

Evaluation of the Risk-Avert Programme

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2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Programme:-

- Risk-Avert is a six session programme that contributes to the health and well-being of young people by empowering them to manage risks to achieve positive outcomes. This innovative approach focuses on the drivers behind behaviour and on supporting young people to develop practical skills to effectively manage day to day risks that they encounter in their young lives. In doing so, it represents a departure from traditional 'information deficit' assumptions about young people's abilities to cope with risks.
- Risk-Avert comprises an online screening questionnaire and six sessions of classroom workshops that are delivered by teaching staff. It is designed for year 8 pupils (aged between 12 and 13 years) and aims to facilitate an increase in awareness and informed decision making about engaging in risks. The programme also hopes to support young people to achieve increased self-efficacy, well-being and resilience, where these psychosocial outcomes are compromised in the first instance.
- Risk-Avert integrates into the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) national education curriculum that is delivered in secondary schools in England. A training programme and set of evidence based resources are available for school staff. Schools can access valuable information about the risks that their pupils take in individual, school, family and community contexts via infograms. Currently local authorities and schools in the UK can commission the Risk-Avert programme.

The Evaluation:-

- An evaluation was conducted between 2015 and 2016 via independent researchers who have honorary positions at the University of Bath and the University of Suffolk.
- It was essential that the evaluation was embedded into everyday practice and did not adversely impact on teaching or school activities. A before and after evaluation design was used to enable change over time in the programme outcomes to be measured. Published questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were used as methods for data collection.
- The pupil and teaching staff samples were drawn from seven secondary schools based in Essex and Medway. In total, 68 pupils participated in focus groups and 59 were also able to complete the outcome measure questionnaires. A total of 14 interviews were conducted with teaching staff.

The Findings:-

- When schools engaged fully with staff training and supported the delivery of Risk-Avert, especially at senior managerial levels, the findings indicate strong support for the programme. A pattern emerged where pupils who engaged fully with the programme reported a newly informed perception and greater awareness about risk, alongside the confidence to manage negative and positive risks. In addition to salient changes in risk management, on average there were also improvements in self-efficacy – the pupil's belief that they can cope with tasks or adversity in life. There were statistically significant increases in well-being and in resilience – the pupil's perceptions that they can cope with life's stresses and thrive in terms of relationships and personal functioning. These outcomes strongly suggest that when integrated into the wider PSHE curriculum, the Risk-Avert programme makes an important contribution to young people's social and emotional development.
- Further additional benefits were also found for schools and staff. The evaluation found that as a result of Risk-Avert delivery, teaching staff and pupils identified greater alignment to a shared school culture and more connectedness with their schools. Improved communication, confidence and trust between staff and pupils were cited with specific examples to underscore these positive outcomes in focus groups and interviews
- Overall, the evaluation advocates continued delivery and evaluation of the Risk-Avert programme as a useful and relevant resource to support pupils to manage risks effectively and therefore to be better prepared to engage with opportunities, responsibilities and experiences for later life.

3 INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

The ambition of the Risk-Avert programme is to contribute to the health and well-being of young people by empowering them to manage risks to facilitate positive outcomes. When young people have experienced difficulties in their lives, the programme also anticipates that the effective management of risks will contribute to the development of resilience. That is, providing young people with the opportunity to develop skills so that they may experience the ability to bounce back, despite adversity. In this way, the programme presents a pivotal opportunity to serve as a method of prevention and to educate as an early intervention, depending on the context and types of risks that young people might engage with, currently and in the future. This report was written at the end of a year-long independent evaluation of the Risk-Avert programme. In total, seven schools based in Essex and Medway participated in the evaluation. Sixty eight pupils participated in the focus groups and fifty eight pupils were also able to complete outcome measures at the start and the end the Risk-Avert programme. The evaluation demonstrated that for the majority of pupils there were positive changes or pre-existing stability in young person outcomes in relation to self-efficacy, well-being, resilience and general behaviour. The focus groups with staff highlighted significant benefits to young people and school functioning when Risk-Avert was supported by senior leadership teams, when schools provided a range of related interventions and when teaching staff fully engaged with Risk-Avert training opportunities and the available resources. In other words, when Risk-Avert is delivered in schools that commit to the programme and integrate it into a range of support being offered to young people, young people appear to benefit significantly from Risk-Avert. These tentative yet salient findings are discussed and recommendations are provided at the end of the report, following a brief outline of the Risk-Avert programme and a summary of the evaluation methodology.

4 PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

4.1 THE TRAINING EFFECT

The Training Effect was founded in 2011 by Mark Bowles, an experienced public sector practitioner and manager. Prior to founding The Training Effect, Mark worked within young person's drug and alcohol treatment services, child and adolescent mental health services, youth work and child health commissioning within the NHS. Beginning with a focus on substance misuse training, The Training Effect has grown to become one of the leading providers of school-based interventions focused on risk-taking behaviours, emotional health, well-being and PSHE. This academic year alone The Training Effect has delivered services to 130 schools in 10 local authority areas of the UK and 21,053 children and young people have completed one of their surveys. The Training Effect's mission is to: 'Design, develop and deliver innovative evidence-based services which improve health and social outcomes for children, young people, adults and families'. Their ambition is to be the leading provider of school based programmes in the UK. The Training Effect's values are to: follow the evidence, deliver innovative approaches that are informed by evidence, facilitate behaviour change and improve outcomes in the young people who engage with the interventions and to provide value to the schools and organisations who partner with The Training Effect.

The Training Effect was commissioned by Essex County Council in April 2013 to design experimental approaches to identifying young people vulnerable to multiple risk-taking. The brief was to develop and deliver a targeted programme which identified young people before participation in behaviours which are likely to cause harm. The authority wished to commission a new approach as existing provision was deemed to be ineffective and evaluation of these existing approaches was minimal and problematic. To respond, the aim was to harness an innovative approach to realise twin track benefits to the authority, namely reducing costs while improving outcomes for young people.

4.2 THE RISK-AVERT PROGRAMME

The Risk-Avert programme offers true innovation in its approach to tackling the full range of risk-taking behaviours. The programme is driven by its refocusing of educational interventions which aim to tackle these behaviours. Risk-Avert moves schools away from the traditional 'Information Deficit' model to one focused on the actual drivers behind behaviour and the acquisition of practical and effective skills. Many traditional approaches to tackle behaviour still focus almost exclusively on the provision of knowledge in the hope that better understanding of behaviours; effects and their risks will lead to reduced engagement. This approach is faulty; as it fails to recognise that our decisions are not only driven by knowledge, multiple additional factors ultimately influence our decisions to engage in any behaviour. These include the influence of our peers, societal or family norms or our own personal emotional state. Risk-Avert provides cultural change for schools and offers the opportunity for young people to acquire practical skills and social and emotional competencies, which better equip them to make positive choices and decisions as they progress through adolescence.

Risk-Avert is a multi-component school based intervention delivered to secondary pupils. In addition to facilitating increased awareness and more informed decision making, the programme also seeks to support young people to increase self-efficacy, well-being and resilience (where these psychosocial domains are compromised). Risk-Avert is primarily focused on year 8 pupils, who are aged between 12 and 13 years, with additional support and interventions available to other year groups. Initially, year 8 pupils are invited to complete an online survey that focuses on risk across 4 domains: Individual, School, Family and Community. The results of the survey generate a risk profile for participating schools at the year group level and identifies young people requiring further support. These young people are offered the opportunity to attend a 6-session intervention programme delivered by trained school staff. The attendance of this intervention is voluntary and consent is required from both the young person and their parents/carers.

Alongside the targeted element of the programme support is offered at the whole year group level through the provision of PSHE resources and the delivery of social norms interventions using the collected survey data. Risk-Avert is supported by a bespoke web platform and an evaluation to cover all elements of programme delivery.

Risk-Avert is delivered to schools in seven local authority areas of the UK. The local authorities are: Essex (Since 2013); Hertfordshire (Since 2015); Medway (Since 2014); Oxfordshire (Since 2015); Southend (Since 2015); Suffolk (Since 2015) and Thurrock (From 2016). Risk-Avert is funded directly by local authorities. The programme is offered at no cost to participating schools. Whilst Risk-Avert can be purchased by single schools this approach to programme funding has not yet been extensively promoted.

The vision of the programme is to develop the leading school based intervention focused on risk-taking behaviours in the UK, which clearly demonstrates its effectiveness through an independent evaluation. The Training Effect aspires for Risk-Avert to significantly contribute to health and well-being of children and young people in the UK and make a meaningful contribution to the evidence and literature related to engagement in risk-taking behaviours.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 DESIGN

The evaluation utilised a single sample before and after (pre-post) design with a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. Where possible reliable and valid measures were used to explore young person outcomes. Semi-structured interview and focus group schedules were standardized and can be made available by contacting the Training Effect.

5.2 SAMPLE

Seven schools in Essex and Medway participated in the evaluation. Whilst school participation was anonymous, the demographic details for each school are shown in the table below. Sixty eight pupils participated in the focus groups and fifty nine pupils were also able to complete outcome measures at the start and the end the Risk-Avert programme. All pupils are enrolled in year 8 (between 12 and 13 years) when they engage with the programme.

School	Grades A*-C	Attendance (%)	Disadvantaged pupils achieving expected progress Maths/English	No. of Pupils (avg. 957)	Girls (%) (Avg. 49.7%)	Free School Meals (%) (avg. 28.5%)	School Action Plus/ Statemented (%) (avg.	Ofsted Outcome	Information on Safety
A	58%	95.1	61 / 61	1125	47.4	14.8	5.5	Good (2013)	Students feel safe and parents agree. Students feel cared for. In the rare incidents of bullying, these are effectively managed. Students are taught about the dangers associated with fire, water and the internet.
B	63%	94.3	47/72	1643	47.9	21.4	7.4	Good (2015)	Efforts to keep pupils safe and secure are viewed as being good and staff training is provided for first aid. Visits and trips away from school are accompanied with risk assessments.

School	Grades A*-C	Attendance (%)	Disadvantaged pupils achieving expected progress Maths/English	No. of Pupils (avg. 957)	Girls (%) (Avg. 49.7%)	Free School Meals (%) (avg. 28.5%)	School Action Plus/ Statemented (%) (avg. 7.3%)	Ofsted Outcome	Information on Safety
C	39%	95%	50/79	1592	51.5	52	11.1	Good (2014)	The topics chosen by students often go beyond the more obvious safety issues and cover topics such as the negative effects of early sexual activity. Students say that they feel very safe and know how to manage risky situations when they are outside of school.
D	58%	95.1	50 / 49	1366	46.5	19.5	7.1	Good (2013)	Students say they feel safe and are aware of bullying, including bullying that takes place via the internet. In the rare incidents of bullying, these are effectively managed.
E	28%	93.7	43 / 33	1382	54.4	34.5	14.9	Good (2013)	Students say they feel safe and are aware of bullying, including bullying that takes place via the internet. In the rare incidents of bullying, these are effectively managed. Students look after their environment.
F	99%	96.6	100 / 94	1199	5.3	8.5	4.8	Outstanding (2015)	No information provided.
G	57%	93.3	65 / 55	1577	99.2	25.8	5.5	Good (2012)	Most students say they feel safe and can access support. Students say they understand how to manage the risks that they might face. Students, especially those in the sixth form, spoke very highly of the guidance and support they receive and felt that they were well placed to make informed choices about their futures.

5.3 INTENDED OUTCOMES

The overall aims of the Risk-Avert programme are to support young people to: 1. Gain knowledge and awareness about risks and risky situations; and 2. Identify risks and feel confident about managing risks. The Training Effect has identified a set of primary and secondary set of intended outcomes that can be associated directly and indirectly with the aims of the programme. These are listed below.

Primary intended outcomes include:

- A young person reporting insight into their own behaviours that are associated with risk.
- A young person who can demonstrate their ability to consider (or “weigh-up”) or identify risk.
- A young person understanding early warning signs in the context of their own behaviour.
- A young person who understands who influences them the most (if anyone) in relation to their own behaviour in the context of risk.
- A young person having insight into decision making processes to manage risk taking behaviours.

