



Partners in Learning UK 2023



Partners in Learning UK Report



Picture: Left: a 'Refugees Welcome' banner outside of the school. Right: a few of the Big Partners flipping through "The Color Monster: a story about emotions" by Anna Llenas in our 3rd session

1 Introduction

According to UNICEF, one third of the refugees and migrants who have arrived in Europe are children (UNICEF Website). In September 2022, the UK received 5,152 applications for asylum from unaccompanied children (Refugee Council, 2023). The challenges to integrate refugees into communities remain present as cruel stereotypes dominate public rhetoric and schools and teachers face a lack of guidance, training and funding to develop holistic practices that meet the needs of refugee children (Schools of Sanctuary Website).

In an education system that is already facing a shortage of resources and teachers, the special support needed by refugee and migrant children is often overlooked. A UNICEF UK report from 2020 described how even then, refugee and asylum-seeking young people "put up barriers in their own mind [about their abilities]", with the main barriers to continuing to further education being lack of support and encouragement; poor mental health and wellbeing; and poverty and disadvantage. Schools and teachers require training, resources and extra-curricular programmes to cultivate the learning needs of younger children at a crucial stage of development.

Our mantra is that "happy memories build resilience" for children to keep coping and hoping.

To this end, we have been working on adapting our international work to help ease the transition for newly arrived or settled refugee and migrant children in the UK. In partnership with **Newman Catholic College (NCC) and Harlesden Primary School**, we adapted components of our signature programmes to support refugee children in the Brent community to thrive. In particular, we want to work with children themselves, as partners and active participants in building their new lives. **The project was made possible with the support of the Chapman Charitable Trust and our corporate partner, Alpha FMC.**

Partners in Learning Programme

Drawing upon our signature "Partners in Learning" programme, we launched a pilot version of the programme in April 2023. This involves a Child-to-Child model to engage older children to deliver playful early learning sessions to younger children. For younger children (Little Partners) at preschool age, the older mentors help to support foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and motor skills. For older children (Big Partners) aged 13-14, the programme works to boost the Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL), particularly confidence, improved self-perceptions, communication skills and relationship skills.

The aim of our UK programme is to focus on refugee and migrant children, a demographic often marginalised and overlooked, with the aim of providing support to challenge limiting stereotypes. The older children were newly arrived refugees, running from 4 months to 1-year. The only exception was one boy who wished to participate in the programme's activities with his friends.

The main objective of NCC was the development of empathy and emotional management skills, as part of the student's holistic education. This approach was implemented in response to existing challenges of disruptive, aggressive behaviour and anxiety issues. Enhanced socio-emotional skills lead to improved school behaviour, strengthening a positive connection to both school and learning. Therefore, it plays a crucial role in helping children navigate complex situations and helps to develop well-rounded lives that are happy, healthy and resilient.

As this programme was our first pilot project within the UK, it was necessary to explore how the sessions, the meaningful interaction with peers and the bonds between children could have an impact on improving and sustaining positive wellbeing for young people. The main tool for this being case studies which were used to assess the progress on an individual basis.

Partners

Newman Catholic College

As a School of Sanctuary, NCC, is part of the national network of 400 primary and secondary schools, nurseries and sixth forms with the shared mission of fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for refugees and asylum seekers. This network aims to raise awareness about the challenges faced by children with refugee backgrounds and promotes social unity.



Figure 3: A Project Leader introducing herself and the project to the Big Partners

"WE ARE A SCHOOL THAT IS COMMITTED TO BEING A SAFE AND WELCOMING PLACE FOR ALL, ESPECIALLY THOSE SEEKING SANCTUARY. THIS COULD BE PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES WERE IN DANGER IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY, WHO HAVE TROUBLES AT HOME OR ARE JUST LOOKING FOR A SPACE OF SAFETY"

(Newman Catholic College, Website)

Harlesden Primary School

Is a Primary school with a diverse student body, reflecting a rich and varied community with various cultures, religions and languages. Our focus at the school was on the Reception Year classes, where we worked with 39 children in total. Among these young learners, there were pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and those with Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

We are grateful to Anjali Saran at NCC and Nikki Kaur at HPS for their support. Within CfC, project implementation was made possible by Joy Okwuono, Asha Verma and Madeeha Ansari. Report authored by Asha Verma.

