

Tower Hamlets Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) Pilot Project 2017-2018

Educational Psychology Service and The Virtual School

Project Background

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training programme was developed by Sheila Burton in Hampshire. This programme has been widely adopted as an evidence-based early intervention for children and young people, led by Educational Psychologists in over 100 local authorities in the U.K. ELSAs are teaching assistants or school support staff who have had special training from Educational Psychologists to support the emotional development of children and young people in schools. Following training ELSAs have regular professional supervision with Educational Psychologists to help them in their work.

The Tower Hamlets ELSA project was launched by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in collaboration with the Virtual School. The ELSA Pilot Project began in June 2017 and will finish in July 2018. The ELSA training programme was delivered by two Educational Psychologists, over 6 days between June 2017 and November 2017. In June 2017, 38 ELSAs from 25 schools in Tower Hamlets were enrolled on the course, of which, there were 5 secondary schools and 20 primary schools. Thirty five ELSAs from 24 schools successfully completed the course in November 2017.

Outcomes of the training

ELSAs completed a pre-training online questionnaire which explored their knowledge; confidence in a range of topics featured in the ELSA training course; their professional skills and their preferred learning styles. A similar post-training questionnaire was also completed at the end of the training and asked about the most significant changes to ELSA's knowledge and practice. Responses were gathered from all ELSAs at the start of the course, and then this data was analysed with responses from 33 ELSAs who completed the post-training questionnaire. This report summarises the main findings from the questionnaires.

The responses indicated overall views of the training course were positive and show an increase in ELSA confidence, knowledge and skills between starting and completing the training.

Main changes in knowledge following the training:

- All ELSAs reported increased knowledge of ways to help children and young people understand and talk about how they might feel. 90% of ELSAs rated 8

or above on a confidence rating scale of 1-10 (10 representing knowing a lot about this).

- 96% of ELSAs reported knowing more about the importance of helping children and young people to feel wanted e.g. as part of a group, their class or school community.
- 94% of ELSAs reported knowing more about possible reasons for negative thoughts, feelings and/or behaviours that children and young people may have.
- All ELSAs reported increased knowledge of social skills and the things that help children and young people to get on and communicate better with one another.

Main changes in confidence following the training:

- Overall, there was a significant increase in ELSAs' confidence in actively listening to young people and in planning and delivering sessions with individuals and groups.
- All ELSAs reported an increase in their confidence with developing positive relationships with children and young people. 94% of ELSAs rated 7 themselves or above on a confidence rating scale of 1-10 (10 representing feeling extremely confident about this).
- 94% of ELSAs rated their confidence at 7 or above in working with individual children or young people on a targeted area that they need help with.
- All ELSAs reported increased confidence in knowing how to help calm down a student when they feel upset or angry. 97% of ELSAs reported confidence ratings of 7 or above with supporting student's emotional regulation.
- All ELSAs reported increased confidence in reflecting on their own practice. 90% of ELSAs rated themselves as 7 or above in confidence to engage in reflections on their work.

The ELSAs most enjoyed the range of activities introduced on the training, opportunities for role play and meeting and learning from others on the course. One ELSA commented:

'The whole course was extremely interesting and has had a huge impact on me personally in my role'.

ELSAs thought that the most significant things that they would take away from the training related to their roles and remit as an ELSA, new knowledge and deeper understandings of the needs of pupils, reflective practice skills and planning for sessions and target-setting. One ELSA commented:

'I think the SMART targets have been the most significant and useful thing because it is hard to measure impact with emotional development'.

As a result of their training, ELSAs thought that their practice would change in them using a calm and confident approach, being more targeted and focused in their work,

and having a different lens through which to view children and young people. One ELSA commented:

'I am more aware of children and young people's emotional needs.'

(Please see Appendix for detailed data taken from the questionnaires)

Summary – to date

- The Pilot Project has enabled the EPS, with support from The Virtual School, to introduce the ELSA programme to schools in Tower Hamlets. ELSA is a training programme with ongoing supervision which supports staff in schools to support the emotional development of children and young people. Nationally, there is an increasing body of evidence which shows the positive impact ELSA has on the wellbeing and attainment of children and young people, and the capacity of schools to support children and young people from within their own resources
- The Pilot Project has been very well received by schools, with 24 schools choosing to train at least one member of staff as an ELSA
- Training days were positively evaluated and 35 ELSAs successfully completed the 6 day training
- At the end of the training, ELSAs reported increased knowledge, skills and confidence in key areas of the ELSA programme (as self-reported in pre and post training questionnaires – see above)
- Group supervision for ELSAs, facilitated by the project EPs, is providing ongoing support and professional development for ELSAs in their role and encouraging reflective practice. It is also creating a sharing of knowledge and practice across different schools in the borough
- ELSA fits with current national priorities. *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision – Green Paper December 2017* emphasises the importance early intervention and prevention work in schools to promote positive mental health and wellbeing

Final Phase of the Pilot Project

ELSAs are attending half termly group supervision with the project Educational Psychologists. This is supporting them to start their work as an ELSA and will provide ongoing opportunities for reflective practice and continuing professional development.

In July 2018, after attending 5 supervision sessions, ELSAs will be eligible for registration as 'Recognised Tower Hamlets ELSAs'. Group supervision will continue to be provided by the EPS beyond the Pilot Project and will be a requirement for those who wish to continue practising as a recognised ELSA.

In August 2018 evaluation of the ELSA pilot project will be completed. Feedback will be sought from ELSAs about the impact of the initial training and ongoing supervision on their knowledge, confidence and skills in this new role; from Senior Managers in participating schools to measure the impact this project has had upon practice and provision in schools and the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of pupils from within their own resources; from the children and young people who have worked with an ELSA to find out what difference this intervention has made to them.

Next Phase of the Project

The EPS and The Virtual School are committed to the ongoing training and supervision of ELSAs in schools. We hope to provide training for a second cohort of ELSAs next academic year, 2018-2019, and initial discussions are taking place to explore possible funding arrangements.

