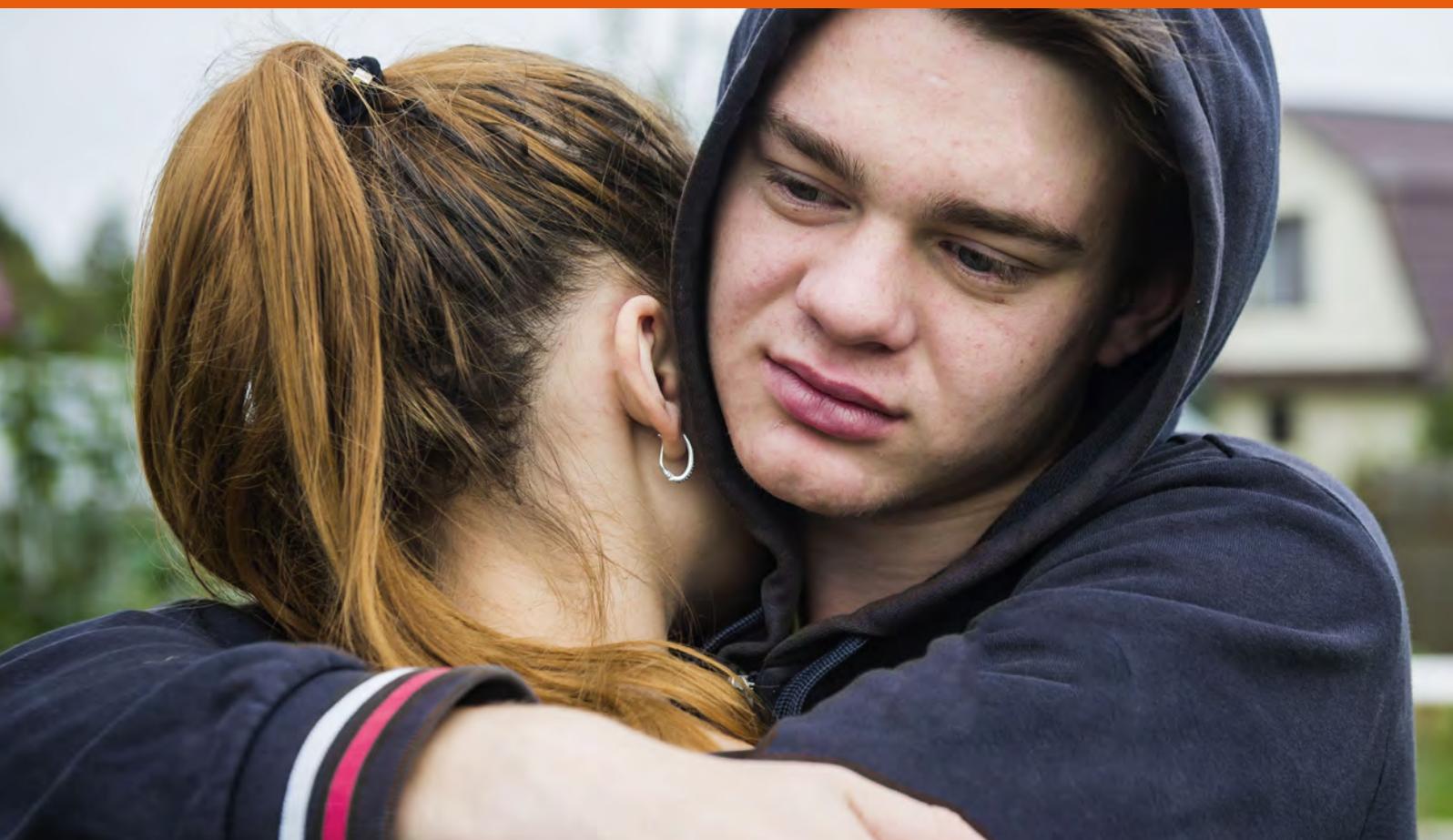




Embrace

LITTLE FISH
THEATRE

ORIGINAL. BOLD. COMPELLING.



Bio

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The evaluation process was completed with the support of:

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Little Fish Theatre

Since its foundation in 2008, Little Fish has established itself as a theatre company that sets out to support marginalised young people. Through the use of theatre-making and other creative arts to develop new and innovative projects that empower young people and help to transform their lives, the company encourages the development of 'both social and personal life skills' and inspires young people to 'become cultural consumers or creators, actively shaping a new social and political landscape' (Little Fish Theatre 2020).

Based in South East London, Little Fish leads a range of theatre and other creative arts youth projects, working with different community and education partners. The Embrace Project, which is the focus of this report, forms part of the company's Community Outreach work and grew out of the Little Fish's New Leaf project, an initiative that runs in partnership with Her Centre, a Greenwich based local women's charity that offers support services that aim to 'eradicate violence against women and girls' (Her Centre 2020).

The development of The Embrace Project responds to an urgent need to address the increased number of sexual assaults and other forms of CSE that have emerged in the UK over the past two decades and the particular impact this has had on both young women and young men.



A key element of these debates is the issue of understanding consent



The Context of the Project

Research produced in a recent report by the National Office of Statistics (ONS) in 2017 revealed that, between 2002 and 2017, there was a 14% increase in the number of reported sexual offences (ONS 2017: 8). Within this 14% increase, sexual offences against young people were inversely represented with 'sexual offences against children' contributing 'over one-third (41%; 6,129 offences) to the total increase' (ONS 2017:10).

Statistical data gathered by the Home Office Data Hub showed that 'females aged 10 – 24 were disproportionately more likely to be victims of sexual offences recorded by the police, particularly those aged 10 to 14 and 15 to 19' (ONS 2017: 14).