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Session Detail

Initially, we planned a ten-week programme, divided into two phases as below. However, the plan had to be modified to a seven-week engagement according to school schedules and constraints. Overall, there were seven playful and educational classroom-based sessions; the initial four were led by a Cities For Children session leader, the remaining three by the Big Partners themselves, under the supervision of session leaders and the Refugee Lead.

Phase 1: Preparing Big Partners

Prior to leading the sessions, we prioritised the need to address and support the psychosocial well-being of the older children. The primary sessions incorporated SEL from our Happy Hoods projects, which aimed to build motivation and facilitate positive interaction between members of the cohort. Over the course of the first 4 sessions, the 14 Big Partners were given in-depth training and support to deliver playful early learning sessions to a pre-selected group of Little Partners.

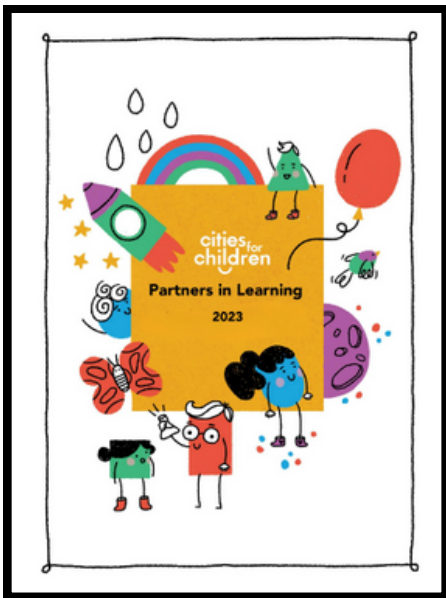
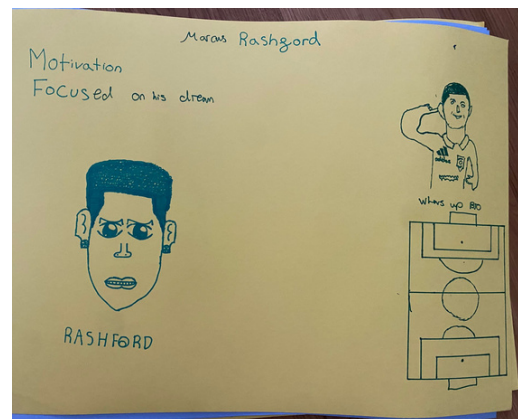


Figure 4 Above: The programme manual with session plans and weekly reflection forms

Through group discussion and interactive activities, we aimed to foster a mindset of becoming role models to the Little Partners, and making a positive impact in their local community. For example, the first session primarily involved group introductions: the boys were given the opportunity and a safe space in which to talk and share stories with each other. In our Heroes session, the boys explored their ideas around what it means to be a hero, and were encouraged to illustrate these ideas in drawings (examples below). Through this process, they gained insight into the essential qualities and mindset required to become 'heroes' for the Little Partners. Additionally, as these sessions were centred around peer-learning and playful learning practices, the Big Partners had the opportunity to build crucial socioemotional and leadership skills, enabling them to excel in life and gain confidence in their abilities. This practice, therefore, met the priorities of NCC to incorporate socio-emotional wellbeing and learning.

Figure 5 (Right): Responses to the question: 'Who is a hero to you?' There were a range of different responses to this question, from footballers to family members.



"I met a lot of new kids and like always it was very fun teaching them and it's always fun playing with them" (Weekly Reflections).

Phase 2: Learning with Little Partners

As far as possible, The content curated for each session was connected to the UK National Curriculum KS1. (Details of the sessions and links to the National Curriculum KS1 can be found in the appendix).

We encourage young learners to discover through messy play, developing their curiosity and imagination. By introducing early concepts of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in a playful and experiential manner, we aimed to ensure that children were actively engaged in their learning. Raw and diverse materials and textures were used to enable sensory exploration, stimulate imagination and develop their understanding of the world around them.

