

No5

Reducing the Risk of Permanent Exclusion from School

2020-2023

Project Impact Report

Background and History

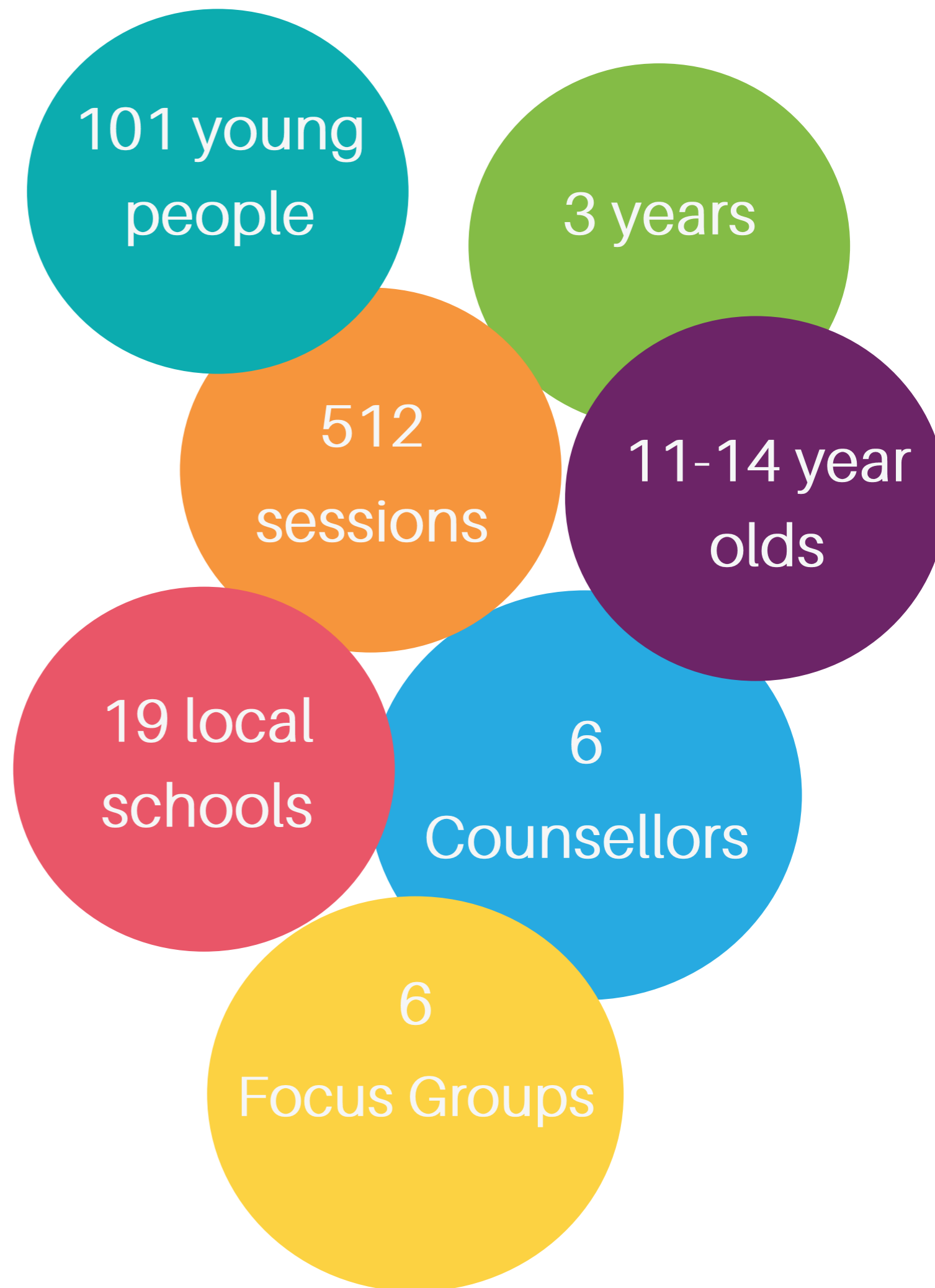
In 2019, No5 was awarded funding from the Berkeley Foundation's 'Skills for Positive Futures' fund to address issues relating to increasing school exclusions in Reading.

