

Review of Engage Forest School Programme: Group 2



Funded by:



Participating Schools:



Welcome

Engage is a youth-centred, family-focused service that works with young people aged 10-19 years in Melton Mowbray and Coalville.

We provide short and long-term one to one and group work support to address the physical, mental, and emotional well-being needs of young people and their families.

Our goal is to build long-term confidence, strengthen resilience, and upskill families to overcome complex problems now and in the future.

Our work is flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of each individual case. We use a youth and community developmental approach that builds effective trusting relationships and enhances youth engagement through one-on-one and group work sessions.

We believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential.



"It's good and it boosts your confidence. It gives me the chance to socialise and I would definitely recommend it to a friend."

Rutland Group 2 Needs Analysis

Young Person	Activity Focus	Short-Term Outcome (By Week 12)	Long-Term Impact (6+ Months)
DB	Outdoor-based teamwork and stress-response workshops.	Improved Regulation: Ability to identify "wobbles" and use a coping strategy rather than withdrawing.	Sustained Attendance: Reduction in anxiety-related absences during school routine changes.
AC	Mentoring with positive male role models and strength-based coaching.	Self-Efficacy: Articulates personal strengths and demonstrates belief in his own potential.	Cycle Breaking: Development of positive relationship models and resilience against adverse home circumstances.
SS	Small group social skills practice and sensory-friendly confidence challenges.	Vocalisation: Confidently contributing to group discussions and managing sensory overload without total withdrawal.	Social Integration: Establishment of a stable peer group, reducing the risk of social isolation and exclusion.
MB	CBT-based anxiety strategies (breathing, grounding) and organisational coaching.	Symptom Management: Reduction in physical anxiety responses (shaking/crying) at the school gate.	Educational Engagement: Consistent attendance and ability to navigate independent tasks (e.g., PE) without distress.
AS	"Identify and Release" emotion workshops in an outdoor setting.	Emotional Articulation: Ability to verbalise distress rather than "bottling up".	Trauma Recovery: Increased trust in educational staff, allowing for better support seeking and regulation.
JLK	"Play" and creative expression focusing on personal talent discovery.	Role Release: Engagement in age-appropriate behaviours and recognition of self-worth beyond caring duties.	Healthy Development: Improved self-esteem leading to more mature and reciprocal peer relationships.

The analysis above outlines the specific developmental needs for each young person during the 12-week programme.

For Rutland Group 2 cohort, we took a more individualistic approach to setting goals.

To address the high prevalence of anxiety and transition struggles in this cohort, the programme will utilise a "Social and Emotional Learning" (SEL) framework. The table outlines the activity focus, the immediate outcomes for the young people, and the long-term impact on their educational lives.



Rutland Group 2 Attendance

Young Person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
DB												
AC												
SS												
MB												
AS												
JLK												



"It's a good learning experience. I have already told two of my friends who want to come."

It was a bracing start for Group 2 this morning with temperatures hitting -4°C, but the cold didn't stop us from getting stuck in. The main goal for today was "soft landing" - giving the four young people space to get to know us and the site without too much pressure.

We kicked things off with some football to get the blood pumping, followed by a full site induction. We spent some time chatting about what the next 12 weeks could look like, exploring potential activities and asking them what they actually want to get out of their time here. It was important to let them know from day one that they have a say in how this programme develops.

Key Observations & Progress

Group Dynamics: I was really impressed with how naturally the group started to gel. Both the lads and the girls began chatting and getting to know each other almost immediately. Usually, we have to do a bit of "social engineering" or ice-breakers to get things moving, but this group formed connections entirely on their own, which is a great sign for the weeks ahead.

Fire Craft & Skills: Given the freezing weather, our fire craft session served a dual purpose. It was a great practical teaching moment, but it was also essential for keeping everyone warm! The group engaged well with the safety side of things and, of course, the toasted marshmallows and donuts were a big hit.

Resilience & Support: One of the young women in the group had a bit of a wobble mid-session; the cold really got to her and she became quite upset. However, with a bit of encouragement to get her coat on and a move closer to the fire, she warmed up and was able to re-engage with the group. It was a good lesson in self-care and managing physical discomfort.

Setting Routines: We walked the group through what a "standard" day looks like—explaining our responsibilities like topping up the bird feeders, fetching water, and general site maintenance. We didn't make them do the "heavy lifting" today as we wanted them to just focus on settling in, but the expectations have been set.

Staff Reflections & Next Steps

The group feels settled and the vibe is very positive despite the frost. They seem like a capable bunch who are willing to talk to one another, which gives us a really solid foundation.

Next week: We'll be moving into 'Reflecting on Skills and Personal Development.' Now that they're comfortable with the space, we want to start the conversation around how they learn and have them identify the specific skills they're picking up through these practical tasks.

It was a bit of a washout today with persistent rain, so we had to pivot and spend most of our time in the clubhouse. While it wasn't the "forest" experience we planned, it gave us a good opportunity to see how the group handles a change in environment and works together in closer quarters. The day was a bit of a mix of high energy and some challenges with focus, which is to be expected this early on.

Key Observations & Progress

The Squirrel Challenge: We set the group a challenge to build a squirrel obstacle course using a mix of provided materials and branches they'd scavenged earlier. It started off really strong with everyone mucking in, but we hit a bit of a wall after about 10 minutes. The boys disengaged and drifted off to play with Lego, while the girls stayed on task. This gave us a natural opening to chat about teamwork, leadership, and follow-through. We talked about why finishing a task matters and the importance of "staying in the game" even when interest dips.

Creative Expression: The girls were in their element with the creative side of things today. They spent a good chunk of time painting wooden pieces for a mosaic project we're starting. It was great to see them so focused; they seem to find the art side of the programme a really good way to settle and express themselves.

Self-Regulation & Energy: Because we were stuck inside, we had to be intentional about "break-out" times. We used regular football sessions to let the group burn off steam and self-regulate. It's clear this group needs that physical outlet to help them refocus when we move back to more structured discussions.

Reflective Practice: We managed to have a brief conversation about how we learn in different situations and how to spot our own personal progress. It was a short chat—the group's attention spans were a bit tested today—but the seeds have been planted. We'll keep coming back to this "learning how to learn" theme in smaller doses.

Staff Reflections & Next Steps

Today was a bit of a reality check on the group's current concentration levels. While they are getting along well socially, the "grit" and "task-persistence" are areas we really need to work on. I spent a lot of time today just chatting with them individually to get a better handle on their specific needs so we can tweak the activities to keep them hooked in.

Next week: Weather permitting, we'll be back out in the woods for some Tool Use and Shelter Building. I'm hoping that getting back into the physical environment will help the boys stay more engaged with the group tasks.



Today was a high-energy session that felt like a real turning point for the group. We moved away from the "settling in" phase and got stuck into some serious project work. The focus was heavily on team development—challenging them to lead, listen, and follow instructions while working collaboratively on the site. It was great to see them having a laugh together while actually getting some hard work done.

Key Observations & Progress

Practical Skills & Safety: We moved onto tool safety today, specifically focusing on the sawhorse and bow saws. The group showed a lot of maturity here; they respected the kit and worked well together to saw logs for our winter stores.

On-Site Projects: We used a mix of logs and fir branches to start building a windbreak around the main base. This was a fantastic exercise in "real-world" problem solving. They had to figure out how to stack and weave the materials to actually make it functional. It's starting to look like a proper camp now, and they're clearly taking pride in it.