This data builds a worrying picture for mixed-sex schools and other educational contexts where young people are starting to learn about relationships and beginning to explore their own sexuality and sense of identity.

The impact of sexual harassment and sexual assault on young women in schools has been the subject of other research where there is evidence of a dissonance between young men's and young women's understandings of what constitutes a healthy relationship and what constitutes sexual consent. A report by the National Education Union and UKFeminista, for example, found that

'over a third (37%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school'.

In addition, 'almost a quarter (24%) of female students' have been subjected to 'unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school' (NEU and UKFeminista 2017: 2). Yet while this kind of unwanted sexual contact can have a devastating impact on young women and their sense of self-worth, teachers often report that they are unable to effectively respond, nor do they feel able to identify ways of challenging some of the negative attitudes towards young women and sexual relationships that have become prevalent within the communities of



young people they teach. This reflects international debates, where teachers and educationalists across the world are beginning to examine how to improve and develop sex and relationship education (SRE) in schools and other youth settings and how to help young people to build a comprehensive understanding of what consent is and involves. As Vanita Sundaram and Helen Sauntson (2016) point out in their book *Global Perspectives and Key Debates in Sex and Relationships Education: addressing issues of gender, sexuality, plurality and power* 'sex and relationships education (SRE) curricula and provision are being discussed, debated and problematised with an increasing sense of urgency in many countries across the world' (2016: 2).

A key element of these debates is the issue of understanding consent.

Yet while debates around 'how sexual consent should be discussed with young people' have been much debated by government ministers in recent years, until September 2020 there were no statutory guidelines for SRE in the UK and as a consequence 'there are few contexts in which these conversations with young people routinely take place' (Coy, Kelly, Vera-Gray, Garner and Kanyeredzi 2016: 85).

The Embrace project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and commencing in Autumn 2017, sought to not only address this gap in SRE provision, but to establish an effective and participatory approach that would speak directly to young men who were at risk of becoming perpetrators of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The Structure and Design of the Embrace Project

Structured around a series of participatory residencies that took place over six to seven weeks, in a range of education settings, the Embrace project was

a three-year initiative designed for young men aged between thirteen and nineteen. The residency workshops comprised of a series of discussions and drama-based activities that examined and developed the participants' understanding of consent and their capacity to navigate sexual activity and relationships. The project also generated resources to support school leaders and teachers, provided training to teaching staff, and modelled good practice in SRE approaches for schools and other education settings.

The longer term impact of the project was 'to challenge misogyny and reduce violence towards women and girls' (Little Fish Theatre 2020). The project addressed this through the development of its residencies that were structured around three key outcomes:

- **Young men at risk of becoming perpetrators of CSE complete the Embrace programme**
- **Reduced risk of young men becoming perpetrators of CSE**
- **Professionals have an improved understanding and skills to support young men at risk of perpetrating or being a victim of CSE.**

Developed over three years (2017–2020) and running in schools, pupil referral units and youth offending teams, The Embrace Project established 16 different residencies across Wandsworth and Southwark. In total, approximately 218 young men were involved in the project with some schools and inclusion units hosting residencies with several different groups.



The participants came from a range of different cultures and backgrounds, as indicated in figure 1, illustrated below.

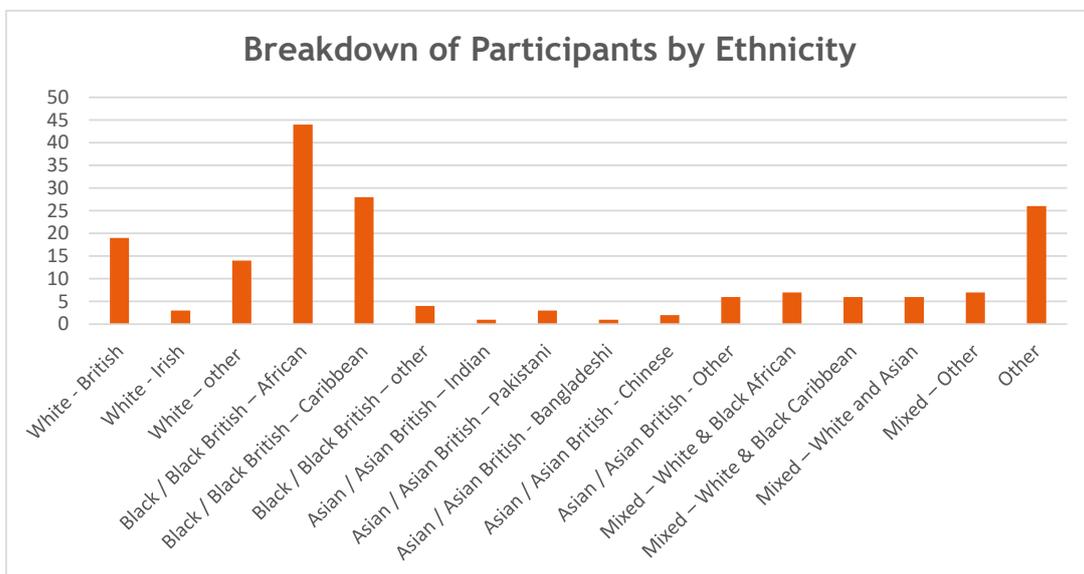


Figure 1. Graph indicating the ethnicity of participants in all 16 residencies.



Selection of the Participants

Schools were invited to identify a group of young men to be included in their residency.

