



Nottingham Trent
University

Grit Evaluation

Report on NTU's evaluation of a Grit approach to Local Authority training
for social work teams

Chris Rolph

Sam Williams

Matt Varley

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Authors

Chris Rolph

Chris is Associate Professor of Education Policy and Practice, and the Director of Nottingham Institute of Education at Nottingham Trent University. He has taught on range of courses from foundation degrees to doctorates. His publications include books on education policy and doctoral supervision, and his research interests relate to leadership and accountability in education, as well as the principles and practice of pedagogy.

Matt Varley

Matt is the Deputy Director of the Nottingham Institute of Education. He develops collaborative partnerships with trusts, schools, colleges and other settings, in an ambition to develop professionals, reduce inequality, and expand our knowledge through research. He was a co-author of the DfE's evaluation of Teaching Schools. Matt teaches and supervises students on our MA course.

Sam Williams

Sam is a Research Assistant in NTU's School of Social Sciences. He has carried out research on a range of projects, including an investigation of the education to employment transition in former coalfield areas, and an international comparison of the motivations of trainee teachers.

Contributions

Chris Rolph: Conceptualisation, methodology, data analysis, writing.

Matt Varley: Conceptualisation, reviewing and editing.

Sam Williams: Data collection, reviewing and editing.

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Executive summary

Introduction

1. Grit Breakthrough Programmes aim to provide a “tough and uncompromising” approach to personal development for young people and adults to break through self-limiting beliefs in order to unlock their full potential. In 2022 Grit began to work with Local Authority (LA) teams, to challenge and change the notion that social workers have “historically operated in a climate of fear which has created risk-averse mindsets and inhibited social workers from using their intuition and placing relationships at the heart of what they do”; this evaluation aims to test the extent to which this might have been achieved.

2. Grit programmes are intentionally challenging and demanding. They aim to develop a sense of agency, along with a balanced awareness of responsibility. Self-expression and self esteem are seen as key, within an understanding of relationships and community. A long history of working with young people and the adults that support them is now complemented by work with LA Children’s Services teams.

3. This evaluation briefly examines the extent to which Grit programmes might support Signs of Safety, an internationally recognised child-centred safeguarding approach that aims to develop system level change in which compliance culture is replaced with a learning culture.

4. The evaluation investigates the extent to which Grit helps to create and maintain a relationship-based paradigm shift, looking in particular at how it impacts on the mindsets and behaviours of participants working at a variety of levels within the LA, as reported by the participants themselves. The sample includes 30 individuals working across 3 different LAs.

5. Interviews were undertaken shortly after initial training, and then again up to a year later, in an attempt to establish any lasting effects of the training, and to understand how embedded any changes had become.

Summary of findings

6. Participants often felt ill-informed about the nature and purpose of the Grit training. This caused some people to feel apprehensive about the training, and there are some suggestions that as a result some people did not attend or engage. However, most of those that did were pleasantly surprised by the training.

7. It was common for people to refer to those in their teams that had not had the benefit of Grit training, with an implied or explicit suggestion that it would have been better if everyone had taken part. There was an equally strong feeling that ongoing refreshers, “check-ins” or self-generated Grit conversations were beneficial; some participants had autonomously arranged for these within their teams.

8. In one LA there was some discomfort over the time needed for Grit training and the lack of obvious direct impact on practice, balanced against a heavy workload. This may have been due to the specific circumstances of that Authority and/or the compulsory nature of the training. This view was not reflected in the other LAs.

9. Participants commonly identified ways in which the training was challenging, and continued to challenge their thinking and practice. For most this was long-lasting; a small minority stated that it had made little difference to their work. Some said that because they were a close and effective team anyway, Grit had little effect.

10. Change on an individual level, in a range of guises, was very clearly the strongest theme to emerge from the evaluation. People talked generally about how they now had a new “toolkit” for their work, suggesting that having a better understanding of themselves and how they think and work was liberating and transformational. For some people this change extended beyond their work and brought benefits to their home and personal lives as well.