As an organisation, we felt well-placed to undertake this work as our 50 year history has demonstrated the life-long impact of offering young people a safe, confidential space to be truly heard by a professional counsellor who can support them and listen without judgement.

Whilst recognising that every young person's story is unique, we also knew from experience that there would be shared features in the stories of young people who had been excluded from school which would be vital in helping us shape what this project should look like.

With this, No5 devised an **Inclusion Support project** which put young people's stories at its centre and has delivered 1:1 support along with a creative expressive Summer Transitions project, all with the aim of **reducing each young person's risk of permanent exclusion from school.**

Overall Numbers



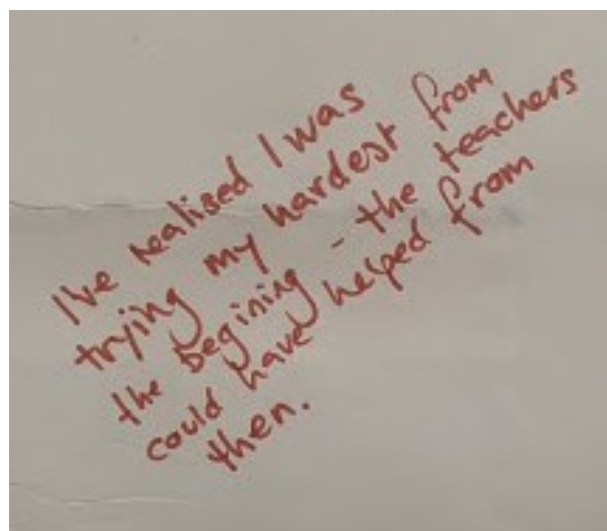
Year 1—Project Development

The project development began with two No5 counsellors, one with specialist experience of Pupil Referral Unit settings and one with extensive experience working creatively, alongside No5's Lived Experience Young Leader, and then Operations and Relationship Officer, spending time in Cranbury College, the local Pupil Referral Unit, and involved **in-depth listening** sessions with young people who had been excluded.

Young people shared their school history with the No5 team, and we learnt that the **transition from Primary to Secondary school**, and the transitions as young people moved up through Secondary school were the **moments where young people's relationships with school began to break down**.

The key learning for us throughout these sessions was that **continuity of relationship**, and that young people (especially those who already face multiple barriers, disadvantages and have experience of Adverse Childhood Experiences) need a **safe adult** within school who can help them to both **navigate their day, and also their thoughts, feelings and challenges**.

Young people also shared that they had struggled to understand concepts such as **choices and consequences** when they were in school, and so they felt they had been punished for things they didn't fully understand at the time.



I've realised I was trying my hardest from the beginning - the teachers could have helped from then.