Our primary aim is to create a safe space for children to form friendships and experience moments of joy as we understand that young people facing challenging circumstances often need an outlet to process and cope with traumatic experiences. For example, the focus of the first session was to make a stress ball and considered the principles of the different feelings that humans can experience as outlined in the PSHE curriculum. The children were taught how to recognise different feelings in themselves and others, the effects of feelings on bodies and behaviour and the ways in which to share and describe their feelings.



Figure 6 and 7: Bubble Scientist Sessions, Big and Little Partners experiment with creating bubbles

Session 1: Introductory Session
Session 2: How Am I Feeling
Session 3: Bubble Scientists
Sessions 4: Colour Changing Liquids

"It was fun teaching and get to know the kids and it gave me a feeling of purpose seeing the smiles on their faces"

Big Partner reflection

3 Monitoring and Evaluation

The length of engagement with each group of Little Partners made it difficult to establish a baseline and endline for their learning, as we do in our regular programmes. The emphasis here was therefore on capturing impact in terms of SEL and wellbeing for Big Partners. According to our evaluation framework, we assessed progress in the following domains, considering both observational data and the child's perspective: relationship skills, self-perception and agency improvement, self-confidence and motivation.



Figure 9, Big Partners experiment with play dough and Toyi kits

Project Outcomes

- 1 Build critical **relationship skills** in students to help them form meaningful relationships with their peers.
- 2 Empower Big Partners to exercise their **agency** and practice active citizenship.
- 3 Develop **confidence** in students and support them to lead younger peers.
- 4 Ignite **motivation** to actively participate within the programme and engage within lessons.

Sources of Data

Weekly Reflections, completed by Big Partners to monitor the weekly changes in mindset toward the programme.

Session Observation Notes, written by session leaders to monitor the engagement and interaction during the sessions and with the learning materials.

An Observation Tool, completed by session leaders to assess the involvement and enjoyment of the Big and Little Partners during each session of the programme.

End of session reflections, which consisted of a body mapping exercise and a survey. Big partners were asked to engage in self-reflection and notice any changes they may have experienced before and after the programme.

Nationalities



UKRAINE
IRAN
NIGERIA
MOROCCO
IRAQ
EI SALVADOR
ETHIOPIA
ERITREA
SYRIA
AFGHANISTAN

4 Impact

As a shorter pilot programme, we recognised that the duration might not allow for the same level of progress monitoring we conduct in longer programmes. Therefore, we focused on the Big partners and their individual progress and socioemotional learning. Our goal was to enhance SEL in terms of: **relationship skills, agency, self-confidence and communication; and motivation to learn and engage.** The case studies showcase positive transformations in these key areas, along with demonstrating empathy and interacting positively with younger children.



Figure 8: Project Leaders explaining the session content to Big Partners.

1) Relationship skills

The initial sessions with the Big Partners included activities that consolidated existing friendships for the older boys, and even created new friendships. One of the Big Partners demonstrated his ability to sing and the others were impressed by this, asking him to sing again. This was noticeable progress as they began to open up and share their talents.

Session leaders observed the changes in the interactions between the Big and Little Partners, as well as the development of relationships. It was noted how the Big Partners initially asked teachers questions, but throughout the session they were able to continue with confidence and formed clear bonds with the children (Observation Notes).

One Big Partner mentioned learning **“how to help the little kids when they need help”** (Weekly Reflections). When asked about an important lesson from the session, another Partner emphasised **“helping a little girl”**(Weekly Reflections). He places importance on this task, showing a sense of pride in assisting the child, and this feeling, if nurtured, can positively impact their personal growth.