11. Those in leadership roles explained that Grit had changed the way that they led others. Without prompting, team members also noted that the way their leaders worked had changed, and that they felt more valued and better understood.

12. Grit training clearly enabled people to see things differently, which in turn gave them a much better understanding of someone else’s point of view. Participants identified how this had improved the work vertically and horizontally within their teams, as well as the front-line conversations with young people and families. For some

participants this drove home the importance of relationships in social work, when previously they might have been more driven by a target-based culture.

13. Good communications were seen to be important, and it was felt that Grit provided mechanisms to both hear and say things more clearly in a variety of situations. Participants felt that Grit gave them tools to maintain challenge within conversations without sacrificing the underlying relationships. This gave people more confidence in their work.

14. Greater confidence allowed people to tackle difficult situations with clients, and also in some cases to have the courage to speak up in team situations. Several respondents talked about the confidence to apply for promoted posts, others to challenge established ways of working, and some felt more able to advocate on behalf of their clients. Increased confidence was linked to a greater sense of personal agency.

15. A very specific concept that commonly arose was the use of internal conversations to support confidence and self-motivation. Similarly people talked about “changing the conversation”: either in terms of choosing a different personal track; or in terms of changing the direction of an actual conversation with others.

16. Grit enabled people to see that they needed to invest time in themselves if they were to work effectively. In one LA some respondents felt that their work did not allow for this, but most recognised that time spent on their own wellbeing was a good investment. Some noted that their managers now allowed them to have time for this.

17. Most of the participants in this study felt that the culture within their organisation had improved as a result of the Grit training. They put this down to improved relationships, both within the service and also with clients. They identified increased trust within the organisation and between teams, leading to greater openness and a renewed common sense of purpose. Morale or team spirit was improved, though there remained concerns about how long this effect would last, and the mitigating effect of colleagues who had not taken part in Grit. Generally people felt that the service they offered was better than prior to the training.

18. Two of the LAs studied use Signs of Safety to a greater or lesser degree. Most participants could see that Grit at least linked to this,

with many able to articulate how Grit gave them more tools to use within the Signs of Safety framework. For others this link was confused.

Conclusions

19. This evaluation suggests that Grit training can lead to a qualitative improvement in the work done by Local Authority social work teams and associated agencies.

20. Change appears to be sustained over the medium term (~18 months) but can be better maintained with regular refreshers for participants. These may be arranged autonomously by the participants themselves.

21. Systemic or cultural change is mediated through the actions and behaviours of individuals who have been challenged and changed by the Grit training.

22. This applies at two distinct levels: at the front line, where Grit supports challenging conversations, based on strong relationships with young people and families; and within the organisation where Grit supports openness and honesty in professional relationships.

23. In the second case this can generate a ripple effect such that the impact of Grit training extends to the wider team, beyond those individuals who took part in the training.

24. On the front line, social workers say they are more confident, more people-focused, and consequently more effective than they were before Grit.

25. Grit programmes can potentially support Signs of Safety where this is used, but the link between the two is not explicit enough for all practitioners to understand.

1. Introduction

26. Grit Breakthrough Programmes aim to provide a “tough and uncompromising” approach to personal development for young people and adults to break through self-limiting beliefs in order to unlock their full potential. In 2020 Grit won funding from the Porticus Foundation to design and develop replicable Grit interventions to transform the culture of Local Authority (LA) teams, specifically those implementing Signs of Safety safeguarding models. In 2021 Nottingham Institute of Education (NIOE) at Nottingham Trent University won a contract to evaluate the efficacy of Grit interventions in a small number of LAs over 2022 and 2023. The ambition of Grit was to challenge and change the notion that social work teams have “historically operated in a climate of fear which has created risk-averse mindsets and inhibited social workers from using their intuition and placing relationships at the heart of what they do” (Grit, evaluation specification); this evaluation aims to test the extent to which this might have been achieved.