The group size varied between groups of 10–12 participants in the pupil referral units (PRUs) and youth offending teams (YOTs), to larger groups of 15 to 20 in mainstream school settings. Teachers were encouraged to identify a range of young men to join the residency project and to include not only those who were thought to be at risk of becoming perpetrators of CSE. Early on in the process, the workshop facilitators learned that including participants with different kinds of backgrounds and experience aided the success of the residency. Francesca Sewell, The Embrace Project Coordinator explained in an interview with the project evaluation team that she found it useful to talk to teachers about the selection process ahead of the commencement of the project. This allowed her to explain how important it was to ‘have a healthy balance in the group’ and to encourage teachers to ‘include a handful of role models who are looked up to by the others’ (Sewell 2020).

This approach meant that the selection process was flexible, fluid and responsive to the needs of each of the schools. The young men were told they were chosen as potential ‘peer leaders’ to take part in this special project because ‘it was impossible for the company to work with everyone’ (Sewell 2020) and, as such, inclusion in the project tended to be viewed positively.

Teachers selected potential participants for a variety of different reasons: some young men, for example, were selected because they had demonstrated sexually harmful behaviour whereas others were chosen because they had sent explicit pictures to others on their phones or because they had been involved in some form of illegal activity around sex with young women.

As illustrated in the chart below, out of the 104 participants who responded on the pre-workshop evaluation form, approximately one-third of participants indicated that prior to the residency they had had some involvement with the police, a pupil referral unit or a youth offending team.

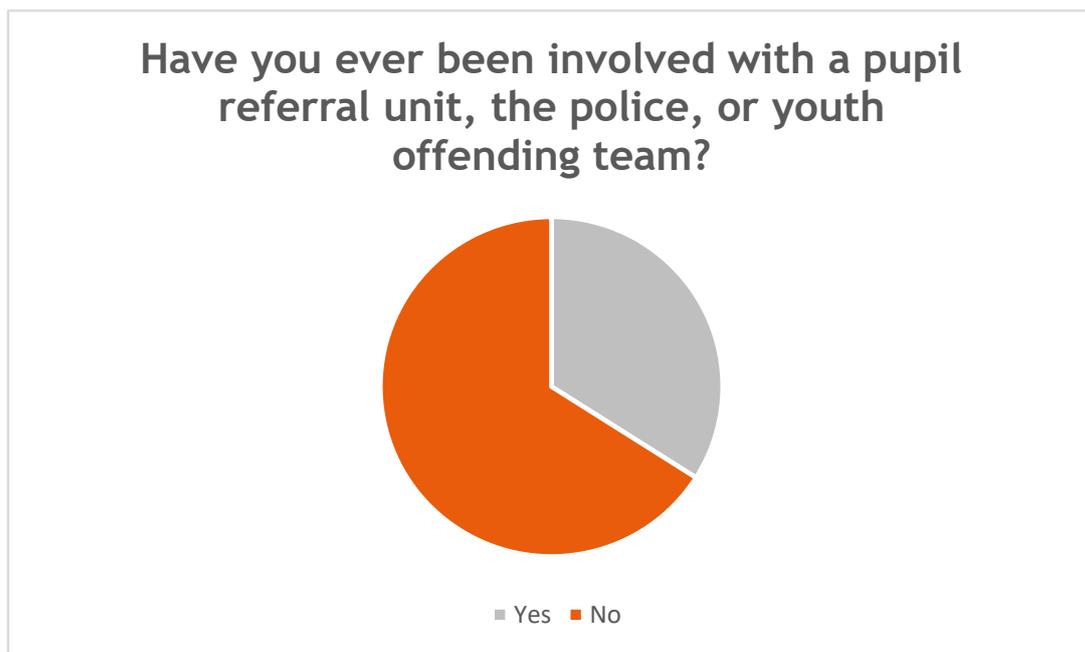


Figure 2. Pie chart illustrating the percentage of participants who indicated they had been involved in some way with a pupil referral unit, the police, or youth offending team.

The Workshops: Motivational Interviewing as an approach to change

The workshops were structured around a series of discussions, drama games and 'trigger scenes', where the facilitators went into role and performed as fictional characters who were encountering some kind of problem or dilemma. The young people were invited to engage with these characters, ask questions and to explore some of the issues these problem situations exposed.

The methodological approach underpinning the workshops was informed by Little Fish's engagement with motivational interviewing (MI).

Motivational Interview is a technique that was originally developed in the United States in the 1980s and early 1990s by psychologists William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick. While initially emerging in psychology and counselling contexts, MI is now widely recognised as a highly effective means of addressing issues of change within a range of different contexts and is an approach that has been adopted by different professionals working in areas such as schools, social work and nursing. Miller and Rollnick perceive change as being rooted in a dialogical and collaborative partnership between the person in the role of 'helping' and the client who is exploring the possibility for change in areas in their own life. Miller and Rollnick describe the MI approach as involving:

attention to natural language about change, with implications for how to have more effective conversations about it, particularly in contexts where one person is acting as a helping professional for another (2013: 4).

In their articulation of MI, Miller and Rollnick develop a conceptualisation of what they describe as the 'spirit' and the 'mind-set and heart-set' of this approach (Miller and Rollnick 2013: 15), which, they argue, is founded on 'four habits of the heart' (2013: 15), which are:

- **Partnership**
- **Acceptance**
- **Compassion**
- **Evocation**



The concept of ‘evocation’ in this context refers to a shift of thinking around how change operates. It represents a move away from what might be construed as a deficit model where the helper approaches the client with the ‘implicit message’ that ‘I have what you need, and I’m going to give it to you’ towards what Miller and Rollnick describe as a ‘different strength-based premise’, which takes account of a ‘*person’s strengths and resources rather than [probing] for weaknesses*’ (Miller and Rollnick 2013: 21).