Leanna Lopez, Tracy Robinson and Ruki Weerasinghe

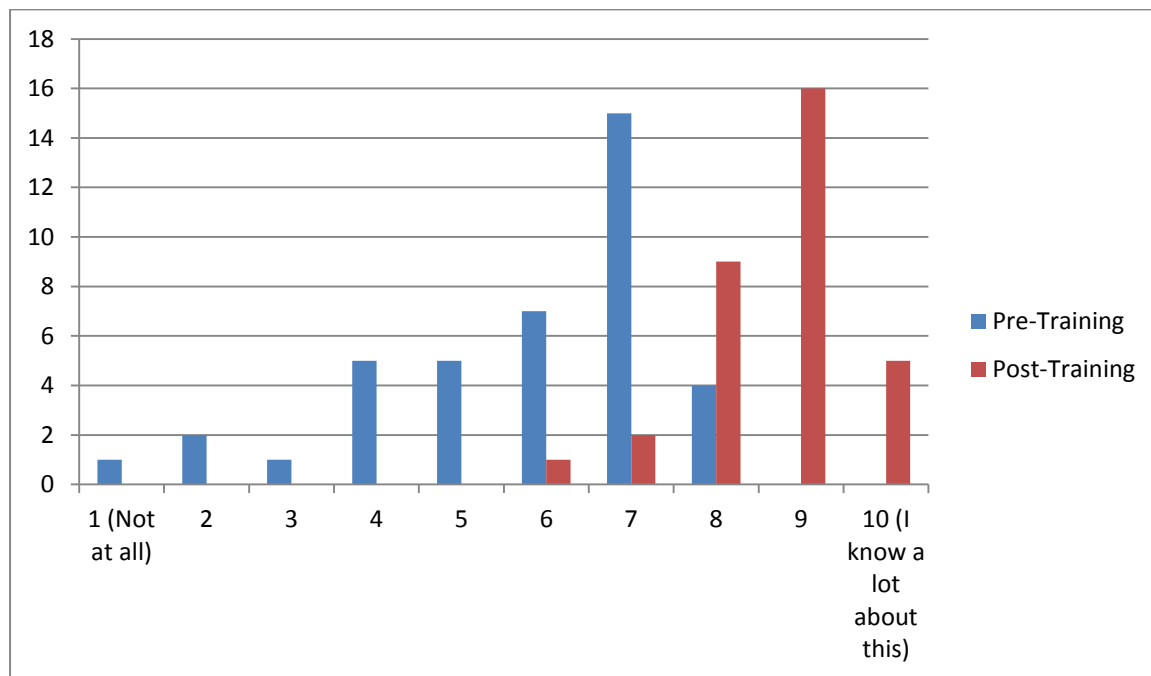
Tower Hamlets Educational Psychology Service

January 2018

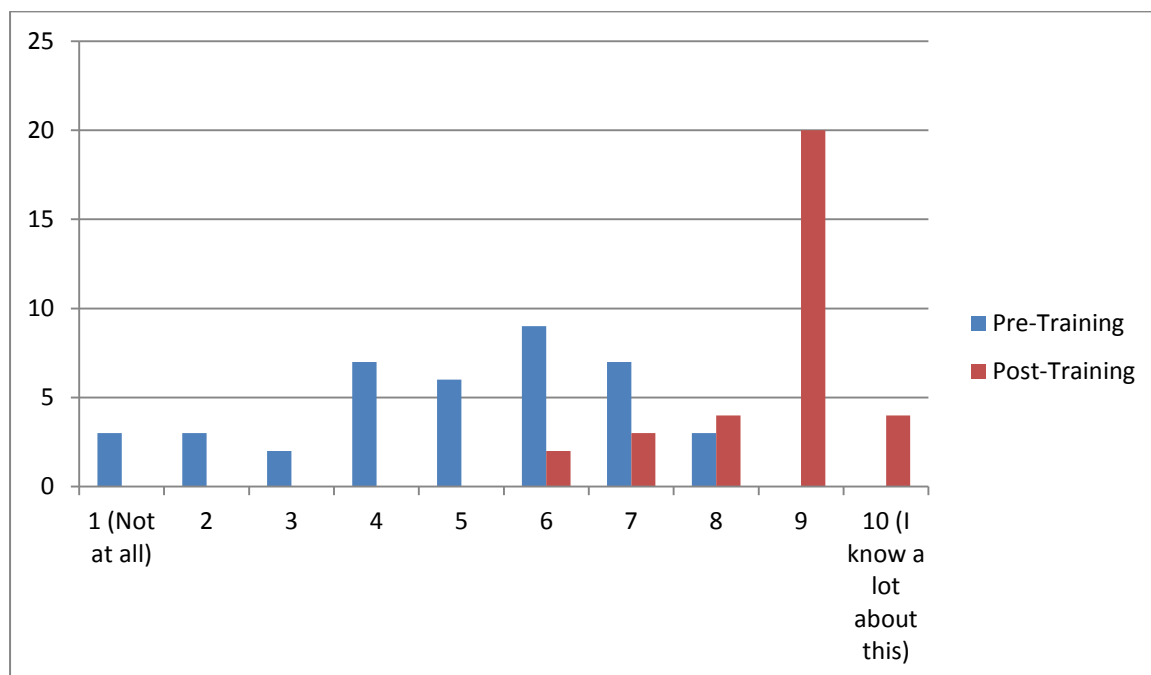
Appendix 1 Tower Hamlets ELSA Pilot Project: Pre-Post Evaluation

Knowledge and Understanding of Topics Relevant to Being an ELSA

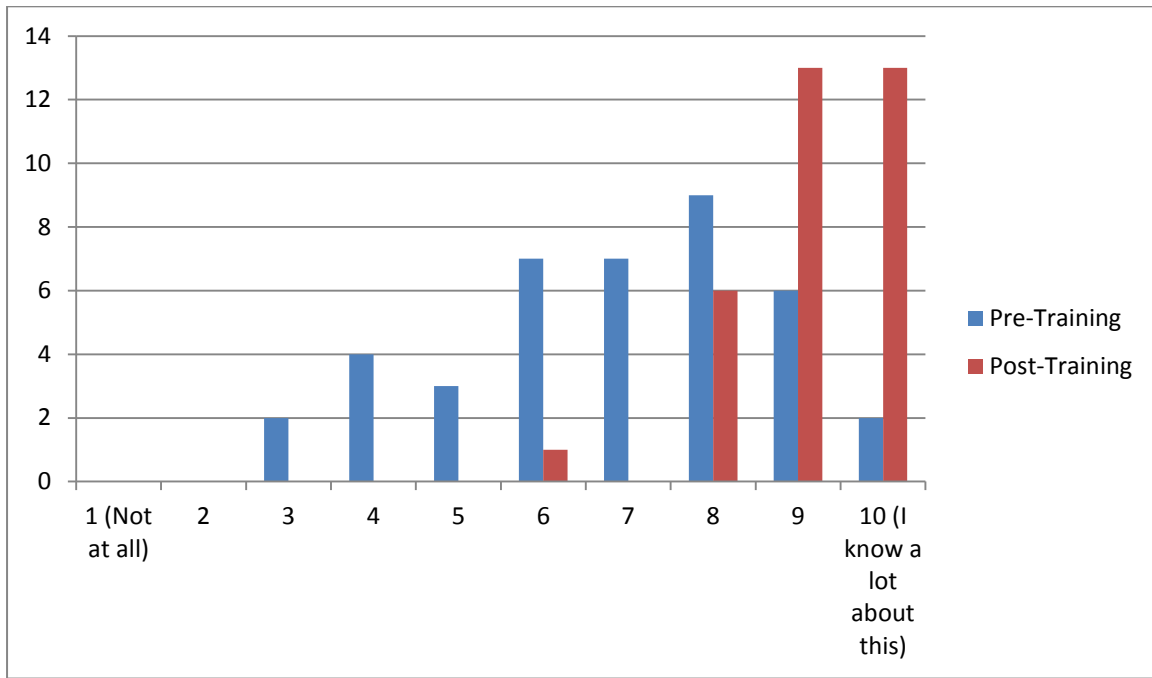
1. Ways to help children and young people (CYP) understand and talk about how they might feel



