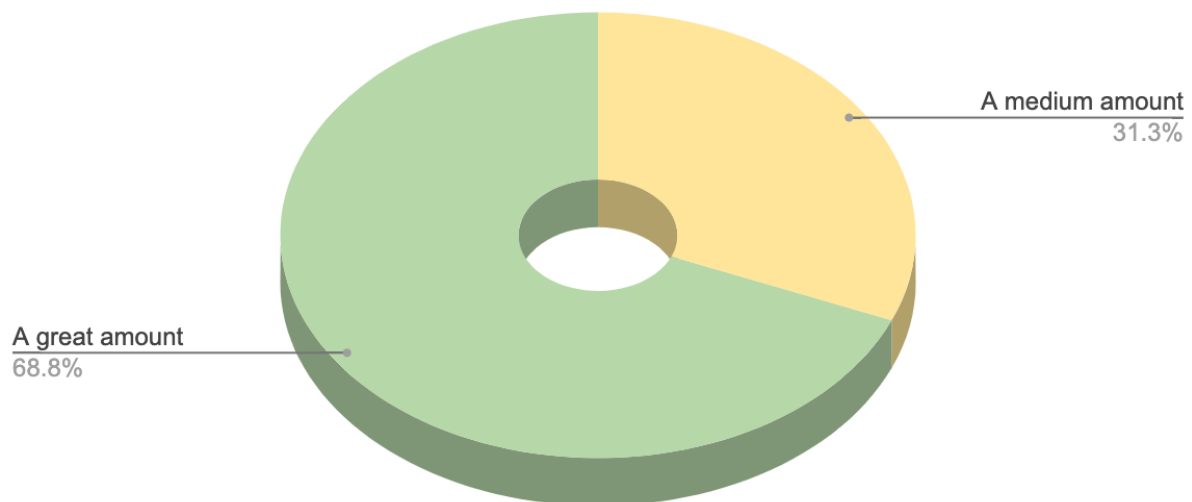
Has your ability to connect other students to helping resources increased, decreased or stayed the same?



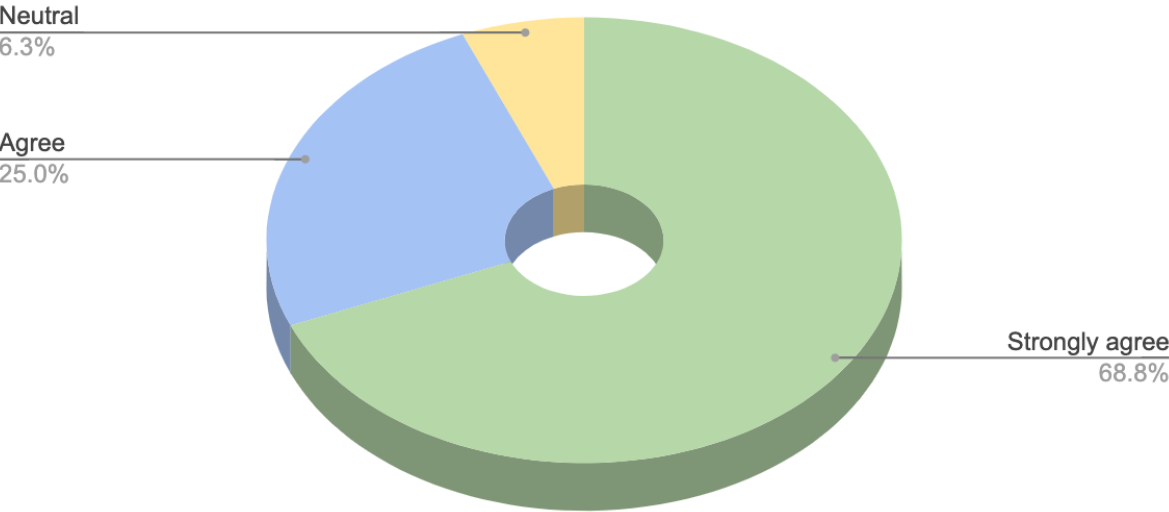
My ability to listen empathetically, non-judgementally and kindly has grown



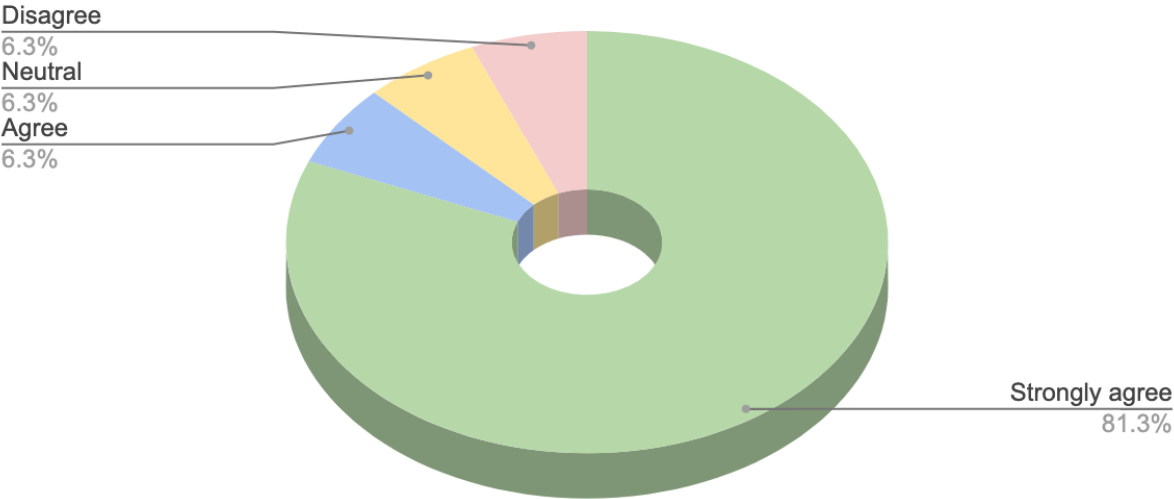
How much have you learnt about suicide prevention?



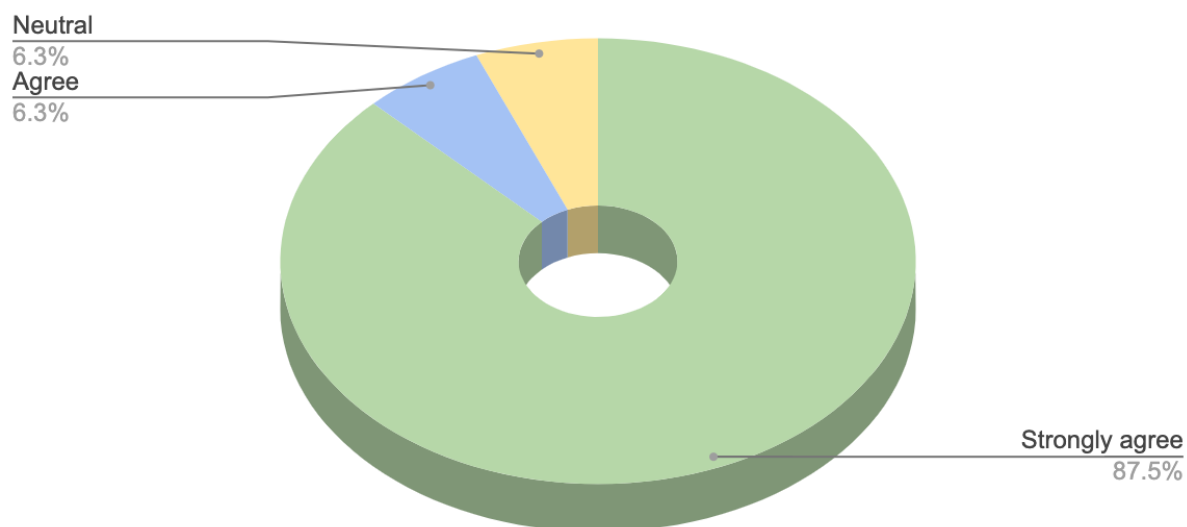
The programme provides a network that I can go to for help and support?