Secondary intended outcomes include:

- An increase in self-efficacy (where self-efficacy is low).
- An increase in resilience (where resilience is low).
- An increase in wellbeing (where wellbeing is low).
- A decrease in risk taking behaviours, including anti-social behaviour, offending, substance use, poor school attendance and fixed school exclusions.

5.4 OUTCOME MEASURES, INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP APPROACH

5.4.1 Outcome measures

Self-Efficacy Outcome Measure: The General Self-Efficacy Scale is a 10-item psychometric scale that is designed to assess optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life. A high score reflects high self-esteem. A low score reflects low self-esteem. The scale has been originally developed in German by Matthias Jerusalem and Ralf Schwarzer in 1981 and has been used in many studies with hundred thousands of participants. In contrast to other scales that were designed to assess optimism, this one explicitly refers to personal agency, i.e., the belief that one's actions are responsible for successful outcomes. Perceived self-efficacy is a prospective and operative construct.

Resilience Outcome Measure: Resilience may be viewed as a measure of stress coping ability and, as such, could be an important target of treatment. The Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (2003) comprises of 10 items, each rated on a 5-point scale (0-4), with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. The scale has established reliability and validity and has been published in peer reviewed journals. Studies have shown that the scale has sound psychometric properties.

Furthermore, the scale has been developed and tested as (i) a measure of degree of resilience, (ii) as a predictor of outcome to treatment with medication or psychotherapy, stress management and resilience-building; (iii) as a marker of progress during treatment; (iv) as a marker of biological (i.e. physical) changes in the brain. The scale also has promise as a method to screen people for high, intermediate or low resilience.

Well-being Outcome Measure: Positive mental health, also referred to as 'well-being', is recognised as having consequences for a range of health and social outcomes (Huppert and Wittington, 2004). For the young person, the Risk-Avert programme is seeking to establish whether there was an impact of the intervention upon young people and their well-being. Well-being was measured using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale which was developed by the NHS Health Scotland, the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh in 2007. The scale consists of seven items or statements that relate to well-being. Depending on the frequency to which a service user experiences each of the situations cited on the statements, a score between one and five will be allocated. An example of a statement is: "I have been dealing with problems well". The frequency scores are operationally defined as: 1-None of the time; 2-Rarely; 3-Some of the time; 4-Often; 5-All of the time. Each statement is positively expressed. Therefore, experiences that occur frequently will be given a high score, which in turn indicates greater mental health or well-being. The Short WEMWBS is a reliable and valid scale and the findings from the analysis of the scale have been externally evaluated and published in a peer reviewed journal.

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire: This is a behavioural screening questionnaire that measures children and young people's developmental level across a number of domains (Goodman, 1997). Typically, the questionnaire is administered by teachers based on their observations of children or young people who are aged between four and sixteen years. The questionnaire contains five domains or subscales. These are Conduct Problems (e.g., I get very angry and often lose my temper), Hyperactivity (e.g., I am restless, I cannot stay still for long), Emotional Symptoms (e.g., I worry a lot), Peer Problems (e.g., other children or young people pick on me or bully me), and Prosocial Behaviour (e.g., I usually share with others). With twenty five item statements, the young person is asked to rate how true the statement is in relation to them or their experiences. The item scale response options are 'not true', 'certainly true' and 'somewhat true'. The scale provides ranges of scores that can be located from 'normal' to 'very high' or raised scores. A normal score reflects the score given by the young person in comparison to a non-clinically identified young person cohort. A raised score indicates that further referral and/or support may be necessary for the young person.

Risk-Avert Feedback Questionnaire: This questionnaire is collected at the end of the Risk-Avert sessions (session five or session six). It enables some of the evaluation questions to be answered and provides a baseline on global questions about school attendance, school exclusions and very general grade attainment. As these questions can be asked again in a twelve week follow up, it will enable any changes that have occurred to be monitored. The questionnaire may be accessed by contacting The Training Effect to request permission to view/adapt the questionnaire.

5.4.2 Interviews and focus group approach

Qualitative methods were used to add richness and depth to our understanding of the Risk-Avert programme and to shed light on the quantitative evidence. Students were invited to participate in focus groups and staff members to focus group or semi structured interviews after the school had participated in at least one iteration of the Risk-Avert programme (post only). Focus group and semi-structured interview guides were derived from the aims and objectives of the evaluation, with some additional opening and closing questions intended to put the participants at their ease and draw the interviews to a close¹. These opening and closing questions provided valuable information about the process and implementation of the programme in schools which have been reported on separately. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews rely on creating an environment where participants feel comfortable to give their views in response to open-ended questions. The interview guide provides a framework to keep the discussion focused on the research objectives but also provides an opportunity for interviewers to develop questions and prompts and review participants' responses during the interview. There is flexibility to address points as they arise naturally during the discussion rather than in a specific order. Successful focus groups tend to involve discussion and interchange among participants (relevant to a question or prompt) and (respectful) disagreement is welcome as it generates a range of responses rather than consensus. Semi-structured interviews follow a similar pattern to focus groups but are usually with fewer participants (1-3).

¹ Please contact The Training Effect if you would like to discuss the detail of the focus group and interview schedules. Thank you.

The interview guides were tested and minor revisions made after the first school to ensure that the timing, questions and approach were appropriate and were generating responses relevant to the research questions.

All fourteen interviews were recorded with digital recorders. Field notes were also taken describing the setting of the interviews, body language, significant interruptions or other local factors.

Notes were made from the recordings, with large sections transcribed directly to facilitate thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this report we have focused on themes relating to the research objectives: semantic themes i.e. what students and school staff said about the impact of Risk-Avert on students' thinking, decision making and behaviour with respect to risk taking and aspects of the programme and its implementation in an individual school which enabled or hindered those impacts, but also latent themes such as impacts on school culture, school connectedness and stigma.

Other latent themes which can be identified from the data include parental permissiveness based on students' perceptions of their parents' acceptance or opposition to their risk taking behaviour and teachers' understanding of parents' reaction to the programme. As this was not a research objective for this study we have not explored this theme in this report but it represents an interesting issue for future research.

5.5 ETHICAL ISSUES

The ethical principles when conducting evaluations with any population, including vulnerable populations must be strictly adhered to². In the context of this evaluation, the authors have also taken into account the additional potential risks involved with the inclusion of 1. Young

² Typically, young people are automatically considered a vulnerable population within many UK based social science university departments.

people who are based in secondary schools; and 2. Research that involves potentially sensitive topics in the event that negative risk taking behaviours are discussed.

In approaching schools about their interest in engaging with the Risk-Avert programme which has an option for an integrated evaluation with this age cohort of pupils, it has been necessary to explicitly agree with schools where and how the programme fits into curriculum and pastoral support structures of the schools.

With regards to discussions about potential negative risk taking behaviours constituting a “sensitive topic”, it is important to note that under the 2002 Education Act, state funded schools must offer a balanced curriculum that prepares all secondary school pupils for opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life, including the topic of health in science and in personal social health and economic education. This specifically includes for example, but is not limited to learning about alcohol and drugs and the effects of substances, including substance misuse on behaviour, health and life processes. For the purposes of the evaluation then, asking outcome questions of pupils who want to discuss these topics is entirely congruent with 1. Standard education curriculum legislation in England; and, is 2. Fully aligned with the ethos of the Risk-Avert programme which is to educate, empower and provide people with information to make positive decisions about risk taking, and to seek further help or support from the school if necessary through safeguarding processes.

Notwithstanding this, each person has the right to choose if they want to engage with the programme and to choose whether or not they would like to provide informed consent to participate in the evaluation. Peoples opportunity to take part in the programme is not impacted in any way by their decision to participate (or not to participate) in the evaluation.

One question that was raised during the evaluation design related to how participants would withdraw from the evaluation even if they had initially provided consent. This question is answered by ensuring that all potential respondents are informed that they may withdraw from the evaluation at *any* point, simply by stopping or ceasing to answer the questions. Where data is collected via paperwork, the respondent can simply keep their questionnaires so that they are not handed to the delivery team. Before completion is possible, a participant

cannot proceed to the evaluation questionnaires unless they have read the evaluation details and provided informed consent.

The choice to stop (at any time) is outlined in this process. People do not need to give a reason or to notify anyone if they choose not to take part or to stop at any point during the evaluation. Likewise, people are not asked any questions about their choice not to take part in the evaluation. To ensure ethical practice, information sheets and copies of informed consent paperwork are available to everyone who is invited to take part in the programme. Direct contact with the evaluation team to answer any outstanding questions is also offered to everybody who receives the programme and to wider stakeholders.

For focus groups and interviews, participants agreed to the use of digital recording on the understanding that their comments would be anonymous. Two adults were present at each focus group interview and all researchers had recent and relevant DBS checks. Staff were invited to review the researchers' notes for the purposes of clarification and to triangulate the findings.

5.6 LIMITATIONS

As stated earlier in the methodology, this evaluation represented a preliminary examination of the Risk-Avert programme. By design, the Training Effect commissioned this piece of work with the definitive intention of identifying whether the key outcomes were achieved amongst young people and to recommend any changes which could potentially contribute to further programme development. Thus, as an initial piece, the work was largely exploratory in nature and although the evaluation design utilised reliable and valid outcome measures, limitations were built in to be addressed in further, larger scale evaluations. An outline of these limitations and the Training Effect and evaluation partners' suggestions to overcome them in the future is presented below.

- *The evaluation utilised a before and after design, with no follow-up and no comparison group:* The Training Effect were interested in the exploratory investigation of outcomes for the current version of the Risk-Avert programme. As the resources have been focused upon programme development over the summer period, the suggestion

for the future will be to include a follow-up design and if possible, to introduce a self-as-control waiting room cohort of young people.

This will enable the counterfactual question – *what happens to outcomes when Risk-Avert is not delivered at all?* – to be addressed and will further strengthen the evaluation design. The quality of the evaluation will then be increased and it will be possible to examine whether outcomes can be directly attributed by young people to Risk-Avert and whether they are maintained over a period of time, following participation in the programme. Within this piece of work, the findings were triangulated by collecting qualitative and quantitative information and by presenting the findings back to the teaching staff to give them an opportunity to review and comment upon their contributions. Importantly, since this evaluation is preliminary, the authors have necessarily been tentative to underscore the importance of further investigation to strengthen the evidence base.

- *The sample of schools was drawn from a larger pool of schools who participated in the Risk-Avert programme:* A strength of The Training Effect's position on evaluation inclusion and transparency is that the organisation asks *all* schools to participate in the completion of evaluation outcome measures. The issue is that there was no information available as to why some of the sub-sample of schools participated and some did not. This meant that selection bias could not be systematically explored. Fortunately, the findings demonstrated that the sample of participating schools included those who promoted programme fidelity and those where the model was not fully adhered to. As the finding sections below demonstrate, there is an emerging pattern whereby schools who commit to programme delivery, use available resources and have senior level staff support tend to be those that identified programme benefits and associated positive outcomes. Future evaluations will ensure that information is collected from participating and non-participating schools about their attitudes towards Risk-Avert and reasons for implementation (or not) of the programme.

- *There is a chance that stakeholders who participate in an evaluation are also those who report a positive experience of engaging with the Risk-Avert programme:* It is always challenging to collect data from those who are critical of an intervention. Stakeholders who are inclined to be positive about an intervention are more likely to make time available for evaluation. However, the participating schools were aware that the evaluation team was independent of The Training Effect and have been constructively critical in their appraisal of the programme. At least some of the schools who were not contactable will have had more pressing issues such as Ofsted inspections or may have made the decision not to participate for reasons unconnected to the perceived quality of the programme.

6 YOUNG PERSON OUTCOMES: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary intended outcomes that the Risk-Avert programme identifies pertain to changes in awareness and decision making processes that young people engage with when they consider risks. It is anticipated that developing greater insight and consideration of risk is associated with a sense of feeling informed and empowered. Therefore, the secondary set of intended outcomes relate to changes in self-efficacy, well-being and resilience, where young people experienced challenges before they commenced the Risk-Avert programme. These findings, discussed below, are certainly encouraging as a preliminary exploration of the programme.