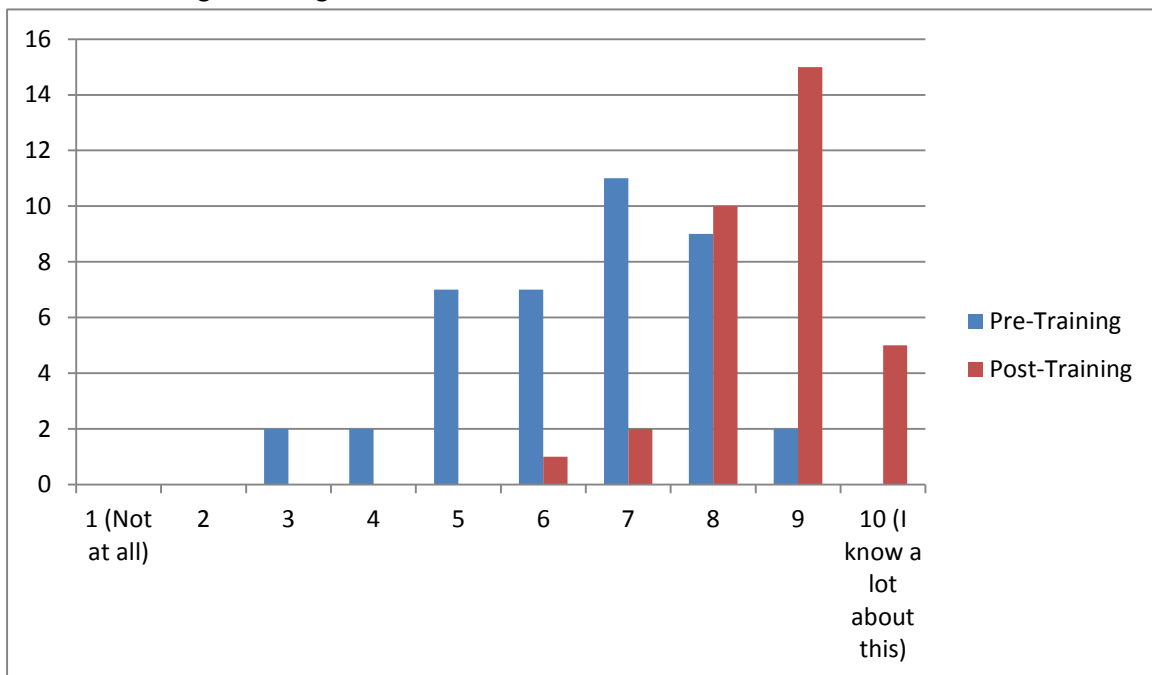
2. Resilience



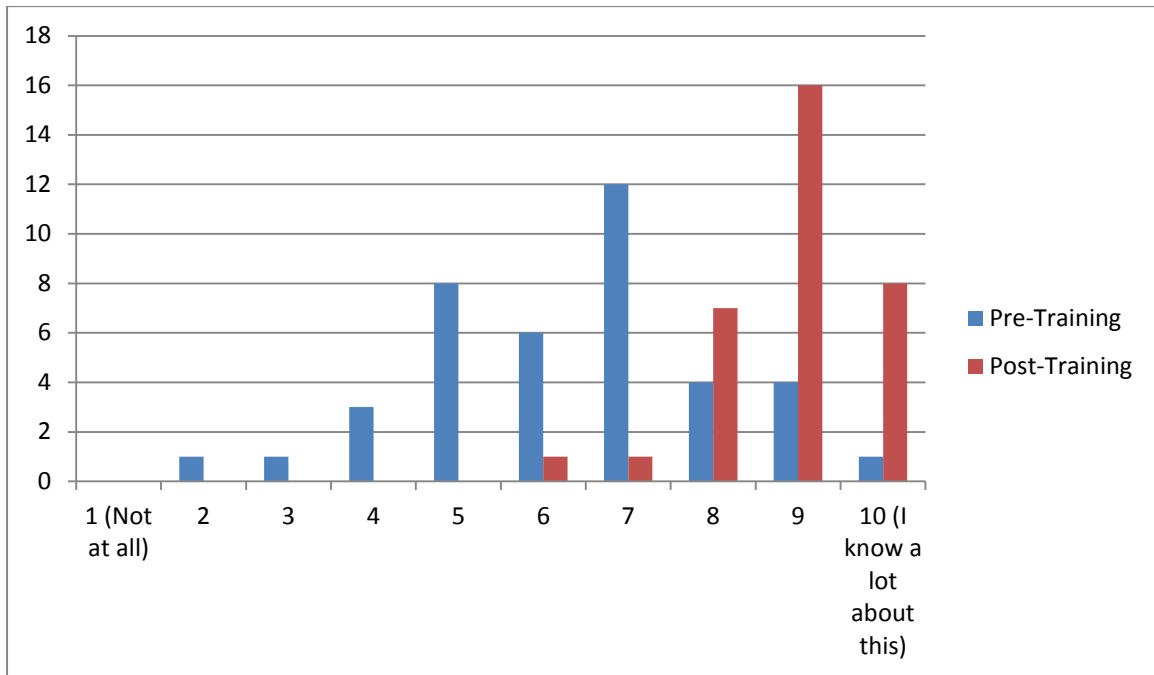
3. Belongingness/the importance of feeling wanted



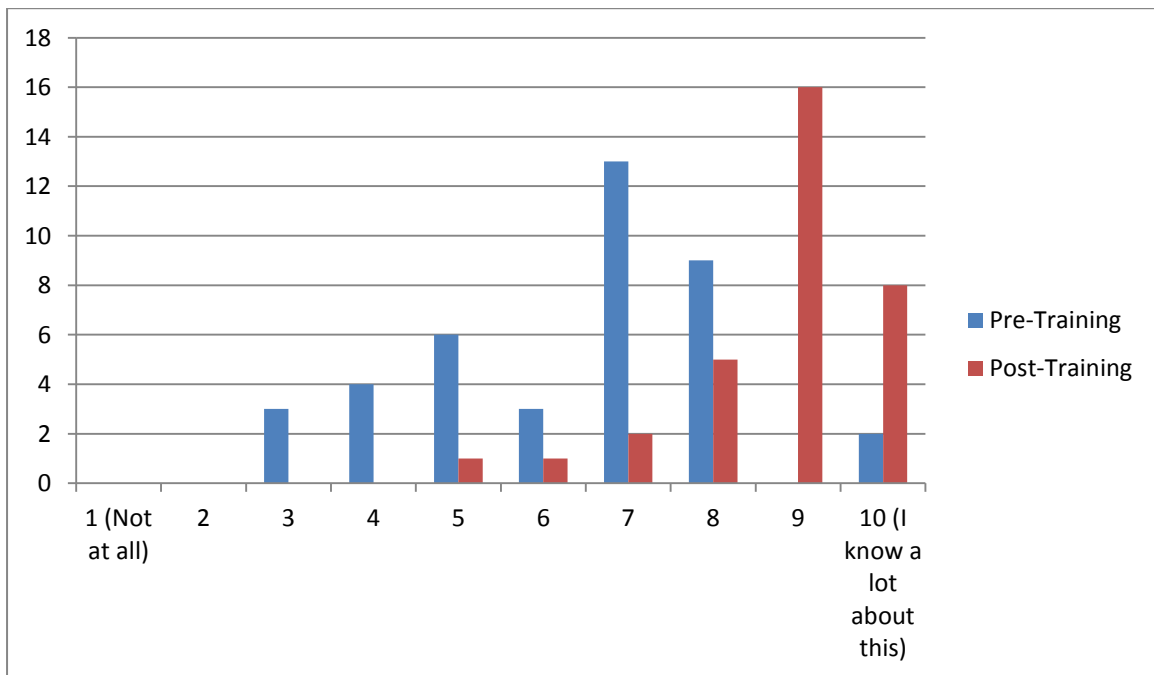
4. Different things that might motivate CYP