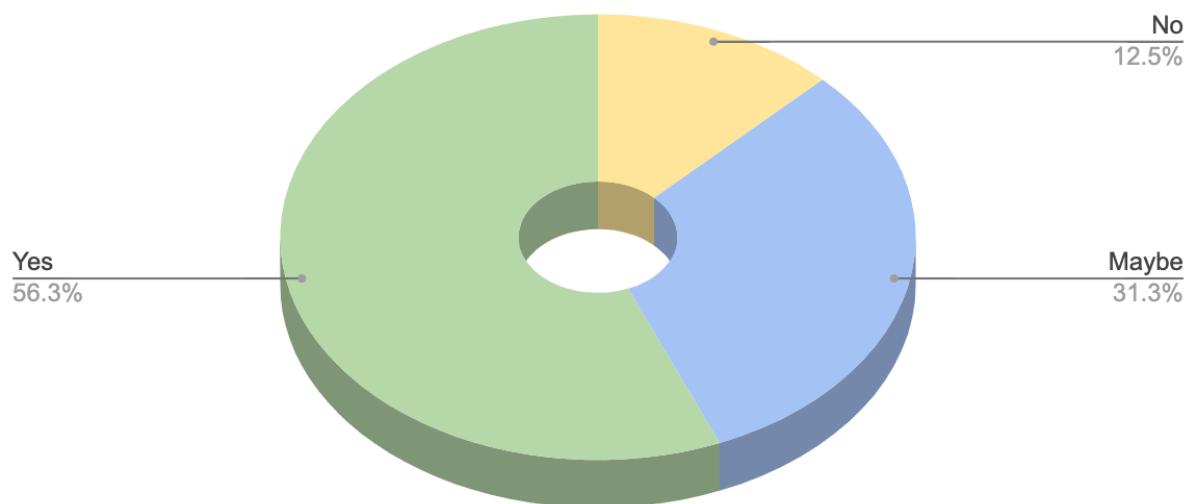
Through being a Peer Helper I have found or strengthened meaningful and supportive friendships



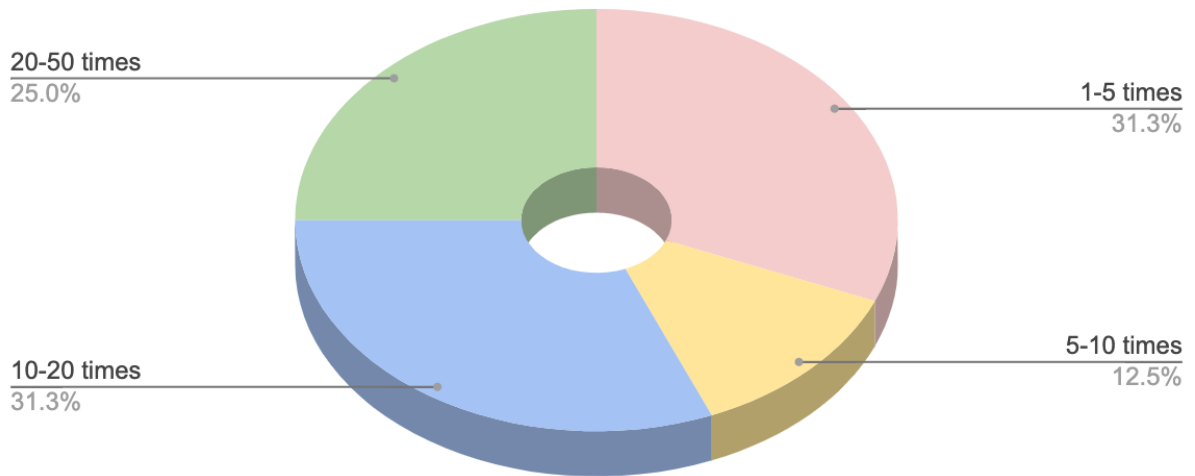
The retreat is an important part of the programme



Would you like to continue as a Peer Helper next year?



On average, how many times (per month) did you help someone using the skills and experience you've gained from being a Peer Helper?



Peer Helper Testimonials

*“**Being a Peer Helper has made me more open to opportunities.** When I first heard about it I was a bit worried about opening up, it was a completely new experience and it felt daunting, but I turned up at my first session and felt so supported, held and listened to. **It’s definitely made me become a better listener, more understanding and has helped me hear myself—that’s hugely impacted my life.** I just loved the bi-weekly meetings so much and I left feeling refreshed, Council also made me feel very heard. **If every young person in the world could do this programme it would make such a huge impact on people’s lives,** especially people going through exams. Having this scheme has grounded me whilst doing my A Levels and having the space to talk has helped me listen to myself and see what matters above everything else. Thank you!”*

— Year 12 Peer Helper

*“Through the programme I have **not only learnt skills that give me strength and consistent support,** but I have **built many friendships that have become a loving and beautiful gift to my life.** I have also learnt **how to connect and support others verbally***

and physically. Another aspect to my time as a Peer Helper is **comfort and the release of stress and toxins in my life**. Overall it's been a massive and supportive aspect of my life."

— Year 13 Peer Helper

"When something bad happens you don't think 'oh god, how is this going to affect me', the first thing you think about is 'I've got the support network from the Peer Helpers and that's going to help me'. The reason we have the support network is because of Council and everyone being so open. I also feel like when I'm in Council I've built up confidence and feel ready to share experiences I wouldn't have shared otherwise—that's vital in healing. Having Council there means you open up the bottle inside you and you don't get judged for it—**it makes me feel safe**."

— Year 9 Peer Helper

"Being a Peer Helper... how unexpected it's been but how big of a pay-off it's had. **It's been 100% worth it and you fully learn how to appreciate not only yourself but other people more and learn that we're far more similar than we are different when we undergo problems—that's a very key thing I've taken away**. Being introduced to Council, a space where you're all willingly there to bond, connect and empathise with each other, all for a common purpose, has been really eye-opening. **It's helped me become more compassionate towards others and also to listen**. Beforehand I didn't think listening was a big thing, now I realise it's a skill and I'm really happy I've been introduced to this style of communication—it's something I'm going to always hold with me."

— Year 12 Peer Helper

"Listening to each other helps and can help people feel better about things once they've spoken to someone—**being truly listened to is really helpful**. Being a Peer Helper **has helped me help myself**, if I'm nervous or feeling anxious or pushing someone away it helps me be kind."

— Year 8 Peer Helper

"Being a Peer Helper has given me a lot of opportunities around what I want to do in the future—it's educated me on further programmes I could go on to. **It's been really**

helpful in my day to day interactions as lots of my friends struggle quite a lot with their mental health so it's good to understand things from many points of view and get actual helpful tips on suicide prevention rather than just trying to wing it. I find the outings really useful and love the whole vibe of the programme—it's an open space where you can totally be yourself and can tell people whatever you want to tell them or just keep things to yourself. It's not something you experience everyday, I'm really grateful for the opportunity to sit down with you guys."