Responsibility & Routine: The group is really leaning into the site routines. They took charge of the water collection and spent time making bird fat balls to refill the feeders. These tasks might seem small, but they're helping the group develop a sense of stewardship over the environment.

Leadership & Dynamics: This session gave us some brilliant insights into the group's "natural" roles whilst taking part in a series of problem-solving games. We're starting to see who steps up to lead, how they respond to each other's ideas, and how they handle it when a plan doesn't work immediately. Generally, the bonding was excellent today.

Regulation & Choice: We made sure to balance the hard graft with time to decompress in the hammocks and marshmallows by the fire. A few of the group also volunteered to help move furniture around in the clubhouse due to the new carpet fitted this same day - a nice bit of spontaneous community service!

Staff Reflections & Next Steps

The energy was much more focused this week compared to the rainy "Lego-gate" of Week 2. They seem to respond much better when they have a physical, tangible task to complete. Interestingly, the group specifically asked if they could have some time in the clubhouse next week to keep working on the craft projects they started during the rain, which shows they are actually more invested in those "slow" tasks than they first let on.

Next week: We'll honour that request and balance our time between the forest and the clubhouse for their Mosaic and Craft Projects, alongside our planned outdoor sessions.



Due to the severe weather conditions brought on by Storm Chandra, the decision was made to move the session indoors to the clubhouse. While this ensured physical safety, the confinement presented a significant shift in the learning environment. This change served as a stress-test for the group's self-regulation skills, removing the natural sensory release usually provided by the outdoor setting.

Programme Delivery & Activities

Despite the change in venue, the programme kept a focus on collaborative problem-solving.

- **Motivation & Energizer:** The day started with a high-energy group activity designed to spend initial kinetic energy and shift the group's mindset toward participation.
- **The Boat Building Challenge:** The core activity required the young people to use various materials to construct a functioning boat. This task was chosen to specifically target:
 - **Communication of Vision:** Articulating abstract ideas to peers.
 - **Resource Management:** Sharing limited materials.
 - **Goal Alignment:** Moving from individual ideas to a collective team output.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

The transition to an indoor environment highlighted specific regulation needs, particularly among the boys.

- **Regulation Challenges:** Without the open space of the forest to absorb noise and movement, the group (specifically the boys), struggled with the confined space. This manifested as restlessness, lack of focus, and boisterous physical play.
- **Peer Friction:** The "pressure cooker" environment led to a fracturing of group harmony. We saw an increase in teasing, "winding up," and immature peer-to-peer interactions.
- **Staff Interventions:** Staff used the following strategies to manage dynamics:
 - **Reiteration of Group Agreements:** Reminding the group of their established rules about respect and safety.
 - **Co-regulation:** Assisting young people in finding space within the room to decompress when overstimulated.
- **Reframing:** shifting the focus back to the shared team goal.

Participant Reflection

To conclude the session, we facilitated a reflective circle using a "What Went Well / Even Better If / Next Steps" model. The group's engagement in this process was honest and showed a developing level of self-awareness.

- **Successes:** The group unanimously agreed that despite the behavioural friction, their actual teamwork on the project was strong. They recognised their ability to build together.
- **Challenges:** The young people self-identified that the atmosphere was negatively affected by "swearing" and "winding each other up."
- **Action Plan:** The group set their own goal for Week 5: To consciously reduce antagonism and stop fighting.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

While the weather presented logistical challenges, it offered valuable insight into the group's regulation triggers. The fact that the young people could separate their behavioural struggles (teasing) from their functional success (building the boat) shows distinct growth in emotional maturity.

Next Steps for Week 5:

- **Return to Outdoors:** Prioritise outdoor engagement to allow for physical energy release.
- **Scaffolded Reflection:** Begin the next session by unpacking this week's "Action Plan." We will hold them accountable to their goal of reducing antagonism by asking how they plan to achieve it before the activities begin.
- **Restorative Practice:** If friction occurs, we will refer to their own admission from this week (that winding each other up hinders the group) rather than imposing external authority.

Despite significantly low temperatures, the group demonstrated resilience by engaging in a series of outdoor activities before the cold necessitated a move to the clubhouse. The session was characterized by a mix of high-energy output and focused site maintenance, testing the group's ability to transition between active and passive tasks.

Programme Delivery & Activities

The session was split between outdoor teamwork and indoor project completion.

- Communication & Teambuilding:
 - Energizer: We began with a high-octane activity to warm the group physically and mentally (The Chicken Game).
 - Blind/Directed Movement: A specific challenge was set requiring the group to move as a single unit toward a goal. This tested their active listening skills and required clear, concise direction-giving, reinforcing the need for trust within the peer group.
- Site Stewardship (Heavy Work): The group split into two cohorts to contribute to the maintenance of the Forest School site:
 - Cohort A: Refilled bird feeders (focus on nature connection).
 - Cohort B: Weeding membrane and transporting wood chips via wheelbarrow (focus on physical exertion and teamwork).
- Project Completion (Boats): Transitioning indoors, the group finalised their boat structures from Week 4. We tested them for buoyancy, and it was a significant "win" for the group that all vessels floated, validating their hard work.
- Regulation & Creative Prep:
 - Paper Making: We initiated a long-term project by tearing and soaking recycled paper. This repetitive, tactile task served as a calming, grounding activity.
 - Social Time: The remainder of the session allowed for board games and unstructured co-regulation.

Participant Reflection

We utilised our standard reflection model. It is worth noting that the group successfully met their goal from Week 4 (to stop fighting).

- What Went Well: The group self-reported a major success: "No arguing today." They also highlighted the enjoyment of the team games.
- Improvements: The group identified that their listening skills were lacking during the communication games. Staff also offered constructive feedback regarding the boisterous play, encouraging the boys to demonstrate more maturity in their social interactions.
- Action Plan: The group has committed to two goals for next week:
 - Sharpen listening skills during instruction.
 - Increase their contribution to the site (making, planting, or growing).



This session was a "game of two halves." The morning was characterised by high productivity, with the group engaging constructively in energisers and site development. However, the afternoon dynamic shifted drastically. While engagement in the creative workshop was competent, the social environment was degraded by targeted teasing and bullying behaviours from the male participants. This necessitated a shift from facilitation to behaviour management, resulting in formal warnings and a review of the boys' future conduct.

Programme Delivery & Activities

The day combined heavy physical work (following the success of Week 5's strategy) with creative expression.

- Regulation & Warm-up:
 - Energisers: We utilised the "Rainbow Wheel" game and group stretches. These were successful in building initial teamwork and were fun.
- Stewardship & Heavy Work:
 - Routines: The group took ownership of the site—filling bird feeders, refilling water stations, sweeping paths, and litter picking.
 - Site Development: We continued the "heavy work" strategy by collecting and transporting wood chip for the base camp. As observed last week, this physical exertion resulted in positive teamwork during the morning block.
- Creative Workshop:
 - Paper Making (Part 2): The group processed the pulp prepared in Week 5 and followed instructions to making their own paper. This was a sensory, tactile activity that many found grounding.
- Unstructured Time:
 - Football and free time.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

The positive trajectory observed in Week 5 regarding the reduction of arguing was unfortunately reversed this week.

- Escalation of Behaviour: What began as low-level disruption escalated into targeted teasing directed at the female participants. This resulted in significant distress, with one female participant reduced to tears.
- Failure to Self-Regulate: Unlike previous weeks where redirection worked, the male participants struggled to listen to instructions or recognise the impact of their actions. The "boisterous" behaviour noted in previous reports crossed the line into bullying.
- Staff Intervention: Strong challenges from staff were required to safeguard the emotional well-being of the group.