No one believed I was struggling

Year 1—Project Development

Training and development

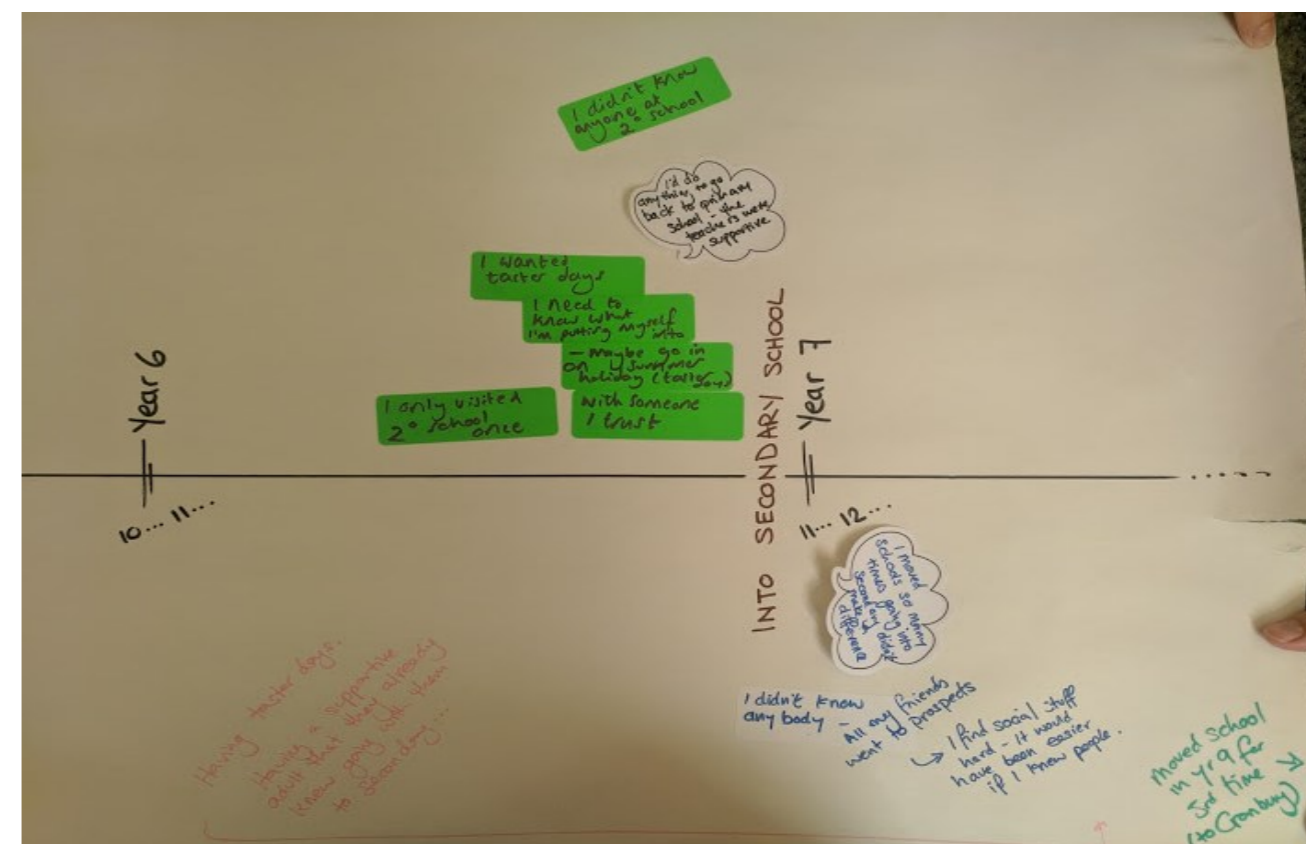
This learning, along with our counsellor's experience working in this setting, supported us to build a **training course was built for counsellors** that brought together direct lived experience of local young people alongside counsellor's professional experience and expertise.

This training was delivered to all counsellors working on the project to support them in what became our 1:1 Inclusion Support session work.

Added Value

The young people who attended these sessions, and the staff at Cranbury, all shared how **impactful and beneficial** they found these focus group sessions.

They said they really **valued the opportunity to be heard** about their school experience, **understand it wasn't their fault**, and **spend time reflecting** on their story with safe adults. They said that sharing their story and knowing it was helping No5 to create a project to **prevent other young people** from being excluded and **get the support they needed** was a **positive experience** and they gained a lot from it.



Year 2—Project delivery: JMA

Final scoping and project design was finalised through focus group sessions with young people attending Alternative Provision at Reading FC Community Trust .

Through these sessions, these young people supported us to identify the **final outcomes** that we were aiming to achieve alongside **each young person** supported on the project.

They were:

- **Improved wellbeing**
- **Improved individual behaviour**
- **Improved capacity to manage emotions**
- **A reduced risk of being permanent excluded**

We needed to identify the school that was the most in-need, and therefore best placed to receive this support. We worked in collaboration with **Brighter Futures for Children** through **Early Help** and the **Youth Diversion Hub** to identify **John Madejski Academy (JMA)** to receive this support.

We then working closely with JMA's Safeguarding Lead in order to shape the project delivery, including a **system for triaging young people**.

The delivery of **12 sessions per week**, delivered by three **counsellors**, began in **September 2021**.

Year 2—Project delivery: Summer Transitions

After the first year of this project, and following discussions with statutory partners, it was clear that more **needed to be done for young people** especially during the **summer holidays** – a transient period where their school routine and relationships fall away. Additionally, we recognised that with an even earlier intervention, young people may even be prevented from becoming at risk of exclusion.