— Year 11 Peer Helper

"I've listened to lots of people and heard how they feel, I like it because I can feel their emotions as well. Being listened to is very nice because people feel appreciated and safer. **When listening it's important to respect, be quiet, not to judge and care about their feelings.** Going in a circle and listening to others just makes me feel happy!"

— Year 8 Peer Helper

"The retreat helped me break down stereotypes between year groups and helped me gain more social skills, it's easier to talk to other years and there is less of a wall around them. I've learnt that it's sometimes better to just listen to someone rather than process their person's emotions, feel things and give them advice. I think I'm more wide-spoken now and don't stay in my shell as much, I express my own opinion now. **The meetings make me feel known and seen, like I'm not alone**—everyone is going through the same stuff. It helps me break down the idea that something is a really big problem when actually it's not. I think having this program next year would be really good especially for younger years and for Year 11s whilst they're managing exams. It helped me, I wasn't stressed about my exams as I had people to talk to and it was dedicated to that. **The atmosphere felt natural, it felt like I was meant to be there, everyone felt together.** This programme is really insightful and it helps you understand the world in a deeper sense."

— Year 11 Peer Helper

"It's been really nice, **I can just be myself and I don't have to hide behind anything**—we can talk about whatever we need and can feel what we need to feel without feeling like we're being judged by others as it's such a small, close community. I've learnt a lot and met lots of new people, each one of the sessions has been a new learning curve—

learning about suicide prevention was incredible! **I've learned how to really listen, I've never done it in person like this before and it's going to stay with me for life.**

— Year 10 Peer Helper

“Being a Peer Helper has changed the way I view my own mental health and the mental health of my peers. **I've become more empathetic and find it easier to relate to other people's hardships.** In my eyes, the primary focus of the programme is about improving the mental health of its members—**some people may think you're becoming a counsellor for other students, but this is far from the truth.** I've enjoyed meeting the ATPS team as they've all created a safe and trusting environment. **By improving my own mental health, I feel more inclined to talk to others and hold a space for them to speak about themselves.**”

— Year 13 Peer Helper

“**Being a Peer Helper helps you build a community that you wouldn't have otherwise, that community is vital for anyone who needs it.** When you have all these people, who've all had different experiences and they're all free to comfortably share how they feel, before you know it... everyone's got confidence to not only speak about their experiences but to speak to others too. Because one person has space to speak, it opens up everyone else. You start to subconsciously learn how to navigate situations... when you're having a conversation with someone, where you'd normally freak out and have no idea how to reply, but **because of being a Peer Helper and having this community, and people who have taught us the groundwork, we're in a position where we can help others rather than immediately panic.** For example, I've learnt how to show people breathing techniques, how art can help you realise things and I know more about suicide prevention and the signs to look out for.”

— Year 9 Peer Helper

“It feels good to listen and not be the victim. I feel respected and it's lovely to have a space to go to. **There's never been a bad session, every session I get the feeling that I'm listening to someone and it's maybe helping them to express themselves—I can be the person who listens.**”

— Year 10 Peer Helper

*“It’s a really supportive atmosphere and it really helps to learn about how other people see the world. **It’s been a really invaluable experience and I’ve learnt so much about how people work—it’s simplified social interactions into something I can cope with.** It’s nice to have a dedicated time in Council—when you light the candle it starts and it ends when you blow it out. There’s no pressure and you know that anything said in the circle will stay there—**it’s a really trusting place to be.** It’s really nice to have a time to talk, everyone normally fights for attention and it’s nice to have undivided attention when you’re holding the talking piece. **I can get guidance and be listened to when I share things that I’d normally hide.**”*

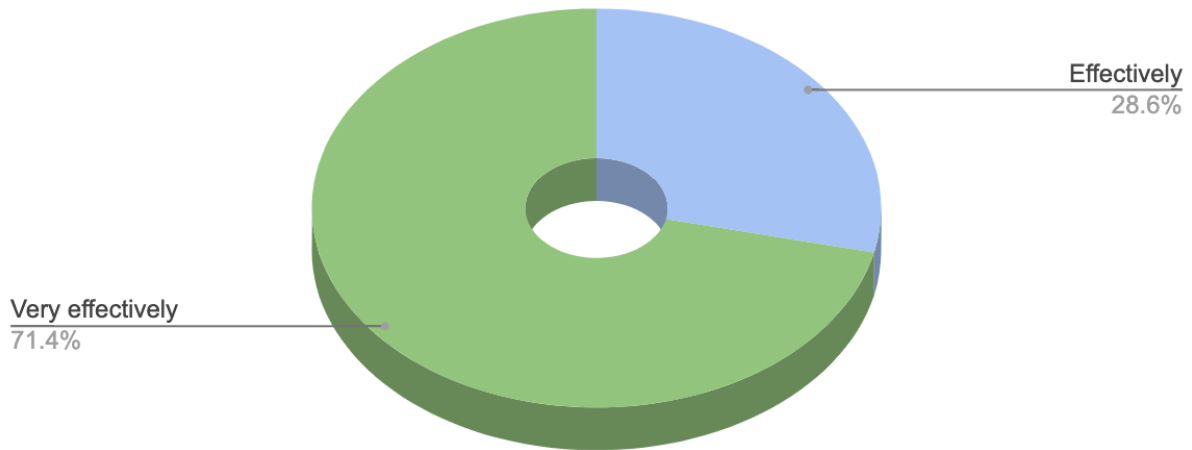
— Year 11 Peer Helper



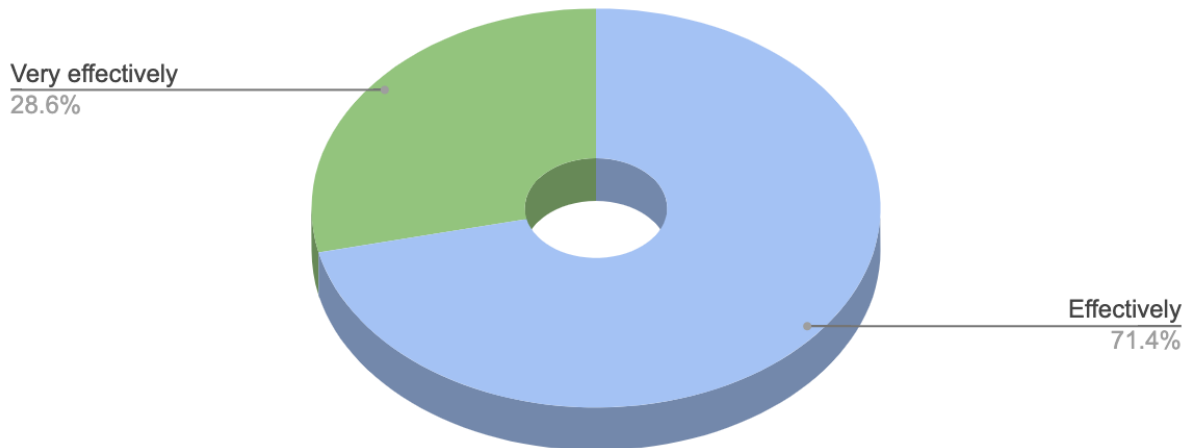
Sponsor and Staff Feedback

The feedback below has been collected from 5 of the 7 Sponsors, a ATPS CIC Kickstarter and an ATPS CIC placement student.