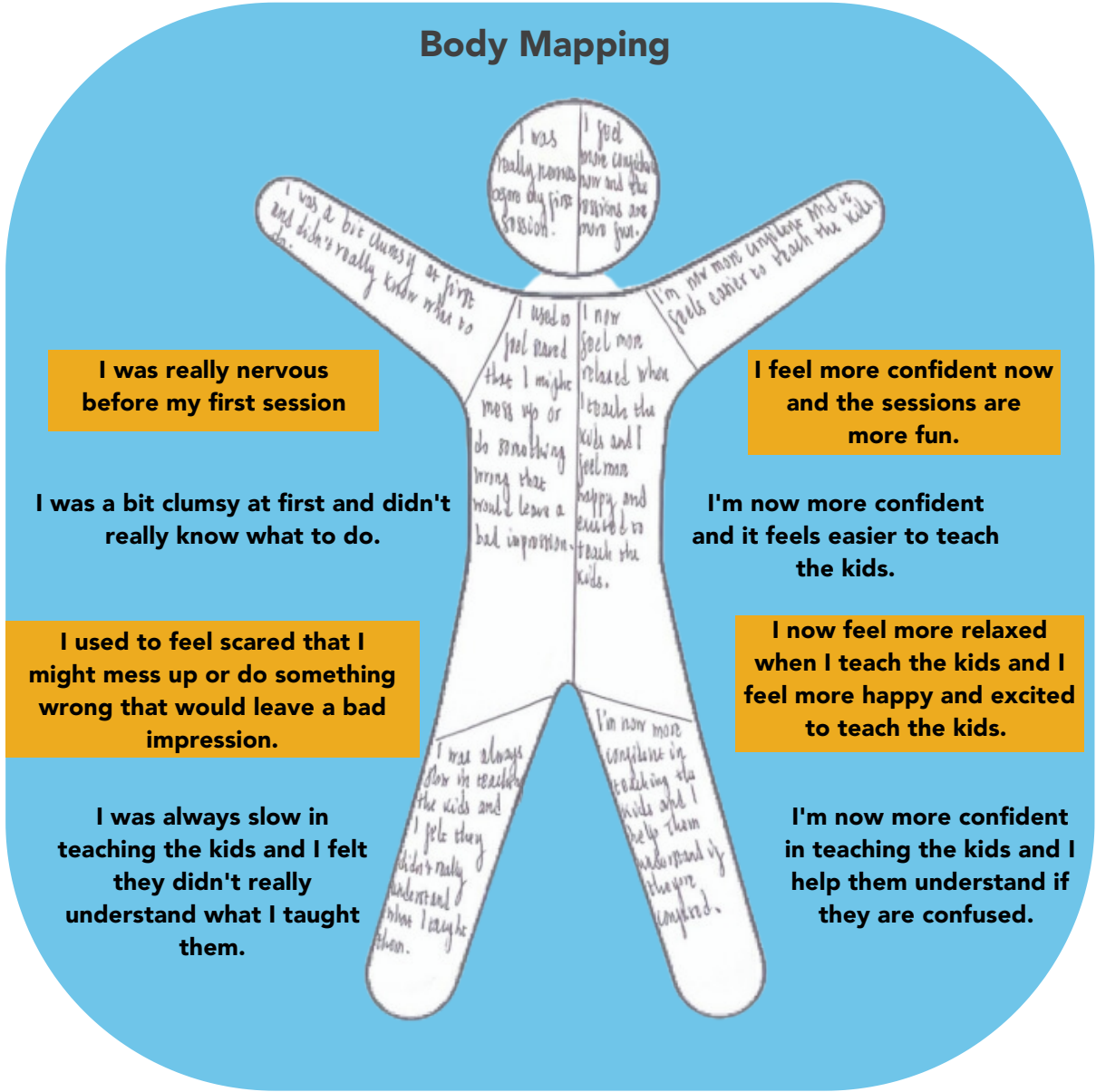
Case Study 1

This Big Partner is asylum-seeking and currently living in a hotel with his mom, with language and communication barriers. He was initially hesitant to participate within sessions, showing a reluctance to talk in general. During the sessions with the children, he displayed absent-mindedness and was unwilling to form relationships or take the lead in activities. He would often sit apart from the group, appearing disengaged and detached, not actively participating in the activities. However, during the last session there was a noticeable progression of his behaviour toward the children. He began to communicate and take the lead during the activities, demonstrating how to conduct the science experiment. There were noticeable changes in his body language as he started to smile and engage more actively with the children. Whilst reflecting during the body mapping activity he wrote - “it was hard to look after children” but “now, it is easier to look after children as I care about them”.