In its engagement with the participants, the project facilitators adopted an approach to questioning that was rooted in what Miller and Rollnick describe as OARS, the ‘core interviewing skills’ of the motivational interviewing technique.

OARS is an acronym that denotes a mode of questioning and reflective listening that is responsive and seeks to support people wishing to make a change in their lives.

It is achieved by ‘asking Open questions, Affirming, Reflective, and Summarising’ (Miller and Rollnick 2013: 62).



In the Embrace workshops, the use of OARS was evident in the way the sessions were planned and delivered and crucially in the quality of the relationships forged with the participants and the ways in which they were invited to engage with the activities and discussions. Some of the qualitative feedback gathered from participants after the workshops reflect their experiences of being part of this reflexive and open space when engaging with difficult discussions about sexual relationships and consent:

***It's easier to learn because we're more open. In class, if you say something you might be sent out, but here... the things that we like about women, we might not be able to say in class.. but here we're open so it's easier to learn about things...
(participant, post-project focus group)***

*[the two project facilitators] are easier to talk to as well. You ask more in-depth questions and good questions for us to answer. You have the skills our teachers don't have to help us express ourselves.
(participant, post-project focus group)*



The identity of the facilitators seems also to have been influential to the success of the workshops. In an interview with the evaluation team, the Embrace project coordinator reflected on the importance of working with facilitators of different ethnicities who did not represent a white middle-class identity. She said:

It's important working with DR [one of the facilitators]... important that he was non-white. The fact he looked like a lot of the young men we were working with... a barrier instantly comes down, a recognition of another young black working-class male. Not middle-class. We go into character as boyfriend and girlfriend... when we were re-enacting a relationship... we didn't water it down and they respected that. We were bang on their level...

(Sewell Little Fish Interview 2020).

This view was reflected in some of the post-workshop feedback that emerged in the focus group discussions with the participants. Throughout the focus groups, the participants repeatedly referenced DR by name, speaking of him very positively and respectfully:

DR taught us that it's not all true.

DR really helped us to understand it, yeah cos he was specific to our needs.

Something DR told me was to take your time in your head to get yourself together.

And one participant went on to say:

***It helped that you [both facilitators] were born in London, or lived in London [...] I don't know why, but it did.
(Post-workshop Focus groups).***

The Evaluation Approach and the limits of its Methodology

The evaluation team drew from a wide range of different areas of expertise and backgrounds and was comprised of the following people:

- **Dr Amanda Stuart Fisher:** (evaluation co-ordinator and author of the report), Reader in Contemporary Performance, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- **Dr Nicola Abraham:** Lecturer in Applied Theatre Practices, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- **Kate Duffy:** Theatre Maker and co-artistic Director of Phosphorus Theatre
- **Cleve Jackson:** Lecturer, Department of Social Work, Royal Holloway University London.

The planning of the evaluation process was developed in close consultation with Little Fish Theatre's artistic directors and with the Embrace project coordinator. The evaluation activities were then broadly embedded into the project delivery itself and were undertaken both by the facilitators as part of the workshop and additionally, where necessary, by members of the evaluation team. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods, the evaluation process drew on data from pre and post-workshop evaluation forms that were completed by the participants in situ, observations of the workshops and material gathered from focus groups with the participants that took place six and/or twelve months after the residencies were completed.

Teachers and other education staff who worked with the young people on a daily basis were also invited to complete evaluation forms and in some instances were interviewed as part of the research along with the Embrace project coordinator, Francesca Sewell.

The data gathered exposed some of the shortcomings of the evaluation form processes, which in this project often tended to elicit very brief responses. It also became clear that not every participant was willing to answer every question, which led to complexities when collating and interpreting the data as a whole. The establishment of the six and twelve-month focus groups was also somewhat challenging in some settings, particularly in non-mainstream school settings where the communities are often transient and therefore constantly changing.

In response to these challenges, the evaluation team drew on different forms of data, using a wide range of evidence to triangulate and substantiate the findings.

Impact of Covid

The Coronavirus pandemic that led to a national lock down across Britain in Spring 2020 had a significant impact of the project in its final year of delivery. With schools across the country being closed or working with only a small number of key worker children, it was not possible to complete some of the residencies or establish new ones. While Little Fish engaged in some important online work with young people during the first lock down, the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic reduced the possibility for the important face-to-face work, necessary for the safe delivery of the Embrace project residencies. The company therefore plan to develop a further residency with another group of young men and another teacher training event some time in 2021.



The Evaluation Findings

The 16 Embrace Residencies were based in mainstream schools, pupil referral units and Youth Offending Teams in the London boroughs of Wandsworth and Southwark.

Participating Schools

- **Southwark Inclusive Learning Service (SILS)**
- **Harris Academy Battersea**
- **Chestnut Grove Academy**
- **Highshore School**
- **Wandsworth Youth Offending Team (YOT)**
- **Graveney School**
- **St John Bosco College**

In total **218** participants attended one or more of the workshops.

At the commencement of the project, participants were asked how much they knew about the law, sex and young people. 71% of respondents indicated that they knew either 'not very much' or 'some things but not in much detail'. Similarly, when asked how they would rate their understanding of what consent means in sexual relationships, 60% claimed they understood 'exactly what consent means', 36% responded by saying that either they did not really understand consent or were confused about what consent meant in the context of sexual relationships.



In these workshops you will be looking at the law, sex and young people. How much do you know about this?



Figure 3. Pie chart illustrating the understanding of the law, sex and young people prior to the commencement of the project.

