



COPE Galway

60 YEARS Improving Lives
Strengthening Community



Solas Óg
COPE Galway

“Beyond Just Talk”

How interactive education is rewriting the script on teen relationships

26th June 2025





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Ciara Tyrrell



What is Solas Óg



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- A support service for children and young people who have lived experience of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
- Covers Galway city & county
- Solas Óg is made up of three teams – a refuge team, outreach team and education team
- We work with 0 – 25 years
- Our Education team work with schools and community groups to deliver our healthy and unhealthy relationships programme.





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Some statistics on dating abuse

In relation to 18 – 25 year old's surveyed – *Womens Aid 2020*

- 3 in 5 young people have experienced, or know someone who has experienced, intimate relationship abuse.
- 1 in 5 young women and 1 in 11 young men have suffered intimate relationship abuse.
- 1 in 6 young women and 1 in 13 young men have suffered coercive control by a partner or ex-partner.
- 1% of young women affected experienced the abuse under the age of 18.





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Some statistics on dating abuse

- 64% of females who experienced sexual violence in their lifetime were abused by a partner/ex-partner and 48% of males.

CSO 2022 Sexual Violence Survey

- Approximately 1 in 9 female and 1 in 36 male high school students have reported experiencing sexual dating violence according to data from 2023.
- A total of 17% of LGBTQ+ students have been forced to have sex at some point.

Wisniewska, M. J. (2024, September 14) "Teen Dating Violence Statistics 2024". Break The Cycle. <https://www.breakthecycle.org/teen-dating-violence-statistics/>





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Background to the healthy and unhealthy relationships programme

- Informed from the work of the Domestic Abuse service
- Adapted over the years from a domestic abuse workshop to a dating abuse workshop
- In 2016 a student from the MA Family Support programme at the University of Galway conducted a Qualitative evaluation of the healthy and unhealthy relationships school workshop run by COPE Galway
- All service users agreed that if they had been shown this workshop when they were younger, they would not have ended up in an unhealthy violent relationship

Nalty, 2016

“ Oh yeah , 100% , I wish that was around when I was younger; “

“ I wish I had seen it because I think I wouldn't be in Waterside Hostel right now”





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Background to programme

- A two-session programme (2x 80 minutes) – covering topics such as what is a healthy relationship, unhealthy relationship, warning signs, digital dating abuse, how to get out of a relationship safely, support options
- Originally targeted at Transition Year (TY) students
- Feedback from young people was taken on board where the young people suggested they need the programme in the junior cycle
- Stated they ***feel it's too late at TY, have already been in an abusive relationship***, some are already dating in 1st / 2nd year of secondary school.





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Pilot Programme 2023

- 6-week interactive programme x 80 minutes sessions
- 10 schools and 268 students
- January to May 2023 pilot programme
- The programme was incorporated into SPHE (Social Personal Health Education) module

