



Impact Report

2025

Building resilience in young people across Hitchin, Letchworth and surrounding areas.

Welcome and Overview



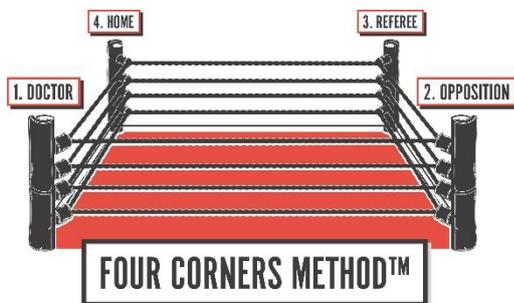
Through GRIT support, 85% of young people find managing challenging emotions easier - the first step towards positive change.

Every young person deserves to feel capable of facing life's challenges. At Growing Resilience in Teens (GRIT), we help them build the mental, emotional and physical strength to do just that.

GRIT is a community based early intervention service which supports young people aged 11 – 24 in Hitchin, Letchworth and surrounding areas to improve their mental health, wellbeing and resilience through a unique combination of non-contact boxing and health and wellbeing coaching.

Our mission remains simple yet powerful, to help young people build the confidence, resilience, and emotional skills they need to thrive. Every day, we see the difference that early intervention can make. When a young person feels safe, seen, and capable of managing life's challenges, everything else starts to change.

At GRIT we use a unique, evidence-informed framework, the Four Corners Method, which blends health and wellbeing coaching, non-contact boxing, and psychoeducation to help young people build resilience, regulate emotions, and re-engage with learning and life.



Our approach draws on the Social and Emotional Learning framework, the Window of Tolerance and Self-Determination Theory to create a trauma-informed, person-centred model to change. Delivered through an embodied approach, the Four Corners Method applies the discipline of non-contact boxing as a metaphor for emotional regulation and resilience. Within this model, the

boxing ring represents the challenges young people navigate, learning to stay centred, recover from pressure, and act with intention. The method helps young people:

- Develop self-regulation through psychoeducation, movement, and reflection
- Build confidence, belonging, and agency
- Strengthen relationships and emotional wellbeing
- Reconnect with education and community life

*For more information about our Four Corners Method please visit www.gricharity.org/four-corners-method

At the heart of this approach are GRIT's six core values: wellbeing, safety, equality, integrity, commitment, and freedom. These values shape every aspect of our work, guiding how we connect with young people, collaborate with partners, and build a culture of trust and inclusion.

- **Wellbeing** – We take a whole-person approach that integrates physical, emotional, and mental health, supporting balance and resilience through coaching and movement.
- **Safety** – We prioritise safeguarding and create environments where young people feel secure, respected, and able to grow.
- **Equality** – We believe every young person deserves access to the tools and support they need, regardless of background or circumstance.
- **Integrity** – We act transparently and reflectively, learning from challenges and sharing impact openly to build trust.
- **Commitment** – We provide consistent, long-term support to create lasting change for young people and their communities.
- **Freedom** – We empower young people to express themselves, embrace individuality, and discover their authentic voice.

These values align closely with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reflecting our belief that local action drives global change. Through our work, GRIT contributes to five key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that best reflect our work across wellbeing, education, inclusion, opportunity, and community connection:



Good Health and Wellbeing – Promoting positive mental health, emotional regulation, and resilience through coaching and physical activity.

Quality Education – Helping young people re-engage with learning and build the confidence and focus needed for lifelong learning.

Decent Work and Economic Growth – Supporting young people to set goals, build aspirations, and prepare for meaningful education, training, or employment.

Reduced Inequalities – Working with young people from diverse backgrounds to remove barriers linked to mental health, school attendance, and social disadvantage.

Sustainable Cities and Communities – Strengthening local partnerships with schools, GPs, and families to create safer, more inclusive communities where young people can thrive.

By aligning our local impact with these global goals, GRIT demonstrates how improving the lives of young people contributes to wider systems of wellbeing, equality, and sustainability.

GRIT's work is rooted in the realities of our local communities. In Letchworth, one in five households experience poverty, affecting more than 1,800 children and young people. Many of those we support live in areas of high deprivation and inequality, including the Jackmans Estate, Wilbury, and the Grange, neighbourhoods that rank among the 30% most deprived in England (*Letchworth Heritage Foundation Garden City Report, 2018*). In Hitchin, pockets of deprivation such as Walsworth face similarly high levels of inequality, with many families experiencing financial hardship, overcrowded housing, and limited access to early support services.

Mental health challenges compound these difficulties. Nationally, almost one in four young people aged 17–19 now have a probable mental health disorder (*NHS Digital - Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023*). Locally, Hertfordshire surveys show that 17% of young people rate their life satisfaction as low, and 5% report self-harm (*Services for Young People, HCC, 2023*). These challenges can make it extremely difficult for young people to feel able to speak up, advocate for themselves, or influence decisions.

Through GRIT, young people learn to identify what's important to them, make informed choices, and advocate for themselves in school, community, and family settings. As one young person said:

“GRIT gave me good ways to think about things so I can make my own ways of helping myself.”

We also work at a community level, partnering with schools and GPs to share young people's insights, strengthen early support, and help shape a more compassionate and responsive culture around mental health and wellbeing. In this way, GRIT not only supports individual growth but strengthens the systems around young people too.



“GRIT has become a lifeline for many of our students. The combination of coaching, non-contact boxing and boxing analogy gives young people a way to manage emotions, rebuild confidence, and re-engage with learning. We see the difference every week, calmer classrooms, more self-aware students, and young people who believe in themselves again.” Assistant Headteacher, Fearnhill School

Our vision is simple: to help every young person move from surviving to thriving, with the confidence, connection, and resilience to shape their own future.



Introduction from Our Chair

This year has been one of both growth and reflection for GRIT. Against a backdrop of continuing mental health challenges among young people and a demanding funding landscape, GRIT has continued to grow. This year, we expanded our services to include a new peer mentoring programme in two partner schools. Throughout these changes, our focus has remained constant in equipping young people through the GRIT framework to build resilience, self-belief, and emotional wellbeing. Behind the scenes, we have

strengthened GRIT's foundations for the future. This has included the recruitment of a new trustee who brings a wealth of experience to the Board, refinement of our programme and training model, and enhancements to our monitoring and evaluation processes, ensuring our growth remains both values-led and evidence-based. However, like many small charities we are operating within a challenging funding environment. Much of our behind-the-scenes work is sustained by goodwill, and we continue to rely on funding to secure our long-term sustainability. In the year ahead, we will focus on addressing these challenges while ensuring that the needs of young people remain at the heart of everything we do.