1.1 Grit Breakthrough Programmes

27. Grit programmes are intentionally challenging and demanding, using intensive group workshops and individual coaching to transform the way participants see themselves and the world. They aim to uncover and break through self-imposed limitations, building confidence and resilience using experienced coaches and facilitators. A sense of agency is developed, along with a balanced awareness of responsibility, and self-expression and self esteem are seen as key, within an understanding of relationships and community.

28. Grit have worked with young people and adults for over 30 years in a range of settings, from conflict areas, such as Kosovo and Belfast, to young offenders’ institutions, schools and universities. Working with social work teams in LAs is a later development that builds on the principles of working in partnership with organisations rather than seeing them as commercial clients. The premise is to move beyond deficit mindsets to embrace people’s existing talents, passions and networks to bring about changes in lives and communities.

1.2 Signs of Safety

29. Signs of Safety is a child-centred safeguarding approach that aims to develop system level change in which compliance culture is replaced with a learning culture. Developed over 25 years ago in Western Australia, the approach has been widely adopted in Australasia, as well as in Europe, North America and Japan. It has been subject to range of evaluations, including some in the UK commissioned by the NSPCC (Bunn, 2013) and DfE (Baginsky et al., 2017). Other prominent analyses of UK implementations exist (Monro et al.'s action research project, 2016 and 2020; and Sheehan et al., 2018). Baginsky et al., (2019) provide a helpful summary of international evaluations of Signs of Safety up to 2019.

30. This evaluation does not examine the effectiveness or otherwise of Signs of Safety, nor the success of its implementation. Initial conversations with LAs indicated that the ways in which Signs of Safety has been used in England are varied, and the extent to which the approach is embedded differs significantly between organisations. Furthermore, some of the LAs which employ a Grit approach do not use Signs of Safety at all. Where Grit participants do use Signs of Safety in their practice this evaluation asks if and how Grit training might have complemented this.

1.3 NIoE evaluation

31. The evaluation brief was to examine the extent to which Grit helps to create and maintain a relationship-based paradigm shift, looking in particular at how it impacts on the mindsets and behaviours of participants working at a variety of levels within the LA. LA Children's Services are subject to inspection by the regulator, Ofsted, so, where relevant, reference is made to the Ofsted framework (updated April 2024).

32. Grit already collect significant qualitative and quantitative data regarding their training, including:

- Attitudinal surveys before and after training;
- Follow-up surveys several months after training;
- Data regarding the characteristics of their participants;
- Engagement and feedback data relating to the training workshops.

33. This NIoE evaluation aims to complement what Grit already know about their training, by providing insight into any affective,

behavioural and procedural differences that are prompted by the training. This is assessed via self-reporting of participants at an early stage of the training, and again after a longer period of time in order to gain an insight into any lasting change. There is the potential for Grit to triangulate findings with their own data to provide a strong rationale for future developments of the work.

34. The evaluation is a qualitative study, based on the views of practitioners, middle and senior leaders within LAs. It makes no attempt to link any changes in the statistics of outcomes for young people and families with the impact of Grit training on a relatively small number of people within the LA. Quantification of cause and effect would require studies over a much longer period of time, involving much larger samples; even so, the multivariate factors in an organisation as large and complex as a Local Authority would severely challenge the integrity of such a study.

2. Methodology

35. The evaluation design was based on a two-stage process that explored the perceptions of Grit participants shortly after their initial training, and then again after a longer time had passed. Views were sought through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, using questions that were deliberately broad in order to enable participants to respond in line with their own views and experiences, rather than seeking responses according to pre-determined criteria. Two exceptions to this approach were questions relating to Signs of Safety (where this was used by an LA), and a final question to ask whether participants had noted a cultural shift in their organisation.