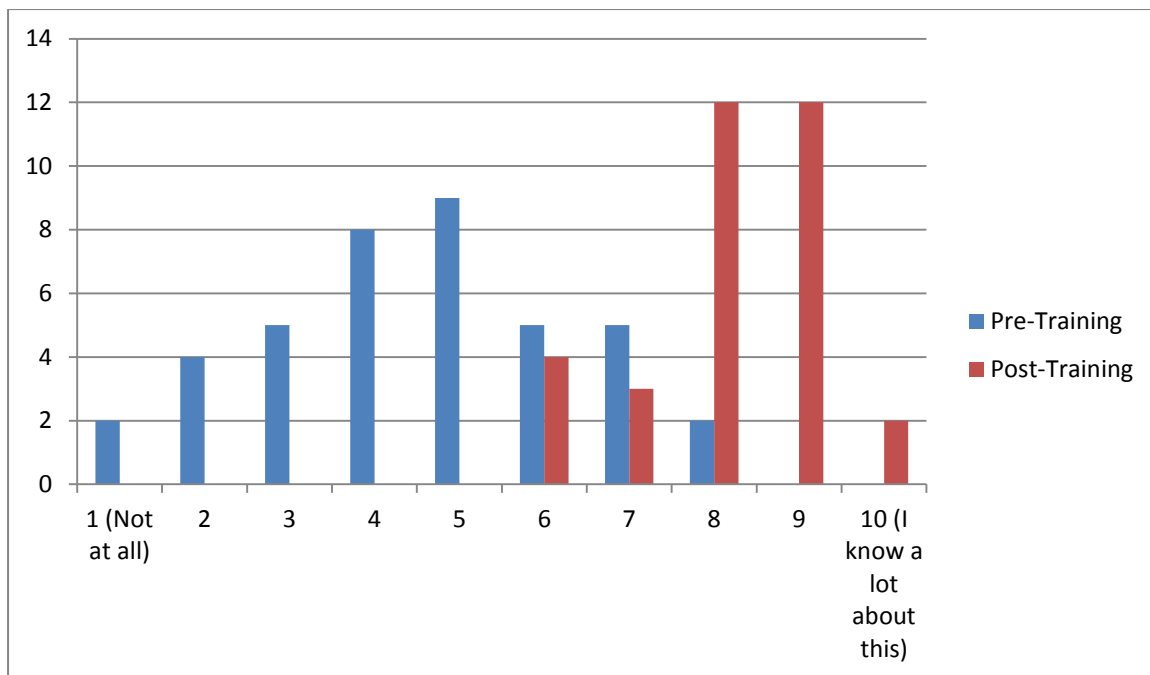
5. Possible reasons behind negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours CYP have