What does remain constant is the courage we see in every young person who access GRIT. As any boxer will tell you, it takes the heart of a lion to step into the ring and make yourself vulnerable. The stories our young people choose to share about how their lives have changed, how they have come to believe in themselves, and how they now have hope for the future, make every demanding day worthwhile.

I could not be prouder of the GRIT team, through their dedication, hard work, and determination to make this vision a success. I will let the results and stories in this report speak for themselves. Our adolescence shapes our future in more ways than we often acknowledge, and the young people we support today are our future. At a time when the world's future can feel uncertain, let us reassure you: from what we witness every day in our young people, there are many reasons to feel hopeful.

Thank you for being part of this journey, and a special, heartfelt thank you to all the young people who show up, no matter how tough it gets. We see you, and we are in your corner.

Dr Louise Randall

Chair and Founder

Our Programmes

Our programmes meet young people where they are, emotionally, mentally, and socially - recognising their reality as the starting point for change and providing a safe space to explore who they are and what they need to thrive. Through 1:1 coaching, group sessions, or peer mentoring, they build confidence, strengthen emotional regulation, and move towards positive, self-directed change.



The GRIT Programme

The GRIT Programme is a 12-week programme for young people aged 13–18 that combines non-contact boxing with health and wellbeing coaching. It is delivered in a fun, energetic, and supportive boxing gym environment.

Each week, up to 14 young people come together for a two-hour session led by our coaches, including one trained boxer. It's a space where movement, mindset, and real conversations come together to help young people build resilience, confidence, and self-awareness.

"I really enjoyed GRIT it was the only thing I looked forward to in the week, and it's quite amazing how different I look at certain situations and try and help not to be a part of a bad situation." A Young Person

The structure of each session mirrors a boxing match, split into two halves, or 'bouts':

Bout 1: Move

Young people take part in a non-contact boxing fitness session, learning technique, building strength, and shifting difficult emotions through physical movement. It's a safe and fun way to release stress, boost energy, and feel more connected to their bodies.

Bout 2: Reflect

After the boxing, the group transitions into a coached session using GRIT's unique Four Corners Method. This is a chance to pause, reflect, and talk, exploring what came up during the session and learning how to handle life's challenges in and out of the ring.

One parent reflects on the outcome of their young person’s experience with the GRIT Programme, “Can I just say a big thank you for this programme. Sam absolutely loves it and counts down the days in between. Sam isn't passionate about anything. I can't tell you how many different activities I've tried him on over the years. He says it's not just the boxing, but the instructors feel like they're your friends. He tries to come early every week so he can have more time. His excitement and commitment for it has blown me away. A huge thank you.”

GRIT Continuation Programme

GRIT’s Continuation Programme offers ongoing support for young people who have completed the 12-week GRIT Programme, providing a safe and consistent space to continue building on their progress. The weekly drop-in sessions combine non-contact boxing with guided reflection, allowing young people to check in with a qualified coach. This informal yet structured environment helps participants strengthen routines, stay connected to positive peers, and sustain the confidence and coping strategies developed during their initial programme. The Continuation Programme bridges the gap between structured intervention and independent resilience, supporting young people to keep moving forward.

1:1 Coaching

For young people who need a more personalised approach, we offer 1:1 coaching.

1:1 coaching is a goal-focused process that helps young people build self-awareness, confidence, and strategies for positive change. It draws on psychology-based principles and evidence-informed methods to deepen self-understanding and explore the connections between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, helping each young person move forward in ways that matter most to them.

Through regular sessions with a dedicated Health and Wellbeing Coach, young people are guided to set meaningful goals, reflect on challenges, and develop practical tools to manage everyday life. The coach will work closely with each young person, adapting the pace, focus, and techniques to suit their individual goals, interests, and circumstances. The approach is flexible and responsive, meeting each young person where they are.



In keeping with all GRIT services, our 1:1 coaching is guided by the Four Corners Method, providing a consistent framework for growth and self-awareness. Movement is also an important part of our approach and non-contact boxing may be introduced when it supports engagement, focus, or self-awareness. While this may not feature in every session, the boxing metaphor remains central throughout, offering a powerful and relatable way to explore resilience, strength, and personal development.

A School Counsellor’s perspective, “The support that the young people at [our school] have received from the coach and mentors at GRIT, whether it is group work or one-to-one, has been invaluable to both them and us as a school. It has enabled lots of young people to access some wellbeing support that they might have otherwise had to wait longer for. As it is coaching it has empowered them to set their own goals and take more ownership of their wellbeing. The coaches from GRIT have integrated well into [our school] and now feel part of the school team.”

***It is important to note that unlike counselling or therapy, coaching doesn’t diagnose or treat mental health issues. Instead, it focuses on helping young people develop the self-awareness, motivation, and practical tools they need to move forward and thrive.*

Small Group Programmes

Our small group programmes, such as the Rumble and the GRIT Art Group, provide safe, creative spaces for young people to explore wellbeing through movement, art, and shared experience.

The Rumble is a small group boxing session facilitated in schools and which provides a dynamic and interactive space for students to work together, building teamwork and emotional resilience. Like our GRIT Programme, the Rumble begins with non-contact boxing and is followed by group coaching focusing on peer support, communication, and developing coping strategies for handling challenges both in and out of school.

Our small group art sessions offer a creative and therapeutic outlet using our Four Corners Method for young people. Through guided art activities, students can explore their emotions, enhance their self-expression, and develop problem-solving skills in a nurturing environment.



Peer Mentoring Programme

GRIT’s peer mentoring programme is an investment in long-term emotional wellbeing, personal development, and educational engagement of young people, helping them build the resilience and skills needed to thrive both in and beyond the classroom.

Currently delivered at Fearnhill School and The Highfield School in Letchworth, and made possible through funding from the Letchworth Heritage Foundation, the Peer Mentoring Programme supports a cohort of students to complete structured training based on GRIT's Four Corners Method, preparing them to become peer mentors within their school community. Mentors are equipped with the tools to support peers facing social and emotional difficulties, including friendships, exam stress and confidence. They learn active listening skills, boundary-setting, problem-solving, and the power of empathy, transforming them into approachable, trusted role models within the school. GRIT also provides ongoing mentor supervision throughout their time in role, ensuring that mentors feel supported, confident, and equipped to manage the challenges that can arise in peer support relationships.

