

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF THERAPEUTIC STORYWRITING IN NORFOLK

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What is Therapeutic Storywriting?

Therapeutic Storywriting (TSW) is a structured, ten-week intervention aimed at enhancing children's emotional wellbeing through the use of narrative and metaphor from stories written by children and the teacher. The intervention also develops emotional literacy and pupils' writing skills. TSW is delivered in weekly sessions over a ten-week period, typically in small groups comprising six pupils aged between 7 and 13 years. Children in the groups will generally be on the SEND register for SEMH needs.



Trisha Waters, a trained teacher, counsellor and therapist came up with the idea of therapeutic writing as a model that synthesised ideas from the education and therapeutic environments she had worked in.

What is Therapeutic Storywriting? From the perspectives of children involved:

As part of the post-assessment questionnaire completed at the end of the TSW intervention, children were asked: "How would you describe TSW to another child?" The following responses offer valuable insight into the experiences and understanding of children who participated in the TSW groups.

"Awesome- we listen to bells, the teacher leads a relaxation, we have post- it notes, a feelings chart, and a story starter to do."

"We write stories and talk about our feelings in a group."

"It is nice because we write and draw stories in our groups and get some quiet relaxation times."

"We write stories every time, and draw our stories but we get to do it together and with the teacher too. It's fun to be in the group and be able to relax and talk about our feelings too."

"We have time to focus on our feelings and stories we are writing. Also we share our stories and listen to each others stories. It's fun and the teacher joins in too."



Existing research

A significant improvement in pupils' emotional vocabulary and sense of belonging (Harris, 2013).

Significant academic gains in pupils' writing achievement (Maclean, 2013)

Enables pupils to develop trusting cooperative and trusting relationships and to process their emotional experiences (Waters, 2002)

Therapeutic Storywriting (TSW) has been used across educational settings for several years, however the existing evidence is now dated, with limited recent evaluation of the impact in the current educational climate.

Moreover, no known research to date has specifically evaluated how TSW is being implemented across specialist settings in Norfolk or explored the perspectives of the staff on both their experiences of the training and the delivery of the intervention.



The context of this research project:

There is currently a clear gap in up-to-date evidence exploring the TSW intervention and how it is used to support children. While TSW has been used across educational settings for several years, the existing evidence is now dated, with limited recent evaluation of its impact in the current educational climate. TSW is currently being delivered in Norfolk, with professionals being trained to deliver the intervention. Therefore, a current understanding of the impact of this intervention, particularly within the Norfolk context, will be beneficial to contribute to an updated evidence base. Moreover, no known research to date has specifically evaluated how TSW is being implemented across specialist settings in Norfolk or explored the perspectives of the staff on both their experiences of the training and the delivery of the intervention.

The aims of the project...

This research aims to address existing gaps in literature surrounding the impact of the TSW intervention and contribute to the evidence base for TSW as an intervention in Norfolk. The project will provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence through pre- and post- intervention data, focus groups, and training evaluations, which will be used to understand the impact for children who have been involved in the intervention and reflections of the staff delivering it. Findings could inform future research and begin developing an evidence base around how TSW supports children in Norfolk.

Why we wanted a TSW project in the SRBs

- Asking children to write is one of the most challenging times in an SEMH SRB.
- Writing is a complex task requiring the “thinking brain” (pre-frontal cortex) to access multiple skills to be used at the same time.

- Focus on creating a story from a simple sentence starter.
- Encourages exploring feelings of an animal or fantasy character.
- Offers a safe way to explore uncomfortable feelings through metaphor.
- Differs from many SEMH interventions as children don't have to personally talk about feelings.
- Supports children who find their feelings too big, confusing, or overwhelming to face directly.

Executive functioning skills to
organise all these skills:

Language skills for vocabulary and
sentence making

Growth mindset skills to
persevere

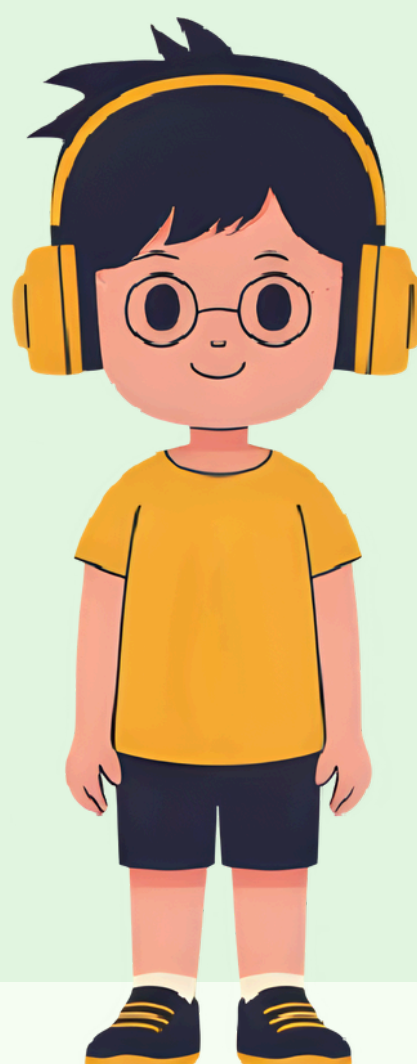
Fear of failure

Spelling and
grammar skills

Learning objective

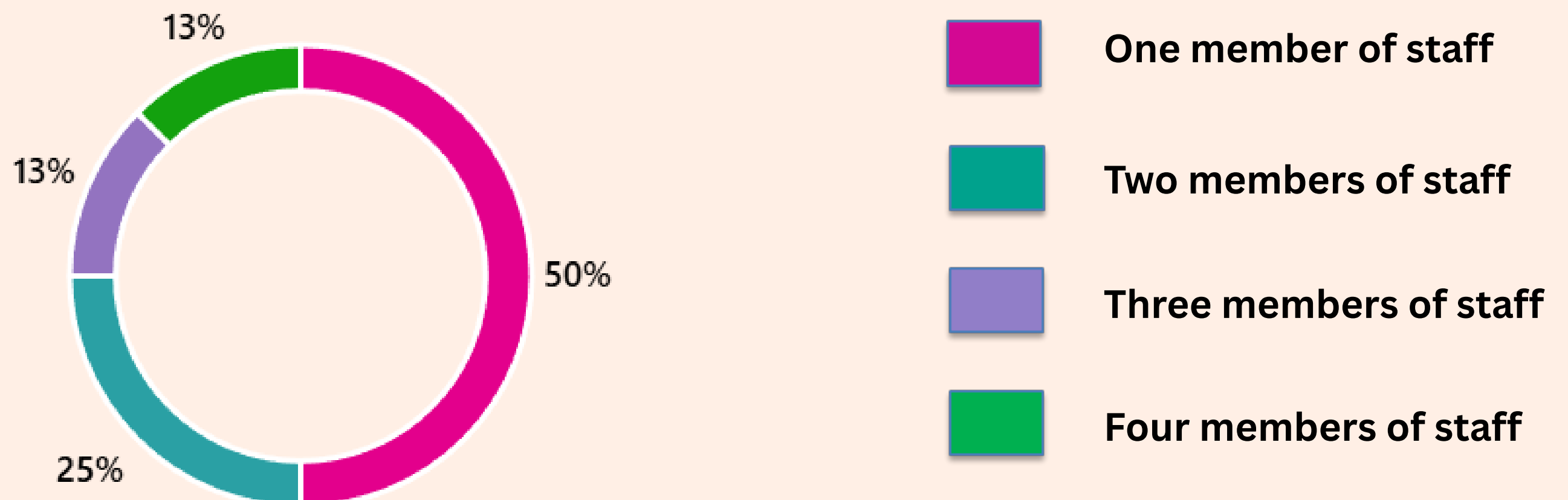
Fine motor skills
for handwriting

Creative and
experiential skills
for ideas



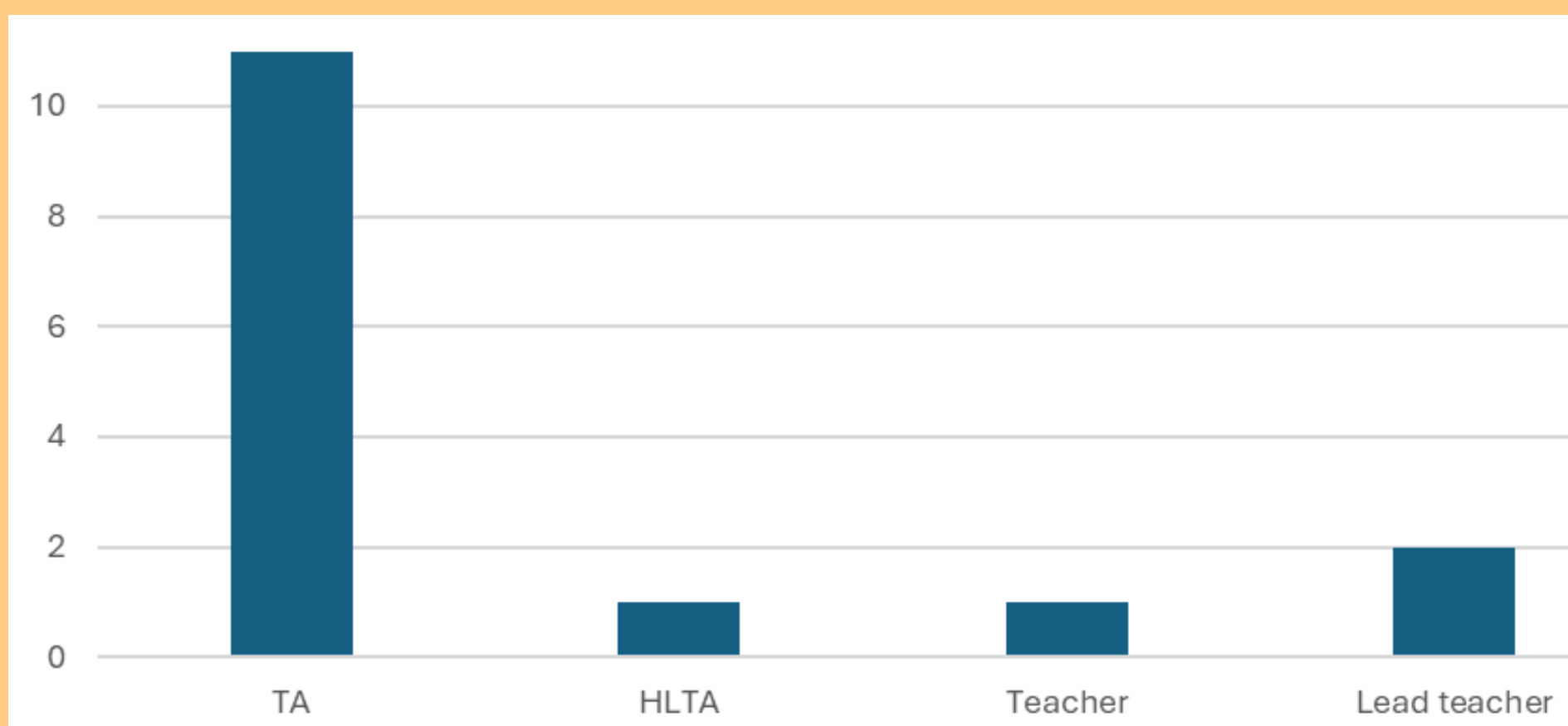
NORFOLK SRB TSW DATA

Number of staff trained to deliver TSW in the SRBs



4 SRBs (50%) have one member of staff trained to deliver TSW, 2 SRBs (25%) have 2 members of staff trained, 1 SRB (13%) has 3 members of staff trained and 1 SRB (13%) has 4 members of staff trained.

