



Theory of Change: Mellow for
Young People Programme

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1 Vision:

We want every child – wherever they are in the world – to be part of a safe and nurturing family that will allow them and future generations the best possible start in life.

2 Problem / Need

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterised by rapid emotional, social, and neurological change. During this period, young people are developing identity, independence, and peer relationships while still needing safe, attuned adult support.

Young people, particularly those affected by adversity such as trauma, poverty, family stress, mental health and well-being challenges, or social isolation, often struggle with:

- Understanding and managing intense emotions, leading to anxiety, anger, withdrawal, or feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling misunderstood, unheard, or judged within key relationships
- Low confidence, self-esteem, and vulnerabilities in their sense of identity
- Challenges forming and maintaining healthy relationships with peers and trusted adults
- Navigating conflict, boundaries, and power dynamics at home and in school
- Coping with peer pressure, social media, and other online challenges.

- Expressing needs safely, resulting in behaviour being misinterpreted or punished rather than understood
- Staying engaged with learning, routines, and supportive services.

Without timely, developmentally appropriate, and relationship-based support, these experiences can escalate, increasing challenges to mental health and wellbeing, contributing to relationship breakdowns, creating barriers to learning, increasing conflict with the law, and leading to longer-term negative outcomes for young people.

3 Programme Purpose

Mellow for Young People is a structured, relationship-based programme designed to promote young people's mental health, well-being, and resilience during adolescence. Delivered through a flexible 12-session group model, the programme provides a safe, supportive, and nurturing space where young people can explore brain development, emotions, relationships, and their lived experiences. Using strengths-based activities and individual reflective journals, increasing their sense of well-being the programme supports young people to build emotional awareness, develop healthier coping strategies, and strengthen their relational skills.

4 Target Group

- Young people aged 11+ experiencing emotional, behavioural, or relational challenges
- Young people affected by family stress, conflict, trauma, or challenges linked to their social context.

- Young people at risk of experiencing barriers to learning, and disconnection from peers or supportive adults
- Young people at risk of conflict with the law
- Care-experienced young people, including those who have experienced challenges in care or relationships that impact their sense of security and belonging.

5 Assumptions (Core Mechanisms of Change)

- Young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing are strongly influenced by the safety, consistency, and quality of their relationships and environments.
- Adolescence is a critical window for early intervention, where timely, preventative support can reduce escalation into crisis or statutory services.
- Young people are more able to engage, reflect, and change when they feel emotionally safe, respected, and not judged.
- Emotional distress often presents through behaviour; understanding behaviour as communication supports healthier responses and outcomes.
- Building emotional literacy and self-awareness supports regulation, coping, and help-seeking.
- Peer connection and shared experiences reduce isolation, stigma, and shame, particularly for young people living through difficult circumstances.
- Strengths-based approaches support confidence, identity development, and resilience.
- Structured, predictable group environments support emotional containment and engagement for young people experiencing stress or trauma.

These assumptions align with the Mellow Evaluation Framework, particularly the domains of:

- Young people's emotional and social well-being
- Relationships and relational safety
- Confidence, identity, and resilience

6 Activities (What the programmes deliver)

- Delivery of a flexible 12-session group programme, with each session lasting 2 hours
- Creation of a safe, supportive, and emotionally containing group environment to support engagement and trust
- Structured, developmentally appropriate sessions designed to support young people's emotional and relational needs
- Use of individual participant journals to support reflection, learning, and continuity
- Opportunities for young people to reflect on experiences, practise new skills, and make sense of their learning in their own time.
- Facilitated group discussions and activities that promote emotional literacy, relational understanding, and confidence

Session structure and content:

Session 1:	Introduction to the programme, group agreements, safety, and trust-building
Sessions 2:	Understanding young people's brain development and how this influences emotions, behaviour, and decision-making
Sessions 3-4:	Exploring feelings and emotions, emotional awareness, and expression
Sessions 5-9:	Focus on young people's lived experiences, relationships, and social worlds, including peers, family, school, and online environments

- Sessions 10–12: Identifying and building on strengths, confidence, and positive identity, concluding participation in a safe and affirming way

7 Outputs (Immediate participation)

Young People:

- Attend and participate in the 12 structured group sessions
- Feel safe, welcomed, and emotionally contained within the group setting
- Engage in group discussions and activities appropriate to their developmental stage
- Use individual journals to reflect on learning, thoughts, and experiences
- Increase their understanding of brain development, emotions, behaviour and how they are linked.
- Explore their relationships, social worlds, and lived experiences in a supported way
- Identify personal strengths and positive qualities
- Build connections with peers through shared experiences
- Facilitators observe increased engagement, confidence, and willingness to participate

8 Short-Term Outcomes (0–6 Months)

Young People

- Increased feelings of emotional safety, trust, and belonging
- Improved emotional awareness. Name, understand, process and manage their emotions.
- Increased confidence to express thoughts, needs, and experiences
- Reduced emotional distress within group and day-to-day settings

Relationships

- Improved quality of interactions with trusted adults and peers
- Reduced conflict and escalation linked to misunderstandings