Session 1

Healthy &
Unhealthy
Relationships

Session 2

Dating Abuse
and warning
signs

Session 3

Leaving a
relationships
safely

Session 4

Digital Abuse

Session 5

Setting
boundaries and
gender
stereotyping

Session 6

Focus group and
summary

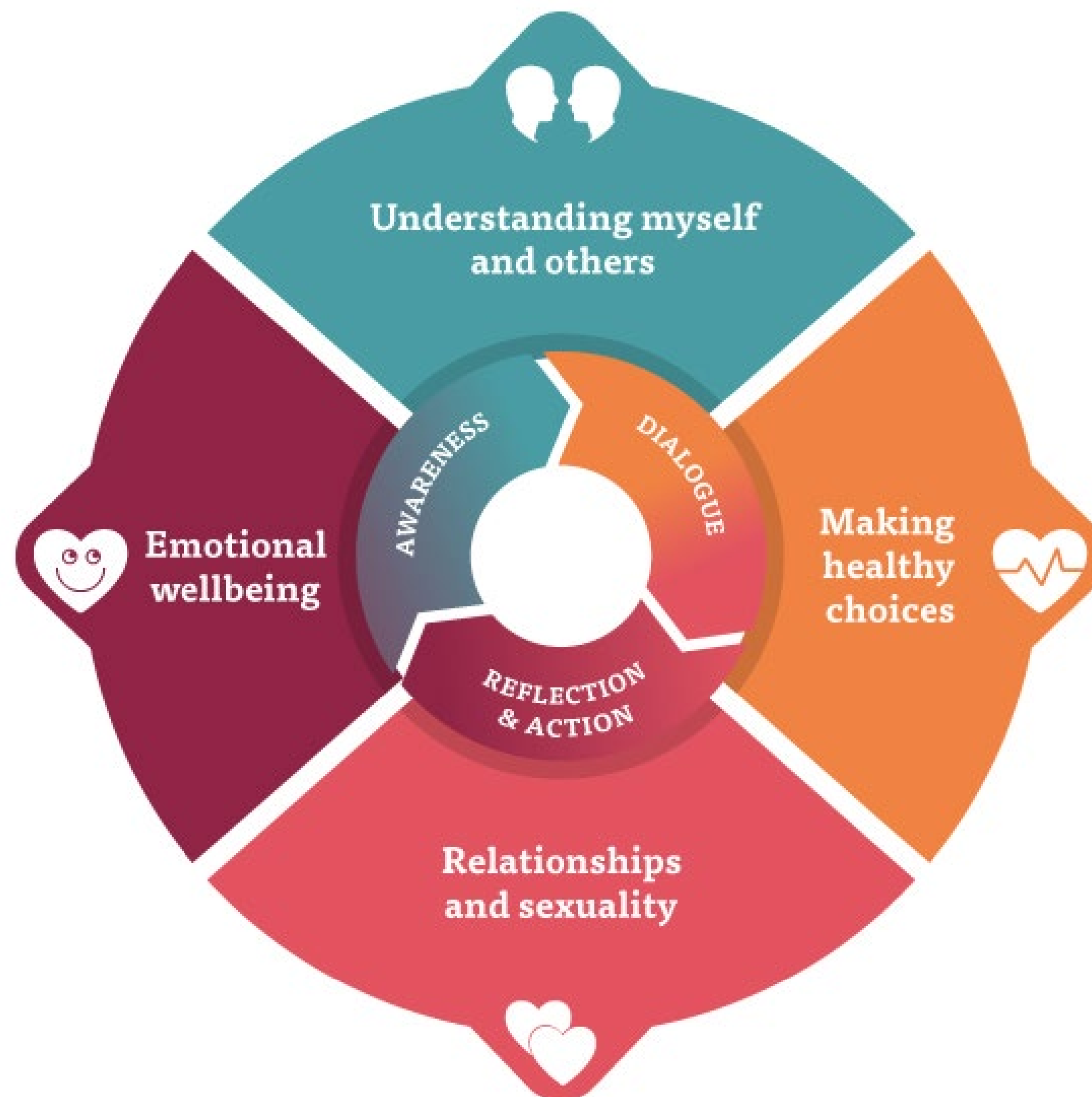


Link to SPHE Junior Cycle



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Our Educational Approach

A non-judgmental approach

Creating a safe space

Participation

A problem posing model of education

A young person-centred approach

Empowerment



Evaluation Methods

Group	Evaluation Method
Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In person survey• Interactive focus group
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online survey• Informal interviews
Cope Galway Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus group