To embed this work meaningfully, we also offer training to staff members, ensuring the whole-school team understands and reinforces the language, values, and mentoring approaches of GRIT. This in turn strengthens the support network for young people as well as establishing a shared understanding around mental health and emotional wellbeing across the school.

Mentoring becomes a two-way journey. Mentees receive relatable, ongoing support, and mentors experience personal growth, develop leadership skills, and discover their own potential. Over time, this ripple effect creates a self-sustaining culture of peer-led wellbeing, where every young person knows who's in their corner.

"In my 16 years at Highfield, I've completed a lot of training courses, but the GRIT Four Corners training really stands out for me. Training both staff and students to deliver the same consistent message has been a simple, empowering and incredibly effective approach." Andrea Edwards, Pastoral Safeguarding Officer/DDSL, Highfield School

Changing Young Lives – Our Impact in Numbers

To demonstrate the breadth and depth of our work over the past year, the following figures show how many young people, schools, and professionals engaged with GRIT's services in 2025:

- We received **513** new referrals from young people aged 11-22 for our 1:1 and group services.
- In total, we supported **585** young people across our 1:1 coaching service and group programmes. This figure includes both new referrals and a number of ongoing participants whose support continued from the previous year:
 - The average age, calculated at the point when young people first accessed support, was **13.5** years, with ages ranging from 11 to 22.
 - **463** took part in 1:1 coaching of which **370** completed 3 or more sessions with their allocated coach. Resulting in an **80%** completion rate.
 - **72** took part in small group programmes such as the Rumble and the Art Group.
 - **50** young people attended our 12-week GRIT Programme, of which **46** completed the programme. Resulting in an **89%** completion rate.
 - **65** young people attended our Continuation Programme.
- **170** young people attended our holiday workshops held at our boxing gym or in our local schools.
- **20** students from The Highfield School and Fearnhill School, Letchworth were trained as mentors in our Peer Mentoring Programme. These **20** students went on to mentor **27** students across both schools.
- **16** teachers from The Highfield School and Fearnhill School, Letchworth were trained in our Four Corners Method to support the Peer Mentoring Programme in their school.

Our impact has also been recognised nationally locally and nationally where we have won the **General Practice Awards 2024: Clinical Improvement in Mental Health** and received the **High Sheriff of Hertfordshire Award for Sport for Good (2025)**, highlighting the strength of our model in improving mental health through sport and community connection. Our Peer Mentoring Programme was also **Highly Commended** in the Sported Awards **Campaign or Initiative of the Year** category.

These results are reflected not only in data, but in the words of families who've seen change firsthand. As one parent shared: *"GRIT gave my daughter the confidence to share her experience with us (her parents) whilst also helping her recognise the validity in her feelings, to talk through her challenges and to empower her to develop skills and strategies to deal with these. We don't know what the future holds, but early intervention has meant this is being dealt with in the first 6 months of becoming an issue, rather than waiting until unhealthy behaviours become entrenched and normalised, which would have serious health implications and potentially necessitate more resource-intensive and longer-term interventions. Thank you again for this helpful and potentially trajectory-changing support"*.

The Difference We Made

Beyond the reach of our programmes, GRIT also measures the changes young people experience within themselves. We measure emotional change using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-16), a validated psychological tool used internationally in youth, clinical, and research settings. It helps us understand how well a young person can:

- Recognise and understand their emotions
- Manage difficult feelings without becoming overwhelmed
- Stay focused and effective during strong emotions
- Use healthy coping strategies to manage stress

Overall, these are the foundations of emotional wellbeing, healthy relationships, and long-term resilience, skills that underpin school attendance, social engagement, and positive mental health.

Understanding Change on the DERS Scale

When young people complete the DERS-16 before and after their coaching journey, their scores reveal how their emotional regulation has changed. In this context, a **10–20% reduction** in DERS scores represents a **meaningful improvement**, the minimum level of change recognised in research as *clinically significant*.

This data is drawn from over **150** pre and post service questionnaires completed during this period. Of these, **81** respondents identified as female, **65** as male, and the remainder chose not to specify or be identified in another way. The average age of participants was **13.5** years, with ages ranging from **11 to 22** calculated at the point when young people first accessed support.