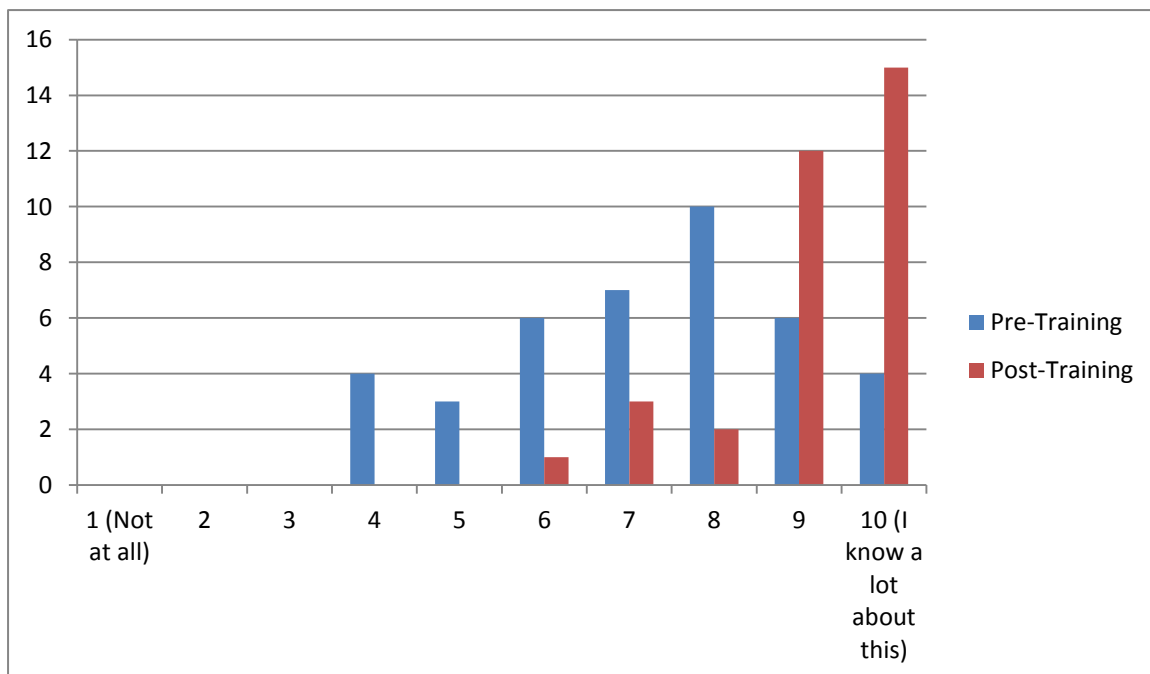
6. Social skills



7. Ways to support CYP who have experienced loss and bereavement

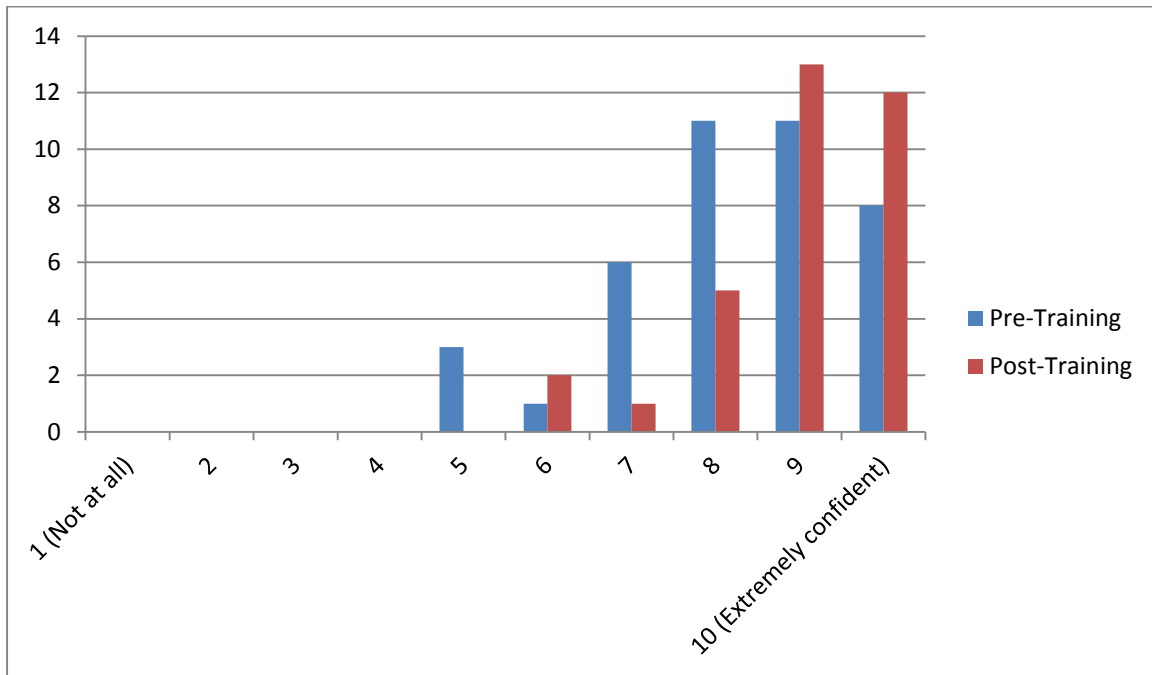


8. How to show CYP that you are giving them your attention and really listening

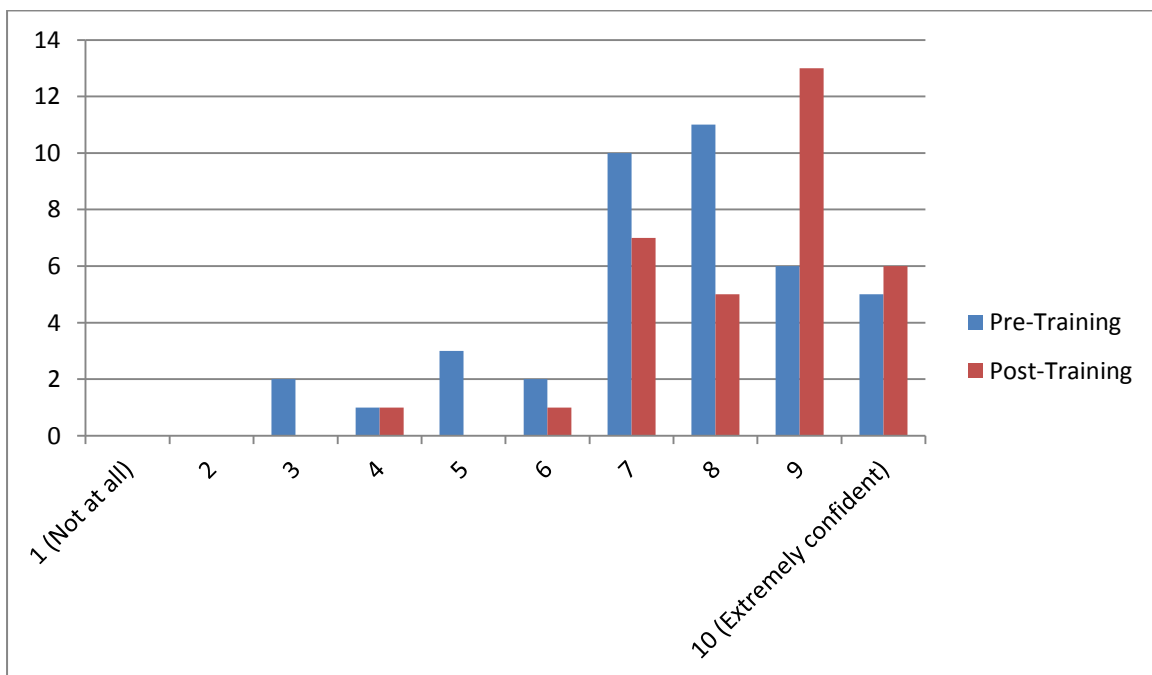


Levels of Confidence Regarding the Implementation of Practical Strategies That Promote Emotional Literacy

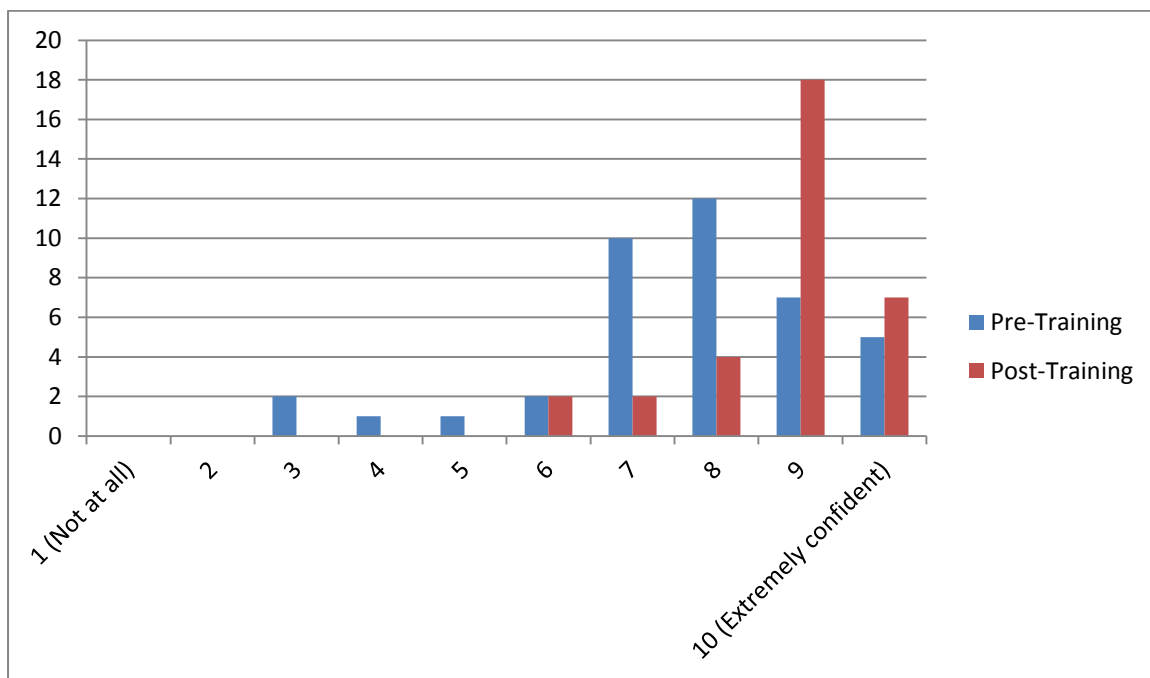
9. Developing positive relationships with CYP