Job roles of trained staff

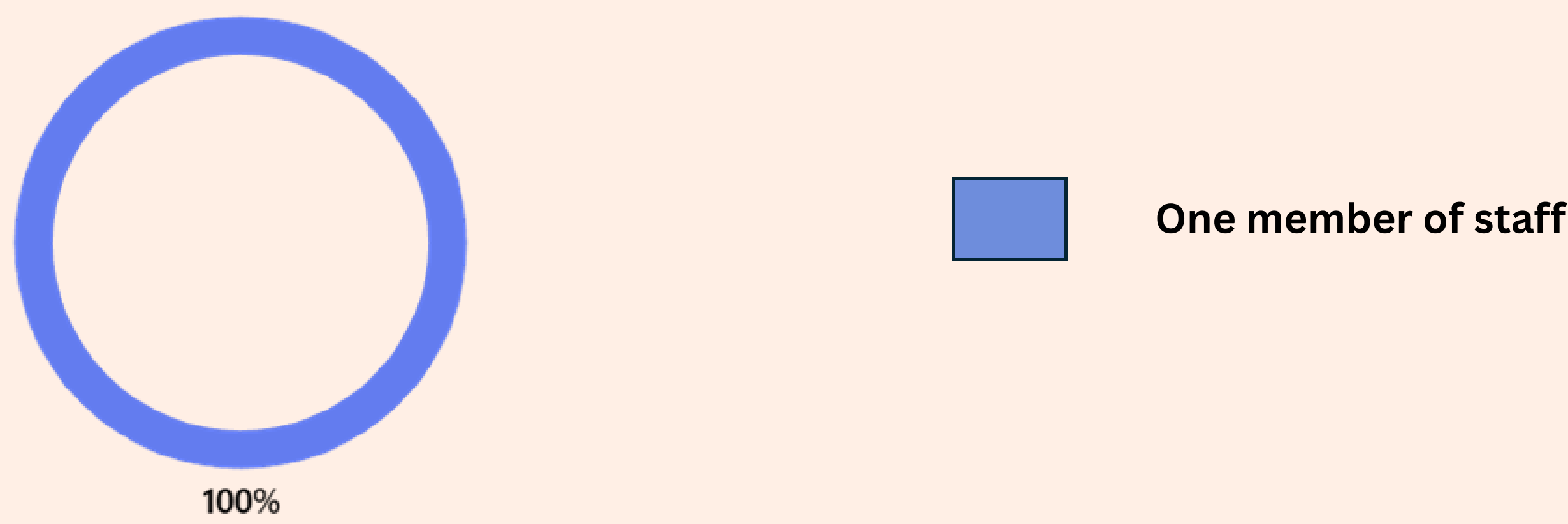


- Across the SRBs staff from a range of roles have been trained to deliver TSW including Teaching Assistants (TAs), a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA), a Teacher and a Lead Teachers.
- The graph shows the staff trained within each SRB

NORFOLK MAINSTREAM SETTING

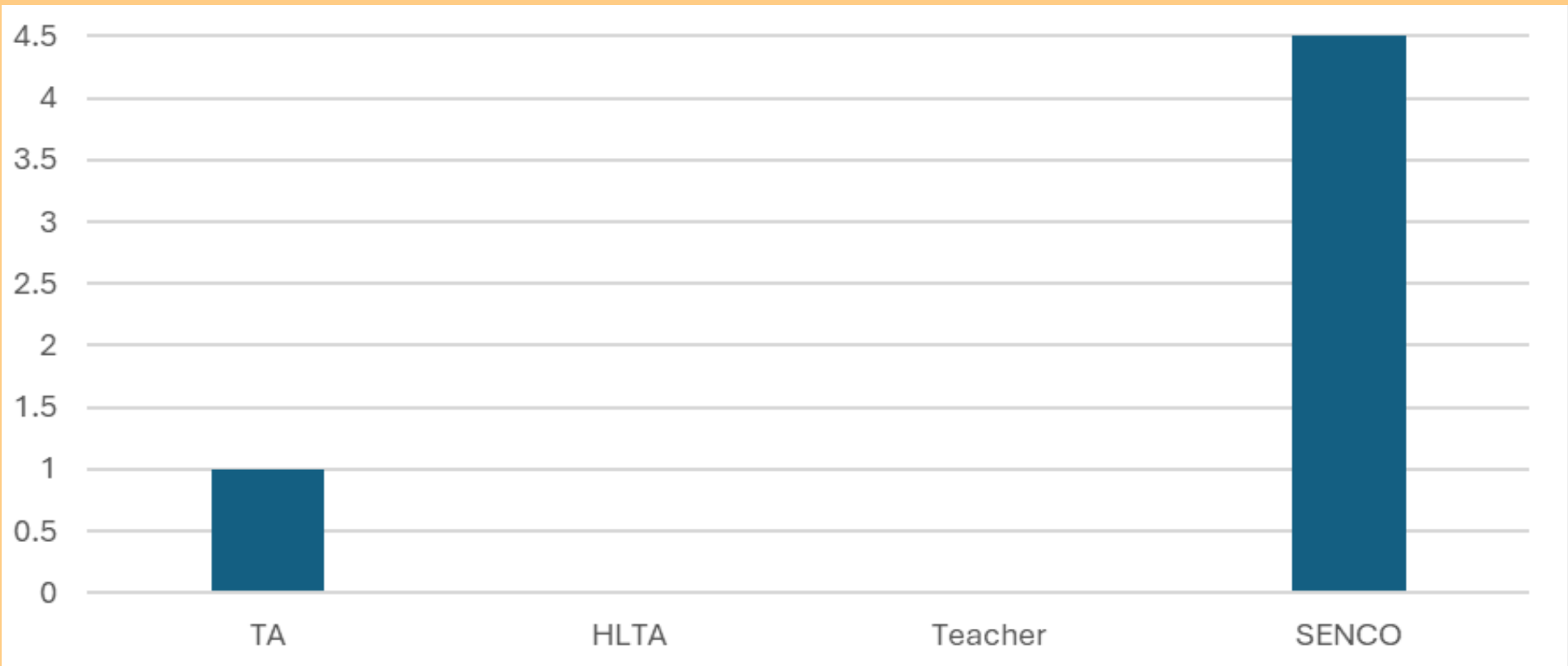
TSW DATA

Number of staff trained to deliver TSW in mainstream settings



All mainstream settings that are currently delivering TSW have one member of staff trained to deliver the intervention.