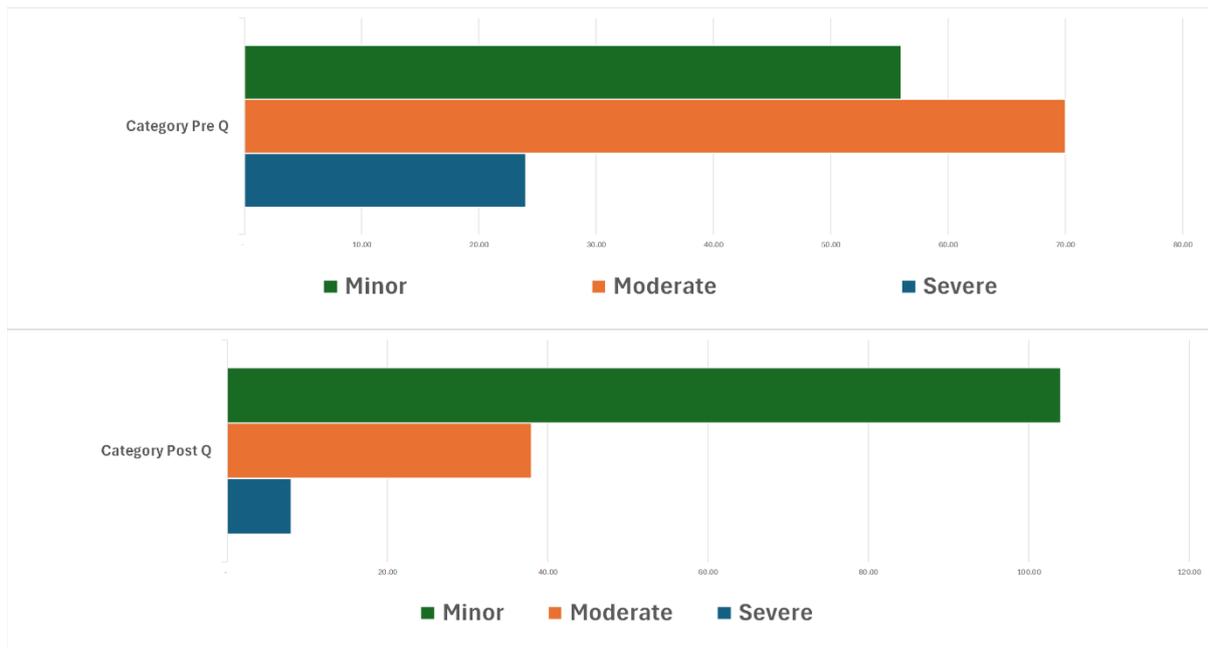
What We Saw in 2024–25

Of the 2024–25 cohort who completed pre and post service questionnaires, **85%** ($n=128$) of young **people showed improvement in their ability to manage emotions**. The mean change in DERS-16 score was a reduction by 10.5 points (p value < 0.01 CI (-12.34, -8.67) demonstrating evidence that GRIT results in an improvement in emotional regulation. The effect size (Cohen's $d=0.93$) was large and the impacts of this are detailed below, both within the DERS-16 score itself across several measures and case studies. *

68% ($n=102$) achieved a meaningful improvement, a 10% or greater change in DERS scores, **confirming a real and measurable impact**.

- At the start of their journey, **16%** ($n=24$) of young people were in the *severe* range for emotional dysregulation. By the end, that number had fallen to **5%** ($n=8$) of the overall cohort.
- **47%** ($n=71$) began in the *moderate* range; only **25%** ($n=38$) of the overall cohort remained there after completing GRIT's programmes.
- Meanwhile, those in the *minor* range, meaning their emotional regulation challenges were low, increased from **37%** ($n=56$) to **69%** ($n=104$), showing many young people had moved from emotional difficulty into stability.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-16)



Category	Category Pre Q	Category Post Q
Severe	24	8
Moderate	70	38
Minor	56	104
Severe	16%	5%
Moderate	47%	25%
Minor	37%	69%

Outcome Profile	Count	% of Total Cases
Meaningful Outcome	102.00	68%
Notable Outcome	16.00	11%
Improvement	9.00	6%
	127.00	85%

Scores are interpreted as follows: 0-44 (minor difficulties), 45-64 (moderate difficulties), and 65+ (severe difficulties). A decrease in score following the programme indicates improved emotional regulation, with a 10-20% reduction typically considered a meaningful outcome.

Number of participants moving to lower category	58.00
% of participants moving to lower category	39%

*See appendix for further details on data analysis.

What Does This Tell Us?

In simple terms, our work helps young people move from emotional distress to stability, from feeling overwhelmed to feeling in control. These results are not just statistical improvements; they reflect genuine, measurable improvements in how young people manage their emotions and daily challenges:

- Fewer young people living in high emotional distress.
- More young people equipped to manage feelings, stay calm, and make healthier choices.
- Stronger foundations for re-engagement in school, work, and relationships.

The results demonstrate a service that is both effective and evidence-based, showing measurable improvements in young people's wellbeing and emotional regulation that align with wider public health priorities. They highlight a model that achieves genuine depth of impact as well as reach, combining trusted relationships with rigorous evaluation and accountability. Beneath the data lies a powerful human story, each percentage point represents a young person who feels more able to manage their emotions, re-engage in education, and take positive steps towards their future.

While the DERS captures how young people manage emotions, GRIT also tracks other key wellbeing indicators that shape everyday life, from school engagement to relationships and

confidence. These insights help us understand change in the round and highlight the broader impact of our early intervention work.

- **School Attendance:**

Of those who reported difficulties with school attendance due to mental health issues ($n=51$), **72%** ($n=36$) showed a reduction in absence by the end of their coaching or group sessions. On average, this equated to six additional school days attended over a 5.18-month period, a clear marker of improved wellbeing and re-engagement with education.
- **Self-Harm:**

Among those who disclosed self-harm ($n=56$), **72%** ($n=36$) reported a reduction in incidents within 5.18 months, reflecting significant improvements in emotional regulation, coping strategies, and help-seeking behaviour. This aligns with national findings from *NHS Digital (2023)*, which report that self-harm rates among young people continue to rise, and *King's College London research (2023)* showing that around **one in 12 teenagers** have self-harmed, increasing to **24% by age 17**. These figures highlight the scale of the challenge and underscore the importance of early, relational support like GRIT's, which helps young people build emotional awareness and healthier coping strategies before problems escalate.
- **Body Image:**

For young people who identified concerns about body image ($n=112$), **79%** ($n=82$) recorded a measurable improvement in how they perceived themselves by the end of their sessions. This positive shift reflects a growing sense of self-acceptance and confidence created through GRIT's embodied coaching approach. It also mirrors national research including The Children's Society's *Good Childhood Report (2023)* and the Mental Health Foundation's *Body Image Report (2019)*, which identifies body dissatisfaction as one of the strongest predictors of low wellbeing among young people. These findings highlight how early, strengths-based interventions like GRIT can help young people develop a more balanced and positive relationship with themselves.
- **Food Anxiety:**

Participants who experienced anxiety around mealtimes ($n=72$), reported notable improvements with **27%** ($n=44$) feeling more comfortable and confident when eating. This suggests that GRIT's focus on emotional regulation, routine, and body awareness supports healthier relationships with food, particularly for young people whose anxiety is linked to control, self-image, or past trauma.
- **Bullying:**

Young people who initially reported experiences of bullying ($n=95$) saw a **34%** ($n=62$) improvement following their sessions, reflecting increased confidence, communication skills, and resilience. Nationally, data from the *Office for National Statistics (2023)* shows that **around one in five children aged 10–15** ($\approx 19\%$) experienced online bullying in the past year. GRIT's relational approach helps disrupt that cycle, empowering young people to rebuild self-worth and connection.
- **Domestic Issues:**