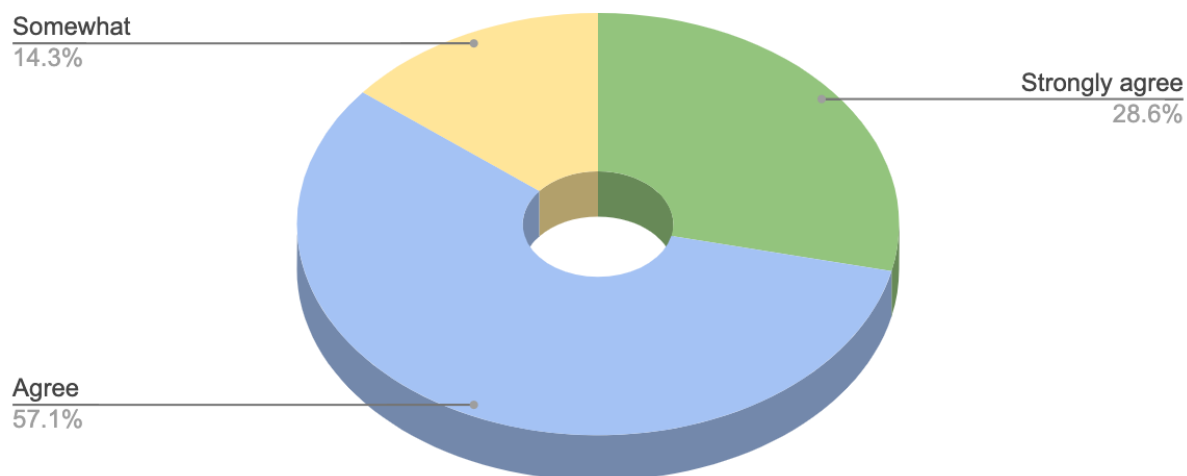
How effectively do you feel the Peer Helpers use the helping/listening/communication skills they've learnt to support themselves?



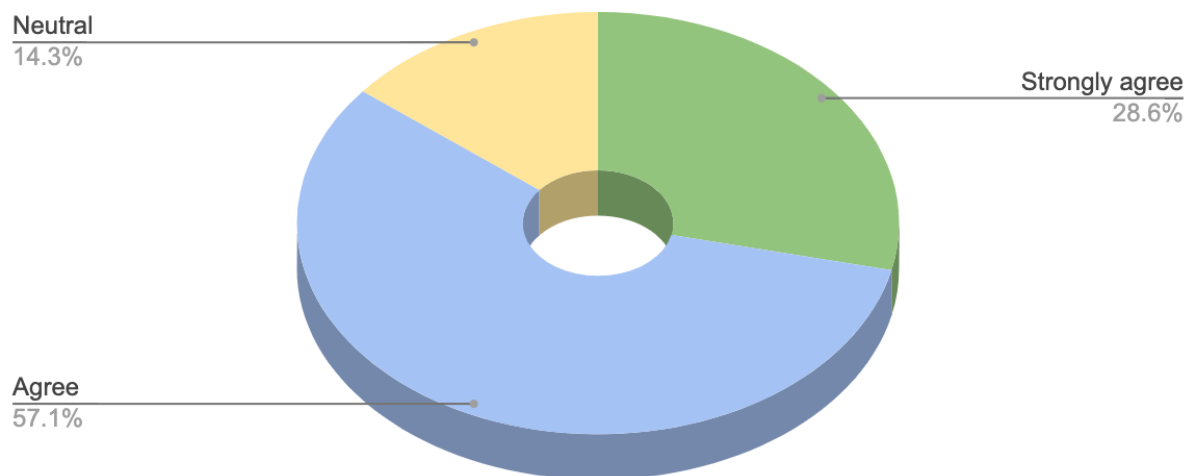
How effectively do you feel the Peer Helpers use the helping/listening/communication skills they've learnt to support themselves?



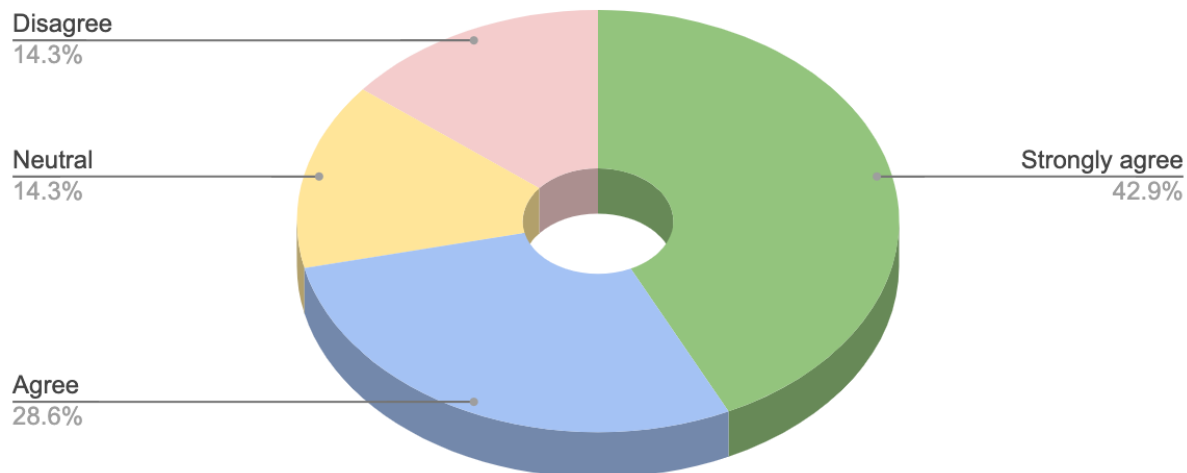
The Peer Helpers recognise when a problem is more than they should handle themselves



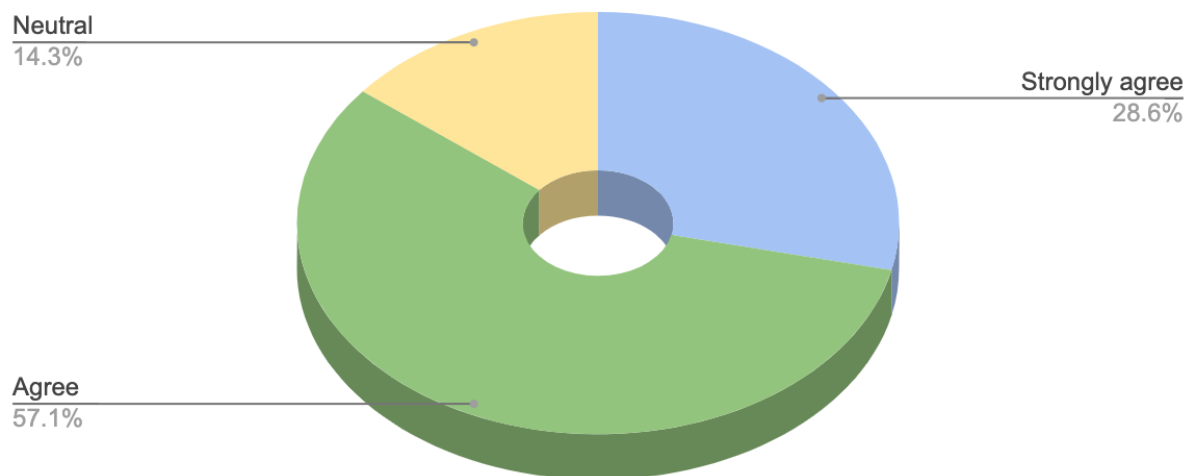
The Peer Helpers' ability to consciously make healthy choices and practice appropriate self-care has increased