Our experience suggested that a **creative project**, focusing on **young people's strengths**, aiming to increase their **confidence**, encourage the building of **safe, trusted relationships**, improve **communication**, and not focusing on school or young people's impending risk of exclusion would be the **most impactful** way to support them.

This was confirmed by the young people at the Local Referral Unit's receptiveness to working creatively to help **tell their story**, especially where they **struggled to find the words** to communicate how they felt and what had happened to them.

With this in mind, we reached out to **two creative partners**, Rabble Theatre and Chris Mitchell, to work alongside **two No5 counsellors** in a **strengths-based, individual young person-focused** way. Our development and work as a partnership team became our, now annual, **Summer Transitions project!**

Year 2—Project Delivery: Summer Transitions

Through careful planning and consideration on the part of the whole project team, we devised a 5-day Creative Expressive Wellbeing project and brought in 2 additional delivery partners -1 to provide additional music experience and support, and the other, a Sound Therapist, to provide a group drumming workshop as part of the programme.

The project was offered both to 11-14 year olds on No5's counselling waiting list, who had self-identified anxiety and issues around school as one of their reasons for asking for counselling support, and to local schools who identified young people who were at likely to struggle with the transition into the next academic year, and were at risk of exclusion.



The project took place during August 2022, and saw a group of 22 11-14 year olds working creatively and collaboratively through drama, music, art and performance.

They told us they built friendships, relationships and confidence throughout the week, and that they were happier.

Year 2—Project Delivery: Summer Transitions

5 specialist,
creative
practitioners and
2 counsellors

5 days

5 songs
produced

11-14 year
olds

12 local
schools

22 young
people

1
performance

30 hours
of support

Year 3—Project delivery: JMA

The second year of session delivery began in September 2022 and saw the three counsellors return to JMA to deliver 12 sessions per week.

Following review meetings and planning during the summer, alongside feedback from young people and JMA, we developed the project to make sure the programme offer reflected what we had learnt. This included moving away from set, routine outcome measures and **integrating different forms of young person, practitioner, and school determined, reported and observed ways to monitor the impact of the work.**

This ensured that **all of the young people supported during the second delivery year were also supported to achieve the project outcomes.**

During the second year of delivery, the project supported 21 young people and delivered 286 sessions.

During this delivery year, we also began exploring how our learnings about **young person, practitioner, and school determined, reported and observed outcomes** could help inform one of No5's strategic aims of finding new ways to include young person determined outcomes in clinically and statistically robust ways. This work, supported by funding from The Considered Ask, is ongoing.

These successes and developments also led to the decision being made for No5 to seek further funding to continue this service offer post July 2023, and integrate this project as part of our core service.

Feedback

"You have helped me make better decisions"

"I can now talk about stuff"

"I have been different ever since you helped me. I really appreciate it"

"Working with you has relaxed me"

"I don't feel as nervous anymore"

"I could talk to you"

Impact and Outcomes

'The school's data shows an improvement in young people making the right choices. Students seem happy to engage and they like the counsellors they are working with.'

'We feel as a school that the program is extremely rewarding for our students in helping them look at a more positive future'

- L. Brawn, Youth Support & Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, JMA

Improved emotional management

Reduction in term-time exclusions

Improved individual behaviour

A Story of Change

Through sessions with one young person who was at risk of being excluded due to his **'disruptive' behaviour** in school, the Inclusion Support Counsellor worked alongside them and established a relationship of safety and trust. They eventually felt able to tell their counsellor that they couldn't tell the time.

The aim of the work became to support him to learn to tell the time, and this brought him a **sense of agency and control** which in turn allowed him to feel better able to **manage his school day**.

This made him **feel in charge of his angry feelings** and made his behaviour less **'disruptive'**.

This young person was supported to **remain in school** and is **no longer at risk** of being excluded as a result of this work.