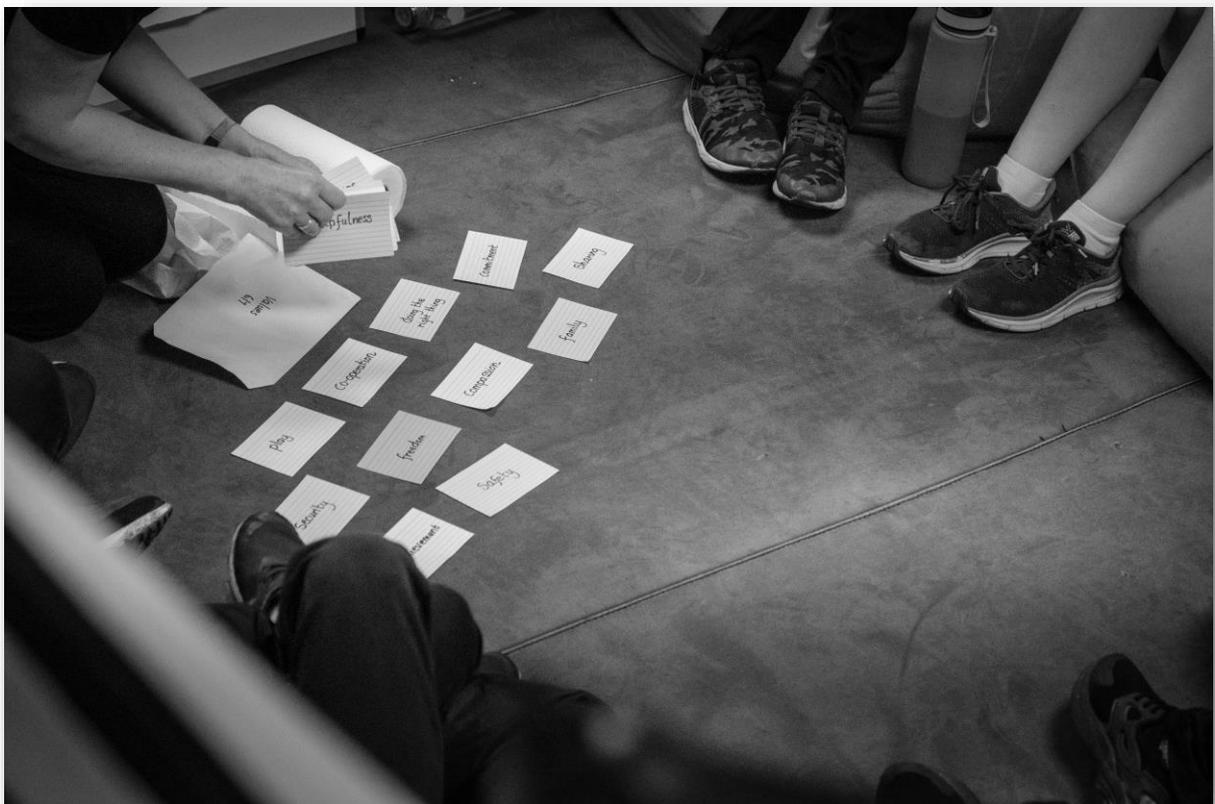
For those navigating difficulties at home ($n=30$), just over **one in four (25%)** ($n=8$) 58%
- **Confidence in School or Work:**

Young people who began their coaching journey with low confidence in school or work

settings ($n = 150$) showed measurable progress, with **51%** ($n=69$) reporting greater confidence by the end of their sessions. This improvement reflects the impact of GRIT's values-based approach in helping young people rediscover motivation, agency, and belief in their own potential.

As one young person who attended our 1:1 coaching sessions shared *"I used to feel like my emotions controlled me. Now I can step back, breathe, and not let it ruin my day."*

Behind every number is a young person with their own story of growth and change. The data shows the measurable outcomes of GRIT's approach, but the real impact is found in the moments of breakthrough when a young person chooses to show up and begins to believe that change is possible. These are the stories that bring our results to life and remind us why GRIT exists to help young people move from feeling stuck or overwhelmed to feeling confident, connected, and in control of their future.



Our Young People's Stories

PJ

PJ was finding life challenging and often felt overwhelmed, especially at school. After a period of ongoing stress and anxiety, everyday worries could easily become too much. A recent loss had also left him anxious about the wellbeing of those closest to him, and changes in routine or environment often felt hard to manage.

He arrived at GRIT's group programme quietly, shoulders hunched, eyes down. He told his coach he wanted to "get fitter" and "learn how to stop stressing all the time." Small, simple goals that were important to him. Over the next twelve weeks, the combination of non-contact boxing and health and wellbeing coaching gave him something he hadn't had for a long time, space to breathe. The rhythm and structure of the boxing sessions became a safe outlet for his emotions, while the coaching space offered time to talk, reflect, and find strategies for managing stress and anxiety.

As his fitness improved, so did his confidence. With the support of his coaches, PJ learned to recognise when his thoughts were spiralling and to use movement and breathing to stay calm. By the end of the programme, he was laughing easily with others, pushing himself in the ring, and encouraging peers who felt nervous.

His outcomes reflected what everyone could see, a 30% improvement in emotional regulation, well above the meaningful 10–20% shift typically seen. PJ reported feeling calmer at school, more able to manage stress at home, and confident in using physical activity to support his wellbeing. But it wasn't just the numbers that told the story. The quiet young person who had once stood on the edge of the group had become one of its loudest cheerleaders, outgoing, warm, and full of life.

As PJ said after his final session: "United we stand, divided we fall," he said with a grin at his final session. "GRIT helped me find my grip. I didn't know who I was until boxing came along. My health and wellbeing coach helped me control my emotions and myself. My boxing coach pushed me to my limit and taught me boxing. GRIT is where I found my motto: 'Old ways are like a flat tyre, you can't go very far unless they change.'"

Connor

When Connor first arrived at the GRIT Programme, he couldn't bring himself to step inside the gym. His hands shook, his eyes fixed on the floor, and every part of him was tense with anxiety. Change and unfamiliar environments had always been difficult for him, and over time, his confidence had crumbled. He'd withdrawn from clubs, avoided social settings, and become increasingly isolated. He was referred to GRIT in the hope that he could start to rebuild his confidence and reconnect with others.

That first session was a turning point, even if it didn't look like it. One of GRIT's coaches met Connor outside, brought him into the gym, and gently encouraged him to put on a pair of boxing gloves. Together they practised light pad work. It was just a few minutes of movement, but it was enough. That small act of trust became the spark that brought him back the following week.

From there, his progress grew steadily. Each session built on the last, using non-contact boxing as a safe outlet for stress and frustration. The structure and rhythm of training helped Connor

feel grounded, while the coaching conversations gave him space to explore feelings he'd struggled to express. With patience, encouragement, and consistency, he began to open up, first to his coach, then to others in the group.