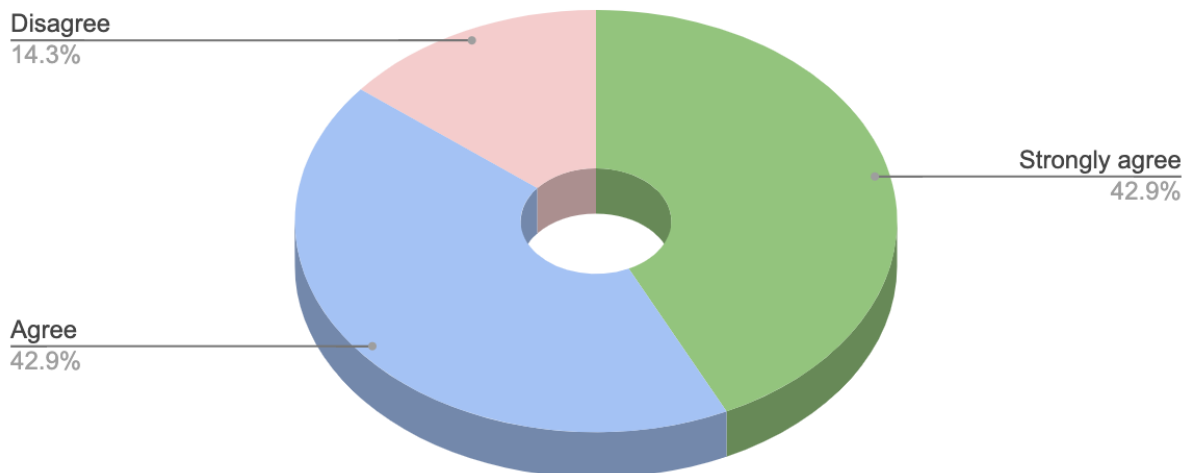
The Peer Helpers' knowledge of how to refer their peers to appropriate helping resources has increased



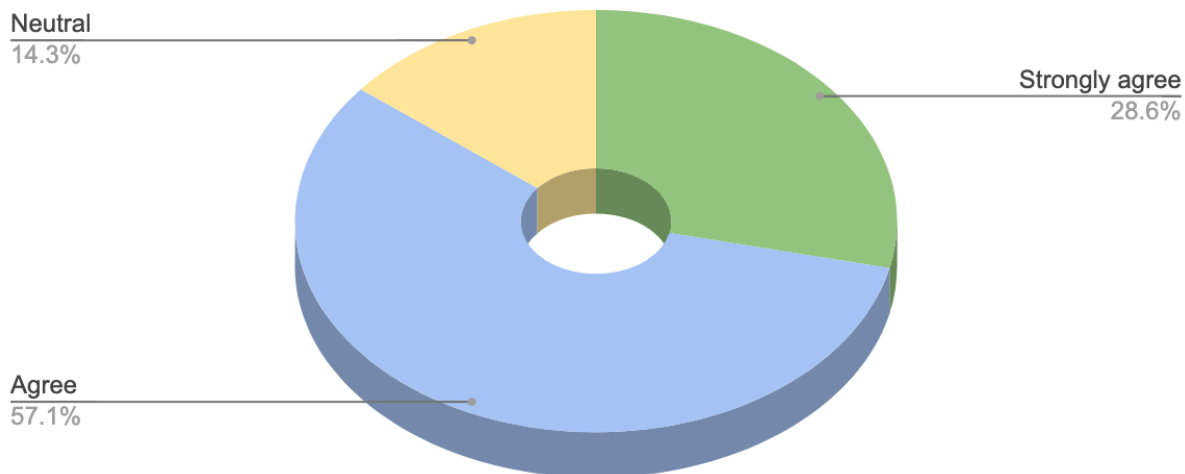
The Peer Helpers have increased their leadership skills, confidence and social skills



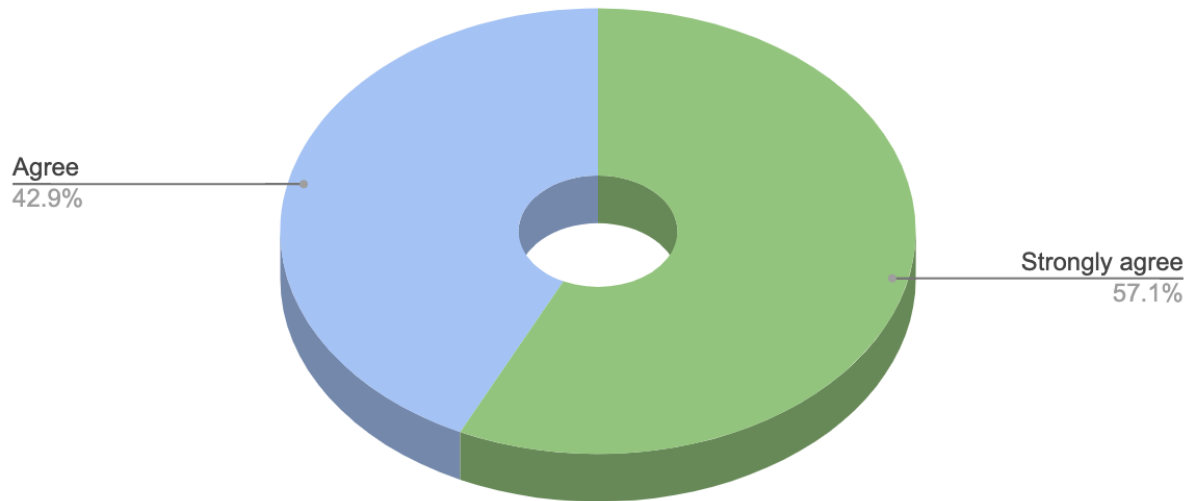
The Peer Helpers have helped create a more caring, accepting and healthy school environment



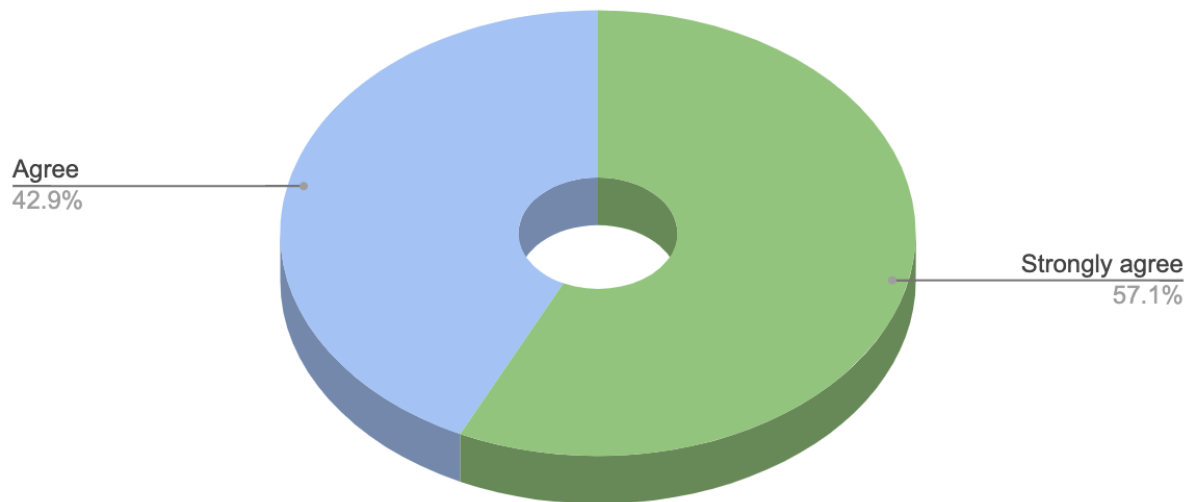
The Peer Helpers have increased their knowledge about suicide prevention and can recognise warning signs