Professional Note: The boys' inability to transition from the high-energy football/outdoor space to the focused social space of the afternoon highlights a critical lack of empathy and impulse control. The "pack mentality" was evident today.

Participant Reflection

The reflection was difficult but necessary. We addressed the behaviour directly.

- What Went Well:
 - Task Competence: The group acknowledged that the physical jobs (sweeping, wood chipping) were done well and as a team.
 - Engagement: The paper-making process was a hit, with high engagement levels.
- Improvements (The Critical Issue):
 - Impact on Others: It was explicitly named that the teasing and bullying of the girls ruined the session's atmosphere.
 - Authority: The boys unavoidably acknowledged they did not listen to staff instructions in the afternoon, nor did they take accountability of their actions, but continued to blame others for their actions.
- Actions & Consequences:
 - Formal Warnings: An initial formal warning has been issued to all male pupils.
 - School Notification: It has been communicated that emails will be sent to their respective schools detailing the behavioural decline.
 - Probation: The boys understand that their behaviour is now being closely monitored, and future participation is contingent on an immediate improvement in conduct.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

Today was a setback in group culture. While the vocational aspects of the course (working, building, creating) are thriving, the social aspects are failing. The boys are currently compromising the psychological safety of the girls, which is unacceptable in a youth work setting.

Returning from the half-term break to exceptionally sunny and dry weather provided a much-needed morale boost for the group. Following the behavioural challenges and subsequent warnings issued in Week 6, staff implemented a strategic, restorative approach to begin the session. By temporarily splitting the group by gender, we provided safe spaces to process previous conflicts, reiterate boundaries, and agree on a renewed social contract. The result was a highly successful, productive session marked by a dramatic, positive shift in attitude across the entire team.

Programme Delivery & Activities

The session balanced active physical engagement with sensory and vocational tasks, allowing young people to regulate at their own pace.

- Reintegration & Energisers:
 - Football Energisers
 - Catch-up & Conversations: Informal, unstructured time to rebuild rapport after the half-term break.
- Sensory & Creative Engagement:
 - Natural Scents & Fragrances: Using natural materials from the site to create distinct scents. This provided a calming, mindful sensory experience.
 - Nature-Inspired Crafts: Allowing for individual creative expression.
- Vocational & Heavy Work:
 - Seating Area Construction: The group collaborated to build a new seating area using logs, branches, and repurposed wooden pallets. This required teamwork, tool use, and physical exertion.
- Regulation Space:
 - Dedicated time was built into the afternoon for self-regulation and "time to breathe," encouraging independent emotional management.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

The contrast between Week 6 and Week 7 was profound. The quality of peer-to-peer interactions and overall engagement was exemplary today.

Restorative Success: The decision to split the group initially was highly effective. Both the boys and the girls utilised this time to discuss the previous weeks openly. It allowed the boys to reflect on their warnings without an audience, and the girls to feel heard. All agreed to a "fresh start," demonstrating an understanding of the programme's boundaries and a commitment to their personal development goals.

Multi-Agency Impact: The positive shift is likely the result of several converging factors: the restorative break of half-term, the impact of the schools speaking directly with their respective pupils regarding Week 6, and our own targeted youth work interventions today.

Targeted Praise: Staff consciously over-indexed on positive reinforcement today, heavily praising the group for their renewed attitudes and collaborative woodwork, cementing this as the desired baseline behaviour.

Welfare Observation: Staff noted that one participant was unusually quiet and withdrawn throughout the day. While no specific cause was identified during check-ins, this represents a subtle shift in their usual baseline behaviour.

Professional Note: The multi-agency communication (informing the schools after Week 6) clearly paid dividends. The young people arrived knowing that boundaries are consistent across their educational environments. We must now maintain this standard.

Participant Reflection

Self-Awareness: The young people explicitly recognised the change in the team dynamic. They reported feeling much more productive, relaxed, and engaged compared to the tension of previous weeks. They enjoyed the tangible result of building the seating area.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

This week was a textbook example of successful restorative practice in youth work. By addressing the conflict head-on, giving consequences (Week 6), and then offering a structured path to a "clean slate" (Week 7), the young people felt secure enough to engage positively.

Benefiting from another dry day, the group demonstrated a continued commitment to the positive behavioural reset established in Week 7. The session was strategically designed to balance high-focus, high-trust activities with low-stimulating regulation time. This included an off-site trip to B&Q (a 2-minute walk from site) to gather supplies, collaborative site stewardship, and the delivery of the promised reward activity: air rifle target shooting. The group's ability to navigate these environments and varying levels of stimulation was highly commendable.

Programme Delivery & Activities

The day encompassed a blend of practical life skills, horticulture, and focused physical discipline.

- **Community Engagement: Off-site Trip (B&Q):** A practical excursion for the girls of the group, to purchase seeds and supplies, testing the group's ability to represent the programme positively in a public, community setting.
- **Horticulture & Stewardship:**
 - **Seed Planting:** The group engaged in preparing and planting a variety of seeds for the forthcoming growing season, contributing to the site's long-term flora development.
- **Regulation & Co-regulation:**
 - **Football:** High-energy physical exertion to release initial tension.
 - **Hammocks & Free Play:** Dedicated, unstructured time allowing young people to relax and decompress around the site.
- **High-Trust Activity:**
 - **Air Rifle Target Shooting:** Delivered as a reward for the improved group dynamics, focusing heavily on strict safety principles, breath control, and focus.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

The positive trajectory initiated last week has been successfully maintained. The group spent a significant portion of the day collaborating effectively on routines and gardening.

- **Managing High-Trust Scenarios:** The air rifle shooting was primarily taken up by the boys. Given the behavioural warnings issued in Week 6, this was a significant test of their maturity. They excelled—listening intently, following strict safety protocols without deviation, and demonstrating excellent self-control.
- **Organic Sub-groups & Autonomy:** While the boys engaged in target shooting, the girls utilised the time to occupy the hammocks and relax. This organic split allowed both groups to get exactly what they needed from the afternoon: intense, focused mastery for the boys, and safe, low-demand social time for the girls.
- **Welfare Monitoring:** Staff successfully utilised the "time to breathe" and unstructured play periods to conduct informal, 1:1 check-ins with the young people, continuing to build trust and monitor the quiet participant noted in Week 7.

Professional Note: The boys' exemplary behaviour during the air rifle session proves that when presented with high-risk/high-trust activities that require maturity, they are fully capable of rising to the occasion. The behavioural contract is working.

Participant Reflection

There was highlighted a growing sense of collective pride.

- **Team Cohesion:** The young people explicitly acknowledged their own positive contributions to the team dynamic, recognising that the day felt calm and productive.
- **Value of 'Downtime':** Participants fed back that they highly valued having the space to simply relax and "check in" with staff and peers without the pressure of a directed task.
- **Vocational Pride:** The group expressed satisfaction in their site stewardship, taking ownership of the planting and the future growth of the forest flora.
- **Target Shooting:** The boys were incredibly enthusiastic about the air rifles, taking pride in their marksmanship and their ability to handle the responsibility safely.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

This week cemented the progress made during Week 7. The combination of off-site responsibility, collaborative physical work, and high-trust rewards has solidified a much healthier group culture. The balance of the programme currently meets their varying sensory and emotional needs perfectly.