6.1 AWARENESS AND DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

6.1.1 Awareness and decision making

In focus group discussions, the majority of young people identified a positive opinion of the Risk-Avert programme. Students who participated could identify what they had learned as a result of the programme, which related well to the planned content of the intervention sessions around risk taking and decision making. The students said the following:

Risk-Avert taught us to be aware of what is going on around us – and not to get caught up in stupid situations like joint enterprise. [Quotation #1]

We learned ‘what I feel’ ‘what I did’ [referring to 4 whats or 4 cogs]. [Quotation #2]

It [Risk-Avert] let you think about what you would actually do in those situations. If someone gave you a cigarette would you smoke? ‘Would I do it? Who’s with me? Are they one of my true best friends?’ [Quotation #3]

They said to be assertive and it gives you a whole new point of view. Gives you views on how to solve something. For instance someone’s being bullied. They might say forget it but the person keeps coming and doing it. And then they might be assertive and just tell them to stop. [Quotation #4]

In particular, the students were able to develop new approaches to managing potentially risky situations because they were more mindful and able to consider a wider range of antecedents and consequences to the situations. Risk-Avert utilises the principle of open dialogue to facilitate articulate thinking or cognitions about risks.

A similar pattern was identified by school staff. Most staff perceived some links between participation in the Risk-Avert programme and a greater awareness of risk among students. One teacher who implemented Risk-Avert across the whole of year 8 stated:

We had a lot of problems in that year group regarding Facebook, Instagram, and snapchat. There hasn't been any of that for months... The active tutorial had something to do with it. [Quotation #5]

Students identified negative risk taking as something to be avoided, although one student gave an example of risk taking as positive and could potentially lead to improved performance through learning by taking healthy risks:

A risk sometimes makes you better – like doing a new trick in skiing then the risk gets easier and easier and easier than you think 'I can do another risk'. [Quotation #5]

In another school the teacher commented:

Some of them [students], I think, have more of an understanding of risk - that risk is not all bad, but that it's about managing that risk. [Quotation #6]

Indeed, it is salient that the Risk-Avert programme actively explains the differences between positive and negative risk taking to young people. Positive risk taking is acknowledged as an important and necessary part of development.

6.1.2 Reinforcement of awareness and decision making

Some students valued the opportunity to have their understanding about risk taking issues reinforced or extended:

I knew it all before but it kind of reminded me. [Quotation #7]

*I learnt more about risk taking and how to make choices in life which is good.
[Quotation #8]*

6.1.3 Negative risk scenarios and decision making

Some students in each of the seven groups were able to reflect on their own risk taking behaviour and how they had drawn on what they had learned in the Risk-Avert programme to make decisions across a range of situations:

My mates were planning to stay out all night - which I thought was a bit risky. The risks of having no sleep and nowhere to go. [Quotation #9]

*When I have an argument with my Dad [it is risky]. I don't do it as much now.
[Quotation #10]*

Boy 1: Well it made me think about energy drinks more. It's really cheap stuff and I have thought about it and well I just have a sip and pour it away. [Quotation #11]

Boy 2: Yeah, I don't drink energy drinks no more. [Quotation #12]

And reflecting on relationships with the opposite sex, specific examples cited by students were:

I slapped a boy who tried to kiss me. [Quotation #13]

Interviewer: And Risk-Avert popped into your head?

Yeah, cause I thought about all the things that could happen. [Quotation #14]

Another girl described how boys approach her and message her:

'I am quite well known, shall I say. And they ask me for pictures and I say to myself, 'My Nan wouldn't like that and nor would my Mum, nor would my Dad, nor would my sister [so I don't send them]'. [Quotation #15]

I ask myself - 'would my Nan want to see that?' '[If the answer is] No', then I don't send it. [Quotation #16]

And in this exchange about social media and risk, a student said:

Like social networking – not following people you don't know – like on Instagram. If you let anyone follow you they can get all your details. [Quotation #17]

Interviewer: *Is that different to what you would have done before?*

Yeah so I actually went through all my followers and I deleted people. [Quotation #18]

6.1.4 Influences on risk behaviour

Some students demonstrated a better understanding of the role of influential factors in risk taking, especially in relation to peer influences:

Like with the peers they are tempting you to do it – I feel more prepared to deal with that now. [Quotation #19]

You can learn about peer pressure and taking risks. I would say it's a good programme and you learn a lot from it. [Quotation #20]

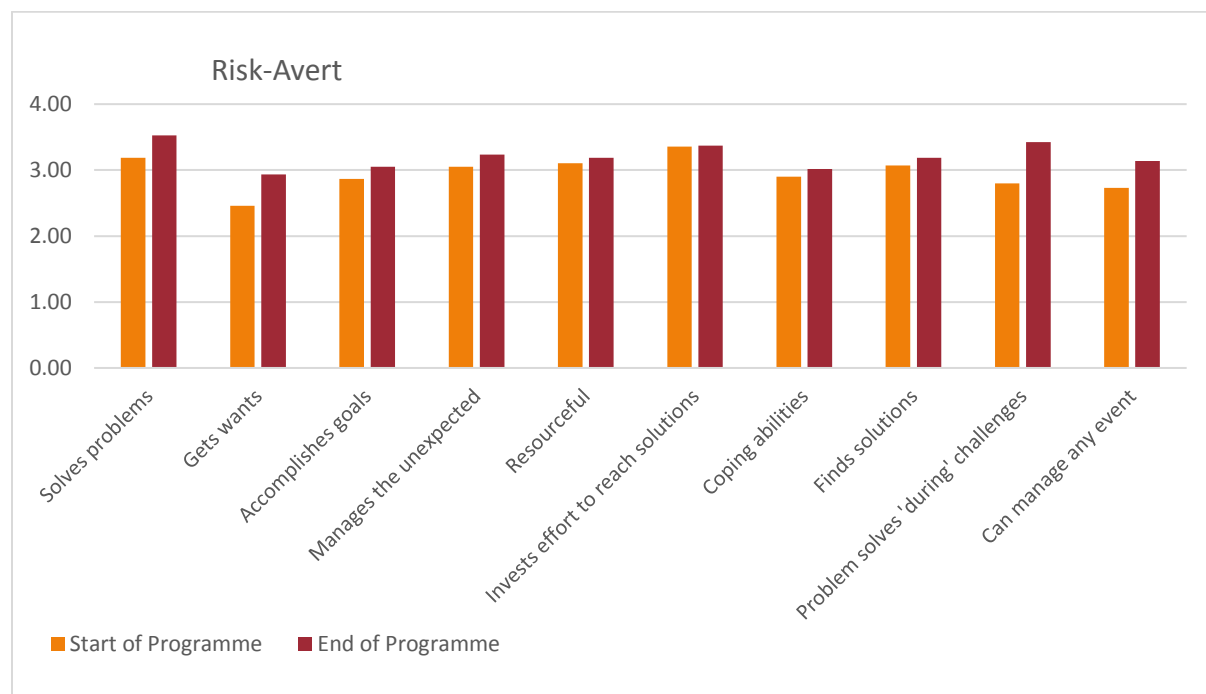
The analyses of the focus group data highlighted that the changes made by young people were not limited to awareness and decision making about risk in isolation. As highlighted in the focus group contributions above, it was also salient that the young people who participated in the programme also reported psychosocial behavioural domain changes. For example, the more detailed cognitive appraisal of risk was linked by the young people to feelings of assertion, confidence, an understanding of the ways that the programme material reinforced learned messages and an enhancement in positive risk taking and reduced negative risk taking. Young people could explicitly link their participation in the programme to changes in risk taking behaviours such as problematic social media experience, bullying, being out alone after dark, conflict with others, relationship issues and diet/nutrition (specially the problems of energy drinks or drug use). The following section outlines the changes experienced in young people's self-efficacy, well-being, resilience and behaviour.

6.2 SELF-EFFICACY, MENTAL WELL-BEING, RESILIENCE AND BEHAVIOURAL OUTCOMES

Self-efficacy may be viewed as the extent of the belief that a person has about their ability to complete tasks and reach goals. Bandura (1997) suggested that students actively influence their own learning processes and achievements. The Risk-Avert programme underscores this by positioning the intervention within a framework that uses discussion and exercises as a platform to learn, where students are proactive agents in the process. Initially the interactions are scaffolded by trained facilitators in classroom workshops with the ultimate goal for students to practice their individual learning in real world situations. The emerging findings about awareness and decision making demonstrated how young people were able to realistically apply their learning to risk taking behaviour (both positive and negative). The young people who participated in the programme were asked to complete a self-efficacy outcome measure before they commenced Risk-Avert and at the end of six sessions. The findings are summarised in the bar chart and table that follow.

6.2.1 Self-efficacy

Broadly speaking, self-efficacy refers to a belief that one can perform a task or cope with adversity in various areas of life. Perceived self-efficacy facilitates goal-setting, effort investment, persistence in face of barriers and recovery from setbacks. It can therefore be considered a protective factor that contributes towards a resilience outcome. Because perceived self-efficacy is an operative construct (relating to future behaviour) it is an important focus of behaviour change for service and intervention providers. The bar chart below shows that on average, the young people experienced positive self-efficacy across all ten of the domains (above 2 points in a 4 point scale). In other words, on average, the cohort maintained the belief that they could set goals, problem solve issues and complete tasks when they started the Risk-Avert programme. Although problem solving belief does not change significantly, on average, there was an increase in the majority of the domains over time, which indicated that self-efficacy increased from first engagement to the point of completion of the programme. The bar chart below shows this upward trend. On average, the largest positive changes occurred in relation to problem solving (when challenges were specified and where they were not), in relation to managing unexpected events and in relation to achieving what was wanted. Conversely, the smallest amount of change was noted in relation to efficacy around the amount of efforts that needed to be invested in a task and in being resourceful.



Self-Efficacy Scores	Solves problems	Gets wants	Accomplishes goals	Manages the unexpected	Resourceful	Invests effort to reach solutions	Coping abilities	Finds solutions	Problem solves 'during' challenges	Can manage any event
Start of programme	3.19	2.46	2.86	3.05	3.10	3.36	2.90	3.07	2.80	2.73
End of programme	3.53	2.93	3.05	3.24	3.19	3.37	3.02	3.19	3.42	3.14

For the majority or 79% of participants, the outcomes were positive. For 24% of these participants there was no change and scores stayed high. For 36% of the participants, there was moderate positive change over time. For 20% of participants, scores were low at the start of Risk-Avert and high at the end of the programme. When individual change was examined, 14% of the participants deteriorated in their ratings of self-efficacy over time. A further 7% of participants disclosed low self-efficacy scores where there was no change over time. It is encouraging that the individual average trend data presented above mirrors the individual outcome self-efficacy data for the majority of participants. This pattern continued when young person confidence was explored within the evaluation.

Several staff members reported improved confidence among students, directly attributing the change to aspects of the Risk-Avert programme. For example, one student described as 'disengaged in lessons' in Year 7 took part in the inter house public speaking competition. This development for this student, who has special educational needs, is attributed to the confidence building aspect of the Risk-Avert programme and being able to make his own decisions and 'not being influenced negatively by peers'.

A teacher described a young person who used to give up at the first sign of difficulty 'but now he is looking for solutions to getting over those difficulties' e.g. by using a reading pen which he was reluctant to do before [he took part in the Risk-Avert programme]. *[Quotation #21]*

In a different school a student was described as having grown ‘braver’, initially admitting to disregarding risks entirely and transitioning during the programme into a self-nominated ‘session leader.’