As the weeks passed, Connor's confidence grew. The young person who once waited outside was soon leading warm-ups, demonstrating technique, and welcoming new participants. His discipline and focus became clear strengths. Through GRIT's Four Corners Method, he learnt not only how to box, but how to recognise his emotions, stay calm under pressure, and believe in himself.

By the end of the programme, the transformation was remarkable. Connor's confidence and self-esteem had flourished. He'd built genuine friendships within the group and developed a sense of belonging he hadn't felt for years. Those who supported him noticed how relaxed and happy he seemed after sessions, how his communication had improved, and how proud he was of what he'd achieved.

By the end of the programme, Connor's progress was clear. He showed an 11.9% improvement in emotional regulation, marking a meaningful change. Although he began in the minor range with some existing coping strategies, his growing confidence, self-control, and ability to manage stress showed just how far he'd come.

Today, Connor's thriving. He's continuing his studies, enjoys playing football, and has become a positive role model for other young people.

As someone close to him shared: "At first, Connor was so anxious he couldn't even get out of the car. But the GRIT team were incredibly supportive and patient. They built his confidence step by step until he felt safe enough to join in. The encouragement he received has done wonders for his self-esteem. He's made real friendships, learnt to express himself, and found something positive that's his own."

Connor's journey shows what can happen when patience, trust, and movement come together. Through the blend of non-contact boxing and coaching, he found not just confidence, but a sense of purpose, belonging, and belief in his own strength.

Ellie

When Ellie first came to GRIT, she wanted to work on expressing her emotions and attending school. In those early sessions, it became clear that she was also struggling with food and body image and had been caught in a cycle of bingeing and purging. She was waiting for a doctor's appointment and spoke openly about how difficult things had become.

From the beginning, she showed courage and self-awareness. She was honest in sessions and committed to trying the strategies discussed, always taking something away to work on between sessions. Over time, the combination of non-contact boxing and wellbeing coaching gave her a safe outlet for her emotions and a place to explore what was happening beneath them.

As she began to understand her body's stress response and how to regulate it, she found new ways to cope when things felt too much. Ellie particularly connected with cold-water techniques and body movement using these as tools to calm her body and reset her mind when emotions ran high. Working with GRIT also led her to seek more specialised support from

CAMHS, where she learned that she was experiencing disordered eating, OCD, and depression. This opened the door to targeted counselling and treatment, allowing her to continue her recovery journey with the right professional support in place.

She moved from the Severe to Moderate range on her emotional regulation scale, showing an 8% improvement, a meaningful shift that reflected her growing self-awareness and coping skills. Her school attendance improved from missing more than ten days to just one to four, and she completed Year 11 with GCSE results she was proud of.

Now in sixth form, Ellie continues to use the strategies she learned to support herself and maintain balance. She's also discovered a love for boxing and plans to keep it up.

Ellie wrote in her post-service questionnaire: "Learning about fight and flight, mantras, and T.I.P (Temperature, Intense exercise, paced breathing) has helped me learn how to regulate myself. I have been able to seek other support from CAMHS since working with a GRIT coach which has led to diagnosis and treatment (OCD and depression). I have been able to get clean from disordered eating patterns and self-harm. I learnt that I love boxing and want to continue."

Tilly

Tilly had been struggling with anxiety for as long as she could remember. School felt exhausting where mornings were a battle, and arriving late left her feeling embarrassed and self-conscious. To avoid walking into lessons alone or sitting by herself, she often chose not to go in at all. At home, tensions sometimes ran high with her mum, and while she enjoyed spending time with friends, most days felt repetitive. She described life as "boring" and spent long hours in bed scrolling on her phone, feeling stuck.

When Tilly joined GRIT and stepped into 1:1 coaching, she set herself a few clear goals, to get to school more often, to feel less anxious, and to figure out what she might want to do after Year 11. Through a combination of health and wellbeing coaching using our Four Corners Method, reflective exercises, and practical strategies for managing stress, she began to rebuild her confidence and sense of direction.

During her coaching sessions, Tilly worked with her coach to explore what was behind her anxiety and the thoughts that made school feel overwhelming. She learned relaxation tools like breathing exercises, gratitude practice, and cold-water therapy to help her calm her body and mind. Coaching also gave her a space to talk openly about frustrations at home and to explore ways of communicating better with her mum.

Gradually, small changes began to add up. She started arriving at school on time and staying for the whole day. By the end of term, her attendance had improved from 83% to 86%, and by Year 11, it had climbed to 97%. Her teachers noticed she was more focused, more engaged in lessons, and putting her hand up to answer questions. For the first time, she completed her mock exam revision and proudly shared that her catering dish was "the best in the class."

Tilly also discovered a new sense of independence such as walking to school alone, joining classes without a friend to escort her, and making new friendships that were more positive and supportive. She felt calmer and less angry, more motivated, and more in control of her emotions. At home, her relationship with her mum improved, with fewer arguments and more time spent together.

Tilly's post programme scores show that she has seen a 19% improvement in emotional regulation which equates to a 'meaningful improvement'. She began sessions within the Severe category but completed the programme in the Moderate range, demonstrating a clear shift in her emotional wellbeing. "I haven't felt anxious at all since coming into school at the start of the new year," Tilly said. "I'm no longer overthinking or imagining the worst. I've been in on time every day, had no detentions, and things with mum are really good. I've made new friends both in and out of school, they're different to my old crowd, but good people."

Her mum added, "I am immensely proud of how Tilly's attitude and behaviour to school, and life, has turned into a positive one. Things have been so much better at home too, and I'm getting to enjoy my daughter again. GRIT has made a difference to all our lives, now, and for her future."

Message from Our CEO



At GRIT, everything we do is rooted in the belief that connection is the foundation of growth. When young people feel connected — to themselves, to others and to their community — they are better able to find the confidence and courage to move forward. This belief runs through the whole organisation, shaping how we support young people, work together as a team, and collaborate with schools, families, funders and strategic partners. Like a boxer finding their stance, connection as a team helps us stay grounded and balanced, combining strength with

focus so we can meet challenge with purpose and control. The way we communicate, listen and support one another reflects the same emotional intelligence and resilience that sit at the heart of our Four Corners Method, creating a culture that prioritises wellbeing, accountability and trust.