Today's session offered a good balance of focused, skill-based activities and collaborative site development. The group engaged well with archery, football, and a new woodwork craft. While the structured activities were a great success, the unstructured downtime highlighted how differently the male and female participants manage fatigue, requiring tailored support and boundaries from staff.

Programme Delivery & Activities

- **Archery & Team Building:** The group took part in archery and a related team-building task, which required good listening skills and strict adherence to safety rules.
- **Site Signage Craft:** We began a multi-week woodwork project to build a sign for the forest site. This involved safely dismantling wooden pallets and decorating wooden "cookies" to use as lettering.
- **Physical Regulation:** General football and designated downtime were provided to allow the group to burn off energy or relax at their own pace.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

Overall, the group worked well together, though we navigated a few behavioural challenges during transitions and free time.

- **Competitive Dynamics:** The boys showed a strong competitive streak during the team activities. Even after staff removed the scoring element from archery to reduce pressure, the boys continued to compete amongst themselves, which led to some minor bickering.
- **Managing Unstructured Time:** During the afternoon downtime, the boys struggled to stay constructively occupied. This led to them messing around, throwing wood chip and stones, and making a mess of the football pitch.
- **Logical Consequences:** Staff challenged this behaviour immediately. As a natural consequence, the boys were given the responsibility of sweeping up the area they had disrupted. Two of the boys responded very well to this, quietly and efficiently tidying the mess without further issue.
- **Managing Fatigue:** One of the female participants became noticeably distant in the afternoon. When staff checked in, she explained she was tired and simply needed time to herself. We validated this, recognising that a full day outdoors is demanding, and gave her the space to relax and self-regulate away from the main group.

Participant Reflection

- The group gave very positive feedback about the archery, clearly enjoying the hands-on skill.
- However, when asked to reflect on their personal development or teamwork, they struggled to engage. Despite staff providing clear direction and examples, the abstract nature of the reflection was difficult for them at the end of a tiring day. We will need to adapt our approach to make these reviews more accessible for them.

Next Steps for Week 10:

1. **Structured Downtime:** Provide a selection of low-demand, hands-on tasks to keep the boys engaged during downtime and prevent boredom-related disruption.
2. **Support Individual Regulation:** Continue to provide ample, guilt-free opportunities for individuals to step away and rest when they are experiencing social or physical fatigue.
3. **Complete the Signage Project:** Facilitate the second half of the pallet sign project so the group can experience the satisfaction of finishing a long-term goal.
4. **Adapt Reflection Methods:** Introduce more tangible or visual reflection tools to help the group articulate their thoughts and feelings more easily next week.



Today was all about pacing. Several young people arrived looking visibly tired, so we consciously decided not to push the group too hard. Instead, we ran a low-demand session with a menu of activities they could dip in and out of at their own pace. This relaxed atmosphere was highly effective; it allowed the group to self-regulate and gave staff the perfect opportunity to have some valuable 1:1 conversation about how the programme is impacting them back at school.

Programme Delivery & Activities

We offered a mix of hands-on projects and free play:

- Site Development: We spent time building a new basketball post and net for the site, giving the group a fresh physical outlet.
- B&Q: I took the boys off to B&Q to fetch gravel boards and plants for the site.
- Crafts & Completion: The whole group dipped in and out of the woodwork station today. We successfully finished painting and assembling the pallet sign, and it looks fantastic hanging above base camp.
- Regulation Time: We made sure there was plenty of time for sports, exploratory play, and resting in the hammocks.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

We kept the pressure low today. I managed to have two very insightful 1:1 check-ins:

- Check-in 1 (Female Participant): We talked about her relationships back at school. She admitted she finds her classmates "annoying" and often clashes with them. However, when asked if Forest School has helped, she reflected that she is trying to be more patient and accepting of others. She feels she has "grown up a little" and learned new things, even if she couldn't quite put her finger on specific life skills just yet. This is a great step forward in her self-awareness.
- Check-in 2 (Male Participant): He was incredibly honest about his struggles in mainstream lessons, explaining that he gets easily distracted and bored, which usually gets him into trouble. He feels his overall behaviour has improved and said he wishes he could do Forest School every week because it gives him a chance to "be himself" and learn without feeling stuck in a classroom. This perfectly highlights his need for hands-on, kinaesthetic learning environments.
- The B&Q Trip: Taking the boys off-site was a great success. Despite being "typical teenagers," they handled the independence brilliantly. They were respectful and responsible, proving again that when we give them real responsibility, they tend to step up to the mark.

Participant Reflection

Rather than a formal review, the feedback today was organic. The group really enjoyed the relaxed pace and explicitly asked if we could have a similar, low-pressure session next week before they break up for Easter.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

Today was a massive win for relationship-building. The fact that the young people are starting to connect what they do in the woods with how they behave in the classroom shows that the programme is working. We will honour their request for a relaxed session next week, as end-of-term fatigue is definitely setting in.

Next Steps for Week 11:

1. Continue Impact Check-ins: Use the relaxed pace next week to catch up with the rest of the group individually. We will also encourage them to complete our youth survey.
2. Easter Activities: Set up a fun, engaging Easter Egg hunt around the site to celebrate the end of the term.
3. Maintain the Pace: Keep the demands relatively low and focus on celebrating the term's successes (like the finished sign and the basketball post).

Today was a brilliant, mixed-pace session as we head into the Easter break. We intentionally designed the day to offer a balance of high-energy fun and low-demand, focused activities. This flexible approach allowed the group to engage at a level that suited their individual energy levels, resulting in a really positive, varied programme today.

Programme Delivery & Activities

We offered a great mix of celebration, practical skills, and reflection:

- The Easter Egg Hunt: A high-octane start to the day! We set up a hunt around the site and clubhouse involving clues and prizes.
- Fire Lighting & Cooking: The group engaged in fire lighting to toast marshmallows. We used this practical task to have some really good, natural conversations around risk, safety, and managing our own choices.
- Physical & Restorative Play: Basketball and football were available for burning off energy, alongside heavy use of the hammock zone for those needing to chill out.
- Site Routines: The group kept up their stewardship habits by topping up bird feeders, doing a general tidy-round, and doing some planting.
- Programme Evaluation: We facilitated time for the group to complete their Youth Surveys, alongside informal 1:1 check-ins.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

The group managed their own energy and transitions incredibly well today, showing real maturity in how they used the space.

- High-Energy Teamwork: The whole group fully threw themselves into the Easter Egg hunt. It was a fantastic, energy-burning activity that saw everyone coming together, communicating well, and working as a team to solve the clues.
- Self-Directed Regulation: After the excitement of the egg hunt, the pace naturally slowed right down. It was great to see the young people organically gravitating towards what they needed: some continued with physical sports, while others opted for the quiet of the relaxing areas. Giving them the autonomy to choose kept the behavioural disruptions to a minimum.
- Handling Risk: During the fire lighting and marshmallow toasting, the group demonstrated how far they've come regarding safety and responsibility. The conversations around managing risk were mature and insightful.

Participant Reflection

Today served as a highly reflective session.

- Youth Surveys: The young people took the time to individually complete our end-of-programme Youth Survey (the formal results of which will be collated in the final group report).
- 1:1 Catch-ups: Alongside the paperwork, staff used the relaxed downtime to catch up with individuals, getting a better understanding of how their weeks had been at school and home. The group is clearly becoming much more comfortable talking openly with staff.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

This was a fantastic penultimate session. The group has shown brilliant progress in their ability to self-regulate and work as a team.