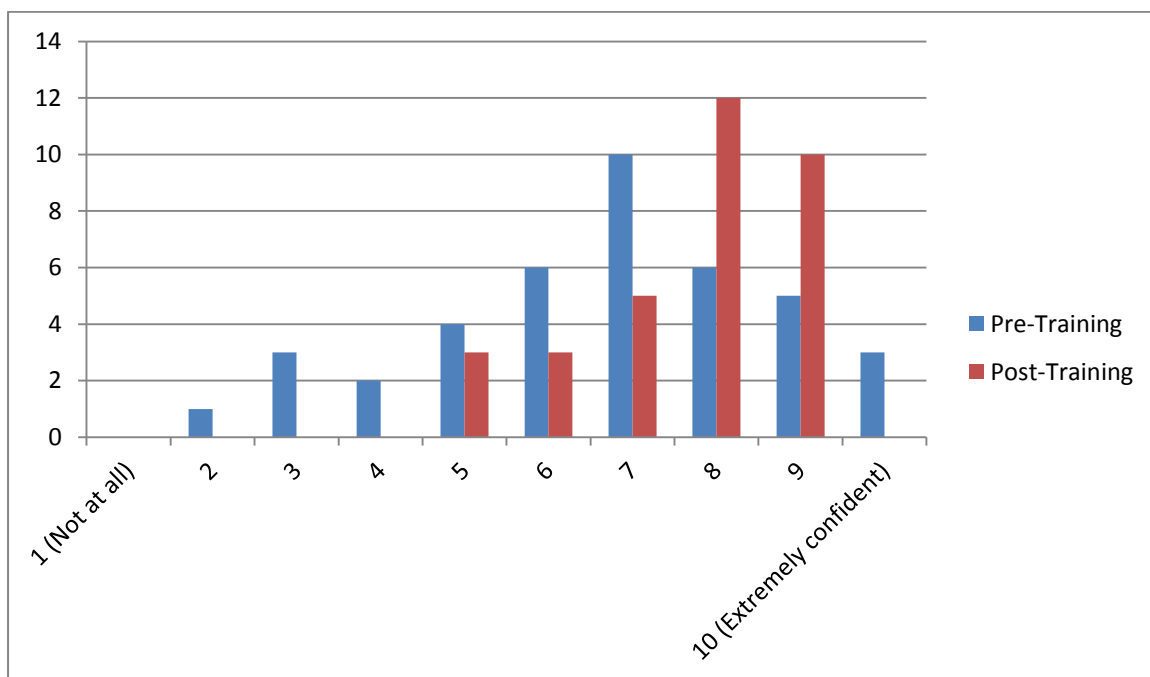
10. Running group work



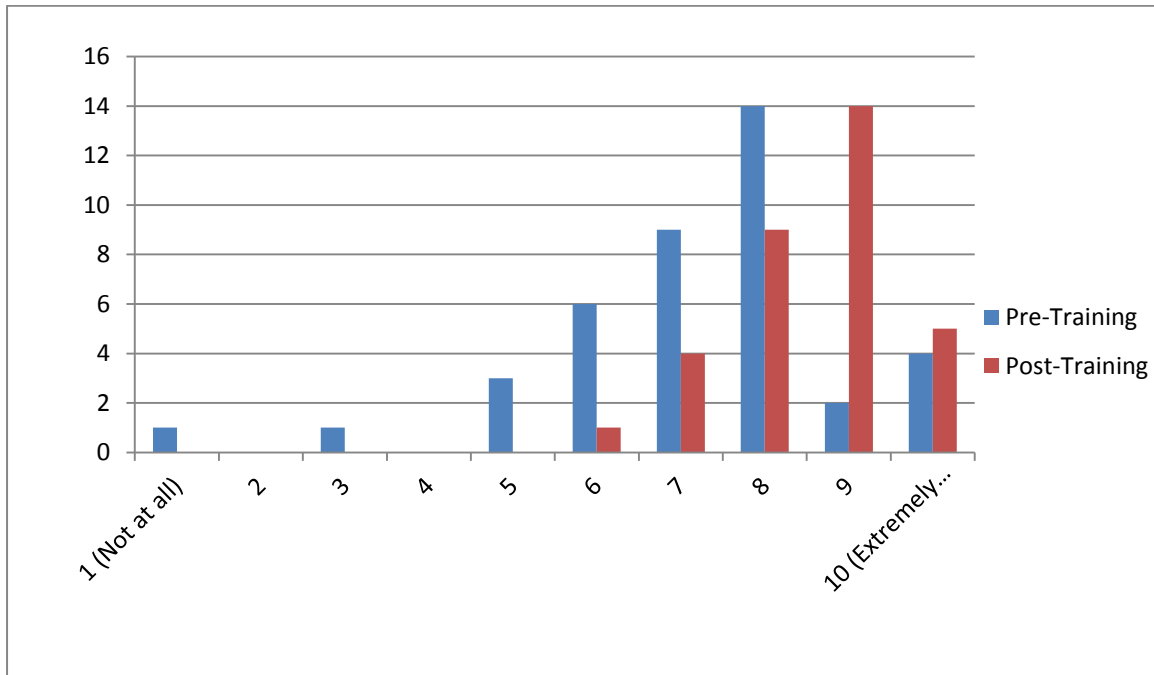
11. Working individually with CYP



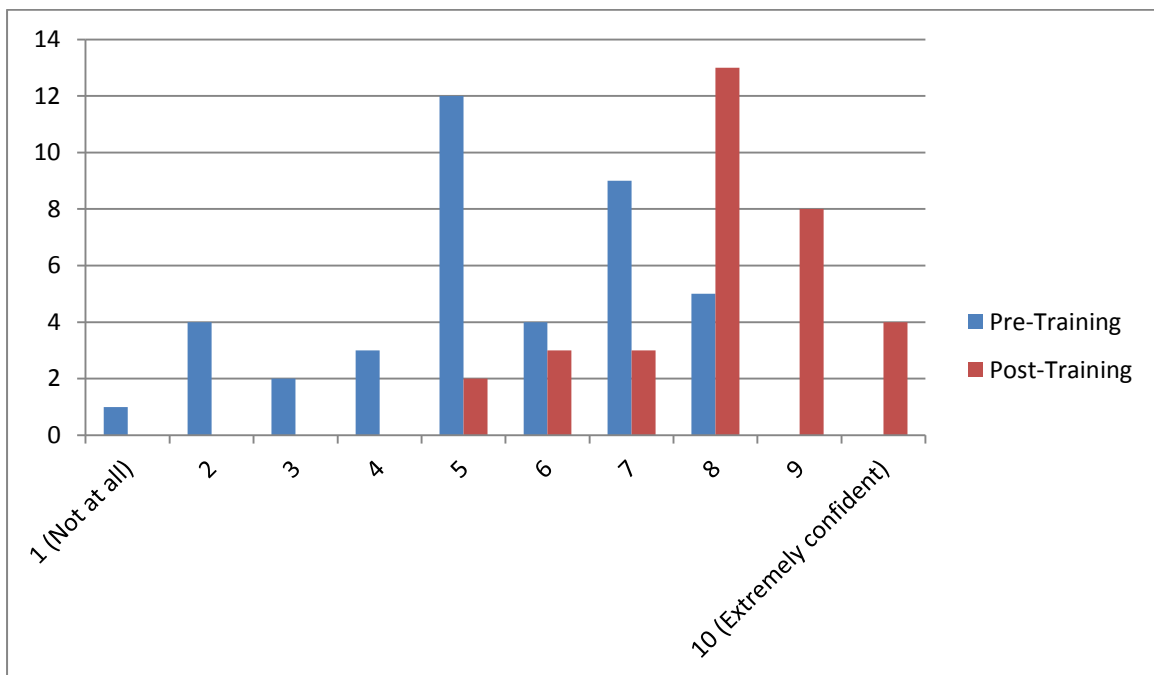
12. Setting SMART targets



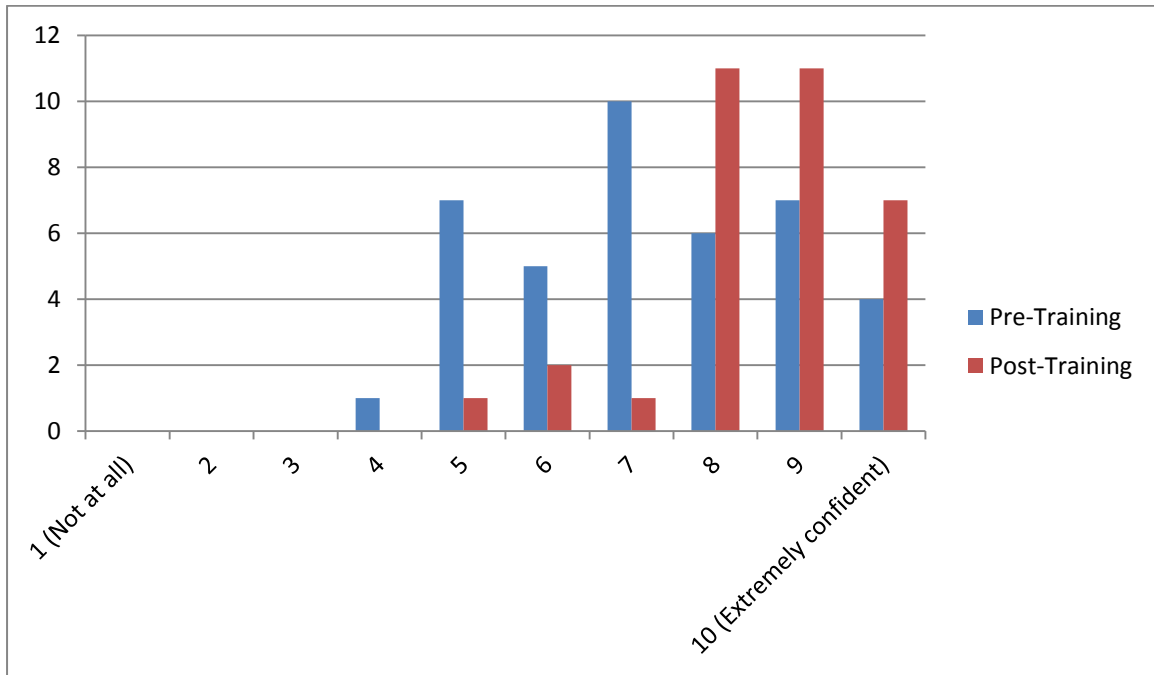
13. Calming CYP down when they are feeling angry or upset