Our progress this year builds on that foundation. Across Hitchin, Letchworth and beyond, we have supported hundreds of young people to regulate their emotions, re-engage with learning and rediscover hope. Alongside this, we have strengthened partnerships with local schools, GPs and funders, expanded our coaching team, and embedded more robust systems for evaluation, safeguarding and training. Each of these steps reflects a deliberate focus on quality, collaboration and long-term sustainability, ensuring GRIT is well placed to respond to growing demand without compromising the care we provide.

We have a duty to ensure that every decision we make, from strategy to service delivery, is guided by the same principles that underpin our work with young people. My commitment is to ensure this approach continues to shape our growth as an organisation, strengthening financial resilience, diversifying funding streams and embedding sustainable practices.

To our team and volunteers, to our funders and partners, and to the young people and families who trust us to walk alongside them...thank you. It is through these shared efforts that lasting change is made.

Rebecca Kelly
Chief Executive Officer

What We've Learned

Progress for young people

This year has deepened our understanding of what helps young people move from instability to self-belief. Through our evaluation data, feedback from schools and GPs, and post-service questionnaires, we've learned that:

- Early, relational support works where young people make measurable progress in emotional regulation and confidence when met with consistency, empathy, and trust.
- Our embodied approach, combining non-contact boxing with health and wellbeing coaching, supports both physical and emotional regulation, helping young people build lasting tools for managing stress and anxiety.
- Completion rates remain high across our programmes, reflecting young people's engagement and the sense of safety and belonging created within sessions.
- Schools and community partners recognise GRIT as a vital bridge between education, wellbeing, and clinical support, filling an early intervention gap and helping to reduce escalation to higher-tier services.
- Young people report feeling better able to manage emotions, re-engage with learning, and make healthier choices, evidence that our model supports not just short-term change, but sustained personal growth.

Developing our learning systems

This year, we've also strengthened our approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL). Introducing the DERS-16 validated scale has given us a more consistent and evidence-based way to measure emotional regulation. However, this transition has also helped us identify areas for further development:

- We need to strengthen how we collect and track baseline data across all programmes to ensure full coverage.
- We are refining how we capture equality and diversity data (e.g. gender identity, ethnicity, SEND status) to better understand who is engaging with GRIT and where gaps may exist.
- We plan to explore why some young people disengage early, helping us adapt our approach and maintain strong participation across different needs and settings.
- We will develop additional outcome measures that capture broader impacts such as family relationships, community and extra-curricular engagement, and help-seeking behaviours.
- We aim to continue improving our data systems to make reporting and learning more efficient for both delivery teams and funders.

Learning as an organisation

Organisationally, we've learned the importance of consistency, connection, and clarity. Our team has grown, our processes have strengthened, and our shared commitment to reflection and learning has deepened.

- We've embedded clearer systems for safeguarding, data collection, supervision, and team communication ensuring our growth is sustainable and aligned with our values.
- The introduction of joint staff training and peer mentoring in schools has shown the power of a unified approach.

- We've learned that financial resilience is built not only through income diversification but through clear reporting, transparency, and shared accountability.
- Finally, we've learned that wellbeing and performance go hand in hand and by supporting our team to feel grounded, confident, and connected, we create the best conditions for young people to thrive.

Collaboration and Partnerships

GRIT is extremely grateful to the individuals, businesses, community groups and funding partners who stand alongside us in our mission. Their belief in GRIT's work and continued support, have enabled the charity to reach more young people, strengthen its programmes and expand its impact across Hitchin, Letchworth and surrounding areas. Each partnership reflects shared values and a commitment to helping young people build confidence, connection and resilience for life.

These partnerships reflect GRIT's belief that change happens through connection between schools, health services, funders, and the wider community.

- Hitchin and Whitwell PCN
- Icknield PCN
- The Chimo Trust
- Hertfordshire Community Foundation
- Garfield Weston
- Hitchin Youth Trust
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
- U8 Fitness
- Helping Herts
- Hitchin Girls School
- Hitchin Boys School
- The Priory School
- Fearnhill School
- The Highfield School
- Knights Templar School
- North Herts Education Support Centre
- Brandles School
- One YMCA

“We are proud to partner with GRIT. Their unique coaching model offers personalised, timely support for young people, some of whom are considered too high acuity for many services outside of CAMHS. GRIT is an innovative and excellent service.” Dr Tara Belcher, Clinical Director, Hitchin & Whitwell PCN

Our Team and Volunteers

Behind every young person's story of change is a team that truly walks the talk. At GRIT, our coaches, mentors, and volunteers bring the same values to their work that we help young people discover in themselves - courage, reflection, resilience, and compassion.

Our team doesn't just deliver programmes; they live the Four Corners Method every day. Whether in the boxing ring, in a coaching session, or in quiet moments of support, they show what it means to meet young people where they are, listen without judgement, and believe in possibility.

"Working in teenage mental health is fascinating and fast moving. As coaches, we have to tap into the world of young people and see things from their perspectives. Being a GRIT coach is really rewarding, and I love seeing and hearing first-hand about the positive impact we are making." Jo Carnegie, Health and Wellbeing Coach

"Working as a GRIT Health and Wellbeing Coach has been an incredibly rewarding experience. The training and support are exceptional, the team is warm and skilled, and it's a privilege to help young people build resilience and emotional regulation while contributing to GRIT's vision for a stronger, more confident generation." Nichola Pyrkos, Health and Wellbeing Coach

We're also proud of our growing network of volunteers, from fundraisers to event helpers, who bring energy, creativity, and community spirit to everything we do. Their time and commitment help GRIT reach more young people and make every session, event, and conversation count.

Together, our team and volunteers are the heart of GRIT, united by a shared belief that change is possible when we show up, stay grounded, and keep moving forward. Their commitment is what turns our values of wellbeing, equality, safety, integrity, commitment and freedom into action, and our mission into reality.

"Volunteering with GRIT has been a real pleasure. The team's warmth and commitment to supporting young people through coaching and non-contact boxing is inspiring, and it's exciting to contribute to projects that will help GRIT grow and reach even more young people." Jackie Ferguson, Volunteer Grant Writer

Financial Overview

Building Financial Resilience and Sustainability

Like many small charities, GRIT operates in a challenging funding landscape. A historical reliance on a limited number of income streams means that building financial resilience is an ongoing priority. At present, unrestricted funding remains limited, reducing flexibility to invest in development, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

Despite these challenges, we have continued to strengthen our financial foundations. Over the past two years, we have introduced robust internal controls, clearer financial monitoring, and regular reporting systems that give trustees and funders greater visibility of performance and risk. These improvements have helped us manage growth responsibly and ensure that every pound is used effectively to support young people.