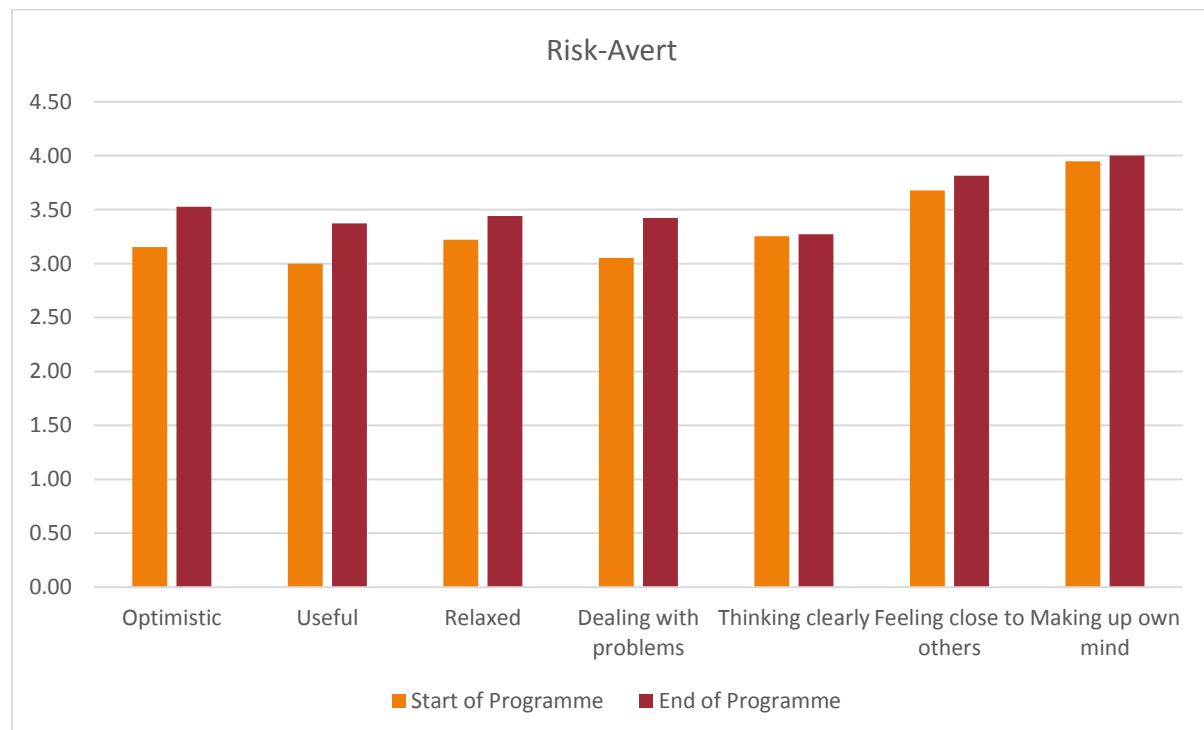
Another teacher noted that a participant had begun putting her hand up in PSHE:

She never would have done that before but she’s been doing that when we’ve been talking about relationships. The last thing I would expect her to be doing is offering her opinion on that as it’s a very personal thing. [Quotation #22]

The findings suggest that by taking part in the Risk-Avert programme, young people felt empowered by being more aware to engage confidently in group discussions and to make personal decisions autonomously about the ways that they would tackle potentially risky situations. Indeed, the ability to identify “early warning signs” and “weigh up” the pros and cons around risk are intended outcomes that are fundamental to the aims of the Risk-Avert programme. Given the support for the primary intended outcomes and the outcomes for self-efficacy amongst the majority of young people, attention is turned towards the question of ‘mental well-being’ and whether any changes were noted in young people whilst they engaged with the Risk-Avert programme. These findings are summarised in the following section.

6.2.2 Mental Well-being

Mental well-being is elicited through positive experiences about how we behave and how we feel on an emotional level. With direct reference to the mental well-being scale that was employed in this evaluation, how we behave relates to effective management of problems, being useful and being able to follow through and think clearly about something (e.g. a task, a goal or a challenge). Similarly, how we feel relates to our emotions around closeness to others, feeling optimistic about the future and being calm and relaxed (e.g. not feeling anxious, pessimistic or distant from others). The Risk-Avert programme anticipates that when people are aware, empowered and have the self-belief to make choices, then mental well-being would necessarily be an associated outcome especially in relation to feeling positive and able to be autonomous about decision making. The outcome measurement of mental well-being at the start and end of young people's engagement with the programme. The findings are summarised below in the bar chart and table.



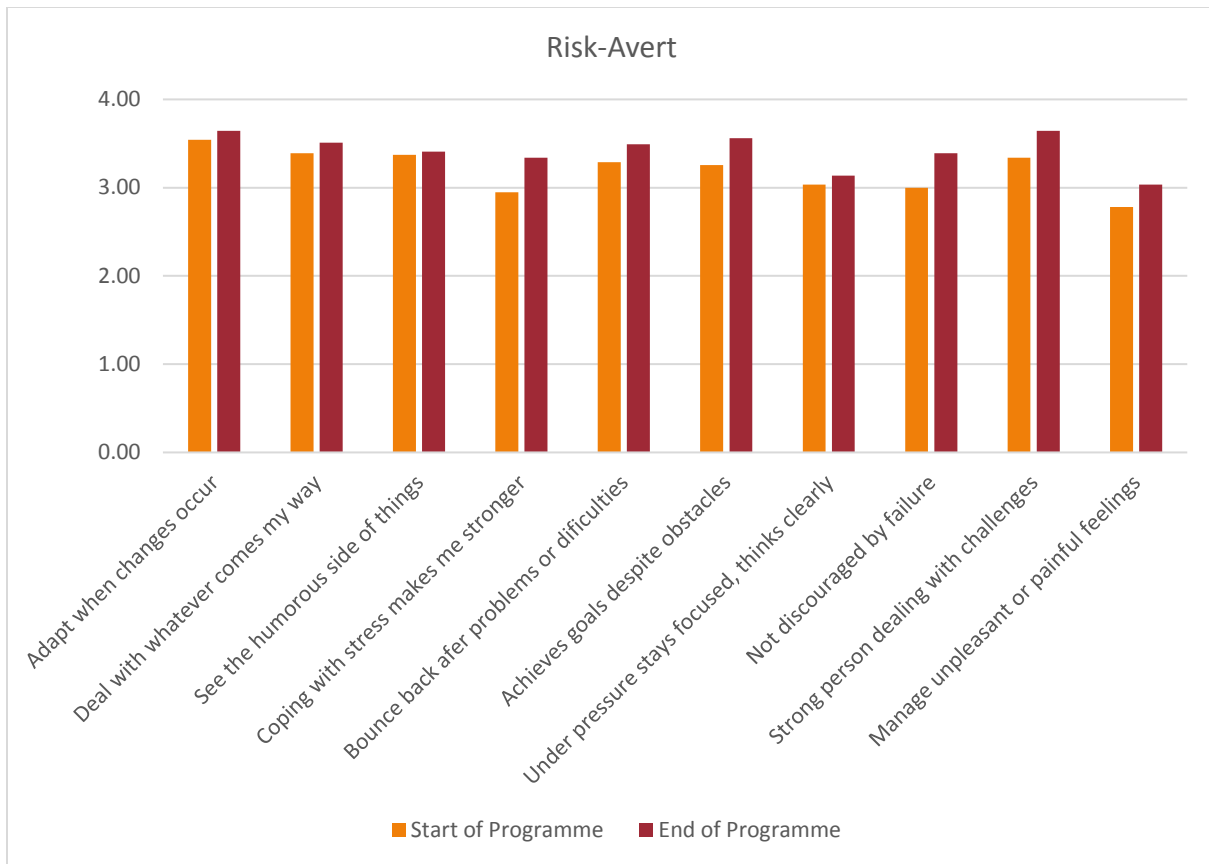
Well-being Scores	Optimistic	Useful	Relaxed	Dealing with problems	Thinking clearly	Feeling close to others	Making up own mind
Start of programme	3.15	3.00	3.22	3.05	3.25	3.68	3.95
End of programme	3.53	3.37	3.44	3.42	3.27	3.81	4.00

The bar chart and table shows that on average, the young people experienced positive mental well-being across all seven domains (3 points or above on a 5 point scale). In other words, on average, the cohort had experienced positive behaviours and emotions frequently over the two weeks that preceded their involvement in the Risk-Avert programme. Although thinking clearly and being able to make up one's own mind did not change significantly, these two domains were scored as being more frequent experiences at the start of the programme. Therefore, these were not problematic areas that negatively impacted on the cohort's mental well-being even before the programme began, for the majority of young people. There was greater and positive change, on average, in relation to young people's reports about the frequency of optimism, the usefulness of their contributions and actions and their ability to deal with problems or challenges. Overall, the average trend showed a change in the right direction across all seven mental well-being domains between the start of Risk-Avert and the end of engagement in the programme. The majority or 81% of the cohort experienced continued positive mental well-being or positive increases in mental well-being between the start and completing their engagement with the Risk-Avert programme. Of this majority, 24% of the participants' scores remained high throughout their engagement. A further 49% of the participants experienced a moderate positive change over time, where scores were high at baseline. For 8% of participants, scores were low at the start of Risk-Avert and high at the end of the programme. As with the findings about self-efficacy, there was a deterioration in the scores for 14% of the cohort. Scores that were low at the start of the programme remained low at the end of Risk-Avert for a small percentage of the cohort too (5%).

Given the feedback from young people who engaged in the evaluation focus groups, it is certainly clear that the Risk-Avert programme provides an important platform for young people to discuss their personal encounters and opportunities to re-address risk. It is salient that young people who engage with the programme are able to extrapolate their learning to multiple situations and contexts and identify that Risk-Avert was an influential factor in enhancing their mental well-being.

6.2.3 Resilience

Resilience may be seen as the ability to cope with stressors in life. The essential requisites to being resilient from a general perspective and in relation to specific areas of life necessarily include adversity and the skill of bouncing back or recovering from the impact that the adversity has. Examples of adversity include (but are not limited to) unemployment, limited opportunities to access education, poor health, poor nutrition, poor housing conditions, social and family conflict, parental substance misuse, abuse and neglect, domestic abuse, financial stresses including debt and dependence on income support and lack of friendships and positive supportive social networks. Examples of behaviours associated with resilience include (but are not limited to) being confident, having a clear aim and goal, coping with change and challenges, having problem solving skills, being able to make and maintain relationships, including close bonds, being optimistic, having a sense of humour and experiencing success or achievements – in personal, social, relational, educational or career domains even in the event of stress. Having considered the findings about awareness, decision making, confidence, self-efficacy and well-being, it was necessary to ask whether changes to the experience of resilience might also be a secondary outcome associated with the Risk-Avert programme. This was especially relevant given the linkage of the programme sessions to the individual examples of emotions, skills and behaviours typically linked with resilient outcomes. The bar chart and table that follow highlight the participant's responses to questions about the experience of resilience that were completed at the start and at the end of the Risk-Avert programme.



Resilience Scores	Adapt when changes occur	Deal with whatever comes my way	See the humorous side of things	Coping with stress makes me stronger	Bounce back after problems or difficulties	Achieves goals despite obstacles	Under pressure stays focused, thinks clearly	Not discouraged by failure	Strong person dealing with challenges	Manage unpleasant or painful feelings
Start of programme	3.54	3.39	3.37	2.95	3.29	3.25	3.03	3.00	3.34	2.78
End of programme	3.64	3.51	3.41	3.34	3.49	3.56	3.14	3.39	3.64	3.03

The findings above show that on average, the young people experienced resilience across the majority of the ten domains (3 points or above on a 5 point scale). In other words, on average, the cohort had experienced medium resilience scores at the start of their involvement in the Risk-Avert programme. Although 'managing and adapting to events as they occur' did not change significantly, these two domains were scored as being situations that young people could cope with in the majority of cases at the start of the programme.

Therefore, these were not problematic areas that negatively impacted on the cohort's mental well-being even before the programme began, for the majority of young people. On average, young people disclosed that thinking clearly under pressure was consistently more of a challenge for them. There was greater and positive change, on average, in relation to young people reporting that they were not discouraged if they did experience failure. Likewise, there was an increase, on average, in young people's opinions that coping with stress made them stronger and that goal achievement was possible even when obstacles existed. Overall, the average trend showed a change in the right direction across all ten resilience domains between the start of Risk-Avert and the end of engagement in the programme. The majority or 78% of the cohort experienced resilience or positive increases in resilience between the start and completing their engagement with the Risk-Avert programme. Of this majority, 15% of the participants' scores remained high throughout their engagement. A further 48% of the participants experienced a moderate positive change over time, where scores were high at baseline. For 15% of participants, scores were low at the start of Risk-Avert and high at the end of the programme. On a participant basis, there was deterioration in the scores for 9% of the cohort. Scores that were low at the start of the programme remained low at the end of Risk-Avert for a percentage of the cohort too (13%). The positive changes that have been identified by participants, their teachers and through completion of the psychosocial outcome measures certainly support the positive influence that engaging with the Risk-Avert programme has in the life of young people. To explore potential secondary intended outcomes that focused on behaviour, teachers were asked to complete a measure based on their professional assessment of their students. These findings are summarised in the following section.