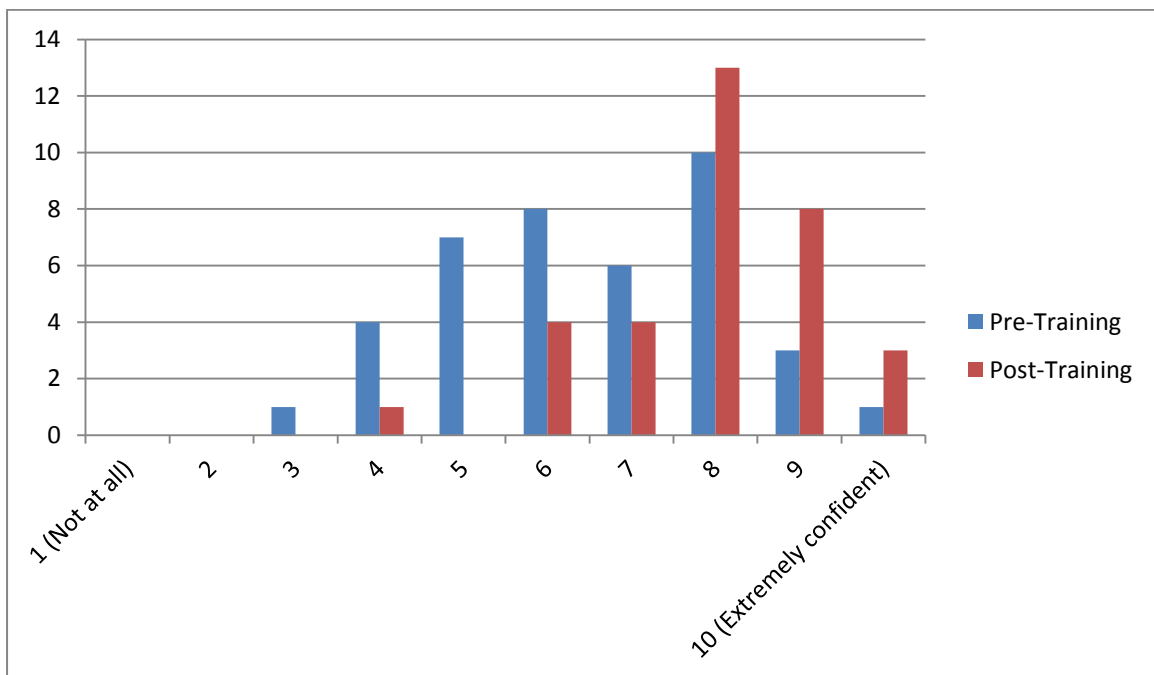
14. Writing and using Social Stories



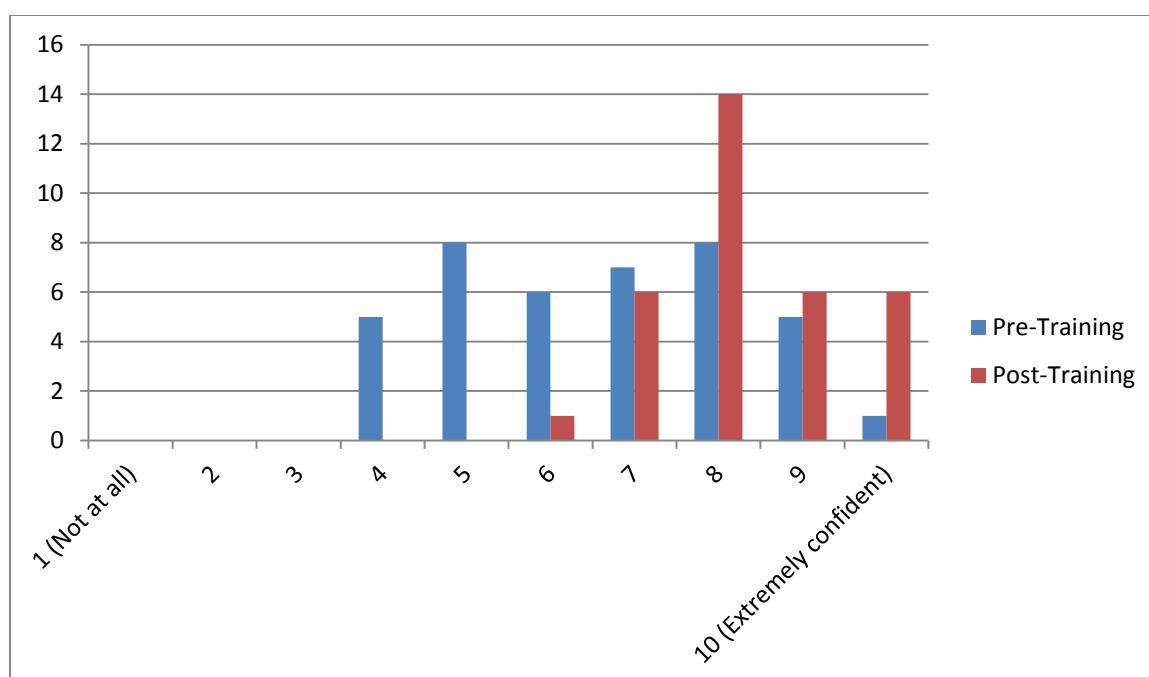
15. Reflecting on own practice



16. Planning sessions for individuals or groups of CYP



17. Making resources to help develop CYP's skills



What ELSAs Most Enjoyed

Most enjoyed...	Example quotes
Starter activities	<p><i>The ice breaker activities were something a will definitely use in my sessions.</i></p> <p><i>The practical activities were helpful as they will help with the sessions we do with the pupils.</i></p>
Roleplay	<p><i>Even though the role play/discussions initially felt uncomfortable, they were an invaluable way to experience how a child might feel when in that position.</i></p>
Meeting and learning from others	<p><i>Networking with other people from different schools in similar job positions as myself. The network we have built has been really strong and we have all swapped email addresses.</i></p> <p><i>Sharing ideas and know how I can better support children who experience difficult situations in school</i></p>
Everything	<p><i>The whole course was extremely interesting and has had a huge impact on me personally in my role.</i></p> <p><i>Everything , I have learnt so much .</i></p>
The course leaders	<p><i>The course leaders gave us good opportunities to share with the group our thoughts and opinions which was great because I gained a lot more core knowledge, empathized with concerns and felt confident in knowing I could ask questions openly in a judgement free zone.</i></p> <p><i>I think the course was presented in a very professional manner and I have learned a lot about emotional literacy and what motivates children.</i></p>

Most Significant Things ELSAs will Take Away

Most significant thing I'll take away...	Example quotes
Role and remit	<p><i>The most significant thing I will take away is allowing myself to know that I am not there to 'fix' the child, I am simply part of a support network alongside the child which works with them to build solutions and create a safe environment for whatever issue they may be facing.</i></p> <p><i>It has been a revelation to realise that the role of the ELSA is not to work in isolation from other staff in the school and the role is not to magically and speedily resolve all issues that a child may face.</i></p> <p><i>The fact that I don't have to 'fix' the child/young person, but work on the problems they come to me with.</i></p>
New knowledge and deeper understandings	<p><i>How a child's behaviour can be from underlying issues and how it helps so much that a child knows that someone is there if they need to talk.</i></p> <p><i>How to help children resolve their own problems by guiding them.</i></p>
Resources and new ideas	<p><i>Resources that I can use and ways I can change materials for the different children I work with.</i></p>
Reflective practice	<p><i>Understanding my own emotions and using that to relate more to pupils.</i></p> <p><i>Being more aware of how I talk to children and the pace.</i></p> <p><i>Being aware of my own body language, facial expression..</i></p>
Session planning and target setting	<p><i>Hard question as there is a lot that is quite significant. But I think the SMART targets have been the most significant and useful thing because it is hard to measure impact with emotional development..</i></p> <p><i>The importance of SMART targets and progress still being valid (even if it means that there are other areas still requiring support).</i></p>

Change in Practice As a result of ELSA training

How my practice will change...	Example quotes
A calm and confident approach	<p><i>I will certainly be more patient.</i></p> <p><i>I feel more calm and confident in dealing with different situations and will be able to be more effective in finding solutions for issues.</i></p> <p><i>Be calmer.</i></p> <p><i>More calming positive approach to assist in finding solutions.</i></p>