2.1 Sample

2.1.1 Local Authorities

36. Evaluators were given access to Grit training in 3 LAs which had very different characteristics:

- **LA X** is a London borough serving a population of about 200,000 people. Grit training involved a large number of members of staff in the Children's Services team, from front-line workers to senior leaders.
- **LA Y** is an established unitary authority which serves a population of approximately 140,000 people. Participants in the Grit training were mainly senior leaders.
- **LA Z** is a newly established unitary authority which, at the time of Grit training, was undergoing significant restructuring and modelling. Grit participants were drawn from a range of services and worked at a variety of levels within the authority and partners who worked with the authority in a Community Safety Partnership.

37. The Signs of Safety approach is embedded within LAs X and Y only.

2.1.2 Individuals

38. A total of 30 individuals agreed to be involved in the evaluation (18 from LA X, and 6 each from LAs Y and Z). They took part in focus

groups, individual interviews, or both. A range of roles were represented, including front-line social workers, team leaders and senior managers. Some participants held unique individual roles; these included the head of a virtual school, a service leader and an elected member.

39. Because of varying structures and nomenclature within the 3 LAs, and to maintain anonymity, for evaluation purposes participants' responses are labelled at three levels: front-line workers; middle leaders; senior leaders.

2.2 Evaluation timelines

40. There were inevitable differences between the 3 LAs, but training and data collection for the evaluation followed the approximate timeline in Fig 1, spread across the calendar years 2022-2023. The Grit training model begins with 3 day-long workshops. These are followed up with further workshops after intervals of about 5 and 8 months, though exact timings were dependent upon the specific logistical and practical demands of each LA. For the purposes of evaluation, researchers attended some of the initial workshops (as observers) in order to better understand the nature of the Grit training. Time was spent with the leaders within each LA who had commissioned the Grit training so that their particular contexts could be properly appreciated.

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12-18
Training	Initial workshops (3 days)					Follow up session		Follow up session				
Evaluation	Establish context						Phase 1 data collection					Phase 2 data collection

Fig 1: Approximate timeline for training and evaluation

41. Phase 1 data collection consisted of a mixture of 1:1 interviews and focus groups, in order to include as many participants as possible. In phase 2 only 1:1 interviews were used. This was to ensure that participants' views and ideas were spontaneous and individual: it was important to try to test whether Grit principles were embedded in individuals' practice and thinking. Use of focus groups at this stage would have allowed for participants to influence one another's responses, and to be reminded of concepts that they might otherwise have forgotten.

2.3 Evaluation interviews

42. Although researchers met participants face to face at the initial workshops, for pragmatic reasons interviews and focus groups were carried out online using MS Teams. All were recorded, and the Teams facility for transcription provided a first approximation to a written record of the conversations. In general, interviews lasted up to about 60 minutes—as they were led by participant responses there was significant variation in this regard.

43. Interviewees appeared to speak freely about their experiences in both phases of the evaluation research. They seemed to have confidence in the guarantee of anonymity and were not afraid to voice criticisms on occasion. Although the relationship with NIOE had been explained at the beginning of their training, several participants seemed to confuse researchers with the Grit team, sometimes offering feedback on the training process rather than discussing its impact.

2.4 Data analysis

44. Transcripts of interviews and focus groups were analysed using a simplified form of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2022). Codes were devised on the basis of participants' interview responses (inductive category formation) and refined and grouped in order to achieve an "authentic description without bias". Quantitative analysis of the frequency of codes was not attempted for two reasons: to do this accurately and with confidence would require a more detailed coding process than time allowed for; and simply counting codes does not give the nuanced understanding of participants' contexts and experiences.

45. Notwithstanding the decision not to carry out any quantitative analysis of the codes, it is nonetheless apparent (and to be expected) that some ideas arise much more often than others. Our analysis therefore allows for reflections on the relative incidence of codes in terms of how often they were mentioned in conversations or by individuals (but not in terms of how often each individual may have surfaced the ideas).