The relationships between the children mutually benefited both: "I learn a lot - even (though) I am old but kid(s) teach you something" (Weekly Reflections). For one Big Partner, interacting with the Little Partners led to personal growth, as he shared "I learnt to be more friendly and fun due to their energetic and quirky personalities" (Weekly Reflections). He also **"was able to learn how to be patient with the kids since not all of them can catch up easily but it didn't stop us from having fun and exciting experiments"**(Weekly Reflections). He developed his understanding of younger children and in the process discovered more about himself.

By reflecting on their abilities before and after the sessions, the Big Partners were able to discover the ways in which they had advanced in leading younger peers. **They felt "more confident and it feels easier to teach the kids" and developed leadership skills: "better at giving instruction" (Body Maps).** One partner commented: **"I found it difficult speaking to children, now I find it easy"** (Body Maps), exemplifying how he overcame the challenge and is now confident in establishing bonds with younger peers.

The Big Partners' efforts to connect with the Little Partners who have a lower level of English proficiency serves as a prime example of building meaningful relationships and bridging communication barriers: **"the girl said to talk to me in Arabic and translate in English"** (Weekly Reflections). Creating a space in which children feel at ease as they are able to communicate in the first language can reduce anxiety and foster a sense of connection.



2) Improved self-perceptions and agency

"Adults listen to you" (Body mapping)

One of the key themes for development that we identified at the beginning of the sessions was a need for establishing an improved self-perception and positive reinforcement. Building relationships between session leaders and Big Partners was necessary in order to support their development and build their confidence throughout the programme.

We focused on how the treatment from adults leads to significant changes within a child's self-esteem and confidence which positively impacts their engagement and contribution during the sessions and broader life. **We recognised the importance of building trust, and changing the child's perception of themselves in the eyes of adults.** As this was a short programme there were examples of this gradual shift in perceptions (demonstrated in individual case studies), but definite room to explore this objective further, as seen in a comment from the reflection session - **"adults see me as a bad kid"** (Reflection Observation).



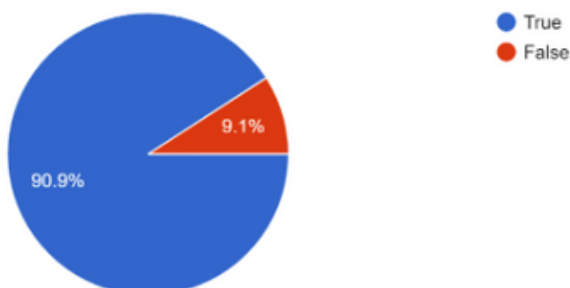
Figure 10, A Big Partner is showing his group how to paint with turmeric.

"I feel that adults listen more and so I choose to talk more" Big Partner Reflection

Case Study 2

This Big Partner is also living in a hotel with no access to public funds or formal asylum seeking status. His mother appears to be protective and actively involved in his life. At the programme's early stages, he put pressure on himself, seemingly concerned about the possibility of disappointing adults. This resulted in difficulties relaxing and forming relationships with the younger children. Although he demonstrated motivation throughout all the sessions, he continually sought help and guidance from adults and lacked confidence in his own abilities to teach and lead. During the body mapping exercise, he reflected on his experience and the progress he made before and after the sessions is clearly evident. Before he expressed; "I used to feel scared that I might mess up or do something wrong that would leave a bad impression". However, after he stated; "I now feel more relaxed when I teach the kids and I feel more happy and excited to teach the kids".

According to the end-of-project survey, 90.9% of the Big Partners felt that after the programme they were able to bring positive changes within their households. Their belief in their ability to contribute positively to their family life shows that they are making steps toward improving their perception of themselves.



I can bring a positive change in my household.

The Big Partners developed their confidence in their ability to teach and become leaders for the younger children. In doing so, it created a sense of purpose and responsibility as they were learning new skills to teach children. One Big Partner shared his experience: **"It was fun teaching and get to know the kids and it gave me a feeling of purpose seeing the smiles on their faces."** (Comments from Survey). Another Big Partner's comment demonstrates the broader impact of the programme on their personal growth: "All of them [the sessions] was interesting because I learn how to care of child." (Comments from Survey). He was able to gain a sense of accomplishment by leading and caring for the children.