Before taking part in the project, participants were also asked to reflect on what consent means and specifically how they would know if their partner was consenting to something. The word cloud below summarises the responses. While for some, consent is about receiving an agreement to sexual activity taking place, a large proportion of respondents reported not knowing.



When asked before and after the workshop, how they would rate their understanding of what consent means in sexual relationships, there was evidence of improved levels in understanding when comparing responses from before and after the workshop.

Prior to participation in the workshop:



Figure 6. Pie chart showing responses to the question: during the workshops, you have looked at issues around consent. How do you know if your partner is consenting to something



After the workshop:

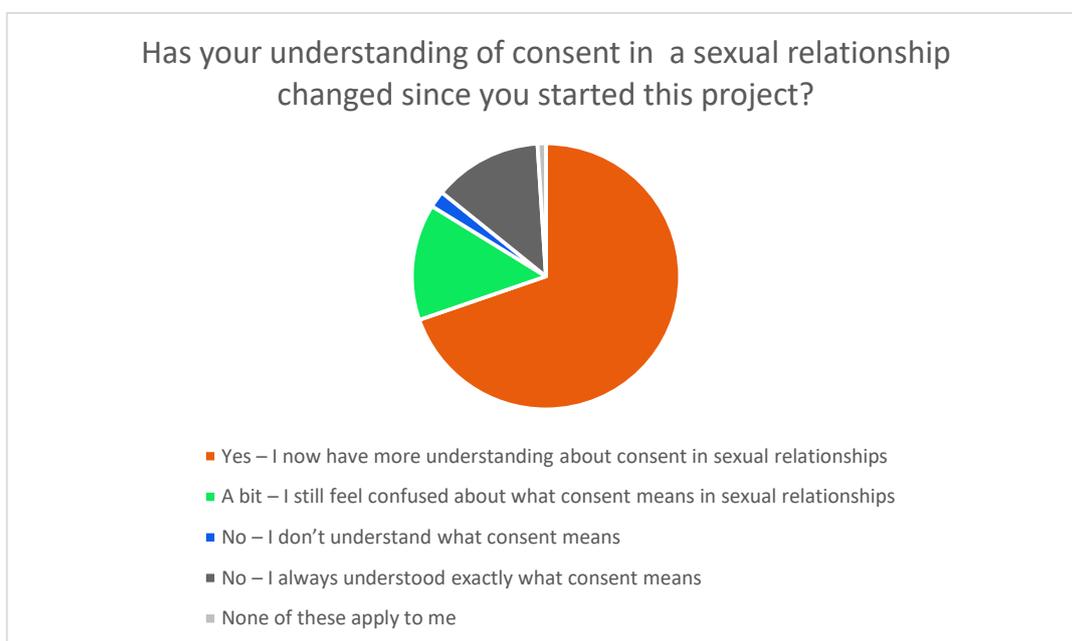


Figure 7. Pie chart showing responses after the workshop to the question: Has your understanding of consent in a sexual relationship changed since you started this project?

At the end of the project, the participants were asked if the workshops had improved their understanding of healthy relationships. 91% of respondents indicated that their understanding had improved either 'very much' (69%) or 'a little' (22%).

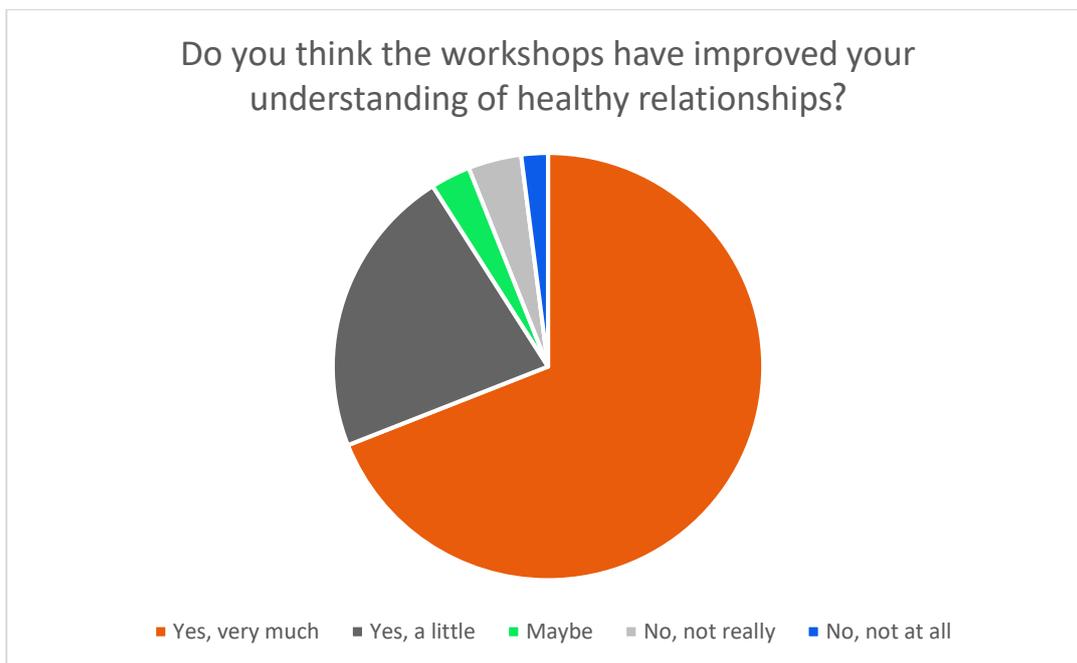


Figure 8. Pie chart showing responses to the question: Do you think the workshops have improved your understanding of healthy relationships?