46. Analytical codes were used as convenient labels with which to associate various ideas and concepts expressed in the focus groups and interviews. No importance should be given to the names of the codes themselves and these should not be interpreted as anything other than a text label. Consequently this report will avoid using the names of the codes as far as possible.

2.5 Ethics

47. The evaluation was carried out according to the standards of the British educational Research Association's ethical guidance for educational research (4th edition, BERA 2018). Participation in the evaluation was entirely voluntary and participants could withdraw at any stage in the process: some who took part in phase 1 of the evaluation declined to take part in phase 2. All of the information collected during the focus groups and interviews was held securely by the evaluation team and none of this raw data was shared with either the employing Local Authorities or colleagues at Grit.

48. Anonymity is maintained in all reporting processes. Consequently quotations may be attributed to either a LA or a participant's managerial level (front-line/middle leader/senior leader) but not to individual roles which might permit identities to be determined. However, unless there is a need to understand someone's relative position in the organisation, quotations in this report (in pink) are not linked to managerial level.

2.6 Findings

49. Sections 3-5 detail the overarching themes arising from the evaluation. In sections 3 and 4 we examine two themes that were generated inductively by the ideas emerging from the participants themselves, without prompting. The first of these (Section 3) relates to reflections on the training itself. Strictly this falls outside of the bounds of the evaluation of the impact of the training, but a discussion is included because it was a common theme in participants' responses, and because it may be relevant and useful to Grit in the ongoing work with LAs. It may have an impact on how Grit is delivered in future, which in turn could affect the efficacy of the training.

50. Section 4 relates to personal change, which was the strongest of the themes arising from the 31 conversations. Personal change was mentioned as a generic impact on people, but was also explained and exemplified through a large number of specific contexts, usually, but not always, work situations. In the presentation of findings these examples are rarely included because they could compromise the anonymity of participants or those they work with.

51. Specific questions were asked about the impact of Grit on the organisation's culture, and, where relevant, the relationship with Signs of Safety; findings from this deductive approach are discussed

separately in sections 5 and 6.

2.7 Dataset

52. In total 30 individuals took part in the evaluation across the 3 LAs. Phase 1 included 6 focus groups and 12 individual interviews. Phase 2 was made up of 13 interviews—so 13 people took part in both phases (everyone who was involved in phase 2 had already taken part in phase 1). The total dataset therefore comprised transcriptions of 31 conversations in all.

3. Training

3.1 Initial training

53.. Comments regarding the training itself were mainly limited to the initial 3-day workshops. Participants often felt they had a poor understanding of what to expect from the training session, although most noted that some information had been provided beforehand. Grit aim to give all participants a written overview and an individual phone call prior to the training, so it is not clear whether this happened in all cases. The comments in this section are all from phase 1 interviews or focus groups.

"We had no information about it other than the little bit that's on your website."

"I went into the first session, not knowing what to expect basically although I had had the pre-meetings."

"I don't think there was a lot of information people really knew what the course was before they did it, which why there was a lot of tension. Nobody really knew what it was, what they were doing, why they were there, what the purpose was. "

54. Some participants felt that information was deliberately withheld.

"It's like Freemasonry. If you don't really know what's entailed, it's secret. And I think the secrets made it not appealing."

"And it was almost at times like it felt and I know it wasn't the case, it was kind of being kept a bit of a secret in a way was like this secret recipe."

55. This reported lack of knowledge led to a nervousness, which in some cases was compounded by the challenging nature of the training sessions.

"We didn't know what it was going to be like and that first day I think was very uncomfortable and I think it took us out of our comfort zone."

56. A small number of participants felt that the combination of lack of foreknowledge and then challenging training would put people off attending, and in one case it was suggested that people dropped out of the training at an early stage.

“Not telling people on the opening day what the course would entail, I think was a problem as well. I think they should have just said we're gonna be talking about different ways to think. ... Nobody had any idea.”

“And that's why a lot of people were put off, I think, because they didn't know what they were coming back into.”