Furthermore, the **Big Partners brought their own ideas to the sessions.** Some of the Big Partners shared their experiences, mentioning how they had interacted with the children by asking "about their names and hobbies" (surveys). Other creative ideas were put forward, such as playing games, making shapes and bringing stickers (surveys & observations). This demonstrated their courage to take initiative during the sessions, which fostered a more engaging environment.

90.9% recognised their own importance in helping children learn

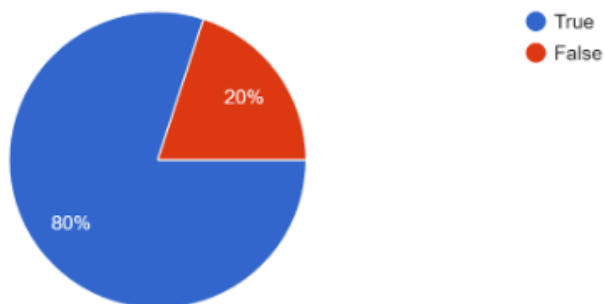


Figure 11, Big Partners are preparing for a Science experiment.

3) Self-confidence

"I'm now more confident and it feels easier to teach the kids" (Body mapping)

During the programme the Big Partners became increasingly confident. 80% of the students were not as nervous when preparing for the last session (survey results) compared to 45.5% feeling nervous in the first session. Participating in the project led a Big Partner to step outside of his comfort zone "I was really nervous before the first lesson, and I was really nervous to know the kids before the lesson because I didn't know what was going to happen". However, he was able to overcome this and experience a sense of joy from helping the children: "I was really happy to show the kids what to do and show them the activities" (Body mapping).

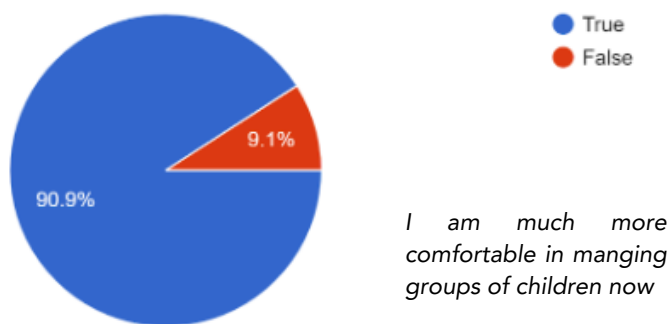


I was not as nervous when preparing for the last session.

"I feel like I changed myself because I am more of a role model!"
Weekly Reflection

Individuals who were initially reluctant to join the programme and were quiet and withdrawn during the preparation sessions, showed a sense of enjoyment when interacting with the Little Partners. **One Big Partner was initially anxious and undecided about his participation, but he led the Toyi and Playdough activity with compassion and confidence. He was interacting enthusiastically with the younger children, asking them questions such as "Do you want to make a monster?"**

Throughout the sessions, the Big Partners were exposed to new learning situations and had the opportunity to practise managing children, a skill which can be difficult. A Big Partner reflected on his contribution to the sessions and shared how he had "taught them to wash their hands when done, no fighting" (weekly reflections). Enabling the Big Partners to become role models is crucial, as they will begin to embody these values during their daily lives as well. Assuming leadership roles and responsibility for younger children can have a lasting positive impact which can extend far beyond the immediate context. By the end of the sessions, 90.9% of the Big Partners felt more comfortable in managing groups of children and 90.9% also recognised their own importance in helping children learn, showing the positive impact of the programme in improving their confidence and ability to form meaningful relationships.



PROJECT IMPACT: STUDENT REFLECTION SAMPLES

"I found it difficult speaking to children"

"Now I find it easy"

"It was hard to look after children"

"Now it is easier to look after children as I care about them"

"No confidence"

"More confidence"

"I feel bad because I don't speak English"

"I feel good because I start to speak English"

Case Study 3

This Big Partner has a challenging refugee background, having lived in a refugee camp in Lebanon without formal education. His only exposure to the learning environment was through "school yard" experiences, where he faced bullying. Due to these hardships, he is unable to read or write in English but is comfortable seeking help when needed. He can be very sensitive and displays aggressive behaviour.