Job roles of trained staff



- In one mainstream setting a TA was trained in all other the member of staff to be trained was currently a SENCO. **** discussion/reflections**

Other professionals trained include: Specialist Learning Support Teachers, Assistant Educational Psychologists, Trainee Educational Psychologists and Social, Emotional and Mental Health Practitioners.

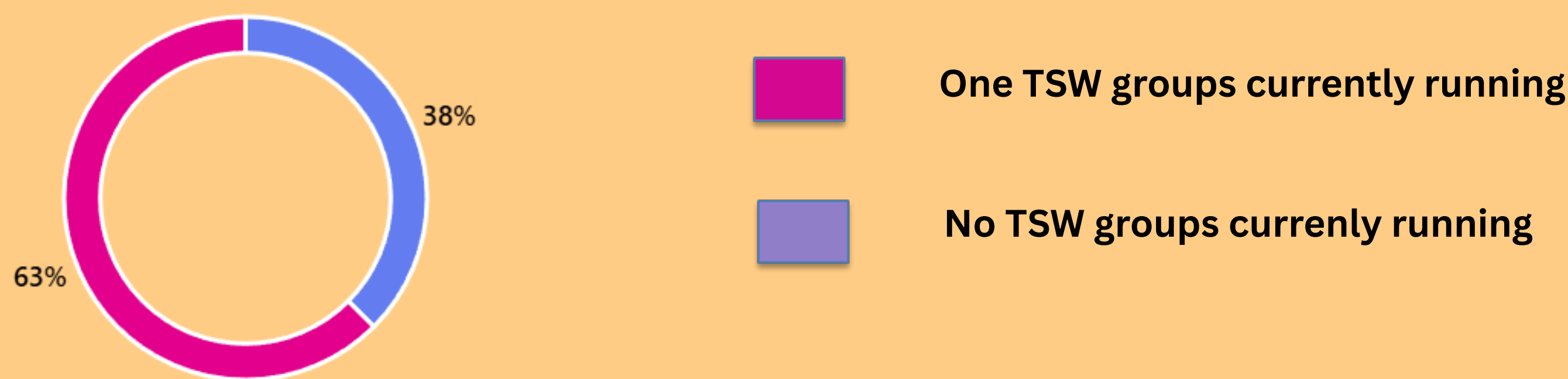
ADDITIONAL SRB DATA

Number of TSW groups that have been delivered in the SRBs



Four SRBs (50%) have delivered TSW with one group of children, two SRBs (25%) have delivered TSW with two groups of children, one SRB (13%) has delivered TSW with 3 groups of children and one SRB (13%) has delivered TSW with 4 groups of children.

Number of TSW groups currently being run



Five SRBs (63%) have one TSW group currently running and three SRBs (38%) have no TSW groups currently running. **** discussion/reflections**



TSW TRAINING EVALUATION FINDINGS

Before anyone can deliver the intervention they need to attend 3 full days of training. These days are split up across the term providing delegates opportunity to meet whilst delivering the intervention to address any queiries and reflect on their experiences.

Overall the training was...



Very useful



Useful



Not useful

- The course's clear **structure** and **practical delivery**, participants appreciated the staged approach, which encouraged applying learning between sessions.
- **Reflective group discussions** and **peer collaboration**.
- **Active listening** practice and a focus on children's **emotional development**.
- The integration of **relevant theory** and **comprehensive explanations**.
- Feeling inspired from hearing the **positive impact** of the intervention for children.

Aspects of the course that were particularly helpful...

“staged approach encouraging running own groups between training”

“time to reflect as a group and share stories/experiences”

“hearing of the impact the intervention can have”

Suggestions for how the course could have been more useful

“can’t think of anything, everything was useful”

“Perhaps more examples of case studies”

“perhaps another session together towards the end, time to celebrate and reflect”

- **Extending the course duration** or adding an extra session for reflection and celebration. ***discussion & reflection*
- Access to **more story examples and case studies**, and **links to relevant theory** online for continued learning. ***discussion & reflection*
- Offering just **face-to-face sessions**.
- Many felt the course was **already extremely effective** and expressed high satisfaction, with some noting their interest in future training opportunities.

Participants praised:

- **Sarah’s expertise**, friendly approach, and ability to create a **safe, engaging environment**.
- The **organisation** and **structure** of the course.
- The **interactive** elements that encouraged participation and thoughtful discussion.
- The **supportive** and **welcoming** learning environment allowing participants to feel confident, supported, and actively involved.

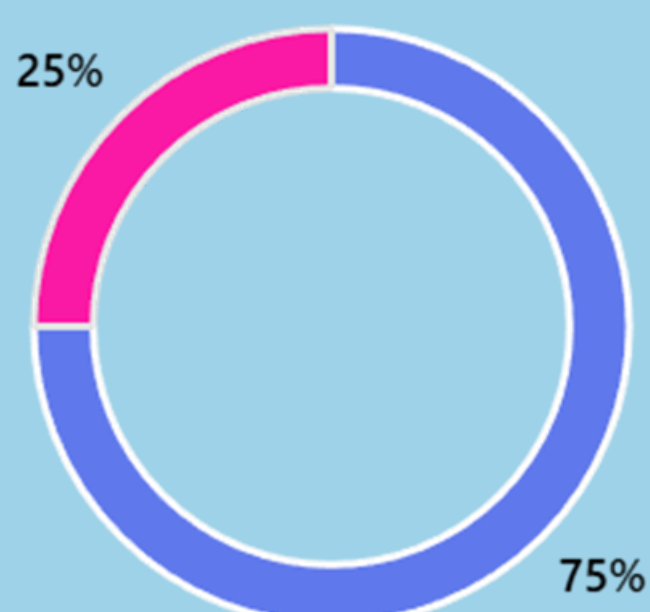
Comments about presentation and organisation...

