

The Ladies College Guernsey Pilot Project

2015 – 2016



The Ladies' College, Guernsey, recognise the need for girls at the school to develop emotionally as well as academically. To develop their pastoral care further, they required a proactive approach that was both flexible and effective. A programme that could be taught by the teachers at the school and that could be shared easily with parents too.

The College approached us after receiving a recommendation from MIND Guernsey. We are Michelle Ayres and Carol Vivyan, cognitive behavioural psychotherapists in Guernsey and co-creators of The Decider and The Decider Life Skills. We have worked in mental health for over thirty years. The Decider was originally developed for adult mental health. Client feedback led us to adapt and simplify this work for generic use as a proactive approach to mental health.

In 2015 we were awarded Mental Health Nurse of the Year by the British Journal of Nursing for The Decider.

About The Decider Life Skills

The Decider Life Skills are twelve evidence based CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), key life skills to increase confidence, build resilience, tolerate distress, manage emotion and improve communication. CBT has an impressive evidence base. The skills are for everyone: adults and children and are being used effectively in health, education, prison and business settings, voluntary agencies and charities.

The Decider Life Skills Manual explains how to teach the skills. The Decider Life Skills Hand Book is a personal copy and record for each student. The Decider summarises the 12 skills.

About The Ladies College, Guernsey

The Ladies College is single sex girls school for 2½ to 18 year olds. There is an established partnership for Sixth Form, where girls and boys mix in classes and for other joint College activities.

The Ladies' College was established in 1872 and has developed a strong academic reputation.

It aims to give each girl the confidence to develop, so they become young women who are proactive, positive, caring and resilient. Academic achievement remains important

and they are proud of the results achieved by their students. There is also clear recognition that opportunities outside of the classroom are a vital part of a rounded education. They can help to develop self-esteem and a range of interests and opportunities to achieve and contribute to an individual's well-being which is also an important part of today's education for young people.

Academic and pastoral systems are designed to offer the best support to the girls and to allow them to discover and develop their self-esteem, so that the girls themselves are happy, fulfilled and have a clear sense of service towards others as being important goals.

Teacher's Workshop

Initially 17 teachers attended a one-day workshop to learn The Decider Life Skills. The skills are clear and memorable and have been made easy to learn and put into practice. The workshop is presented in a fun, creative and interactive style using didactic teaching, demonstrations, music, visuals and reflection and skills practice to aid learning.

A 14 item questionnaire was given to the teachers at the start of the workshop and repeated at the end. The difference in scores indicated that new learning had taken place and that the teachers felt more confident in their ability to memorably and clearly teach students The Decider Life Skills. Comments included *"I've learnt so much in one day! It's been great"* *"An excellent course, I feel very well equipped to deal with students' emotions and how to handle life's stresses"*

The manual is designed to be used flexibly and adapted to suit the client group, in this example the students of The Ladies College.

Teaching the Students

The teachers chose to deliver the skills in a range of ways to suit the lesson subject and their own style of teaching. The staff were creative and in addition, The Decider Life Skills posters were exhibited in all classrooms, included in all yearly diary planners, used as book marks, displayed on electronic information boards and discussed in assemblies. Parents were given information and also attended a presentation at parents' evenings.

Results

205 students from 4 year groups completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) a self-report inventory behavioural screening questionnaire for children and adolescents before being taught the skills and this was repeated ten months later.

The results indicate students who undertook the decider skills course had a clinically significantly lower score post intervention ($M = 0.907$, $SD = 7.02$), $t(204) = 1.85$ $p = .066$.

The results are .01 from being statistically significant to the level of $p=.05$. This demonstrates an important decrease in the pre to post overall scores which was unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Potential reasons for the scores not reaching a statistically significant level to the level of $p=.05$ could be linked to a non-clinical cohort consisting of high functioning students and therefore having less room to improve in pre to post scores.

Repetition of the study on a group of students with higher pre scores at outset would be important to identify whether further reduction occurs to a statistically significant level.

A further randomised control trial could also be of benefit to indicate whether statistical significance is more evident when compared against a control group who did not receive intervention.

Feedback

The teachers reflected that The Decider Life Skills has become part of the language of the school (a copy was buried in a time capsule in the foundations of a new school building!) and that they are naturally developing their own vocabulary. There was a steady 'drip feed' of skills throughout the school.

It felt good to be able to teach mental health skills as teachers, raised the profile of mental health - opened it up. Teachers felt empowered and it was 'less scary to talk about mental health' than before and there was a reduction in stigma. They felt that the skills were practical and down to earth and in some ways they were doing it anyway. The skills gave it labels that they could all use.

Feedback from the students and their parents has been very positive with an emphasis on the common language of the skills enabling cohesive communication about emotional health at home and at school. The students also described being able to talk to each other about mental health in a meaningful way too as these discussions can sometimes feel daunting.

Conclusion

Our experience of working with teachers has been a good one. They showed a real sense of fun and a huge commitment to helping their students. This, coupled with their knowledge of the students and ability to teach the skills in a creative way made the process a satisfying one. It is an excellent example of education and mental health working together for the good of students.

In conclusion, the model appears to be a flexible and adaptable one. The initial quantitative findings together with the qualitative feedback from students, teachers and parents provide a basis for further research into the potential for The Decider Life Skills to be used as a proactive approach to mental health in schools.