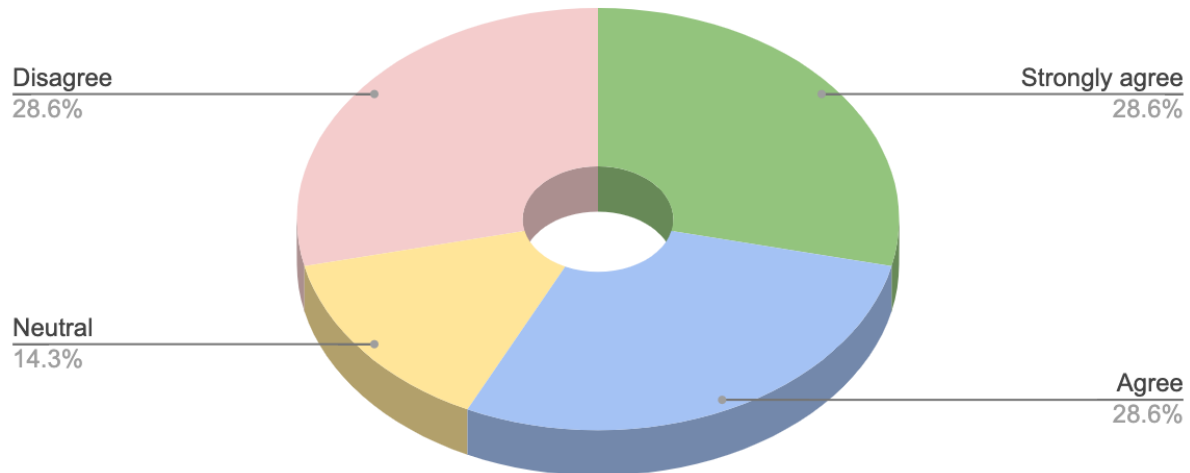
The retreat is important and helps bonds Peer Helpers to the programme



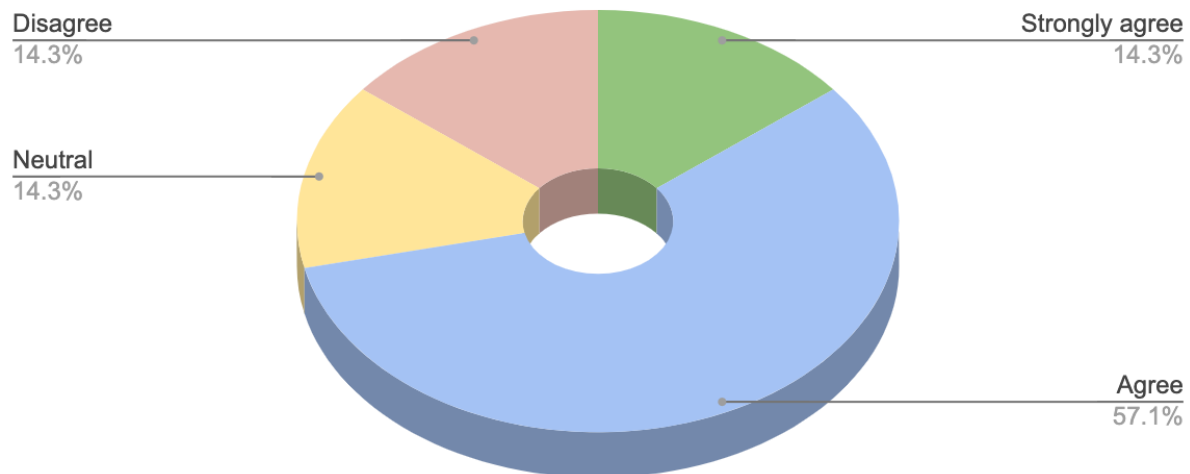
The retreat is important and helps bonds Peer Helpers to the programme



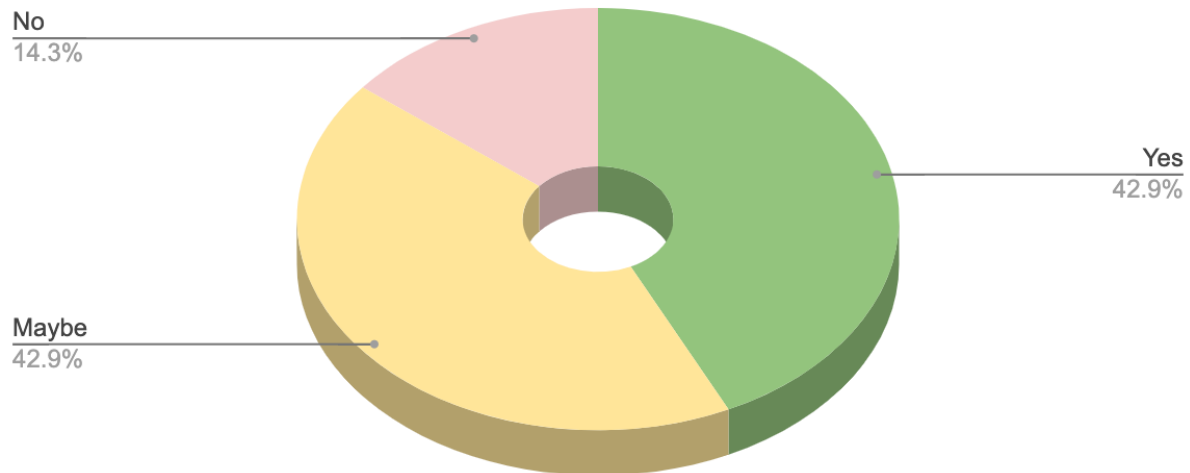
My own skills and awareness about youth suicide and related problems increased as a result of my participation in the programme



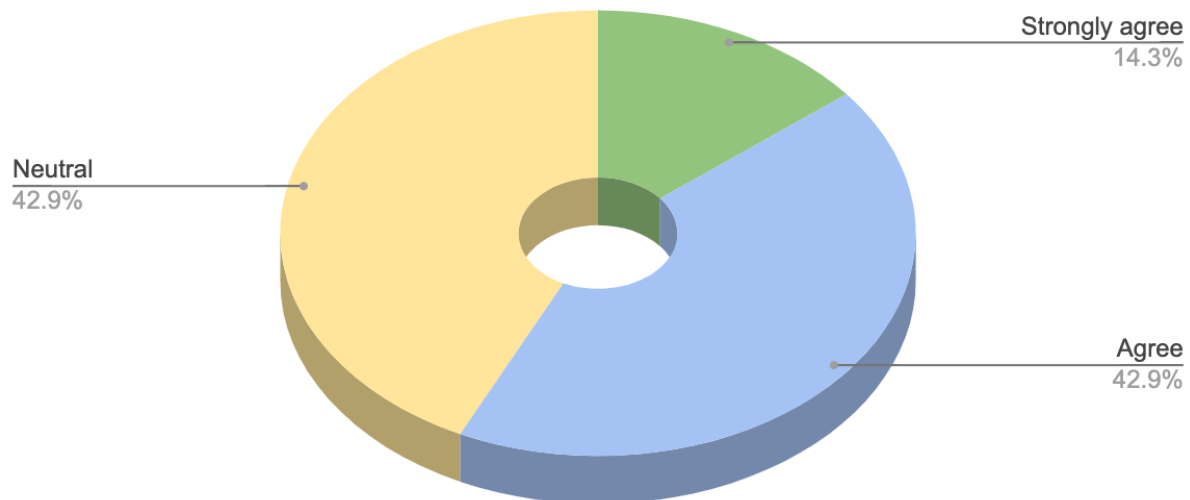
The programme has supported my ability to more empathetically connect with students and other members of staff