6.2.4 Behavioural Outcomes

Staff reported that some young people's behaviour had substantially improved following their engagement in the Risk-Avert programme. Although unable to attribute change exclusively to Risk-Avert, staff described Risk-Avert as a successful part of a range of programmes and strategies their school were using. Staff also provided some examples that supported this:

Interviewee 1: *One student was on the verge of being permanently excluded, was on a reduced timetable and possibility of being transferred to the young person's referral unit. Even if Risk-Avert was just a part of all that effort, he is back on a full timetable, no longer on report, [we are] no longer meeting parents weekly. [Quotation #23]*

Interviewee 2: *[Two boys] were in quite a lot of trouble, not just in school and we were in contact with parents about [it]. Whether due to Risk-Avert or not, both those boys are not in the same place they were before. [Quotation #24]*

One teacher observed that they thought there might be a subconscious or long term impact on the pupils, stating that the impact might also be more impressive than '*how it appears on paper*'.

Other teachers reported that they had recently observed young people correcting each other's behaviour in school as a result of taking part in the Risk-Avert programme, stating that if the pupils are '*messing around*' one of the others will say – '*you're taking a risk*':

[It shows] 'they understood what we had been talking about'. [Quotation #25]

Another recalled having observed a general change in the decision making of participants based on what they had learnt in sessions whereas another noticed that, whilst the behaviour of a young person was still occasionally negative in school, this pupil was more aware of the risks they were taking and the consequences of their actions:

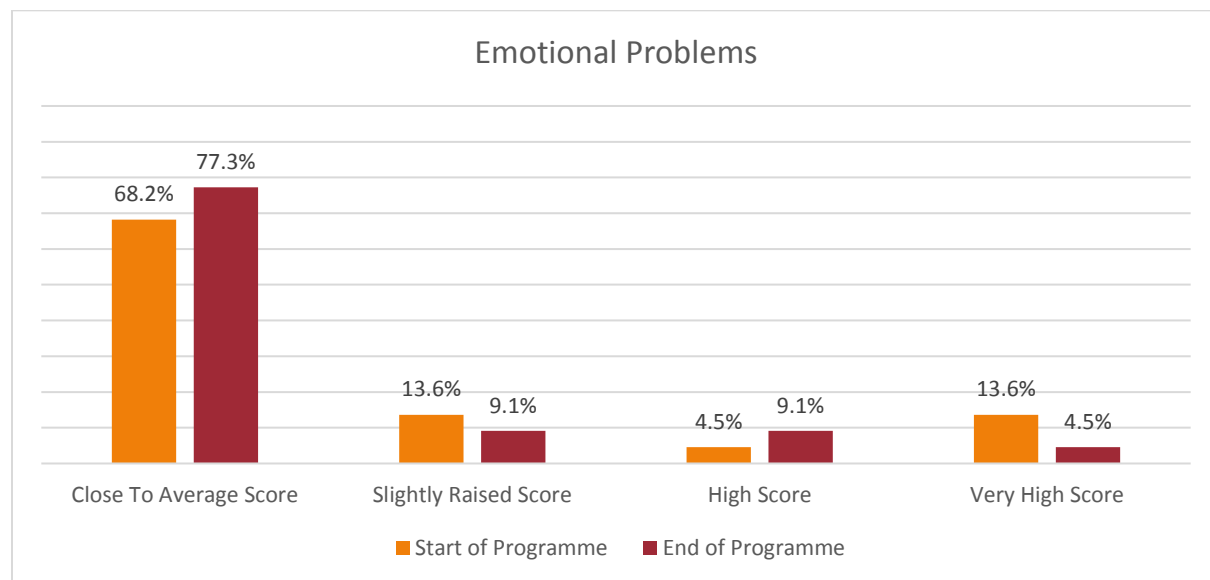
What I've noticed more recently is that he wouldn't lie about it. He would say 'I did that I shouldn't have done it and I will apologise. I will serve my time'. This is a move forward. Whether it has anything to do with Risk-Avert itself, it's more accepting of and more analytical of their behaviour. More willing to accept that this is not acceptable, and therefore more able to do the right thing. [Quotation #26]

In every instance except one, all of the teachers could recall positive changes that they had seen overall or on a case by case basis in pupil's behaviours, whilst they were engaged in school. As we would expect, it was not possible for teachers to report on behavioural change in young people outside of school contexts. It is likely however that the positive changes observed in school are carried across contexts as a result of changes to thinking situations through (cognition) and the social and emotional skills that young people are encouraged to develop throughout the Risk-Avert programme.

6.2.4.1 Emotional Problems

It is important to note that the majority of young people who engaged with the Risk-Avert programme disclosed normal emotional experiences that fell within the average score parameters on the behavioural questionnaire they completed (68%). Examples of normative emotional experiences include feeling stability in terms of mood and not feeling intensely worried, nervous or anxious about day-to-day experiences. Negative risk taking behaviours and emotional problems are typically linked. The remaining 32% of young people did experience higher scores before they commenced the Risk-Avert programme. At the end of the programme, there was a reduction in the percentage of young people who experienced raised scores.

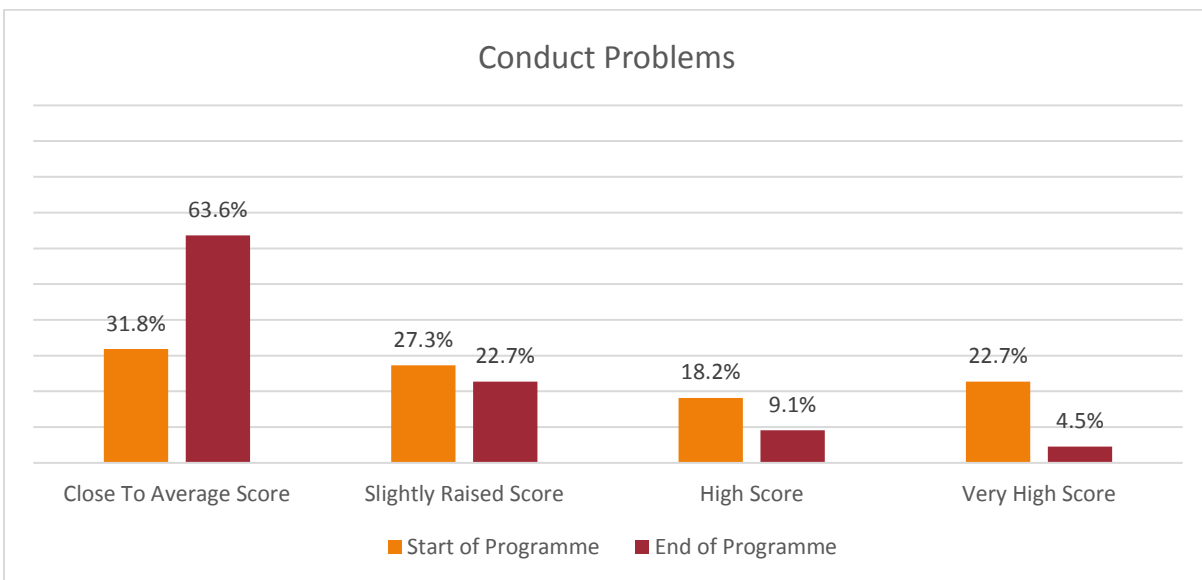
As stated in the methodology section, in contrast to the self-efficacy, well-being and resilience findings, behavioural outcome scores that are 'raised' are viewed as a problematic indicator of risk. Behavioural outcome scores that are 'average' are not viewed as being problematic to professionals. In fact, less than a quarter of the sample disclosed feelings of worry, nervousness and anxiety at this point (22%). This underscores the relevance of school based programmes that can be delivered by teaching staff, who know and can support pupils and use programme tools to help identify young people who need support and monitor these salient changes in emotional and behavioural outcomes.



6.2.4.2 Conduct and Hyperactivity Problems

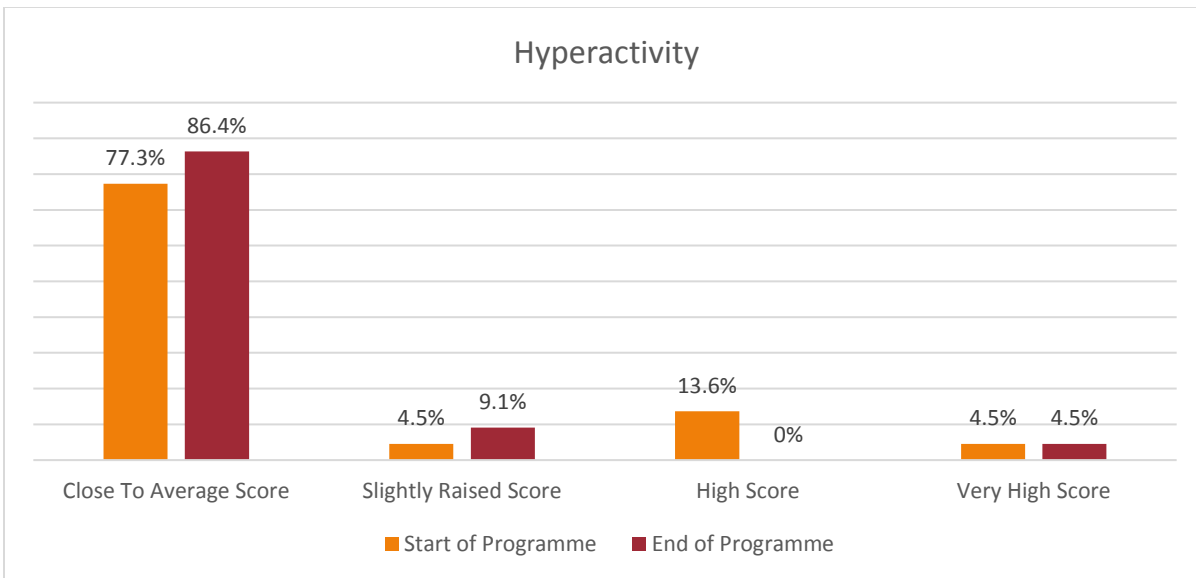
Sixty eight per cent of young people were identified as having some difficulty with behavioural conduct at the start of the programme. Conduct problems included being oppositional and quickness to anger (such as loss of temper). By the end of the programme, this percentage had significantly reduced to 36%. Twenty three per cent of these young people experienced mild difficulties with conduct (23%/36%). Thirteen per cent of these young people experienced ongoing and more prominent issues with conduct, whereby teachers are trained to provide support and/or utilise referral pathways within each of the school's policies and procedures to support pupils (13%/36%).

As the interview and focus group work has demonstrated in the preceding sections, teachers noted that the pupils were able to benefit from a range of intervention approaches, including the Risk-Avert programme. For example, the Risk-Avert programme facilitates the acknowledgement of responsibility and offers an opportunity for young people to make more informed decisions and to learn to adapt their behaviour. Based on the young people's experiences of Risk-Avert and the teaching staff's observational assessments, it certainly appears that the programme can offer an alternative approach to considering the benefits of positive risk taking over those risks that impact negatively on behavioural outcomes.