Similar to another individual's experience, he was initially hesitant to engage and speak during sessions, but with time, he started actively participating and even formed a strong bond with two Syrian sisters. The session leaders observed his effort to connect with the Little Partners who have a lower level of English proficiency. It is a prime example of building meaningful relationships and bridging communication barriers. This progress was also accompanied by a change in his interaction with adults. He wrote: "I feel that adults listen more and so I choose to talk more". His engagement during sessions directly correlates with his improved perception of adult relationships.

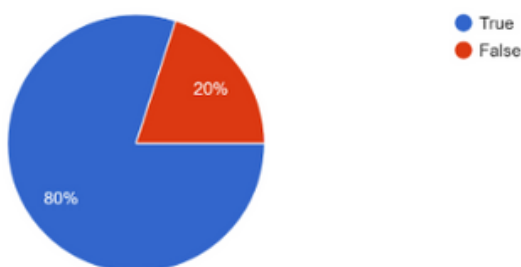
4) Motivation to learn and engage

"I think I want to be a teacher" (Body Mapping)

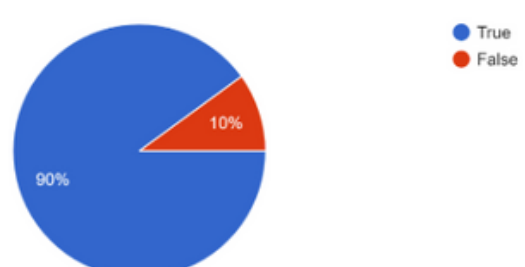
With 80% of Big Partners acknowledging the challenges of managing classrooms, they realised what skills were involved in taking care of younger children. As a result, they developed an appreciation for their own teachers as 90% of the Big Partners reported that they were more motivated to listen to their teachers.

The Big Partners were thinking of ways to create sense and order within the sessions. While reflecting on one of the weekly sessions, a Big Partner expressed that "it was messy, maybe we should rule something to not be messy"(Weekly Reflections). This reflects a proactive stance and if explored through further sessions, he could take initiative and create appropriate rules. Similarly, a Big Partner expressed happiness about the fact the younger peers had followed his instructions: "I was really happy that they followed my rules, it was a bit messy but it was a fun experience"(Weekly Reflections).

From participating in the sessions, Big Partners began to explore aspirational goals;"I think I want to be a teacher" (Body mapping). He particularly enjoyed leading and inspiring the younger children "Kids loved me helping" (Body mapping) and recognised his talents.



After this programme, I understand how difficult it is for teachers to manage classrooms



After this programme, I am much more motivated to listen to my teachers and learn

Case Study 4

During his reflection on the session with the Little Partners, he shared his experience, commenting that he felt “Good! A little girl Arya was crying. I helped her stop and she felt good. She was happy and made a picture” (Weekly Reflections). This Big Partner demonstrated an improvement in his relationship skills as he helped to comfort a child who had particular difficulties in new environments. He noticed that she was reluctant to engage and was upset. After various attempts by teachers to settle her, he focused on making her feel comfortable and showed her how to paint a picture using the resources. In this instance, the young person was developing his empathy skills and applying them to find a solution for someone in need. He recorded this experience in his weekly reflection journal, demonstrating the significance of this moment for him.

Challenges

Learners with English as an Additional Language

Language communication and comprehension seems to be a significant barrier to effective engagement, with a large proportion of older children being learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL). To take this into account, the session plans should be accessible for learners with EAL. We found the most effective way of preparing the Big Partners was to demonstrate the various experiments and to use visuals so they could see the various stages.

Time for preparation

It was evident that insufficient time was scheduled for their full understanding of the principles behind the science experiments. For example, incorporating a practice whereby the boys demonstrate with each other before teaching the children would be beneficial. In this way, the children would be more likely to remember the stages and have confidence in their teaching abilities. Also, establishing a set time and day would ensure that all the children are aware and can attend, promoting better focus and understanding of content.