On the post-workshop evaluation form, participants were also asked to describe, in their own words, what they felt made an unhealthy relationship. The word cloud below reveals the results, most prevalent are words such as violence, abuse, controlling, arguments and trust (lack of):



Training the Teaching Staff

The residencies were supported by the creation of education resources and accompanying online materials to provide support for teaching staff when incorporating CSE education into the school curriculum. This provided some sustainability for the project, enabling teaching staff to learn from the Embrace project facilitators and to understand how the innovative practices developed in the Embrace project might be fed into their own pedagogies.

The education resources comprised of three interconnected elements:

a) The Embrace Pack: Facilitators Guidelines by Francesca Sewell and Alex Cooke

A booklet providing guidance on good practice when working with young men and tackling the complexities of CSE and SRE in schools.

b) The Embrace Resource Pack: Session Plans by Francesca Sewell, Alex Cooke and Suha Al-Khayyat

A set of workshop plans for each of the residency sessions.

c) Video resources, available via YouTube

A set of online video resources providing trigger scenes and short performances to be shown in the class, providing support to schemes of work addressing CSE and SRE and dramatically exploring some of the issues examined in the Embrace workshops.



Other Teacher Training Initiatives

Throughout the Embrace project Little Fish also provided training workshops for teaching staff that modelled the kinds of techniques that were explored in the practical work in the residencies. Two staff training workshops took place at SILS (Southwark Inclusive Learning Service) and Harris Academy Battersea and at the time of writing a total 25 staff members have attended these. In their feedback, all of the staff who responded indicated positively that the activities and approaches planned by the company would effectively support and challenge young men who were displaying sexually harmful behaviour. The respondents specifically commented on the relatability of the activities and how the use of drama and trigger scenes encouraged the young men to talk about their feelings and experiences, enhancing their capacity for empathy. They said:

- I think it will be very effective for the young men because they will have a channel to actually see other people's views

Very helpful. Young people sometimes have to be put in real-life situations for it to be real – good way to do this

Very effective as it tackled the root of the issues (toxic masculinity, societal expectations etc) and not just the behaviour



Further responses from those who attended the training sessions also suggested that it would be useful for staff to gain further experience in MI techniques and OARS approaches to questioning:

I think it is very beneficial for staff to learn these techniques - makes young people think

- Most definitely. [Staff] need to be flexible in their methodology in teaching our young people
- Yes – you are not telling people, you are explaining options, giving positive feedback. Making them feel valued, supported and engaged

Analysing the Findings and Some Unexpected Outcomes

While the closed questions and qualitative data gathered by the evaluation forms provide a useful snapshot of the overall efficacy of the project, the discussions that took place in the focus groups with the young men sometime after the residencies arguably reveal a more nuanced insight into the different ways the young men were changed by their experience of the project. When analysing the data from the focus groups, unexpected outcomes began to emerge that draw attention to the multi-layered impact of the project as a whole.

One interesting finding is that while the pre-workshop evaluation form reports that 94% of respondents felt initially that they knew 'a lot' or 'some things but not in much detail' about 'the law, sex and young people', by the end of the project several participants indicated that while initially they 'thought [they] knew a lot about the law and consent,' after the workshops, they actually realised they knew less than they had first thought. Another unexpected finding was that the participants spoke of their intention to share their learning around consent with their peers, suggesting that the impact of the project as a whole will ultimately exceed the participants who were directly involved in the residencies themselves.

Broadly speaking, the impact of the workshop can therefore be summarised as addressing four interconnected outcomes:

- A) An improved understanding of the laws governing sexual consent and what this means in the context of sexual relationships;
- B) A recognition of the importance of communication within relationships and an acknowledgement of the importance of listening and hearing what the other person says;
- C) A better understanding of how to distinguish a healthy relationship from an unhealthy one;
- D) The possibility for the learning outcomes of the workshops to be disseminated beyond the parameters of the residency via peer communication.

The sections below provide evidence from the focus groups that support these findings.

A) An improved understanding of consent and what this means in the context of sexual relationships:

So from learning about consent, I think that consent is like, it doesn't matter what the girl's body language shows, it's what she actually physically says and if she is ready or not, and you've got to ask her instead of just proceeding to do what you want to do with her.

(post-workshop focus groups)

I think what I enjoyed most was the definition of consent. Before, many of us didn't know what consent was, so we learnt it and we were thinking about why we should get consent.

(post-workshop focus groups)

I think approaching relationships I'd be the same, but certain stuff, like talking about sex and stuff, I would talk very differently about this now. Like what you guys said about consent, I'd get consent first. I would get her consent before doing it, because of what we talked about.

(post-workshop focus group)

Consent is what you actually give permission to be able to do something. When you're under 16, you can legally say if you want to do this, you can do it, but if you're under that age and you want to do it, you can't do it. In the law, like, you're seen as not mature enough to be able to do things.

(six-month focus group)

I have the knowledge about the consent but I haven't applied it because it's too early in my life to be playing this kind of consent.

(12-month focus group)

[At the start of the project] I thought I knew a lot about the law, and consent... but during this group, I've realised a lot of what I thought I knew I did not know.

(post-workshop focus group)

It's taught us that consent is not something you can force.

(post-workshop focus group)



B) A recognition of the importance of communication within relationships and an acknowledgement of listening and hearing what the other person says.

Because, say you have a relationship and try to get a conversation with her and she's only answering in yes and no's – you're not gonna have a lot of conversation with her, so if you do open questions you're going have a better conversation with her, so you can get into a better relationships.

(post-workshop focus group)

Like instead of you taking your anger out on the other person in the relationship, you could like, do things to cool down, talk to someone you know, to help you, talk and sympathise with your situation so you didn't end up upsetting the other person.