More targeted or focused work	<p><i>Practice will be much more deliberate and focused, which I hope means that progress will be more measurable.</i></p> <p><i>It will help me plan my sessions and have clearer targets.</i></p> <p><i>My emotional work with young people will be much more focussed.</i></p> <p><i>The plans and SMART targets are a clear and effective way to design good quality sessions and measure impact. I also am looking forward to having a formalised way to record evidence, which was something I found difficult before.</i></p>
A different lens through which to view CYP	<p><i>More aware of young people's emotional needs</i></p> <p><i>It has taught me that there are no naughty children but naughty behaviour.</i></p> <p><i>Looking at things with a different perspective, understanding more about their emotions.</i></p>

Feelings about Becoming Recognised ELSAs

Feelings about becoming an ELSA...	Example quotes
Proud and grateful	<p><i>Very proud.</i></p> <p><i>Proud and looking forward to getting stuck in.</i></p> <p><i>I am proud of what I have learned.</i></p> <p><i>I feel it's a really positive step for my professional development and my career.</i></p> <p><i>Privileged.</i></p>
Excited and ready to start	<p><i>Happy and positive.</i></p> <p><i>Nervous but excited.</i></p> <p><i>Very excited! And Ready!</i></p> <p><i>Looking forward to getting started.</i></p> <p><i>I am very excited about becoming an ELSA as this recognised 'role' is something myself and SLT have spoken about a lot in the past but never had the advice/network of how to source the skills I had already. The role will fit in massively with our school ethos and it is a great asset to have career wise.</i></p> <p><i>More confident and looking forward to starting to put what I have learnt into practice!</i></p>
Apprehension	<p><i>A little apprehensive.</i></p> <p><i>I've always loved helping children talk about social and emotional challenges; but also nervous about doing a good job. I'm unbelievably reassured about our</i></p>

	<p><i>supervision sessions. Thank you so much for this!</i></p> <p><i>A little scary but I'm sure as with anything else ,the more I do it the easier it will become</i></p> <p><i>Concerned regarding whether the school will be in a position to continue to support the programme in 18/19.</i></p> <p><i>A little anxious, but also know we will have ongoing support through supervisions.</i></p>
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Optional Additional Comments

Please stay in touch for support.

Thank you so much Leanna and Tracy!

The course was run very well. Everything was clearly delivered and I feel ready to start delivering ELSA.

Absolutely amazing courses that has given me the knowledge to help support children and also help guide teachers to get the right support.

Our tutors were so helpful and dedicated; they made the course so interesting.

Thank you for a great training and it was very informative and enjoyed all the start activities, which I will be using all the time.

Feel very proud to be working as an ELSA. Training has been great. Tracey and Leanna have been amazing. Very exciting times ahead!

It was fun.

I have really enjoyed the course and can't wait to get started! I was really impressed by the professional manner in which the course was presented. Leanna and Tracey not only provided a really useful course, but they dealt with questions and problems brought to the sessions with great ease. I felt challenged by the course content and inspired by the ideas suggested. I feel much more empowered to do my job. Thank you!

Leanna and Tracy gave such a fantastic demonstration of how to talk to and listen to people authentically. I felt completely valued, heard, seen and appreciated. They spoke to us with the understanding that we care about the children we work with. Nothing was patronising. It was so helpful. The theories explored were accessible and clear. My only wish would be that I could see a copy of the transcripts of what they were saying, because it was all gold!

Thank you Tracy and Leanna (EP) for everything you have done in making this course one of the best I have experienced. You both shared your practice in an effective and friendly way and made sure everyone felt they could ask for advice if needed.