Working with the school.

It became clear that some children required additional support and greater communication with the school was essential to align our principles. A big partner was initially reluctant to attend the session but was explained by a session leader that he would be a helpful addition to the learning of the younger children. He decided to attend, but after displays of misbehaviour, he was prohibited from participating. Unfortunately, this reinforced the idea of being “bad”, and it was a missed opportunity in terms of creating an alternate view of himself; participating in the sessions as a means to learn emotional management and form meaningful relationships with others.

6

Lessons Learned for the Future

Being a pilot project, the process of reflection has been helpful in gaining insights.

The assistance of the Refugee Project Lead based at NCC was invaluable as the older children had an initial relationship with her and so were more willing to listen to her instructions. Overall, it was easier to manage the behaviour of the group under her supervision.

Continuous positive behaviour management has been necessary throughout the project. We consistently reviewed the expectations of being a role model and leader to the younger children and what that entailed from them. During the following session, it was observed that they were reminding each other about the responsibility of acting like a role model. This is a theme which should be continuously touched upon throughout the project as a reminder that they are representing the school and themselves.

Targeted skill development workshops would equip the Big Partners with essential skills. For instance, further focus workshops aimed at developing leadership skills would enhance their ability to lead, interact and manage the sessions with the Little Partners. One effective approach could be encouraging the Big Partners to ask questions that prompt engagement and participation from the Little partners. Also, incorporating collaborative games into the activities would be beneficial, as it would enhance the relationship dynamics among the participants and foster a stronger sense of connection. Engaging in games together encourages teamwork, communication, and cooperation. The Big partners felt, to some extent, that they could contribute their own ideas, however this potential could be further expanded through brainstorming sessions that allow them to explore ideas, games and ways to interact generally with the children.

7

Concluding Note

We witnessed significant development among the Big Partners within the relatively short duration of the programme. They successfully built trust and developed meaningful bonds with the Little Partners.

These strides were instrumental in boosting their confidence, with some individuals who initially felt anxious becoming increasingly self-assured in guiding the Little Partners. There were examples of conflict between the Big Partners, however the participants were able to effectively resolve these issues to ensure the programme's continuation.

If given the opportunity for further exploration, the Big Partners have the potential to continue making meaningful impacts in their lives and communities. Our goal was to provide a positive experience for children who were new to the country, and lay the foundation for future potential to continue.



Appendix

	Session	Curriculum links
1	Introductory Session	<p>PSHE KS1</p> <p>Learn about rules and age restrictions that keep us safe.</p>
2	How Am I Feeling? Making a stress ball.	<p>PSHE KS1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H11. about different feelings that humans can experience • H12. how to recognise and name different feelings • H13. how feelings can affect people's bodies and how they behave • H14. how to recognise what others might be feeling • H15. to recognise that not everyone feels the same at the same time, or feels the same about the same things • H16. about ways of sharing feelings; a range of words to describe feelings • H18. different things they can do to manage big feelings, to help calm themselves down and/or change their mood when they don't feel good • H19. to recognise when they need help with feelings
3	Bubble Scientists	<p>Pupils should explore and experiment with a wide variety of materials, not only those listed in the programme of study, but including for example: brick, paper, fabrics, elastic, foil.</p> <p>Working scientifically : Observing closely, Pupils might work scientifically by: performing simple tests to explore questions.</p>

4	Colour Changing Liquids	<p>Describe the simple physical properties of a variety of everyday materials</p> <p>Working scientifically :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking simple questions and recognising that they can be answered in different ways • Observing closely, using simple equipment • Performing simple tests
5	Making Oobleck & Silly Putty	<p>Describe the simple physical properties of a variety of everyday materials</p> <p>Compare and group together a variety of everyday materials on the basis of their simple physical properties.</p>
6	Let's Make a Catapult	<p>Working scientifically :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking simple questions and recognising that they can be answered in different ways • Observing closely, using simple equipment • Performing simple tests

N.B: Sessions 5 and 6 were not conducted due to time constraints.