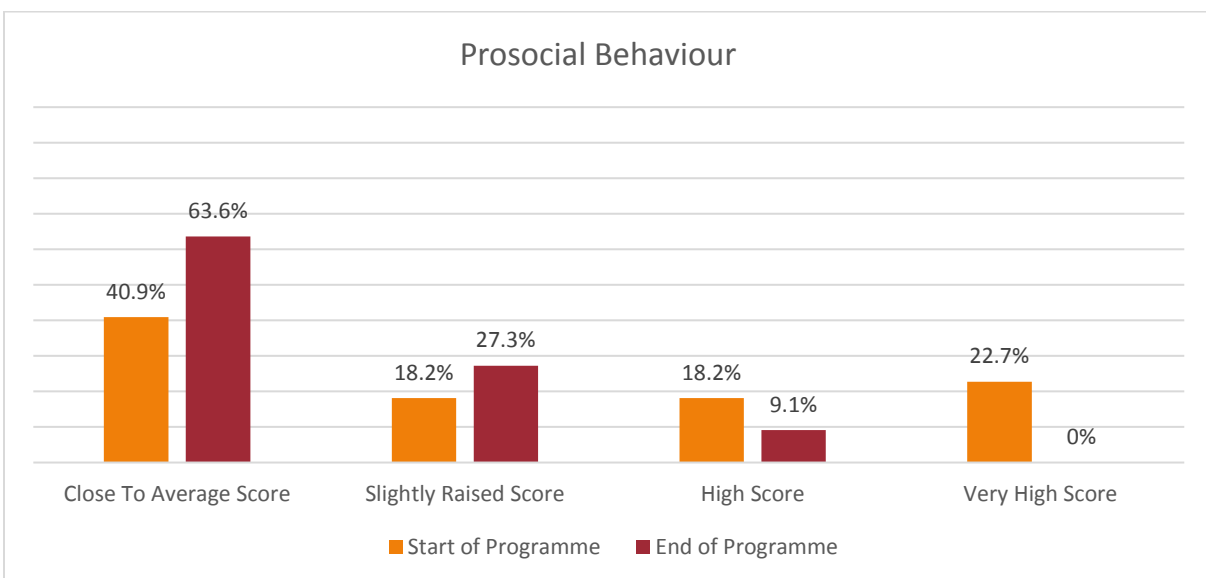
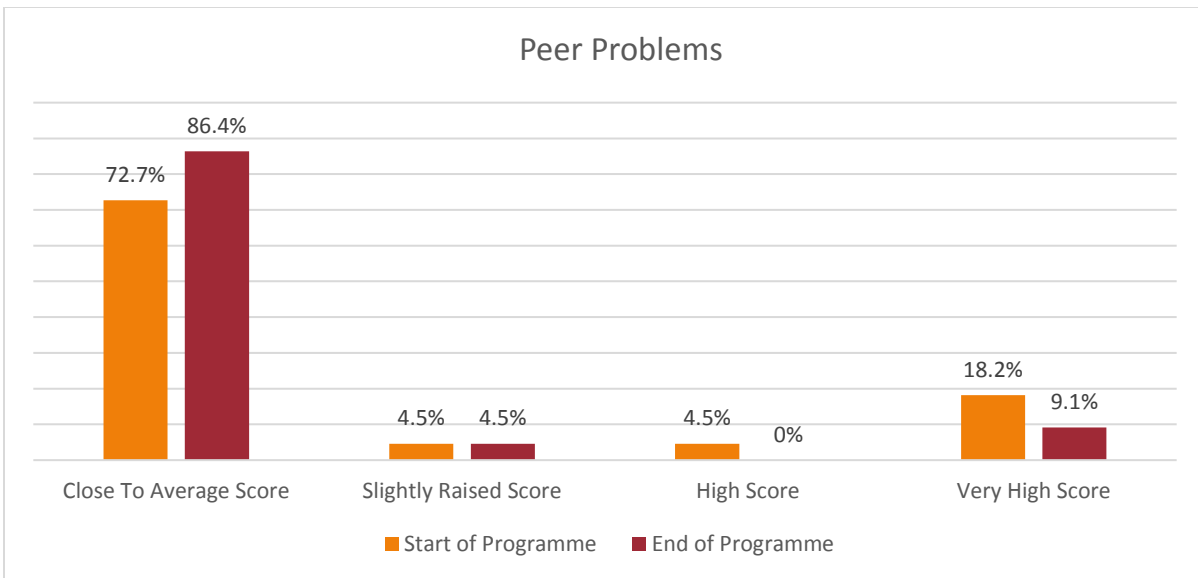
In contrast to conduct issues, the majority of the pupils did not have significant issues relating to hyperactivity when they first engaged with the Risk-Avert programme (77%). However, 23% of pupils struggled with hyperactivity to some extent. Examples of hyperactivity typically included being restless, easily distracted, unable to complete tasks and taking action before thinking things through. At the end of the programme, 14% of pupils continued to display behaviours associated with hyperactivity, although most of these pupil's scores were slightly raised (9%/14%) and a smaller percentage of these pupil's scores were very high (5%/14%). From an education perspective, the teachers are able to coordinate the appropriate targeted support for pupils who experience behavioural issues associated with conduct, hyperactivity and social interaction difficulties.

Whilst Risk-Avert is not a therapeutic programme for young people with behavioural issues, it does appear to have a beneficial impact for some young people by better equipping them to develop decision making skills that results in some behaviour change (for example, the adaptation from taking negative risks to taking positive healthier risks). This may account for the changes that have been identified here in relation to conduct and hyperactivity.



6.2.4.3 Peer Problems and Social Competencies

At the start of the Risk-Avert programme, 73% of young people did not experience problems with their peers. However, only 41% of the young people achieved average scores in relation to prosocial behaviours. Whilst peer problems, which included a lack of same age friends, solitary interactions and feeling bullied, were not prevalent amongst the majority of the young people, it appears that relational skills such as being considerate, kind, empathic and sharing were not commonly observed either. Ideally, social competence comprises the presence of relational skills alongside the absence of problems when building peer relationships. Thus, at the start of Risk-Avert, it is possible to observe why teaching staff were particularly motivated to identify and support any pupils who might potentially take negative risks, especially if they also experienced peer problems and limited pro social skills.



As the bar charts demonstrate, by the end of the programme, the majority of young people did not experience peer problems (86%) and had improved upon their pro social skills (64%). As stated in the preceding section, teacher observations enable schools to identify and support pupils who experience behavioural issues. Thus, whilst Risk-Avert aims to facilitate increased awareness and productive decision making about risk, the programme also provides survey and assessment tools that empower teachers to identify at-risk pupils who might benefit from more targeted support.

Given the findings above and the focus group and interview feedback, there is an emerging picture that suggests that young people who become more aware, take responsibility and consider risks, alongside their actions in general, might also benefit by addressing peer problems and developing some important relational skills as a result of participating in the Risk-Avert programme.

7 RISK-AVERT DELIVERY: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The young person outcomes that occurred when pupils participated in the Risk-Avert programme have been positive for the majority of young people. In addition to young people's cognition, decision making, psychosocial outcomes and behaviour, there has also been an impact more closely related to the schools that pupils attend. In this section of the report, the findings as they relate to the delivery of the Risk-Avert programme are outlined. These relate to the impact on the school culture, connectedness to the school and factors that serve as barriers and enablers to the delivery of the Risk-Avert programme.

7.1 IMPACT ON SCHOOL CULTURE

In addition to support of a direct positive impact on students, there was also evidence for an influence on wider school culture. Broadly speaking, school culture may be seen as the ways that school staff work together to develop their values, practice and the organisational structures that impact on school functioning and interactions with pupils, parents, professionals and stakeholders (including the public). Of Risk-Avert, one teacher noted:

I find it has brought the pupils, the form tutors, the year leaders and the head of the lower school together, all working on this project. [Quotation #27]

In another school the lead teacher reported a positive impact on the PSHE programme as a whole for Year 8 students. Two heads of year who had run Risk-Avert also spoke about how they had modified their approach to behaviour problems for students who had participated in the programme. In one case, the positive relationship between staff and the pupil enabled direct interaction:

Head of Year #1: A quiet student who took part in Risk-Avert who came to school in jeans recently – instead of sending an admin person, I went to collect him and talk to him about it. [Quotation #28]

Head of Year #2: *The sanctions haven't changed. They are still treated the same as everyone else, but now I think they understand a little bit more. [Quotation #29]*

Further examples of change to the interactions between staff and pupils were also cited:

Some of the pupils were involved in quite big incidents during the eight weeks. And we used some of the things we had been doing in our sessions to help manage the situation.

[Quotation #30]

We've changed the language we use when we are speaking with pupils. Classically, we don't ask why you did that [anymore] because they don't know. Of course they don't. But now they have a thought process and we can talk it through with them.

[Quotation #31]

7.2 IMPACT ON CONNECTEDNESS TO SCHOOL

Connectedness to school is promoted by Risk-Avert whose approach is to train staff to deliver the resources themselves and not to rely on external agencies. Relationships between staff and students are an indicator of students' connectedness to school which appear to be a predictor of positive outcomes for students. Overall, staff who had delivered the programme reported a more positive relationship with the students following Risk-Avert:

They love seeing me around school. It [the relationship] bodes well for Year 11.

[Quotation #32]

The girls in my group will make the effort to come and speak to me..... [to talk about] what they did at Christmas, 'Did you see me in the show miss?' They're the ones I didn't know before but will have a conversation [since Risk-Avert]. And because there's six of us if there's someone in the school they had a good relationship with then they will go to them, hopefully, if they're in strife. [Quotation #33]

In the same focus group, the staff members all agreed there had been a strengthening of 'community' in the school. Another teacher stated that whilst the staff at the school like to remain 'aloof' [from the students]:

It is a more knowledgeable relationship. [Quotation #34]

This sense of a greater connectedness to school was also clearly appreciated by most students:

We thought it was going to be people teaching us that we didn't know.

Interviewer: *Was it a good thing that it was your teachers?*

Group response: *Agreement. [Quotation #35]*

When asked if their relationship with teachers was different now, boys in one group stated:

Pupil #1: *Yes - you've told them stuff you wouldn't have told other teachers. [Quotation #36]*

Interviewer: *Has that improved their relationship with you?*

Pupil #2: *Yes. They know something about you and you know something about them. You can go to them. [Quotation #37]*

However, in one school the teacher responsible for delivering the programme had not considered that there might be benefits for students to have a different kind of relationship with staff. Independently students also said they would not speak to her if they had a problem, but discussed feeling able to go to other specific staff in school if they had a problem, such as safeguarding or student support teams.

In another school, a student reported that staff reactions to problems discussed in Risk-Avert sessions made her more wary of going to them with problems:

It [Risk-Avert] actually put me off going to teachers. 'Cause if you tell them anything they get really like concerned. And then they're like we need to tell your mum we need to tell your dad. What if it's something at home? You can't really get your mum involved! [Quotation #38]

A student from a school where delivery of the programme was not strongly supported by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and disrupted by poor communication, stated,

I trust the session leader but I wouldn't tell him if I had a concern. Teachers can still stitch you up about stuff and you'll still get in trouble for it. If I'd done cocaine and I told a teacher they would still get me done by social services. [Quotation #39]

Discussion in another group suggested that Risk-Avert had taught one student more about developing effective management skills:

Pupil #3: It's more being able to sort things out for yourself, staying calm.

Interviewer: Being self-reliant?

Pupil #3: Yes. [Quotation #40]

The evaluation found that a greater connectedness to school also involved the experience of primary caregivers. A teacher reported that the relationship between parents, students *and* teachers had improved since participating in Risk-Avert, saying that there had been some '*good, healthy conversations*' since the surveys had been carried out.

Overall then, these findings demonstrated that when the principle of a reciprocal trusting interaction was promoted as advocated by Risk-Avert, connectedness appears to improve. Conversely, where this principle is not promoted when delivering the programme, school connectedness through teacher, pupil and parent relationships does not improve. This finding is discussed in the recommendations section at the end of this report.

7.3 FACTORS THAT WERE IDENTIFIED AS 'ENABLERS' AND 'BARRIERS' TO DELIVERING THE RISK-AVERT PROGRAMME

A number of factors were identified which appeared to facilitate or enable Risk-Avert to be effectively delivered. Similarly some barriers to this process were also identified. It is useful to outline these factors to inform future development of the programme and to aid training and implementation processes.