2024 Financial Summary

- **Total income:** £197,376
- **Total expenditure:** £182,408
- **Main funding sources:** NHS, Chimo Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, Garfield Weston, Hertfordshire Community Foundation, Helping Herts, and Letchworth Heritage Foundation.

Looking ahead, our focus is on diversifying and strengthening our income base. Alongside maintaining our core NHS contracts and charitable grants, we are expanding community fundraising, developing a paid-for service model to enable more young people to access our programmes beyond Hitchin and Letchworth, and building new partnerships with trusts and foundations. This blended approach will reduce dependency on single funders, increase financial stability, and support the gradual growth of unrestricted reserves, helping GRIT build the long-term resilience needed to sustain our mission and impact.

Thank You

To every young person, partner, funder, and volunteer, thank you for believing in Growing Resilience in Teens (GRIT) and standing with us in our mission to help young people thrive. Your trust and commitment make our work possible. Every conversation, partnership, and act of generosity helps create the conditions where young people feel seen and supported, and confident to shape their future.

Together, we are building a community where young people can find their footing, families feel supported, and partners across the sector work side by side to make early intervention real. Thank you for being part of this shared purpose and helping GRIT to make a difference.

Appendix - Analysis of Data

Aims of the Analysis

The analysis aimed to address three key questions:

- Does participation in the GRIT programme lead to measurable improvements in adolescents' emotional regulation skills?
- If improvement is observed, how does this influence broader aspects of young people's lives such as school engagement, relationships, and wellbeing?
- Is there any evidence that participation in GRIT causes harm to young people?

Population and Intervention

Young people engaging with GRIT represent a diverse population aged 11–23, referred via GPs, schools, and self-referral routes. GRIT employs a transdiagnostic, early-intervention model that supports adolescents experiencing a range of emotional and behavioural challenges. The level of engagement varies from light-touch workshops to structured 12-week programmes and one-to-one coaching.

While this heterogeneity makes programme fidelity difficult to measure, it reflects a pragmatic real-world approach to supporting young people. The intervention under study is GRIT's integrated coaching and non-contact boxing model, delivered according to the Four Corners Method.

A formal control group was not available, as GRIT does not operate a waiting list and lacks resources to maintain one. For comparative context, reference was made to published validation studies of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-16) in adolescents, which suggest that emotional regulation remains relatively stable over time in the general population.

Statistical Analysis

Pre- and post-intervention DERS-16 scores were collected from 150 young people who completed both measures. As this was a within-subjects design, a paired-samples t-test was used to assess the mean difference between pre- and post-intervention scores. Data were mildly positively skewed and were therefore transformed to meet parametric assumptions.

Results indicated a significant reduction in DERS-16 scores following GRIT participation, $t(149) = -11.4$, $p < .001$, with a mean decrease of 10.51 points ($SD = 11.36$, $SE = 0.93$). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference was $[-12.34, -8.67]$, confirming that the true mean reduction in emotional dysregulation lies within this range.

The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.93$) indicates a large effect, meaning the improvement in emotional regulation following GRIT intervention is both statistically and practically significant. These results support the hypothesis that participation in GRIT results in meaningful enhancement of emotional regulation skills among adolescents.

Supporting outcome data from GRIT's 2025 impact report strengthen these findings:

- 85% of participants showed improvement in emotional regulation.
- 68% achieved a clinically meaningful improvement ($\geq 10\%$ reduction in DERS-16 score).
- The proportion in the severe range decreased from 16% to 5%.

- Those in the moderate range fell from 47% to 25%, while the minor range increased from 37% to 69%.

Together, these findings demonstrate that the GRIT programme produces both statistically significant and clinically meaningful improvements in young people’s emotional regulation.

Broader Wellbeing Outcomes

To explore how improved emotional regulation influences other areas of life, a bespoke self-assessment questionnaire was used. The results demonstrated improvements across multiple domains, as summarised below:

Area of Change	Sample (n)	% Positive Change	Summary of Outcome
School Attendance	51	71%	Average of six additional school days attended over 5.2 months
Self-Harm	56	72%	36 young people reported a reduction in incidents
Body Image	112	79%	82 young people reported improved self-perception
Food Anxiety	72	27%	44 reported greater comfort and confidence around mealtimes
Bullying	95	34%	62 reported increased confidence and resilience
Domestic Issues	30	25%	One in four reported improved coping or family relationships
Confidence in School/Work	150	51%	69 reported greater confidence and engagement

These outcomes suggest that improvements in emotional regulation correspond with gains in broader wellbeing, engagement, and functioning across home and school contexts.

Consideration of Potential Harm

Of the 150 participants with paired DERS data, 20 (13%) showed an increase in DERS-16 scores, indicating greater perceived emotional dysregulation. However, only three participants moved to a higher severity category (two from moderate to severe, one from mild to moderate).

Qualitative feedback suggests these cases were not indicative of harm from participation. One young person was identified with symptoms of clinical depression and appropriately referred to specialist services. Another reported that “the boxing helped me understand how I felt,” and the third had participated only in a short school-based group. None reported distress or adverse experiences directly linked to GRIT.

Missing Data and Limitations

Across 2024–25, GRIT received 513 new referrals and supported 585 young people in total. However, paired DERS data were available for 150 participants (26%). Missing data can be attributed to several factors:

- Referral recording: all referrals, including those who decline or are redirected, are logged.
- System transition: implementation of Salesforce temporarily disrupted data collection.
- Incomplete follow-up: some participants completed sessions but did not complete post-assessments.
- Loss to follow-up: school exclusion or disengagement led to attrition.

To address these limitations, GRIT has implemented new data governance procedures, including improved coach training, mandatory completion or justification for missing post-assessments, and system-based prompts within Salesforce.

Summary

Despite missing data and the absence of a control group, the evidence demonstrates that GRIT participation is associated with a large, statistically significant improvement in emotional regulation and measurable gains in broader wellbeing indicators. These findings are consistent with feedback from young people, parents, and schools, highlighting GRIT’s relational, embodied approach as both effective and acceptable.

In summary, GRIT provides a credible, evidence-informed early intervention that supports adolescents to move from emotional distress toward greater regulation, confidence, and engagement in life and learning. Ongoing data improvements will further strengthen the reliability and longitudinal tracking of outcomes in future evaluations.