After the Easter break, we will be running Group 2's final session. To celebrate, the young people have specifically asked to spend the day preparing and cooking chicken burgers (with healthy salads and dressings) over the fire, followed by more toasted marshmallows. This is a perfect final activity, as it combines teamwork, fire safety, and the vital life skill of outdoor cooking.

Next Steps for Week 12 (Final Session):

1. Prep for the Feast: Prepare the full ingredients list and equipment needed for the cooking session.
2. Shared Responsibility: Ensure the whole group is actively engaged in the entire process—from preparing the food and managing the fire, right through to the cooking and the final clean-up.
3. Final Group Review: Facilitate a meaningful final reflection circle to seek their verbal feedback, celebrate their personal growth, and close out their Forest School experience on a high.

Today marked our final session with Group 2, and we were treated to beautiful sunny weather to see them off. As it was our closing session, we handed the reins over to the young people, allowing them to choose how they wanted to spend their final day. This resulted in a brilliant, relaxed mix of sports, downtime in the hammocks, and some light gardening. The absolute highlight of the day was bringing everyone together for a final team-building feast, preparing and cooking burgers over an open fire.

Programme Delivery & Activities

We kept the structure flexible and youth-led today:

- **Sports & Games:** A great mix of high-energy activities including basketball, football, and swingball.
- **Restorative Time:** Plenty of guilt-free opportunities to chill out, swing, and chat in the hammock zone.
- **Firecraft & Cooking:** The core whole-group activity. The team worked together to manage the fire, prepare the ingredients, and cook their own burgers from scratch over the open flames.
- **Site Stewardship:** Some light gardening, giving the young people a chance to leave their mark and ensure the site looks great for the next group.

Group Dynamics & Behavioural Observations

The group dynamic was very settled today. Because we allowed them the freedom to choose their activities, they naturally gravitated toward their established friendship groups for much of the day.

- **Natural Groupings & Autonomy:** The boys largely opted to burn off energy with the sports, while the girls preferred to use the hammocks as a safe space to relax and have extended conversations.
- **Shared Spaces:** Despite this split, there were lovely moments of spontaneous integration. The whole group came together organically to share the pitch for basketball and football, managing the space and the rules well without staff needing to heavily intervene or referee.
- **Meaningful Conversations:** Throughout the cooking and downtime, staff facilitated some really positive, informal chats about their journey on the programme. It was incredibly rewarding to hear them talk openly about what they've learned and how they plan to put those new skills (like patience, teamwork, and emotional regulation) into practice back at school, at home, and in their local communities.

Participant Reflection

Rather than a formal sit-down, our final reflections happened organically around the campfire while eating. The group shared their favourite memories from the term and expressed a lot of pride in what they've achieved over the last 12 weeks.

Professional Assessment & Future Recommendations

Group 2 has been a fantastic cohort to work with. Over the 12 weeks, we have seen significant growth in their ability to self-regulate, communicate effectively, and take on real responsibility. Finishing the programme with a successful, highly sensible youth-led cooking session is a testament to how far their trust and maturity have developed since those challenging middle weeks. They leave the programme on a real high.

Here is a summary of the Group 2 Forest School programme, capturing the journey of these young people over their 12-week intervention.

Programme Overview & Context

The Group 2 cohort participated in a 12-week programme underpinned by a "Social and Emotional Learning" (SEL) framework. Because this specific group presented with a high prevalence of anxiety and transition struggles, our goals focused heavily on improving self-regulation, building resilience, and developing positive peer relationships.

Key Developments & Milestones

- **Organic Bonding:** The group gelled naturally from Week 1, chatting and connecting without the need for forced ice-breakers, which provided a brilliant foundation for youth work.
- **The "Heavy Work" Strategy:** We quickly identified that physical exertion was key to regulating the group. Tasks like transporting wood chips in wheelbarrows, sawing logs, and building a windbreak out of fir branches fostered excellent teamwork and provided a constructive kinetic outlet.
- **Restorative Practice in Action:** Following a significant behavioural dip in Week 6, we implemented a restorative reset in Week 7. By temporarily splitting the group to process the conflict safely, they successfully agreed to a "fresh start" and entirely turned their social dynamics around.
- **High-Trust Triumphs:** As trust built, we introduced high-responsibility activities. The boys excelled during an air rifle shooting session, adhering strictly to safety protocols, while off-site independence trips to a local B&Q proved they could represent the programme maturely in public.
- **Site Stewardship:** Over the 12 weeks, the young people took real ownership of their environment. They consistently managed routines like refilling bird feeders and water stations, and they left a lasting legacy by constructing a seating area, a pallet sign, and a basketball post.

Core Challenges Navigated

- **Environmental Confinement:** Bad weather, including Storm Chandra, repeatedly forced the sessions indoors. Losing the natural sensory release of the forest acted as a pressure cooker, leading to restlessness, a lack of focus, and peer friction.
- **Behavioural Escalations & "Pack Mentality":** The biggest challenge hit in Week 6 when boisterous behaviour escalated into targeted teasing and bullying of the female participants. This highlighted a critical lack of impulse control and required firm boundaries, formal warnings, and multi-agency communication with their schools.
- **Managing Fatigue & Attention:** The group occasionally struggled with "task-persistence" during complex activities or when reflecting on abstract concepts at the end of a tiring day. By Week 10, end-of-term exhaustion was visible, requiring staff to pivot to low-demand, flexible pacing to avoid burnout.

Outcomes & Personal Growth

- **Self-Regulation & Autonomy:** By the end of the term, the young people showed brilliant progress in managing their own emotional and physical needs. They learned to organically direct their downtime, with some burning energy through sports while others independently retreated to the hammocks to decompress.
- **Transference to School Life:** During 1:1 check-ins, one female participant demonstrated growing self-awareness, noting she felt she had "grown up a little" and was actively trying to be more patient with her classmates at school. Similarly, a male participant reflected on his need for kinaesthetic learning, recognising that the hands-on Forest School environment helped his overall behaviour compared to a traditional classroom.
- **Conflict Resolution & Accountability:** The group developed the maturity to own their actions and meet behavioural goals. For example, when the boys made a mess of the pitch during unstructured time, they accepted the logical consequence and efficiently swept it up without further issue.

Ultimately, this cohort required a robust balance of firm boundaries and high-praise vocational tasks. They weathered some significant social turbulence, but through consistent restorative practice and tangible outdoor projects, they finished the programme as a highly capable and mutually supportive team.

Feedback from young people



Youth Survey

In week 11, we conducted anonymous surveys for every group member. This method fostered honest feedback and provided everyone with the opportunity to share their opinions openly, without any supervision.