Teacher's perspective

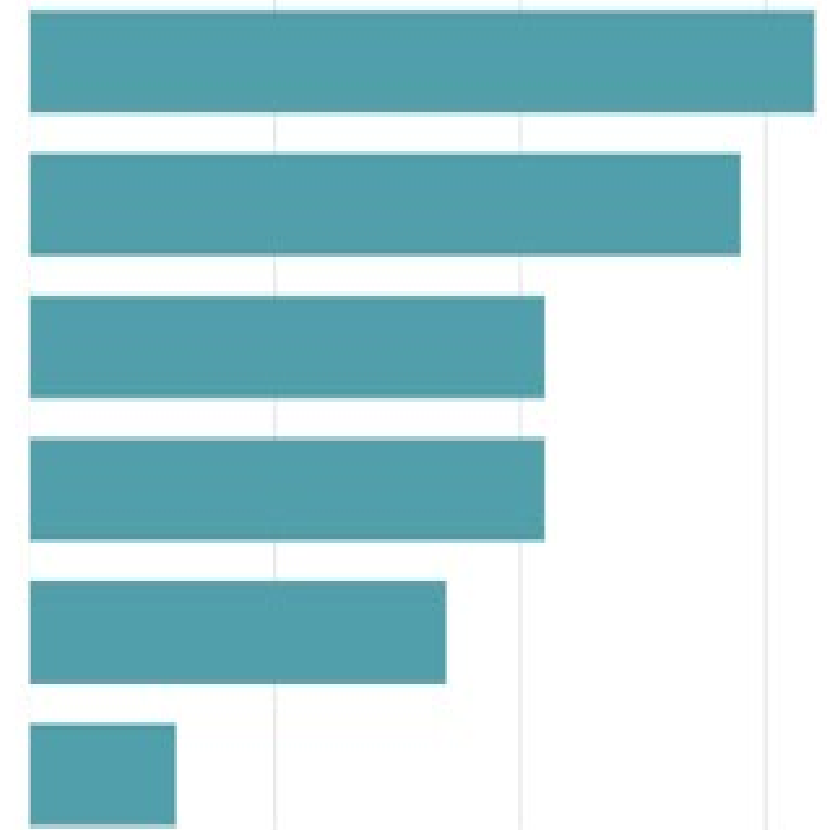
- The key theme emerging from the teachers '*was the ability of facilitators to engage the Young People in the programme*'.
- All of the teachers that completed the survey rated the programme of an excellent quality. The teachers outlined the **benefits of the programme** illustrated in the graph

'Excellent program, delivered with ease and grace, with a great connection with the Young People. One of the best presenters we have had in the school that was able to relate to the young people, Thank you'
(Teacher Survey 4).



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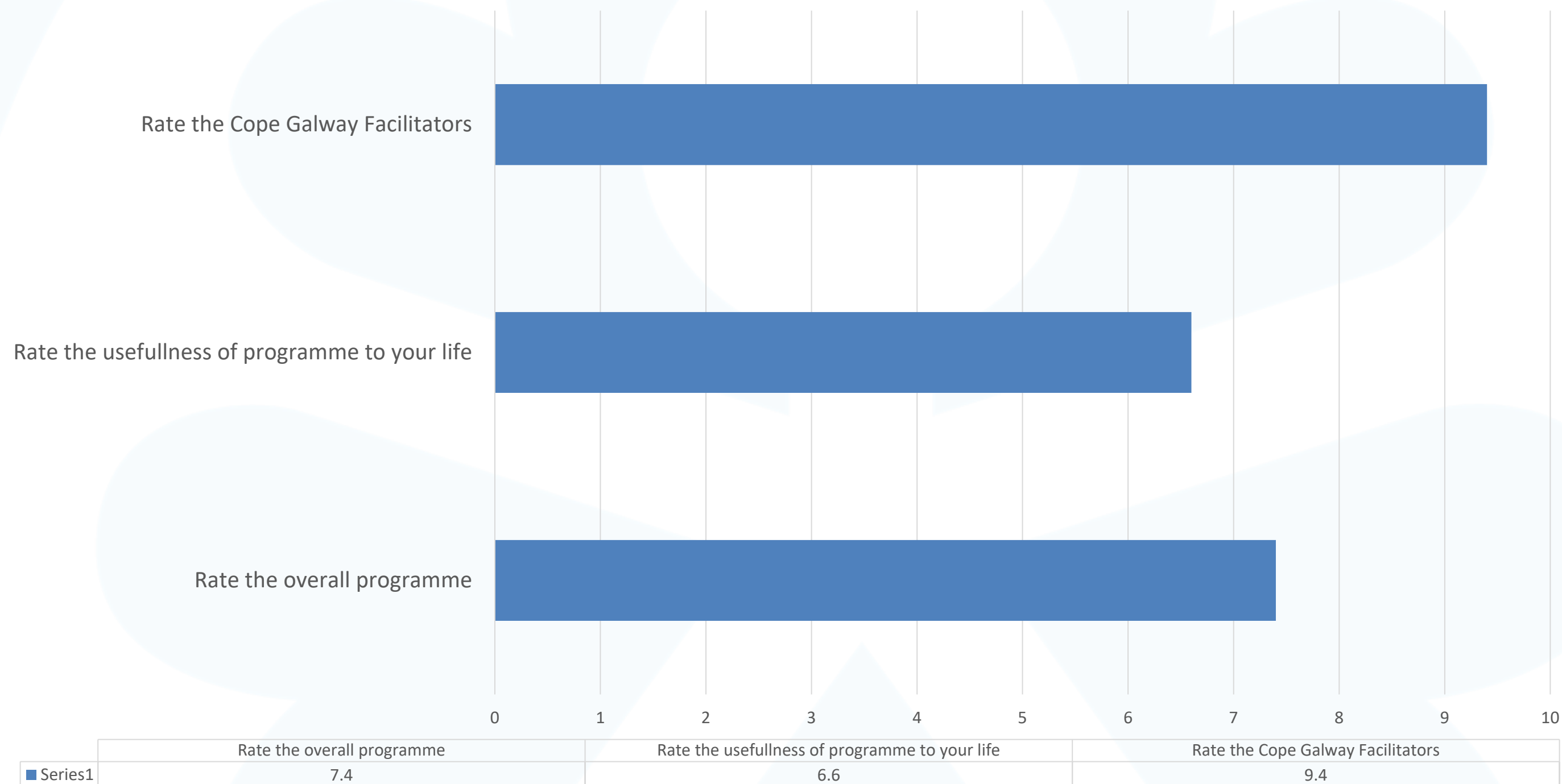
1 Attitudes and Beliefs
2 Knowledge
3 Communication skills
4 Social Skills
5 Confidence
6 Other