9 Medium-Term Outcomes (6–18 Months)

Young People

- Improved emotional regulation and coping strategies
- Increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive identity development
- Reduced behavioural challenges linked to unmet emotional needs
- Improved engagement with education, routines, and supportive services

Relationships

- Healthier peer relationships and boundaries
- Increased trust and communication with key adults
- System Outcomes
- Reduced referrals to crisis or specialist services
- Improved engagement with early help and preventative supports

10 Long-Term Impacts (18+ Months)

Young People

- Sustained improvements in mental health and emotional well-being
- Stronger resilience, coping capacity, and help-seeking behaviours

- Improved life chances across education, relationships, and wellbeing

Relational & Intergenerational Impact

- More stable, supportive relational environments
- Reduced intergenerational patterns of emotional distress and relationship breakdown

System-Level Impact

- Reduced demand on CAMHS, crisis, and statutory services
- Stronger preventative and relational youth mental health and well-being pathways

11 Summary Causal Pathway

Mellow for Young People provides a safe, structured, and nurturing group environment where young people build emotional awareness, confidence, healthier relationships and coping strategies. As well-being and relationships improve, young people are better able to regulate emotions, engage positively with learning and support, and build resilience.

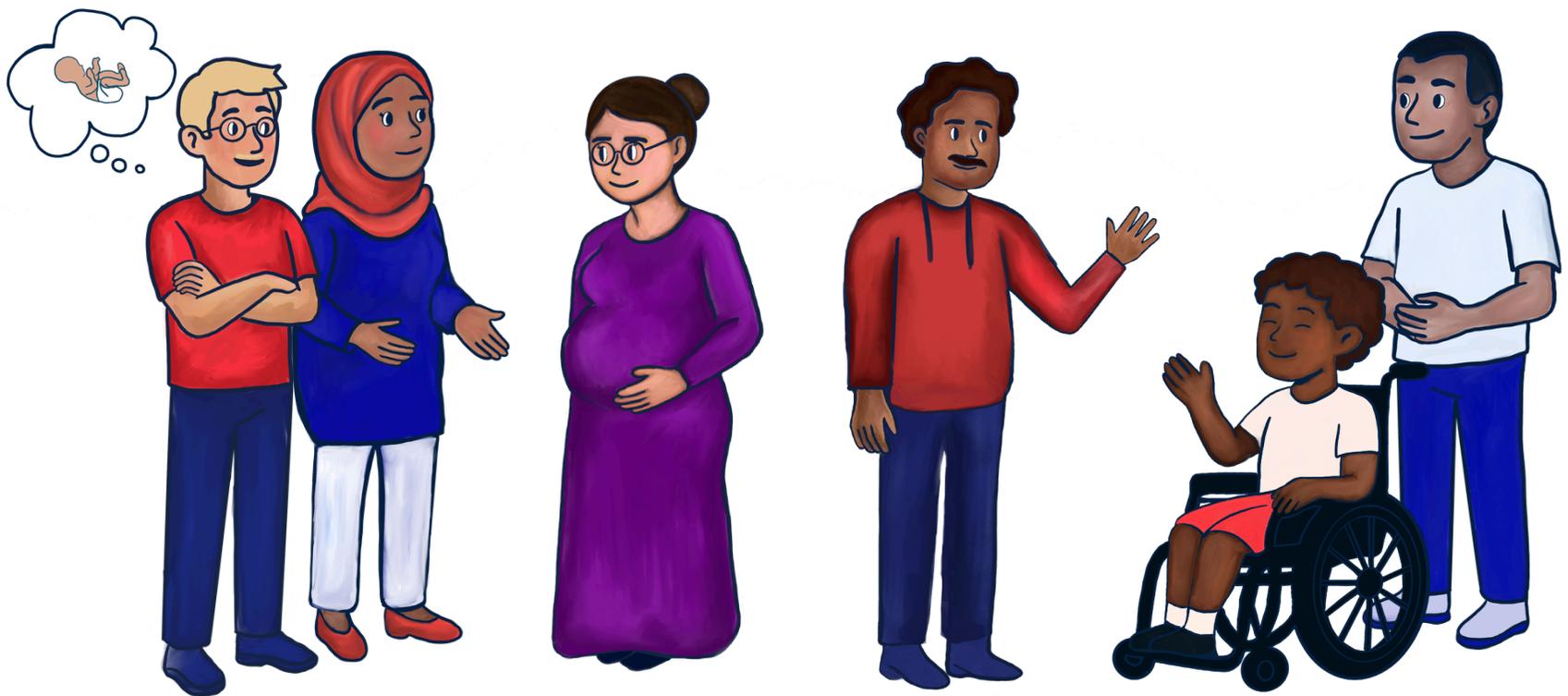
Which leads to:

- Improved mental health and emotional well-being
- Greater resilience and reduced distress
- Improved engagement with learning, support, and positive activities
- Increased likelihood of positive destinations in education, training, employment, and healthy relationships
- Reduced need for crisis or statutory intervention



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