“presented with high level of knowledge on subject and content”

“really organised but in a way that felt relaxed and supportive”

“sarah is skilled at getting people to share in a very safe space”

The standard of venue and catering was....



Very good



Good



Poor

Any other comments related to the course, your professional development and future training/supervision requirements?

“Such a fabulous opportunity to learn about this powerful tool. Made me reflect on myself, my own experiences and how they have moulded and affected me”

“I have grown in confidence in my knowledge of how to deliver the sessions”

“This was one of the best training courses I have done. I know I can and will use it as such a positive intervention for young people”

- Participants reported **increased confidence and practical skills** in delivering TSW, and valued the chance to apply **learning in real time**
- They felt the course fostered a **supportive and collaborative learning environment**, with access to ongoing supervision.
- There was enthusiasm for **further training opportunities**, especially in related approaches like Story Links.
- Many noted a **positive impact on the children** they work with, as well as on their broader professional roles.
- **Overall**, the course was highly praised for its **structure, delivery, and inspiring content**.



Pre and Post Evaluation Data

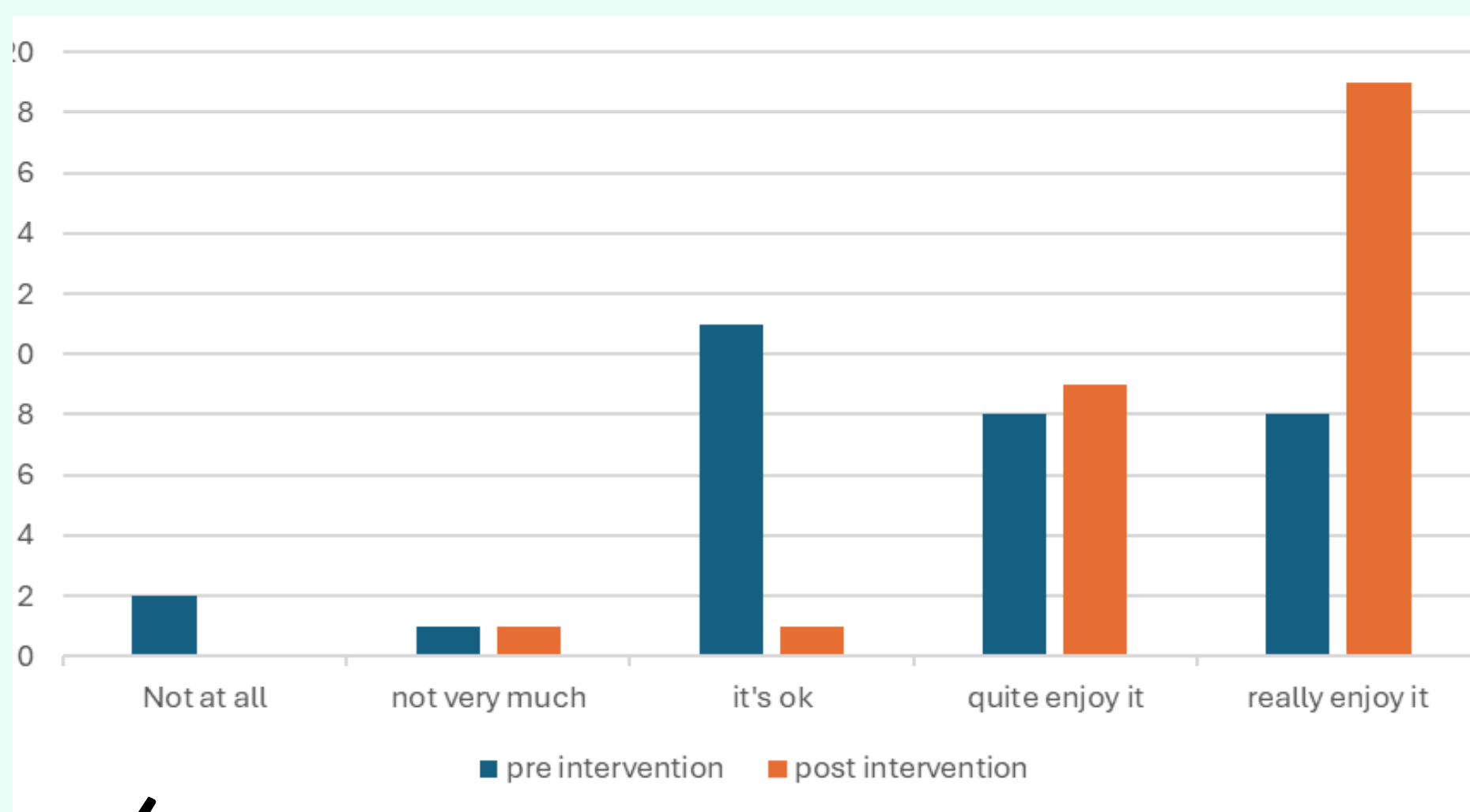
We collected and analysed the pre and post evaluation data from the views of the children attending the sessions, as well the views of their teachers:

- Questionnaires with children completed **before** starting TSW with group facilitator
- Questionnaires completed by class teacher **before** starting sessions
- Questionnaires with pupils completed **after completing** TSW with group facilitator
- Questionnaires completed by class teacher **after completing** sessions

See below for a selection of quantitative and qualitative data drawn from various questions across all questionnaires.

Pre and Post Child Evaluation Data

How much do you enjoy TSW?



Before TSW intervention 26% of children 'really enjoyed writing' compared to 63% after.

"It's more interesting than reading."