→ **100%**

All young people wanted to be part of this programme

→ **5 out of 6**

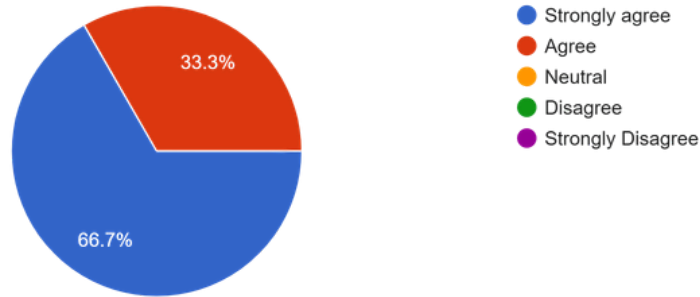
Find it easier to regulate their emotions

→ **84%**

Have seen personal growth

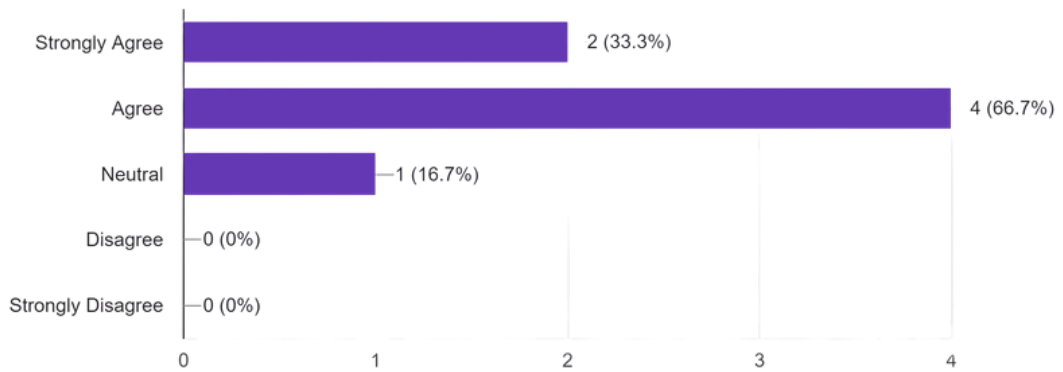
I wanted to be a part of engage

6 responses



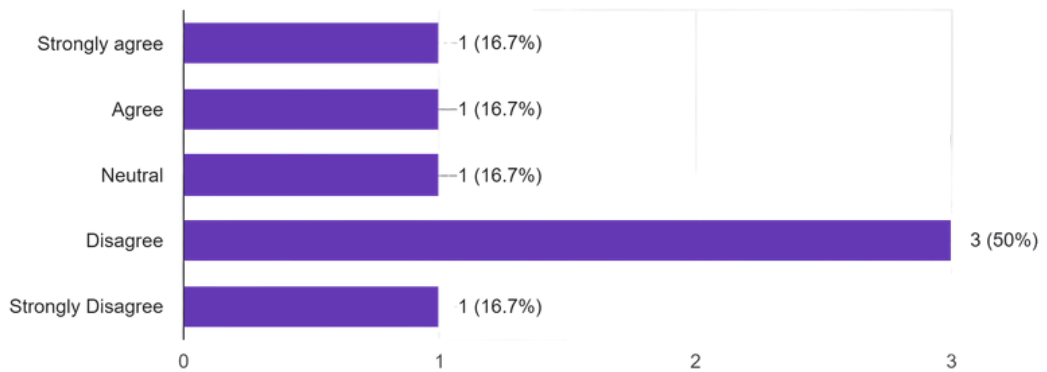
I enjoy my session with engage

6 responses

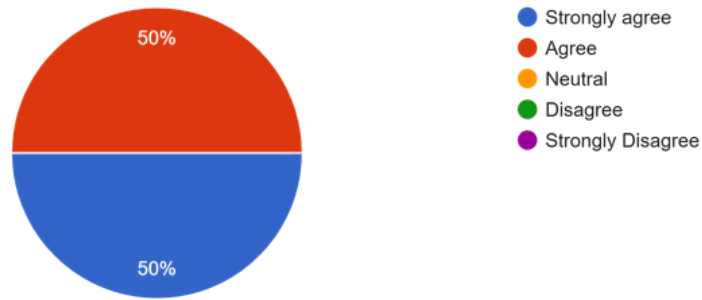


I had an idea of what engage would be like before i started my sessions

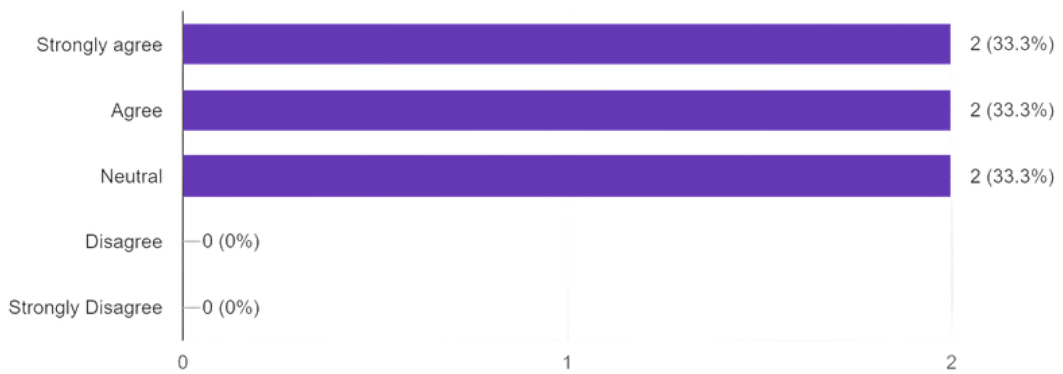
6 responses



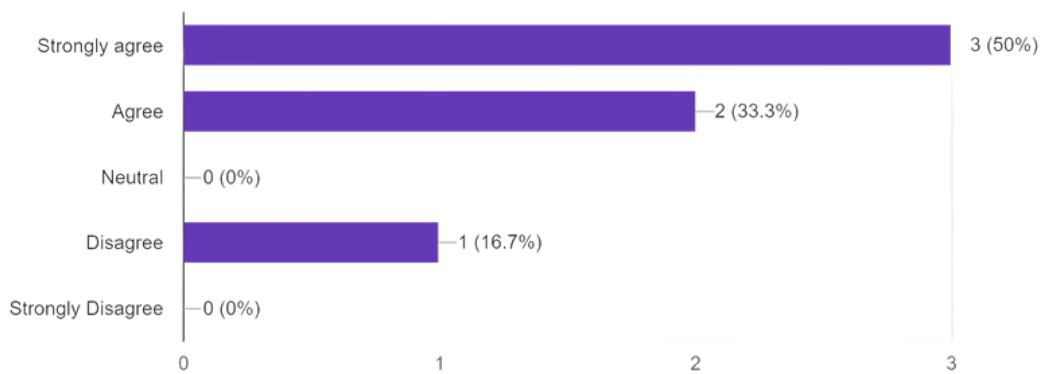
The service is better than i thought it would be
6 responses