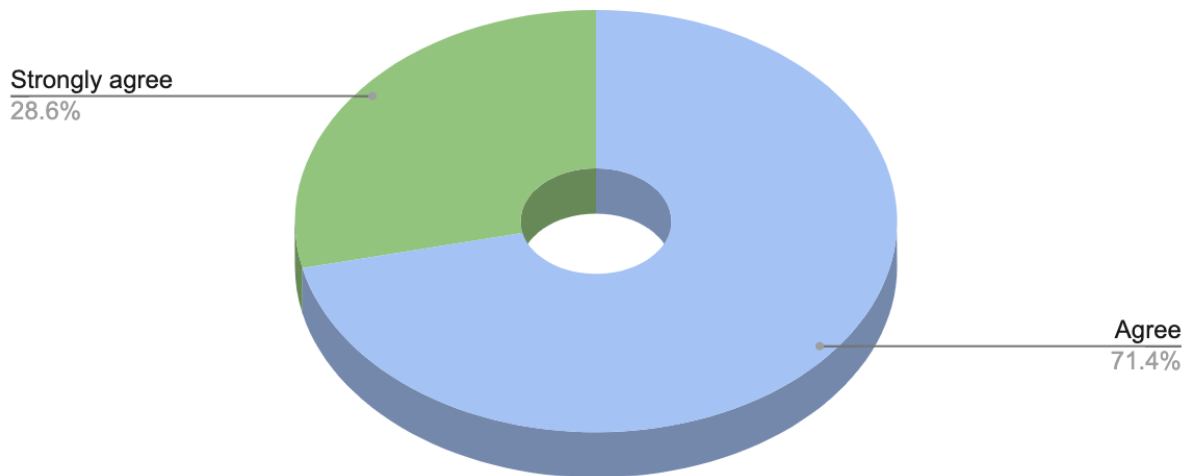
Depending on whether the programme goes ahead next year, would you like to continue as a Sponsor/staff member?



This programme has supported me with my own wellbeing



The Peer Helpers have developed trusting bonds with teachers/supportive adults in school



Sponsor and Staff Testimonials

*"It has been a great journey of discovery for many of our students. **A very worthwhile trial.**"*

— Sponsor

*"Personally I have enjoyed getting to know all the students and listening to what they shared in the circle. Although at first I didn't think I would benefit from what was spoken about in the sessions I quickly realised that it was just what I needed and I looked forward to the sessions. **I found my confidence grew massively from attending.**"*

— ATPS CIC placement student

*"I think the Peer Helper programme has made a huge impact on the students and the school as a whole. **It has given the students a safe space to share and taught them skills they will carry with them for life.** I think it has also helped spark those difficult conversations and promote connections across the year groups."*

— ATPS CIC placement student

“The young people from the start are completely different to who they are now. They have an understanding of how to look after themselves and others more effectively.”

— ATPS CIC Kickstarter

*“It’s made the **students have a kinder approach**. I’ve made some lovely friends and bonded with the students.”*

— Sponsor

The level of **confidentiality was a strength**, it’s given the students a sense of **belonging.**”

— Sponsor

*“Invaluable experience for both staff and students **to throw any titles or power dynamics to one side and recognise each other as equals and human beings**. I love that everyone had a chance to share or not share and there was absolutely no pressure or judgement. **It just felt natural!**”*

— ATPS CIC placement student

“The Sponsors were there because they wanted to and believed in it and not because they had to—this really reflected on the young people.”

— ATPS CIC Kickstarter

“I think the program has had a profound impact on the participants, this has been its main and deepest achievement.”

— Sponsor

*“I’ve learnt how to give myself self care, how to recognise mental health, how the body works, **how to recognise other peoples mental health and suicidal thoughts.**”*

— ATPS CIC Kickstarter

*“I really enjoyed meeting the Peer Helpers and gaining a different perspective on working with students out of the school environment. **It was really beneficial and sowed the seeds for the Peace Garden.**”*

— Sponsor

*“A really good ‘listening and being heard’ space for Sixth Form students. **These students seem more receptive.**”*

— Sponsor

“I found that it helped me realise we all go through the same emotions no matter how old or what experience you hold.”

— ATPS CIC Kickstarter

Reflection

The pilot year of *Natural Helping P2P Support* felt like a time of embedding, building relationships, initiation, learning and experimenting. It naturally evolved that most of our time was spent introducing Council, self-reflection and inquiry, listening and new concepts to the young people—we feel that if we offered a second or third year, the focus would be more outwards. This year was an ‘hello’, moving from being an acquaintance to a friend of King Edward VI Community College and its school community.

‘What Went Wells’, Strengths and Successes

ATPS CIC Facilitators’s Observations

Participant Development:

- ATPS CIC facilitators built strong relationships with the students and their relationships with each other grew extensively
- The student’s ability to communicate their concerns and feelings increased, they ‘found their voices’ and showed a rise in emotional resilience/intelligence
- Peer Helpers and Sponsors acknowledged the value of simply listening and being listened to
- Student’s willingness to be vulnerable increased
- Student’s awareness and ability for self-care expanded
- Over half of the nominees want to continue next year and a third have said ‘maybe’

- The interconnectedness and sense of community between the students, staff and facilitators grew
- The nominated students took risks, tried something completely new and stuck it out
- Peer Helpers referred those in need to supportive, trusted adults (ATPS CIC Facilitators and Sponsors) and showed recognition of their limits

Meetings:

- Students regularly attended meetings and continuously expressed their gratitude for a safe space to talk
- Meeting bi-monthly felt like a manageable rhythm
- Having a regular, dedicated room (which began to get decorated) and a space to store equipment was very useful and felt important for continuity, efficiency and creating a safe container
- As the year developed, it took less and less time for the Peer Helpers to 'land' in the meetings
- Students became increasingly confident with suggesting ideas, games, Council prompts and topics of interest
- When someone couldn't attend a meeting it was communicated clearly and maturely
- The curriculum was primarily taught experientially through Council circles rather than giving them information on 'how to go out and help'
- Everyone learned from each other (peer-to-peer learning)
- Embodiment drop-ins before each session allowed the participants to connect with their bodies and regulate their nervous systems before sitting in Council
- Using a wide range of experiential learning methods through Council, role-play, workshops and training created variety and kept the students engaged
- Regularly sitting in Council created safety and normalised talking about feelings
- Students were willing and able to sit in Listening Partnerships and Sit Spots; they seemed to receive connection, grounding and support from these practices

Retreat/trips/workshops:

- The retreat as a whole was excellent, it was a very memorable experience for the Peer Helpers and they regularly reflected back on it throughout the year—it served as a source of inspiration, learning and connection
- Having the retreat at the beginning of the programme worked well
- Getting all years together was important for cohesion and continued bonding
- Going off the school campus and getting into nature, even if it was just outside on the school grounds, changed the whole energy into being more relaxed and resulted in more engagement from the students—nature connection feels paramount
- Sitting in Council, Listening Partnerships and attending the storytelling workshop with Phil increased the Peer Helpers' ability to voice their passions, what they believe in and to actively listen; this assisted with asking 'the question', "are you thinking about suicide?"
- The art therapy workshop gave the young people an opportunity to express their feelings through nonverbal means
- The Tree of Life workshop (based on Narrative Therapy) gave the Peer Helpers, individually and as a community, the chance to see their life journey as a whole, honour their experiences, celebrate their strengths and acknowledge their support network

General:

- Intergenerational connections throughout the programme, having older ATPS CIC facilitators and mixing age groups—young students were often supported by older students
- It was explicit that the project was under umbrella of suicide prevention, this made every topic relevant and impactful as anything connected with wellbeing is considered an 'action to prevent suicide'
- Going with what's alive, organic development and responsiveness to what was naturally arising—trusting the process
- The students loved the hoodies, they wore them with pride
- Other students throughout the school expressed their interest in becoming a Peer Helper

'Even Better Ifs', Challenges and Learnings

ATPS CIC Facilitators's Observations

Meetings/curriculum:

- To train the teachers to deliver the sessions so ATPS CIC facilitators are eventually dispensable
- The staff who were nominated as Sponsors—4 x Heads of House (Pastoral Team), 1 x Teacher and 1 x Teaching Assistant—found it very difficult to find the time to attend the meetings, especially the Heads of House as the timings coincided with tutor time and break (a time when students often come for support)
- Communicating with the Peer Helpers about meeting times, workshops and sharing general information outside of meeting times was challenging (we used verbal sharing, email, assembly, daily bulletin, parent emails and Google Classroom)
- Students arriving late for meetings and leaving early created disconnection, distraction and lack of safety during Council—stronger boundaries
- Having the meetings over tutor and break meant that they had to give up their free time and part of a lesson, ATPS CIC facilitators feel it would be better after lunch (2:15pm-3:15pm) during the last session of the day
- As the focus this year was directed towards building relationships, embedding within the school, self/group inquiry and reflection and getting to know the school we didn't complete any service projects or focus so much on active helping throughout the school—this could come in year 2 or 3
- It's necessary to improve education around helping resources and strategies for immediate support (e.g. what to do if someone is having a panic attack)
- Next time, give the initial Peer Helpers Agreement our earlier (pre-retreat), giving it more more gravitas and continuing to refer to it throughout the year, adding more weight to the role
- 40-50 minutes felt very tight for what we were delivering (75 or 90 mins would have been better)—finding the time for both staff and students alongside the curriculum and pressures of school life was challenging

- Next time, give the teachers an opportunity to experience staff-only Councils so they can fully understand the work
- More 'all years' meetings feel necessary
- Keep copies of 'Resource Pack' somewhere, or have an online portal (website or app), where all students can access helping resources/help lines/advice when an adult isn't present

Participants:

- Peer Helpers worried that they'd be seen as 'uncool' and not be taken seriously
- Students joining the programme late, who hadn't attended, didn't have the opportunity to integrate and bond with the group
- Only 11 out of 18 students came on the retreat due to sickness, nerves and unavailability
- ATPS CIC Facilitators felt like the Sponsors and had the most contact with students—the Sponsors found it very difficult to find the time to attend (due to timetabling, other duties and teaching pressures)

Nominations:

- Selecting students that are resilient enough to be a Peer Helper, making everyone aware of the qualities and level of commitment needed for the role—some students weren't mature enough
- Clarifying that being a Peer Helper is about supporting others, rather than a referral service for students that need support
- Making sure all more sub-groups within the school are represented
- Avoiding having groups of friends nominated, ideally students who don't know each other very well—having little groups created clique dynamics
- Have bigger group sizes, rather than having three groups and 18 students all together (Year 8/9 = 6 students, Year 10/11 = 6 students and Year 12/13 = 6 students) having two groups and 24 students in total (for example, Year 8/9/10 = 12 students and 11/12/13 = 12 students)
- Engage students more actively in the nomination process
- Experiment with selecting a bigger group of students and then whittling it down after a taster, perhaps in the summer term
- Start the nomination process at beginning of summer term
- Include Year 7s, perhaps doing a welcome Council for new students
- Nominate more staff

General:

- Offer the Sponsors a stipend for their time and commitment
- Facilitate the project for a year and, once it's complete, have everything in place for the school to continue without the constant presence of ATPS CIC facilitators (perhaps only partial) or run it for 2-3 years (needs to embed before ATPS CIC move on)
- Having co-facilitators who are aware of Council and have practised it before
- Room 39 was noisy and echoey, very close to the playground and didn't always feel welcoming/safe
- Spend less money on the retreat, merchandise and staff overtime (all very feasible)
- Introduce the program better (people didn't understand exactly what it was)

- To include other initiatives within the school such as the Mental Health Ambassadors, SEND team, sports clubs, arts, food tech and more
- Have a more structured approach with clearer intended outcomes so everyone fully understands the programme and how it works
- Share the programme more widely with the school

Conclusion and Hopes for the Future

“When something bad happens you don’t think ‘oh god, how is this going to affect me’, the first thing you think about is ‘I’ve got the support network from the Peer Helpers and that’s going to help me’.”

— Year 9 Peer Helper

Action To Prevent Suicide CIC hope to continue evolving the *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* programme over the coming months and years with a view for it to become part of our developing Alternative Education programme (a collaborative social prescribing service for young people) which includes facilities from range of organisations and the wider community—*Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* is a component of our evolving, comprehensive “Action To Prevent” programmes.

This year’s pilot project was a time of initiation, embedment, building relationships, learning about the internal workings of a particular school and discovering how the program wants to unfold alongside ATPS CIC’s skills and delivery of services.

We firmly believe that peer-to-peer mentoring, learning and support is the way forward as it encourages young people to develop listening skills, find their heartfelt voices and become empowered young leaders—the wisdom is always in the group. We hope to continue sharing the *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* with King Edward VI Community College and introduce it to other local schools.

Our main learning from this year is to get the teacher Sponsors more deeply involved with the programme and to connect with other existing initiatives within any given school, college or university to ensure the programme’s longevity and sustainability.

We want to continue to normalise varying forms of circle practice, group collaboration and cooperation within schools, referring young people who are struggling and in need of higher level services into a community of support (and 1-1 therapy where necessary)—we feel healing within community reduces stigma and taboo, therefore creating less loneliness and isolation. This will create greater resilience, connection, understanding, self-leadership, self-efficacy and esteem.

We'd like to breathe the ethos of *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* throughout schools, organisations and communities sharing our understanding that suicide is preventable and “everyone’s responsibility”—we all have the ability to respond. In essence, we’re stronger together and in connection. We’d like the *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* programme and other offerings to uncover the key issues within any given school and the wider local community. We see schools as the centre of our local community—they are hubs or information which reflect the whole.

This pilot, which we feel has been a success, has delivered much learning and has helped us understand what is needed in the future. We are endeavouring to secure funding to deliver another year of *Natural Helping Peer-to-Peer Support* at King Edward VI Community College and more programmes across schools in South Devon with a view to continue creating a world freer of suicide.

“I’ve learned how to really listen, it’s going to stay with me for life.”
— Year 10 Peer Helper