"I feel more confident when I am writing now"

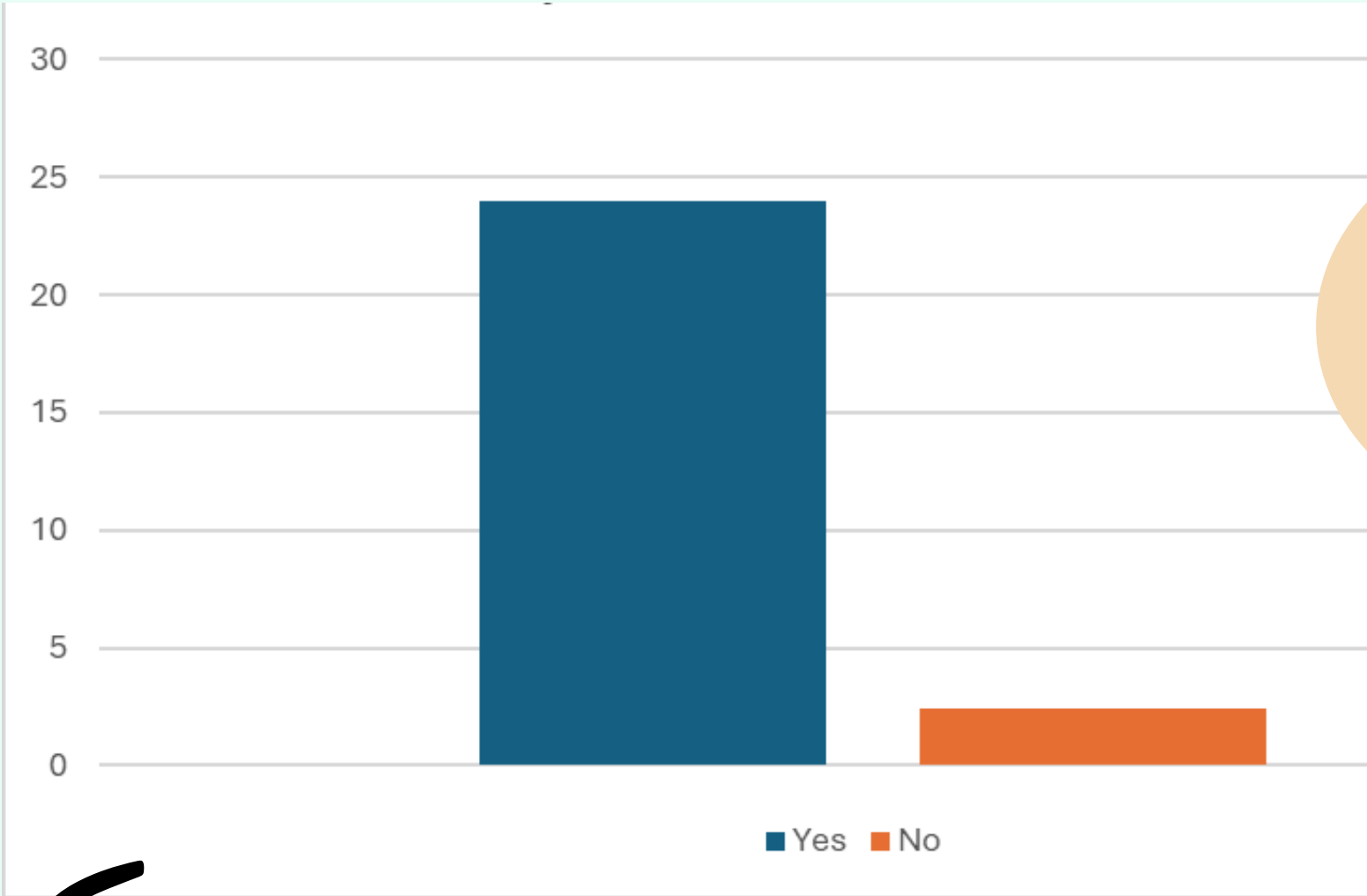
"It's okay but not my favourite because it can be boring"

"I find it fun and I think of more ideas from my head"

"It hurts my arms, and spellings are harder"

"Yes I can write how I want, spellings do not matter as much as long as I can write good stories is what matters"

Would you recommend TSW to a friend?



92% of children would recommend TSW group to a friend.

Yes, I loved writing stories together. Other child would also love it.

Yes - it was so imaginative and I loved that!

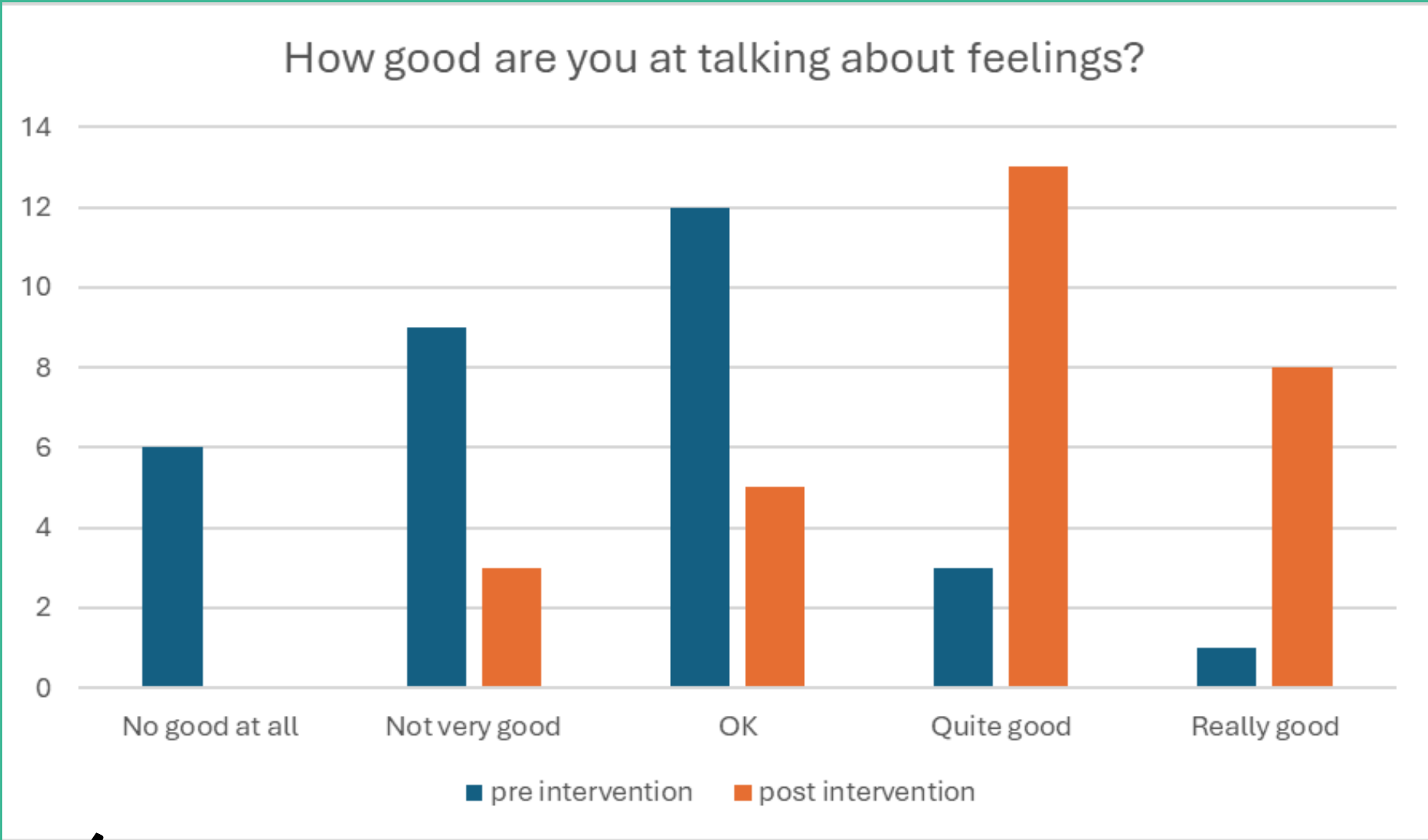
I would like to tell them to do it- its worth it.