(post-workshop focus group)

We need to make sure that both sides of the party need to communicate, so that they need to understand each other before they can move on, or they're not gonna resolve what they're doing so they'll keep going over and over it.

(12-month focus group)

I feel I'm able to communicate better, cos I'm aware that I should, like, take two sides of the story instead of just taking one side of the story and interpreting what they might think. I should actually listen to them before thinking of anything else.

(12-month focus group)



C) A better understanding of how to distinguish a healthy relationship from an unhealthy one.

A healthy relationship, like, it's the way you deal with something. So, say you're in an argument you can deal with it in a good or a bad way. So say in a good way, like, you can ask them open questions, say I cheated on her, you ask the girl, how do they know I cheated? And in a bad way you just end up fighting each other, physically and inside.

(post-workshop focus group)

A healthy relationship is when two people are happy.

(post-workshop focus group)

I learned what it takes to be a man or a woman, and the stereotypes

(6 months focus group)

[I've learned that a healthy relationship is] a stable couple, trusting each other, not using each other, communicate well, consent when its needed, both caring too.

(post-workshop focus group)

I know there's a clear difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship, and I know the difference between them.

(12-month focus group)



D) The possibility for the learning outcomes of the workshops to be disseminated beyond the parameters of the residency via the participants and peer communication

I relayed it back to my friends, shared the information. The knowledge you gave me, I was able to distribute it and now, like, other people have that and if they distribute it, it will go everywhere and others will have that same knowledge that I have, that I was given from the sessions, they can apply it to their own lives.

(12-month focus group)

I distributed it to my friends, so now they know about consent, and how to use it and if it's right or wrong.

(12-month focus group)

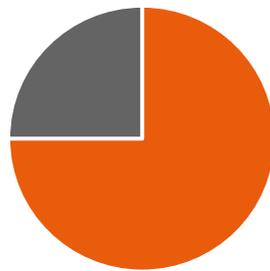
Improving the Understanding and Skills of Professional and Teaching Staff Feedback

A productive partnership with school staff throughout the residencies became critical to the efficacy of the project as a whole. A representative of the teaching staff was required to be present at every workshop and to support the facilitators with behaviour management issues. This benefited the structure of the workshop and ensured there was a joined-up approach to behavioural expectations and any necessary interventions. Early on in the project, however, the project coordinator began to identify certain moments when the progress of the workshop was being hindered by some of the teaching styles of staff and an anxiety about teacher-led disciplinary interventions within the workshop space. She soon began to recognise the importance of setting up meetings with staff prior to the commencement of the workshops in order to establish a framework for any behaviour management and to lay out the central ideology and processes of the workshops themselves. Sewell, the project coordinator explained that these meetings were invaluable because 'It was important to get the teachers on side, right from the start' (Little Fish Interview 2020). Establishing this kind of engagement with teaching staff ensured that the facilitators and school staff could maintain a shared vision when engaging with the workshop material and this ultimately prevented potentially useful dialogue between participants from being closed down. In order to enhance the relationship between teaching staff and facilitators, Little Fish also began producing handout materials for teaching staff, which provided useful information about the project and went some way to disseminating the good practice developed during the Embrace residencies amongst the wider education and school community. The dissemination of good practice during the Embrace Project and the support and upskilling of staff was also addressed the Embrace Resource Pack, outlined above.

When asked, at the end of the project, if staff felt the workshops had increased understanding of the law, sex and young people, 75% of respondents indicated they felt that the participants now had a solid understanding of what is and isn't legal. Similarly, 78% of teaching staff felt that the young people who took part in the project now had a much-improved understanding of healthy relationships.



How much has The Embrace Project increased the participant's knowledge and understanding of the law, sex and young people?



- They now have a solid understanding of what is and isn't legal
- They have an understanding of some bits but not everything

Figure 11a. Pie chart showing responses to the question: how much has The Embrace project increased the participant's knowledge and understanding of the law, sex and young people?

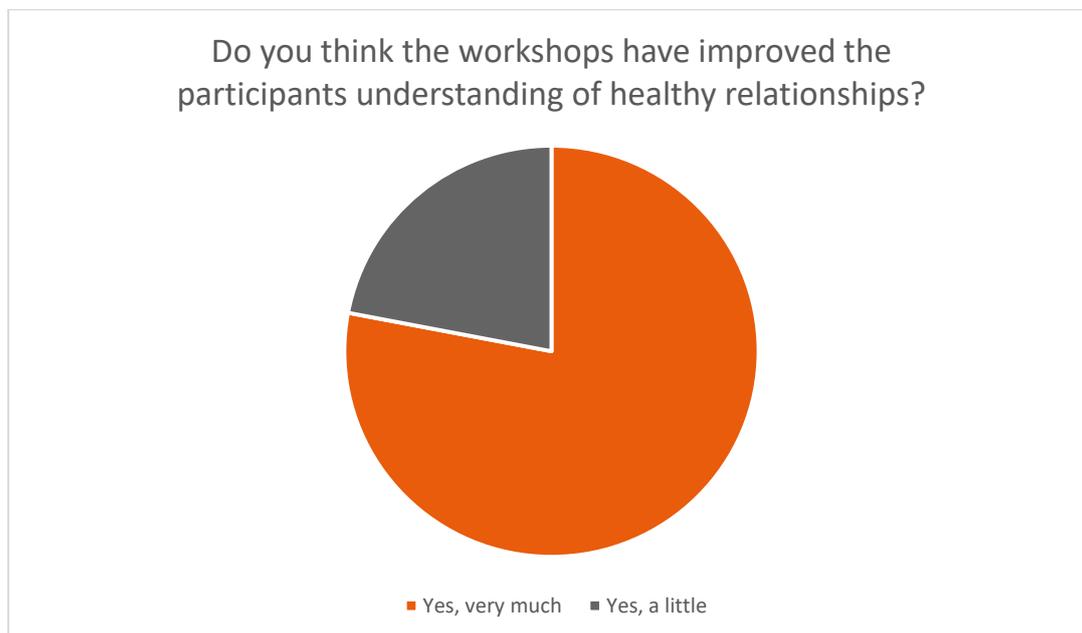


Figure 11b. Pie chart showing responses to the question: do you think the workshops have improved the participant's understanding of healthy relationships?