I actively participate in my engage sessions
6 responses

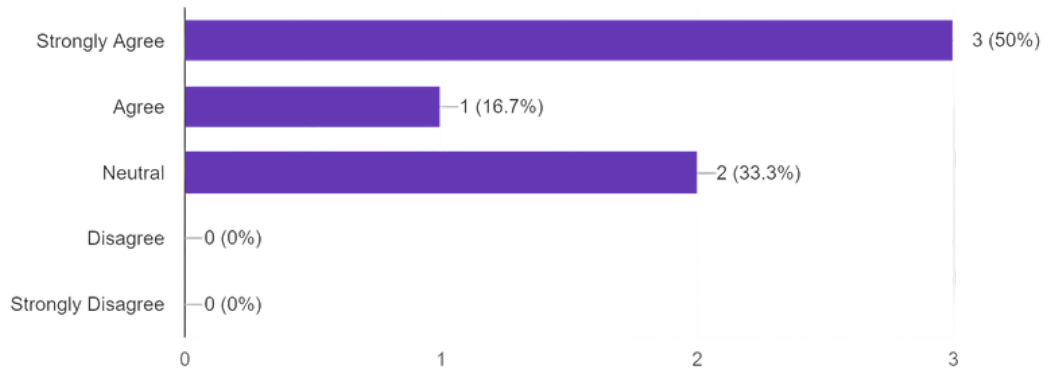


I feel as though I have a say in shaping the sessions
6 responses



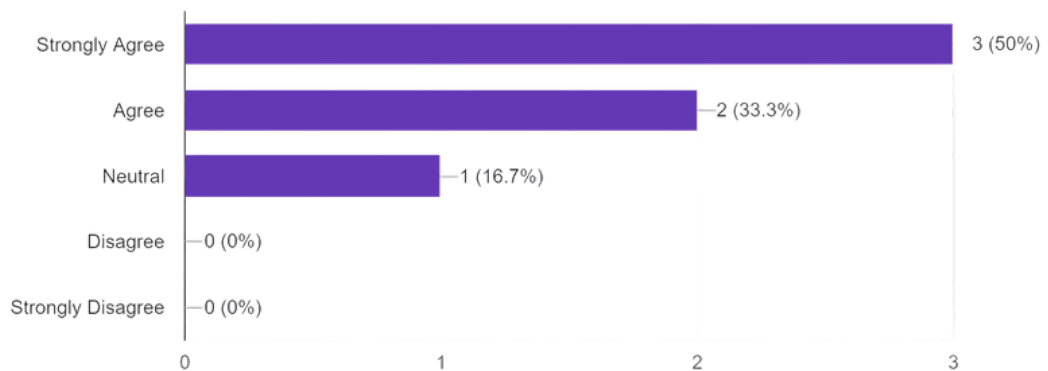
I feel like I can be myself around youth workers and feel comfortable during my sessions

6 responses



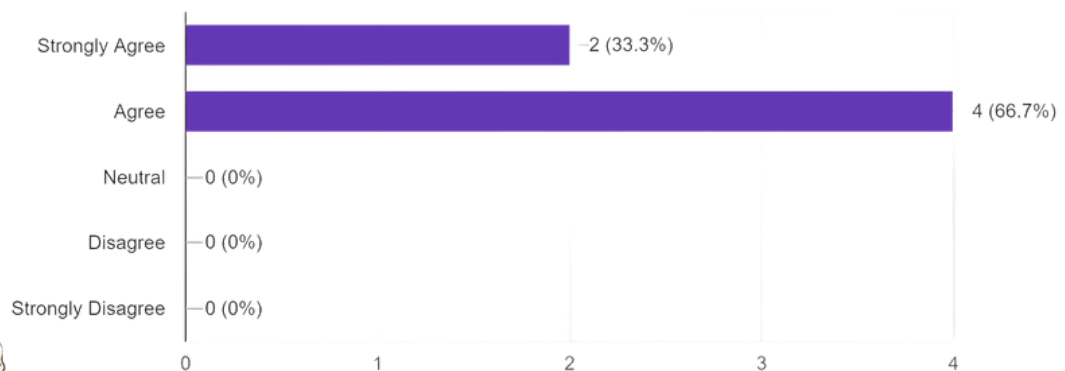
Sessions are suited to my individual needs

6 responses



Engage youth workers respect and listen to me

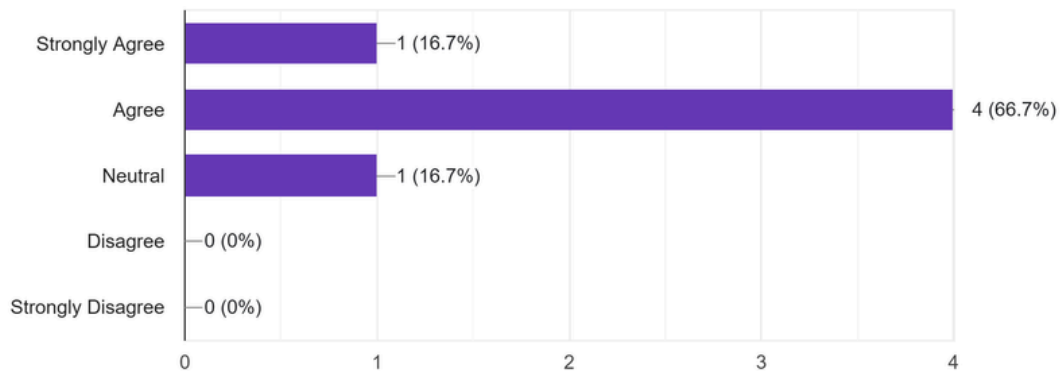
6 responses



Since you have been with Engage have you noticed any changes in the following questions.

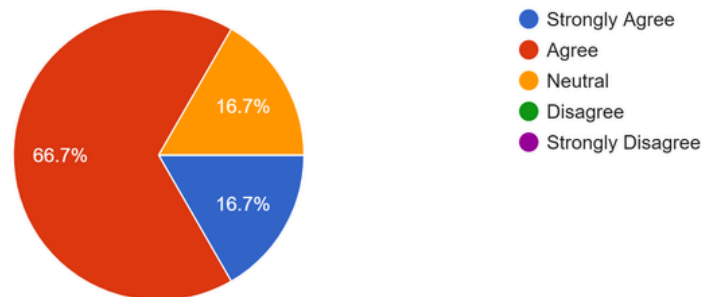
I have seen personal grown in myself since being with engage.

6 responses



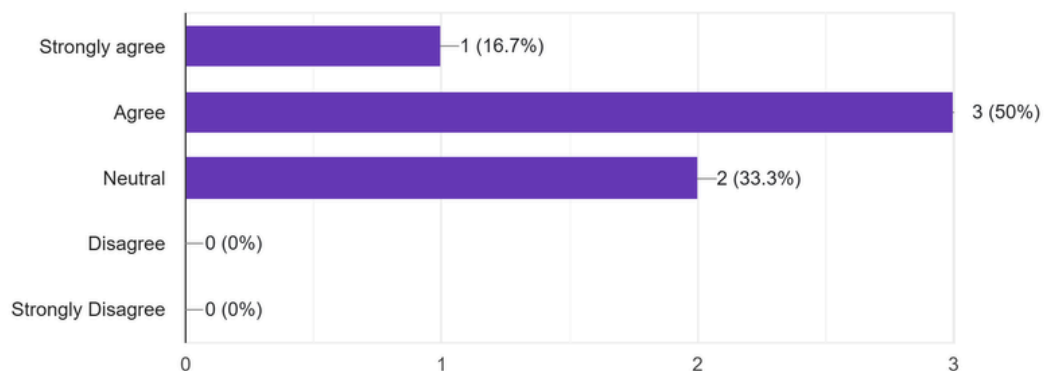
I am more confident in myself

6 responses



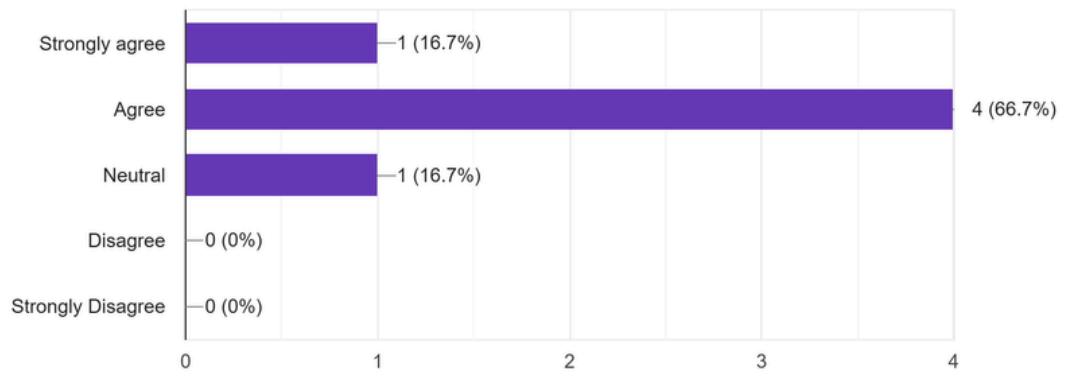
I am doing better at school/collage/work