7.3.1 Enabling Factors

Small Groups: The programme is recommended for small groups, not exceeding a maximum capacity of twelve pupils. Smaller group deliveries are viewed as being preferable to provide young people with an opportunity to be heard and to facilitate manageable conversations where authentic communication can be facilitated between staff and pupils. Indeed, a common theme became a pattern where pupils valued the opportunity to speak and to be listened to:

You didn't have to compete to be heard like in a bigger group with 'like 10,000,000 other people who are being stupid and not taking it seriously. [Quotation #41]

Everyone was involved. [Quotation #42]

At school you have to be loud to be heard, so this was good. [Quotation #43]

Students also felt their opinion was valued:

It helps as well that you know that if you put your hand up – like you know that your opinion matters, if you like. [Quotation #44]

Teachers felt the discussion aspect of the programme had had a positive impact on the emotional well-being of some students:

I think they can appreciate the fact that they can actually talk, have an opinion. Especially those who participate when it comes to risky behaviour. I get the impression some of them maybe don't feel listened to or maybe don't feel valued and that's [their risky behaviour] is partially the reason why they don't. I think it gives them a bit of value. It [Risk-Avert] gives them something to look forward to. [Quotation #45]

Another teacher stated that:

In a small group everyone counts and matters and everyone is listening, whereas in a large class the discussion might be dominated by a few characters and the topic might be more general. [Quotation #46]

Group composition: Typically, schools carefully considered the composition of groups, sometimes relying on the knowledge of Heads of Years or pastoral care teams who were not otherwise involved with the programme. This was usually intended to facilitate a situation where young people would be willing to discuss the topics freely. One school divided the students into two single sex groups because they felt students would be more willing to open up. While this had benefits, students also thought they should have done at least one session as a mixed or whole group:

Female pupil: You could have got perspectives from everyone else. Because girls our age we obviously worry about what boys feel about us and so it would have helped us to make decisions if we knew what they were thinking. [Quotation #47]

Interviewer: *Boys – what do you think?*

Male pupil: *Mmm probably – we would have got different perspectives. [Quotation #48]*

In another school, where the number of boys selected outnumbered the girls resulting in one mixed and one all boys group, one of the boys said he preferred to be in a boys only group. Clearly, group composition based on sex is a matter that school staff and pupils have thought about as a factor that might influence the communication dynamic within sessions. Future staff training can use this information to consider mixed and/or same sex groups (for all, or for some sessions) and perhaps consult with the pupils to gain a consensus. Fortunately, in mixed sex schools, the Risk-Avert groups are small enough to permit same sex and mixed sex sessions to give young people the empowered choice.

Staff qualities: The qualities and experience of the staff delivering the programme played an important part in the impact of the programme on young people. One pupil said:

Teachers were nice. They were nicer than normal teachers. [Quotation #49]

In one school the lead teacher was well known to pupils for having run the Year 7 residential programme. She thought Risk-Avert had further strengthened her relationship with the pupils, which was confirmed independently in the student focus group where a pupil spoke on behalf of everyone and said:

[We] had a good relationship with [teacher name] [Quotation #50]

Some staff had considerable pastoral experience and prior knowledge of the pupils involved in Risk-Avert which also helped, both during and after the programme. One such staff member said:

Interviewee: *There were a couple [of pupils] that I had never spoken to. I knew half of them pastorally because they had been naughty before. Then you had some that when they were flagged up I thought 'what? Why?' [Quotation #51]*

Interviewer: *How has the relationship changed?*

Interviewee: *I got to know the boys I worked with better. You see them in a different way [as a result of Risk-Avert]. [Quotation #52]*

For some staff the programme fitted well with other professional qualities, such as their ethos and preferred teaching style. For example, one teacher identified the importance of communicating as an equal member of the group, where the teacher-pupil barrier was removed:

We tried to come away from a normal lesson. [...] Just so they didn't see us as their teachers trying to teach them things but more them discussing things and learning from one another. We wanted their perception to be that we were as much equal to them as possible so they would be comfortable with it while others were unfamiliar with the approach. [Quotation #53]

In general staff appreciated the flexibility to draw on their existing experience as teachers and also from their own experience of growing up. Personal disclosure was not a strategy they would use in other lessons but for some it felt comfortable as part of Risk-Avert:

Interviewee 1: *It helps them to see that you are human and that you were once at school. [Quotation #54]*

Interviewee 2: *And they appreciate that too. [Quotation #55]*

Interviewee 1: *That was quite important. The students asked if I had taken any risks and they would not ask that in other lessons. [Quotation #56]*

However for some staff the approach to teaching and learning was unfamiliar, even uncomfortable:

I am not going to lie, I was not very confident, especially not knowing the kids, and [.....] it being discussion based, it's not an approach I am confident with. If the school could find someone else to do it next year, I'd be happier, to be honest. [Quotation #57]

Fortunately, Risk-Avert programme training and session implementation does facilitate the self-selection of school staff to take place.

Programme delivery setting: Some schools also thought carefully about the setting in which Risk-Avert was delivered, almost half of the schools chose a meeting room, board room or drama studio to distinguish from a teaching classroom. Some of the schools provided refreshments and this was always positively received by pupils. Some of the delivery teams gave pupils a weekly reminder slip so that they knew the date, time and venue of the session. This was also positively received by pupils who felt that they were attending a meeting and not a lesson.

Voluntary participation: In all schools attendance was by invitation, based on the Risk-Avert survey results and in most schools participation was voluntary (so long as parents had given permission). Where a pupil was reluctant but parents willing for them to attend, the pupil was encouraged to try one session, and this usually resulted in them continuing to attend every session. However some pupils did refuse and one complained she was made to attend. One student participated but reported that he did not tell his parents he was involved. In both of these cases, it has been possible to feed back to schools that voluntary

attendance is a key principal that underpins participation and is likely to have an impact on the positive retention rate and productive outcomes associated with the programme.

Delivery style and content: In most cases pupils preferred active learning to writing and video clips. Sessions which stood out were those where pupils were directly involved such as the sessions which involved making items out of paper and sessions about decision making, delayed gratification, goal setting and brain development. These were sessions where pupils could actively contribute with their own perspectives.

Senior leadership support: Senior leadership team support contributed significantly to the perceived impact of the programme. Indeed, the greater the level of support, the more positive staff and pupils were about the Risk-Avert programme. In some cases, senior leadership team support was a given, in that staff leading the programme were also members of the team. In other cases, teachers actively sought the support of the senior leadership team and used examples from the programme materials and the training session to enlist their commitment. In one school where senior leadership support was not obvious, there was also less commitment for other related aspects of school such as PSHE education. One teacher noted:

I have to use my PPA time...Some staff don't value PSHE, so we're up against it.

[Quotation #58]

Similarly, pupils in this school found the programme difficult to access and valued Risk-Avert less than in other schools where senior leadership team support was high.

School level organisation: The majority of schools were well organised in the selection of pupils and implementation of the programme. For example, there was detailed negotiation with staff across the school to avoid pupils being absent from the same lesson on a regular basis. Availability of staff at times to suit pupils was also something which programme leaders were able to consider. Finally there was a need to ensure good communication with pupils to

enable them to attend. Where schools were less organised, the following issues were identified, albeit in very few of the schools that participated in Risk-Avert:

We don't get any notice of when our next session is going to be. Our form tutors will get an email but we won't get told. [Quotation #59]

I only find out when someone else from the group tells me [that there is going to be a session] [Quotation #60]

We didn't go to it enough. You don't take interest. [Quotation #61]

Interviewer: *Does that suggest to you that the school values the programme?*

No [Quotation #62]

The school is lazy. [Quotation #63]

Perhaps if we'd had a timetable - we can't really do it when they don't tell us. [Quotation #64]

In other schools the Risk-Avert programme was delivered as part of the pastoral support and in association with the school's connections with external agencies to support pupils' overall development.

It [Risk-Avert] fits in perfectly. You wouldn't want this programme to be a stand-alone programme. It should be part of a jigsaw. [Quotation #65]

It was clear that when the delivery of the programme was planned, including the organisation around the logistics of pupil attendance and in some cases, where other partnership work was also being delivered, the reception of Risk-Avert was more positive and valued.

Models of delivery: Schools adopted a range of models for the delivery including small groups as recommended. It was also delivered through tutor time in one school for all pupils and as a drop down or off timetable day for the identified pupils. Pupils who experienced the drop down model liked the variety of teachers who became involved:

It was good because there were different teachers with different opinions. And different ways of viewing things. [Quotation #66]

But some also found the sessions too passive when this occurred:

We were sat down for most of the day. I think if we'd got up and done some more activities it would be good. Maybe watch a video then act out a video. [Quotation #67]

Interestingly, different schools presented different ideas about the most effective way to enable the delivery of Risk-Avert. This point is returned to in the recommendations section of the report.

7.3.2 Barriers

There was only one perceived barrier that was identified as being a factor to effective delivery of the Risk-Avert programme. It was clear from the interviews that when sensitively managed, this factor need not arise.

A risk of stigma: In one school, concern was raised as to whether pupils might feel stigmatised about participating in the programme. Pupils are selected based on their responses to an online survey. They were told the results would be anonymous and were subsequently invited to participate in the Risk-Avert programme. Pupils were then missing from lessons on several occasions and so their classroom peers would notice their absence. To reduce this risk from occurring, one teacher renamed the programme as 'PSHE sessions' after the sister of one of the participants told her that the young person was being bullied because she was being called

‘a risky child’. In the same school students were also told they were ‘risk ambassadors’ - that they were role models in their year group and they could influence others’ risk taking by understanding more about decision making. Again, this was a positive way to manage the way that the programme was viewed across the school. Other schools had not anticipated the possibility of stigma but said that pupils were often released from lessons for a variety of other activities so this would not appear unusual in any way. No pupil reported to the evaluation team that they had been bullied or harassed by other pupils because of their involvement in Risk-Avert. Most pupils who participated in the evaluation said that they were initially nervous about taking part. However in most cases students were reassured by staff explanations that they were not in any trouble about taking part in the programme:

I changed my opinion when it started because we didn’t know what was going to happen until it happened. [Quotation #68]

In one school staff reassured students by saying:

This [Risk-Avert] is a really good programme, everyone would benefit from having this and you’re just the lucky ones. [Quotation #69]

Other staff made sure students knew their participation was voluntary which did much to encourage students to continue to attend. It is important to note that the Risk-Avert training and all guidance from The Training Effect strongly reinforces eligibility for pupil and parent involvement in the programme based on an understanding and willingness to engage on a voluntary basis with full provision of informed consent. Overall then, whilst stigma was not a significant barrier to participation in Risk-Avert, most staff addressed pupils’ nervousness about the process of selection early in the Risk-Avert programme and encouraged only those pupils who wanted to engage willingly.