Teaching staff were also asked to reflect on how the project had enhanced the participant's understanding of consent. The word cloud below reflects the comments received in relation to this question.

Overall, the responses were very positive:

I think this workshop has widened our pupils' outlook on consent because now they pay attention to things such as body language, whereas before they did not even consider this.

They have a strong understanding about consent.

They have enhanced their knowledge of consent by looking at things such as body language and facial expressions instead of just taking someone's word for it.



Figure 12: Word Cloud showing staff responses to the question: During the workshops, the participants have been looking at issues around consent. What do you think consent means to the participant's (in terms of a personal and sexual relationships)? To what extent do you think the project has enhanced their understanding of consent?



In the post-workshop staff evaluation, the teaching staff were also asked for their feedback on what other areas could be tackled. One issue that was mentioned several times is the subject of abuse within a relationship.

In terms of the participant's understanding of healthy relationships, what other areas and issues do you think need to be tackled?

- Maybe abuse in relationships can be tackled a little more
- I think our pupils have a better understanding on healthy relationships but need to understand the topic of "trust" with more clarity
- More in depth understanding of respect and the meaning of partnership
- The aspect of trust and respecting your partner as your equal
- The programme was comprehensive. It would have been good to take some issues further using scenarios / moral reasoning in more depth
- Needs of your partner. Resolving conflict
- How to interpret the gang influence or unhelpful comments towards women / drugs that they get from music
- LGBT still ignored!
- I think it's sometimes how to implement the ideas, this takes maturity and practice. However, I think they really understood the concepts of healthy relationships.
- Understanding themselves and why they think / feel / behave certain ways.
- Pressurising their friends.

Conclusion

Reviewing the different forms of data gathered throughout the evaluation process, it is clear that The Embrace Project was highly successful in many different ways. As a result of taking part in the project, the participants clearly gained an improved understanding of consent as well as acquiring greater knowledge of the law and sex in relation to young people and their relationships with others. However, while the written evaluation forms reveal some useful qualitative data about the project's efficacy, it is in the data gathered from the focus groups and evidence in the young men's written commentary that reveals a more granular and nuanced account of what was learned. While the evaluation forms provide a useful snapshot of what the young people felt they knew about consent before and after the residency, the qualitative data reveals that the workshops also taught the young people how little they actually knew about consent prior to taking part in the project. This suggests that while at the start of the project 60% of respondents reporting knowing 'exactly what consent means' in a relationship, as the workshops developed the young people began to understand that the issue of consent was perhaps more complex and multi-layered than they had first assumed it to be. In this sense, the workshops were able to work carefully and intimately with the young male participants in order to debunk myths and to scrutinise more closely issues relating to sex and consent that are often missed or misunderstood.

In addition to the practical information acquired during the workshop processes, it seems that the project also gave the young men a language with which to speak about consent, enabling them to find a way to talk about their experiences and the challenges they have faced when navigating relationships and other encounters with young women. One of the interesting thematics that arose in the qualitative feedback was the issue of body language and the role this might or might not play in consent. Feedback from the participants revealed how unreliable 'reading body language' was in this context and as such the acquirement of the language of consent was felt by all to be crucial.

One clear strength of the project, which was evidenced in the workshop observations and the focus group discussions, was the quality of the relationship established between the facilitators and the participants. The focus on MI techniques played an important role here, helping to foster open and empathic interactions in which the young people felt valued and heard. This enabled the participants to find the confidence to participate in discussions and to explore subjects that can be difficult to talk about. For example, in the post-workshop evaluation forms, several participants mentioned their positive response to the

condom demonstration and in focus groups spoke positively about being able to participate in this element of the workshop. The persona of both facilitators was also a factor here and was evidenced in several different evaluation processes. While having a positive male role model in this context seems to have provided a critical element of the project, the modelling of a respectful and reciprocal relationship between a female and male facilitator was also impactful.

The role of the teaching staff within the structure and day-to-day running of the workshops was also key to the project's success. The growing awareness of the need for a staff briefing prior to the commencement of the project enabled the practice to develop further because The Embrace Project coordinator was able to ensure both school staff and Little Fish facilitators were working together in partnership and were attuned to the philosophy of the project as a whole and the needs of the participants.

While the evaluation materials evidenced that the project met its intended aims, the focus groups, which took place six and twelve months after its conclusion, revealed some interesting possibilities for potential peer education around the issue of consent. From the various evidence gathered, it is clear that not only did the young men who participated in the project feel they had acquired a language with which to talk about consent and sexual relationships, after the project had concluded they felt confident enough to share what they had learned with their peers. This an exciting and unexpected outcome, pointing to a dynamic and impactful element of the project's efficacy, suggesting that the impact of the project went beyond those who attended the sessions delivered within the residencies.

Overall, this dynamic and innovative project was highly successful and modelled an effective way of using MI techniques in a drama context to establish positive and participatory workshop encounters in which it becomes possible to discuss and explore some complex and 'hard to talk about' issues while feeling confident and supported.

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