6 responses



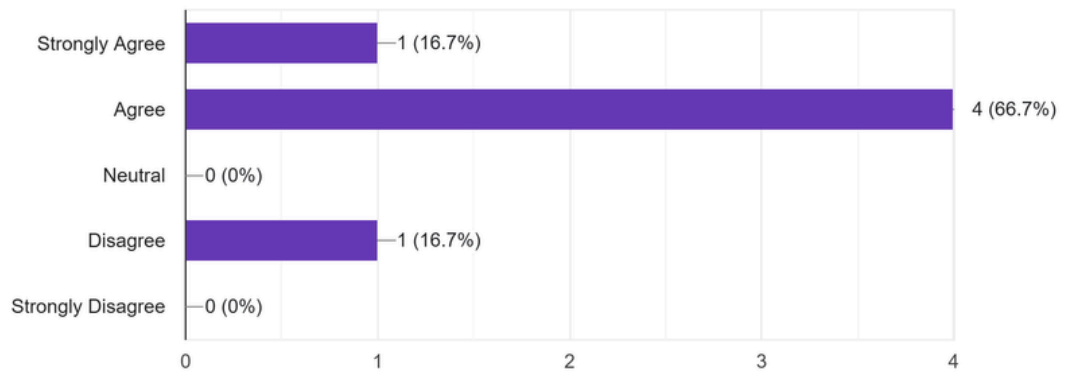
I am finding my day to day easier

6 responses



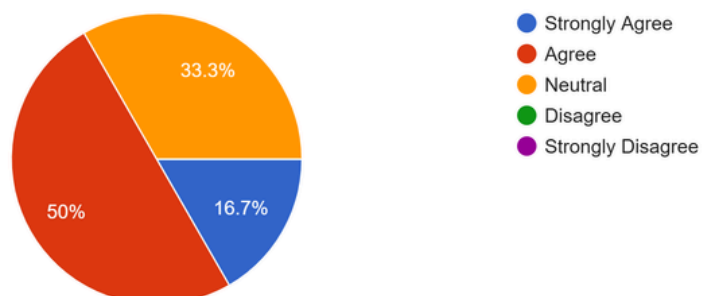
I am finding it easier to regulate my emotions

6 responses



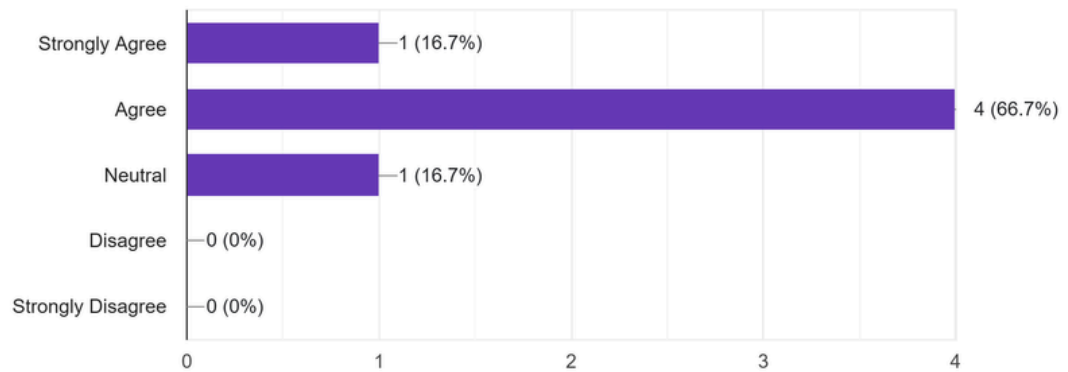
I am making better choices that improve my own life

6 responses



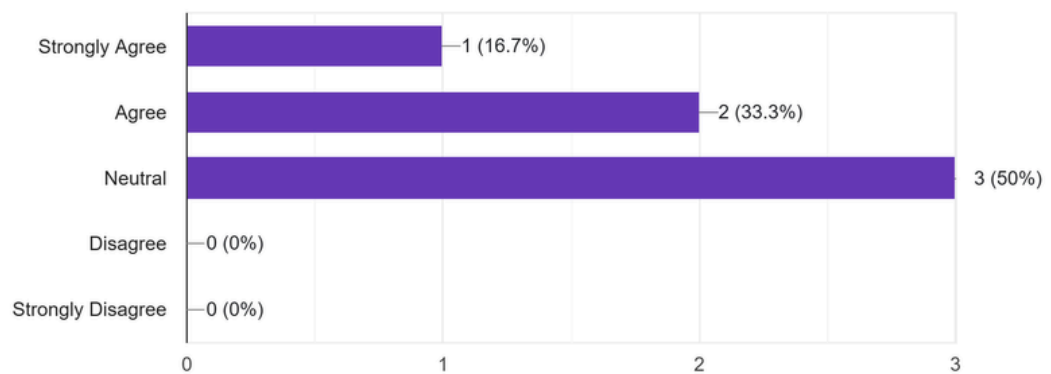
My relationship with friends has improved

6 responses



My relationships with family/guardians has improved

6 responses



Shaping Our Service

What would you change about the service to better suit yourself? 6 responses

- Nothing
- Nothing
- I dont know

What is something you would like to do more of in your sessions? 6 responses

- Nothing
- More team games
- Not sure
- More archery please
- Building more stuff
- I dont know

If you could remove one part of your session that you don't enjoy what would it be?
6 responses

- Nothing
- Shooting
- Don't know
- Talking to the boys

How would you describe your part of engage to someone who has never been ?
would you recommend it to a friend ? 6 responses

- It's good and it boosts your confidence. It gives me the chance to socialise and I would definitely recommend it to a friend.
- It's a fun place to go to, there's nice activities to do and people to talk to.
- Fun helpfull
- It's a good learning experience. I have already told two of my friends who want to come.
- Good. I would tell my friends.
- I'm not sure and yes

What Next?

We are asking all school professionals who work with and have received feedback from this cohort to get in touch and tell us what you think. Your feedback is important to us and helps to shape future sessions with other young people.

You can email Joe on joe.engageproject@gmail.com with your comments or for any further information.



→ Future Plan

- Group 3 will be our final 12-week programme of this academic year. We are busy resetting the site and look forward to providing another exciting programme.
- We are hoping to have built a new greenhouse during this cohort, that will help to inspire our young people to be more green-fingered and motivated to contribute further to the beautification of our site.
- Furthermore, our clubhouse is being knocked down... But we are building a newer and bigger one!

→ Beyond the pilot

So, what's happening beyond this pilot?

Engage will be reaching out to each school over the next few months to find out if this is a service they would like to continue, either as a partnership with other schools or independently.

As a charity, we rely on programmes like this to fund our work, on that note, we will be seeking confirmation of future programmes prior to the end of this academic year.

If you are interested, please speak to your senior leadership team then get in touch with us. It would be a pleasure to have a chat.

Contact Us



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