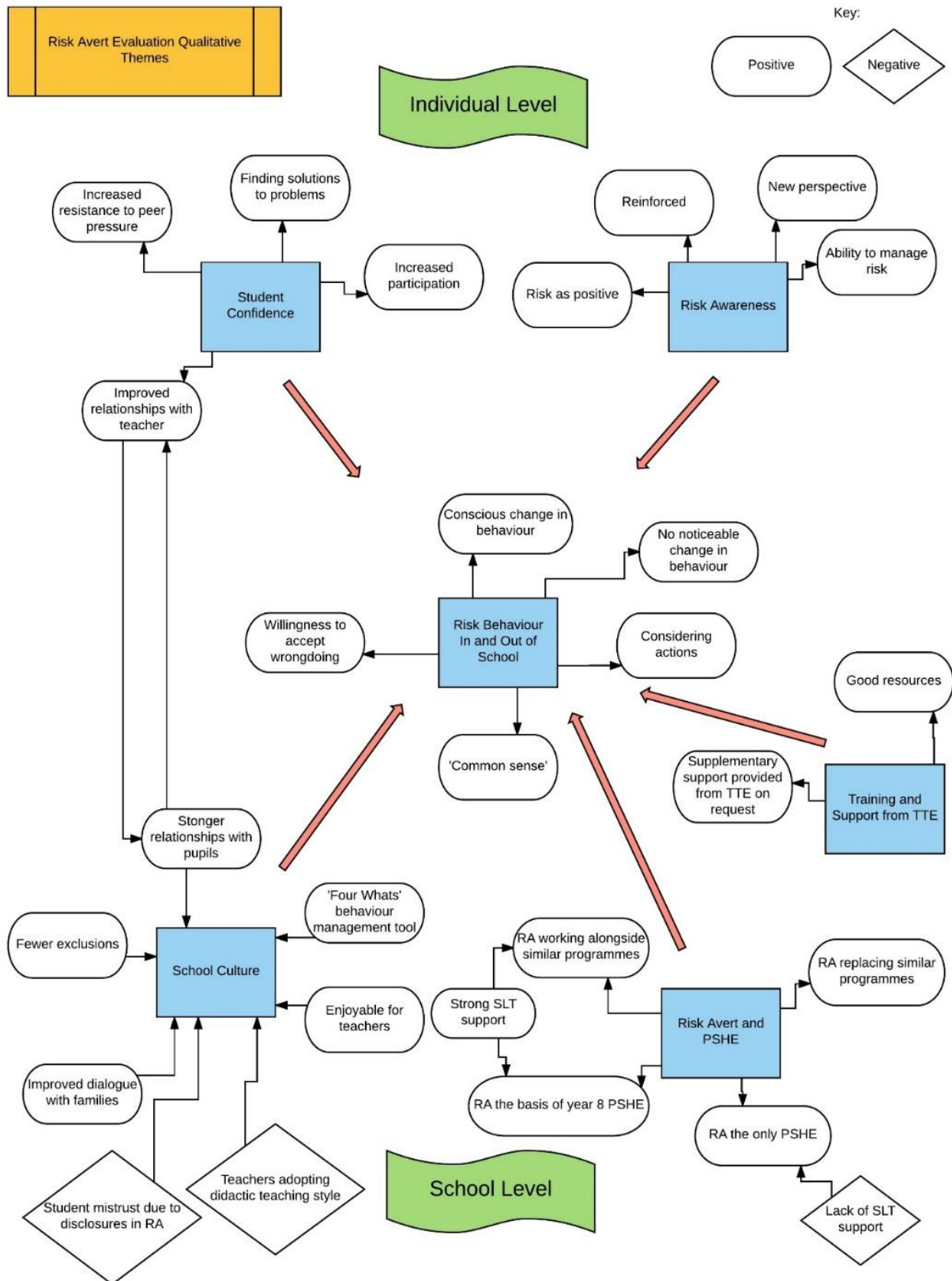
8 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The key themes to emerge from the young person outcomes and the focus groups and interviews with professionals and with young people who participated in the Risk-Avert programme were:

- A newly informed perception and greater awareness about the concept of risk; that risks can be both negative and positive.
- Greater confidence in the ability to make decisions and manage risk, including the identification of risk, the ability to think about the pros and cons and consequences of taking risks, taking responsibility, an understanding about recognising early warning signs and finding solutions to problems.
- Greater confidence in resisting peer pressure, knowing where to go to get support and improved relationships with school staff; which facilitates communication.
- Improvements and/or continued stability in psychosocial areas such as self-efficacy, resilience and well-being for the majority of young people who completed outcome measures.
- Improvements and/or continued stability in developmental areas in relation to emotion, conduct, hyperactivity, peer problems and pro social behaviours for the majority of young people who completed the outcome measures.
- Improved and/or positive perceptions amongst school staff and pupils in relation to school culture and connectedness to the schools.
- A clear sense of the factors that enhance and the factors that serve as barriers to delivering the programme amongst school staff, including group size, group composition, delivery setting or environment, organisation and communication, avoiding the perception of stigmatization, confidence and trust, teaching styles and levels of school support and commitment.

In summary, these are encapsulated in the diagram shown below which positions the key themes in the context of the individual and school level, showing both positive and negative themes to arise from the delivery of the Risk-Avert programme.



8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation identified two key areas where recommendations could be made to support the development and delivery, and the evidence base of the Risk-Avert programme.

8.2.1 Development and delivery of the Risk-Avert programme

- The Risk-Avert programme has demonstrated significant positive outcomes across the qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. The evaluation authors strongly suggest that with sustained outcome monitoring and funding, there are individual and school based benefits to pupils' participation in the Risk-Avert programme.
- The Training Effect staff to team up with the school contact lead to formally introduce the Risk-Avert programme where senior leadership team support needs to be established. The evaluation showed that where senior support is high in schools, the programme is positively received.
- The Training Effect staff to work across schools to establish the optimal and effective aspects of the Risk-Avert delivery model to inform future developments and the possible need for flexibility in different areas (negotiable and non-negotiable aspects of the delivery model).
- The Training Effect to include a set of competency and confidence questions about the key points of the programme including information safeguarding to reduce pupil mistrust about programme eligibility and the management of disclosures during participation. These questions can be incorporated into the training outcome measure.
- The programme may be a useful adjunct to formally refer and engage pupils in more targeted support if their developmental and well-being needs extend beyond Risk-Avert. The Training Effect could support schools on an individual basis to include the programme within the safeguarding framework in the formal school policy to position Risk-Avert clearly in the safeguarding process.
- The Training Effect could develop a compliance checker system where the quality of the engagement with TTE, the level of school connectedness, the engagement with the training and fidelity to the survey and full programme delivery can be scored to enable the early identification of support needs within each school.

The evaluation clearly demonstrated that where schools engage fully in the delivery of the Risk-Avert programme model, the perceived outcomes by pupils and by teaching staff are positive.

8.2.2 Development of the Risk-Avert programme evidence base:

- Continuation of in house or external evaluations to increase the available outcomes data for the Risk-Avert programme and to facilitate the publication of the findings at peer reviewed conferences (and in journal articles).
- The use of a valid comparison group, for example, the introduction of a young person waiting room group who participate in outcome measure completion before eventually receiving the programme and then again once having received the programme. This will enable The Training Effect to begin to tackle the counterfactual question as to what would happen when the Risk-Avert programme is not delivered initially and then what happens when it is.
- Adaptation of the evaluation framework to integrate more easily into the available time that teaching staff and young people have. This might include the selection of a number of schools where the full framework is applied and then a shorter after delivery evaluation for the remaining schools. If this approach is successful, The Training Effect might consider whether there is merit in conducting a randomised controlled trial to add to the quality of publication opportunities.

9 APPENDIX ONE

9.1 RISK-AVERT PROGRAMME PROCESSES

Pre-Delivery: Signing up and Training

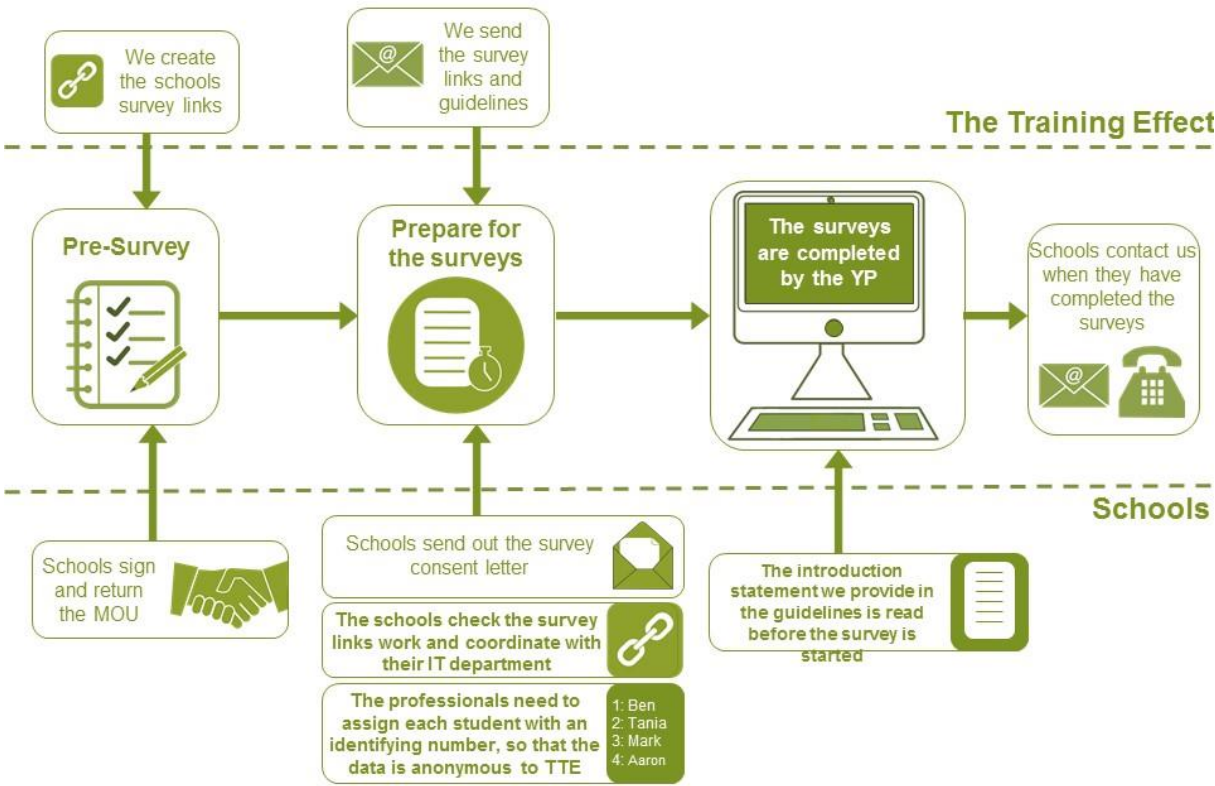
1. School Contact



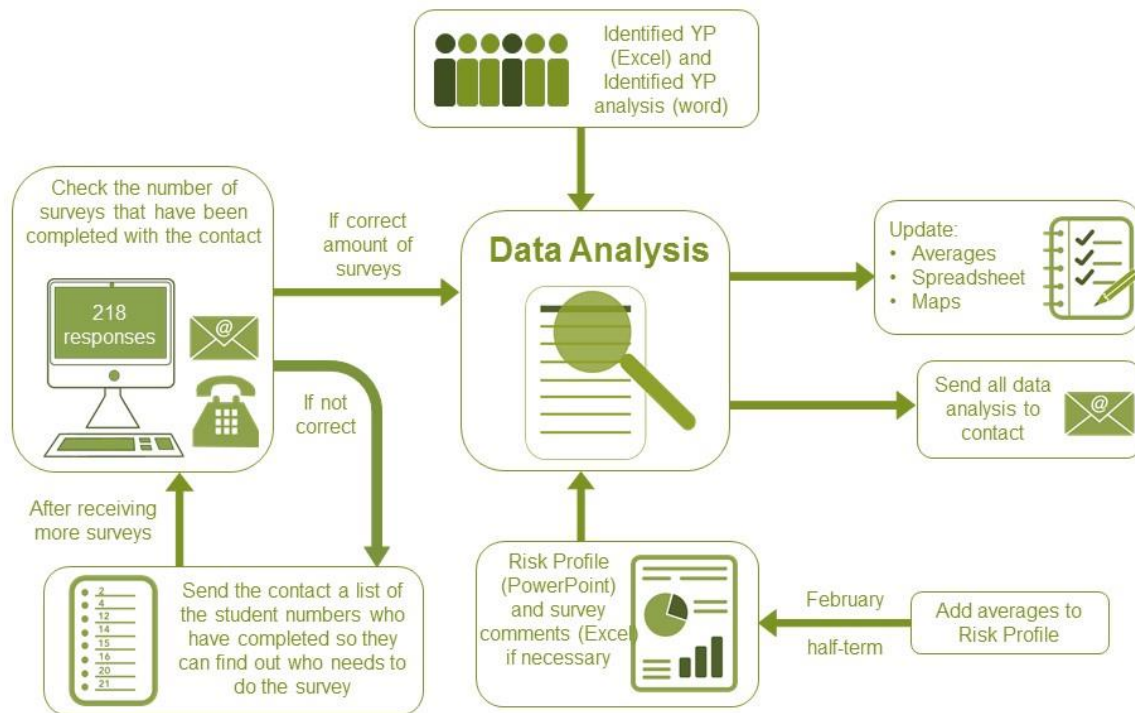
2. Training



Pre-Delivery: Surveys



Pre-Delivery: Data Analysis



Delivery and Evaluation