Impact and Outcomes

Reduced risk of permanent exclusion

Return to full timetable

No longer on a PSP

Reduction of term-time exclusions

Managed moves redacted

Reduction of instances in isolation

Impact and Outcomes: Improved individual behaviour

Of the 101 young people supported during this project, all of them have achieved the four core outcomes, and this has been seen in the following ways:

- Young people felt able to ask to **walk during their sessions**, to both move around and because some found **talking alongside** their counsellor (rather than face-to-face) really helpful
- Over time, young people were demonstrating the **trust and respect** that had been built, by **holding doors open and thanking** the counsellor, which was **also noticed by school**.
- Young people said their support **helped them understand the consequences of their actions and behaviour** and the implications of interventions such as managed moves. They explained how this could negatively impact them and **expressed their dreams and wants for the future with an idea of how to achieve this**. This allowed them to **improve their behaviour** and managed moves were no longer needed.

"You have helped me make better decisions"

"I have been different ever since you helped me. I really appreciate it"

"Now I can make a fresh start next year"


Impact and Outcomes: Improved individual behaviour

- One young person was sent to isolation significantly less during and after their support. Previously, being sent to isolation happened **multiple times per week**, however during and after their support, times in isolation **reduced to weeks apart**. When they were sent to isolation for the first time during their sessions, they expressed that they felt bad about it and that they had let themselves and the counsellor down. From this they were able to **better identify the consequences of their actions** and when were able to **improve their communication, and make better choices**. Consequently, their **behaviour improved** and they **weren't sent to isolation for the rest of that term**.

Impact and Outcomes:

Improved capacity to manage emotions:

- Young people were able to identify their emotions and feelings and express that their **refusal to go to lessons was due to anxiety not defiance**. Sessions helped them with **regulation and self-soothing**, and they were then able to explain how they felt to school.
- Some young people did need to move to a more specialist learning environment. Their time with the counsellor helped them to see that this was **not their fault**, they had **not done something wrong**, this was **not punishment**, and that the **new school would be more suitable for them**.
- Some young people were supported to identify that a **disclosure needed to be made** to the school regarding Safeguarding. They were able to ask the counsellor for help to do this, and said they realised they didn't need to be scared or worried on their own.
- Young people, counsellors and school, all experienced the impact of them **developing understanding of their emotions** and how they were feeling, and allowed them to **find ways to manage them within school when they were struggling**. This supported them to **stay in lessons and school** when they would otherwise leave or refuse.



*"Working with
you has relaxed
me"*

Impact and Outcomes:

- Some young people were discomfited by the idea of seeing a counsellor at the beginning and felt they had **no control over their lives**. Over time, they were able to see that there were **people around them who care**. From this, managed moves were avoided and they were **able to stay in school where they felt safe**.
- Some young people who were **being excluded** or were on a **reduced timetable** had often been **verbally abusive** to staff and other students, could **explode with rage** very easily, and were **having fights with other students**.

They often had **little awareness of their own emotions** and how to process them. Counsellors **worked hard** on this in their sessions, **celebrating the positives** the young people were able to achieve, offer a different perspective to **increase their sense of self-worth**. This supported young people to be **able to question their choices, understand consequences and make more informed decisions**, therefore reducing negative patterns.

Over time, this meant they were in a **much better place to be able to manage their emotions and feel calmer**. This led them to feel that they wanted to **better themselves, do well in exams** and supported them to **visualise a future**.

Looking Ahead—2023/24 delivery

The success and impact of this project throughout has resulted in No5 committing to continuing this project and seek funding to make it possible.

With thanks to funding from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and Peter Harrison Foundation, we are delighted to continue to offer 12 sessions per week at JMA throughout the 2023/24 academic year.

We will continue to seek funding to support this project as part of our core service offer in years to come, and expand this across more Reading schools as exclusions continue to be a challenge across the area.



Looking Ahead—best practise model and replicability

Whilst we continue to deliver this work, we also are keen to explore how we can share best practise.

Alongside our work to explore young person determined outcomes, we are also keen to work with research-based partners to share the learnings from this project and conduct research into its success, in order to encapsulate this model and way of working to support the up-scaling and replicating of this work in other schools and across other areas.

Thank you!

We would like to say a huge thank you to all of our partners who have made this project possible, and to the young people who have trusted us to work alongside them and support them to reduce their risk of being excluded from school.





**Supporting Young People to
Take Charge of Their Mental Health**

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