Yes of course, I have been learning and they can too

“Yes, 'cos it's awesome!”



How good are you at talking about feelings?



“I liked the feelings part and writing it down. I liked having to think about my feelings”.

“It is a peaceful space for us to talk about our feelings”.

“Satisfying, it is relaxing”.

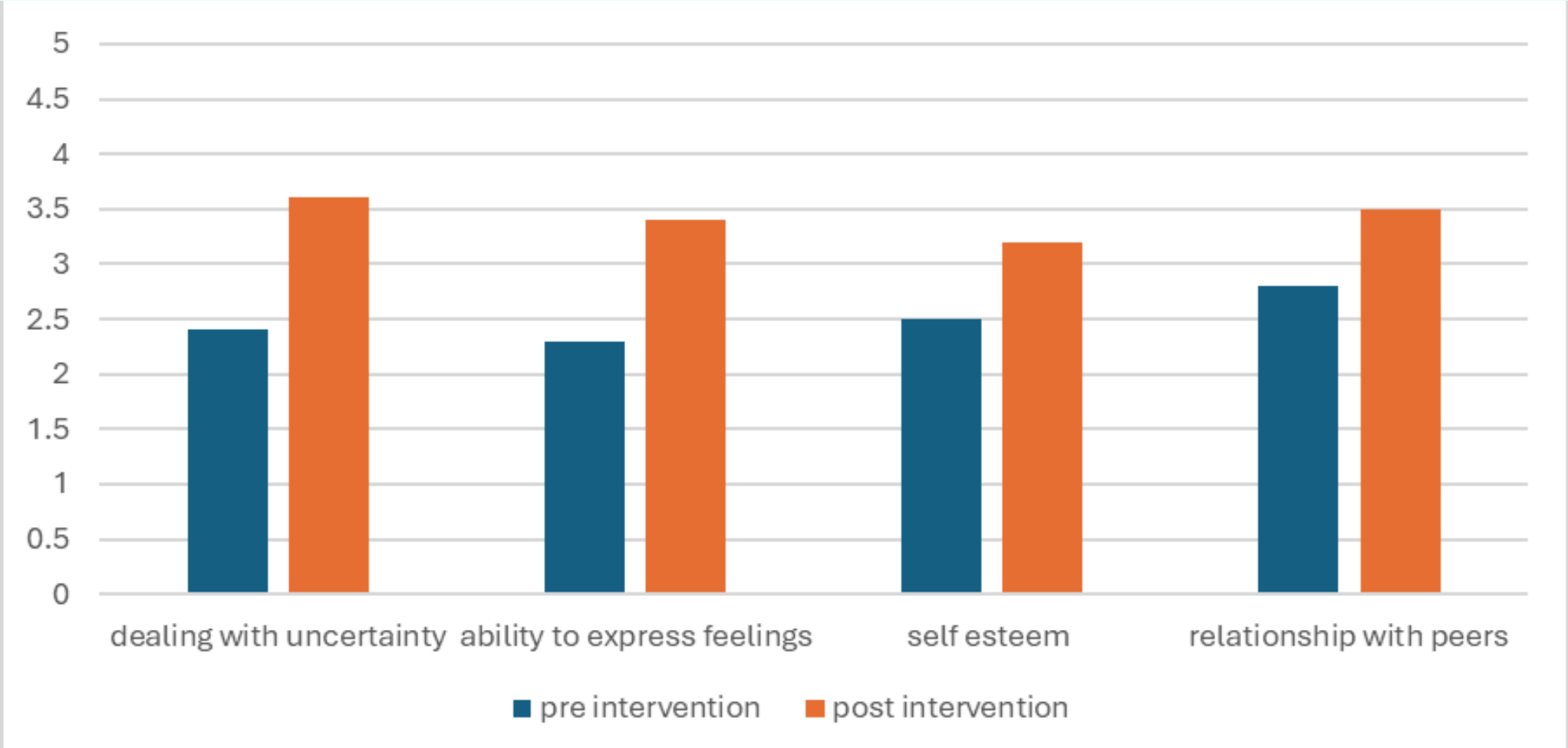
“Exciting to share feelings with other people”.

“Mindfulness, it helps me to calm down after lunch”.

Before TSW intervention 13% of children said they were ‘quite good or really good’ compared to 73% after.

