

# THRIVE

Training Hope and Resilience In Vulnerable Early school leavers



## Overview

The THRIVE study involved a mixed methods evaluation to explore the use of trauma-informed practices in second chance education settings.

As part of this study, a small number of focus groups were conducted with educators working in second chance education settings, and with learners participating in the Youthreach programme

In total, 17 educators and 6 Youthreach learners also took part in focus groups

### 'Left behind' - Early school leavers experiences of mainstream education

Early school leavers' negative experiences of mainstream education were highlighted.

Feelings of stigmatisation and a lack of support played a key role in disengagement from mainstream education

"I never wanted to go in, because they always used to make a show of me in front of everyone" (Youthreach learner)

"They've been left behind. They got lost, struggling to keep up along the way" (Educator)

"They are coming here with the perception that they're not equal" (Educator)

### A second chance - Belonging in second chance education

Positive experiences of Youthreach were highlighted. Educators and learners spoke of feeling a "sense of belonging" in second chance education.

Learners felt more supported and described personal growth and development from these positive experiences

"They find a sense of belonging here. I think that really helps" (Educator)

"I've made more memories here [...] It's like a second home" (Youthreach learner)

"When I was in school I didn't care about college. I wasn't planning on doing anything. But now I actually want to go to college" (Youthreach learner)

### (Re)Engaging - Meeting the needs of learners in second chance education

Positive relationships and building trust were identified as crucial to supporting learners. Building strengths and fostering well-being were also emphasised

Organisational factors, particularly small class sizes were seen as being important for achieving positive outcomes.

"In school you're just a student [...] here you are sitting there with us" (Youthreach learner)

"Recognising strengths [...] that small but little bit of praise and encouragement - that can make a big difference" (Educator)

### 'Boundaries and barriers'

An increasing prevalence of adversity and mental health issues amongst learners were highlighted as major challenge for educators.

Work-related stress and distress were commonly experienced, particularly when dealing with learners' psychological health and well-being.

Educators also expressed frustration at a lack of resources and a perceived creeping emphasis on academic rather than personal-social outcomes for learners.

"We have to show success [...] but it gives you less time for the soft skills" (Educator)

"I was upset all the time and I didn't know how to deal with it" (Educator)



## Conclusions

### 'What works'

The findings shed light on 'what works' for learners in second chance education, particularly a sense of safety, support and connection.

The findings emphasise the importance of trauma-sensitive environments in second chance education, which can buffer student resilience, strengthen connection and relationships and promote learning and skill development

### Areas for development

Educators also need support. The findings highlight educators' experience of stress and helplessness. Compassion fatigue and burnout can negatively impact educator effectiveness.

Training and support to mitigate against secondary traumatic stress are important. Greater resourcing and opportunities for collaboration can also help to alleviate educator burden.

For more information go to [thriveresearch.eu](http://thriveresearch.eu)

This research was funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union