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Young People's perspective





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Young People's perspective cont'd

- Young people enjoyed the programme and participated very well each week
- Young people felt that the majority of the topics covered were **important** and **relevant** to them
- Young people felt both **heard** and **listened to**

Opportunity for the voice of the young person

Never	0
Some of the time	2
Most of the time	13
All of the time	5



Young people being listened to

Never	0
some of the time	1
most of the time	9
all of the time	10



Facilitator's perspective



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- **Teacher present in the room:** decorum for the debates, child welfare, buy in from teachers and follow up. Constraint - may not be as open.
- **Building relationships with young people:** get to know you activities, a different approach to youth centred, fun and open non-judgemental.
- **Additional activities:** Fun activities, elective activities.

'We really got to know the young people over the six weeks and got to see them build in confidence and find their voice'

(Cope Facilitator).





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Feedback from young people

- Inequality experienced by girls (sports used as a useful example)
- Some of the **boys believed men should have more say in the relationship**, as they felt it was there right because they were male. Other boys and girls believed that if one person in the relationship was **the sole money earner, they should have more say in the relationship**.
- These attitudes and beliefs may be of concern when young people start moving into their first relationships. However, the programme was quite effective in getting the young people to debate and to **challenge one another on these matters**, that opened them up to consider other perspectives.



Boundaries



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Taking notice throughout the programme

- The young people were able to apply the use of **time, physical and emotional boundaries** to overcome the problem-based scenarios provided to them during the programme.
- One of the common issues experienced by young people is a lack of **clarity around time boundaries** in a relationship.

Considerations

- **Physical boundaries** are also something young people need to be aware of so that they can outline what they feel comfortable with and not comfortable with particularly around physical touch.





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“Learned about
unhealthy/healthy
relationships, forms of abuse,
stereotypes, coercive control.”

“I learned about coercive control
and how controlling relationships
can be.”

Some feedback the current academic year...

“Why was porn even
created?”

“3 things I learned coercive
control, digital dating abuse,
how to exit a relationship.”

“What happens when
you say no but a boy
keeps trying?”



Where we are now....



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A further **6 schools** participated in the academic year 2024 / 2025 bringing a **total of 16 schools participated = 1015 students**

A teacher training workshop has been developed regarding the understanding of the programme, the topic of teenage dating abuse, how to support a young person ensuring they receive the same messaging and looking at how they Recognise, Respond and Refer (3 R's)





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THANK YOU!