Pre and Post Teacher Evaluation Data

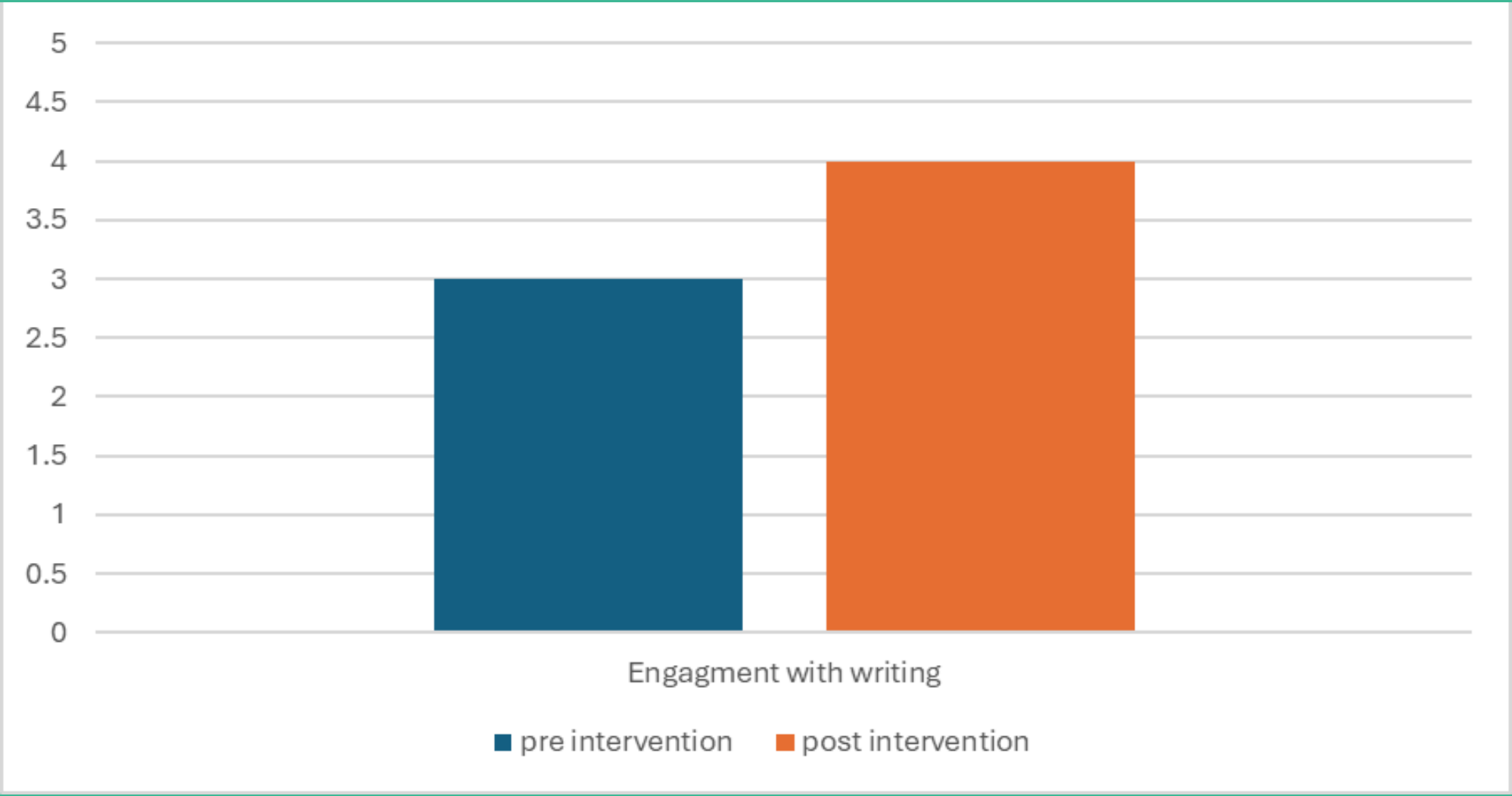
Average scores across various areas of emotional wellbeing



Average scores for dealing with uncertainty rose by 50%, ability to express feelings by 48%, self esteem by 28%, and relationships with peers by 25%



Engagement with writing



Children’s engagement with writing rose by 33% by the time they had completed the TSW intervention.

she will now engage in writing lessons and on the odd occasion will do so independently too

they now respond positively to being supported by an adult with their work

they no longer spoil their written work

they can now tolerate being corrected



Interviews

Due to time constraints, we were unable to conduct a focus group during the summer term. However, to gain some insight into the views and reflections of staff who have delivered TSW, we conducted a series of interviews.

The interviews were conducted with Specialist Learning Support Teachers via Microsoft Teams, each lasting approximately 30 minutes

Key Themes:

- Openness to talk about feelings
- Positive training experiences
- Challenges sustaining groups & logistics around delivery
- Sense of belonging
- Reflecting on TSW in the wider role

“When talking with children in my different roles I now adopt the language and reflect on the ethos and values of TSW”.

“It provides a really safe space for children to feel safe, open up and have a sense of belonging”

“I guess its capacity and if there is space for it. For schools- time and funding. I would like to do it if there is space for it”

“They opened up more about their feelings, their language enhanced and I really noticed how they began to interact with one another.”

“Sarah is really motivating and its just yeah I found it really helpful- all of the training and materials, and the chance to run through what a session looks like.”

“Relationships between children in the group ... by the end they were all friendly with each other so that was really lovely to see.”



Future next steps for research?

Case Studies:



Initially, our plan was to attend TSW groups and complete a number of case studies with individual children. Due to time/capacity constraints, this was not possible for us. However there will be two new Assistant Educational Psychologists joining the team in September! This could offer opportunity to add to this research project through case studies, to offer rich and detailed exploration of individual children's experiences of the intervention. Stories and drawings created by the children could offer creative and meaningful insights to contribute to findings around the impact of TSW in Norfolk.

Exploring TSW as a transition tool supporting CYP returning to mainstream settings

Another intended aim was to explore TSW as an intervention used to support children transitioning back from the SRB to their home school. Again we have not had the time/capacity to complete this but hopefully this could be a further opportunity for the new AEPs to take forward. This would be an exciting avenue to explore to enable us to see the wider impact of the intervention.