“So because of that, people that attended the initial day didn't attend the three days and that was the word on the street, so to speak. That's what I heard. I wasn't that enamoured about coming back.”

57. It was much more common for participants, even if they felt unsure about the contents and nature of the training, to express pleasant surprise. Most recognised that the training intentionally took them out of their comfort zone but then had positive benefits, with many respondents suggesting that they had needed to maintain an open mind regarding the process, plus a certain amount of patience or resilience to stick with it. Some were critical of colleagues who they felt were less open minded and therefore unable to benefit from the training.

“And you're like, oh, what's it gonna be like and then it was just so inspirational and eye opening.”

“I was open minded. I didn't know what to expect.”

“Anyone who says, oh, Grit training is no good, did not help me. And then the question we have to ask that person, did you attend the training wanting to learn, wanting to engage, wanting to change? ... They should question themselves. They should analyse themselves. They should evaluate themselves. Did you want to learn? Did you come in to take information, to develop yourself?”

“We were open minded. We wanted to take information. We were attending the training wanting to know what is there.”

"We did get to know some people a lot better and a lot quicker than we would have done if we'd done sort of standard team building stuff."

58. Finally there were a very small number of comments that demonstrated that some participants not only did not understand the nature of the Grit training, but also doubted the value it might be able to bring to the individuals or the organisation.

"I would have liked it to be more focused around how people whose work involves young people, how they will engage with those young people in future. It seemed to me to be a little bit more introverted than that, a bit more about us as individuals than about good practice with dealing with young people. That's what I would have liked to have seen."

59. Contrasting with this there was another, equally small, set of responses identifying specific work practices that had changed as a result of the Grit training.

"I recall when I started working here I used to struggle to sleep at times I was. I'd dream about those challenging cases you know. But no, I don't do that any more, because I have actually structured a very systematic way that is so efficient."

"I should have mentioned earlier what Grit taught me. And I think one of the things I actually did stop was making lists. I had this habit of making a list of things I needed to do in the day, front and back, and I'd look at it and I'll be like no, I haven't done this. And I put myself under so much pressure. I stopped that. They said you don't need to do that."

3.2 Team coverage

60. Several participants expressed concern that some members of their team had not taken part in the training, either through choice or because they couldn't (for example, in some cases reference was made to colleagues new to the service). This prompted a disappointment that the impact was not as great as it might have been. Clearly some participants felt so positively moved by Grit training that they tried to pass some of it on to absent colleagues, though the nature of the training made this very difficult in practice.

"I'm also wondering about people who didn't attend the training because we have, like, a cohort of people who never attended the training. And also we have some new staff ... So we have this group

same service and we want the same results. We work with same young people with similar needs. So are they gonna be? How are they going to benefit from this? Because there is no point, some people benefiting and working a certain way while other people did it, attend the training and they don't know what we're on about."

"So people have joined our team later, or people that couldn't be there at the time we have disseminated the Grit information that they clearly haven't been Gritted, but they've got some understanding. So we felt that we could still use the terminology and people understand, you know, the menu and the meal because we've talked about it: we've gone through different sections and tried to explain our words."

"I would say that it is a difficult thing to explain to people who weren't there because it was so like experiential. So you know you can talk to people about some of the concepts, but actually it doesn't work so well when you're just sort of stating that, explain it to people without them actually being in the training."

3.3 Ongoing refresher training

61. Several participants talked about the potential for further refresher training. They felt that momentum could be lost unless there are frequent opportunities to continue the conversations that were begun in the Grit sessions. Others wanted a resource which they could refer to at a later date.

"I don't know how other people will say, but for me it's very good training that has to be ongoing ... I think once in a while, [they] need to bring it back again and then we do it. And even if it's not three days training, maybe one day training, a review of Grit training, once, once a year, once every two, twice a year, I don't know."

"I mean, if there was some form of structure or handout or course booklet that just gives us an overview. It would really remind me of some of the things that I haven't retained as well as other things."

62. Some participants had taken this idea into their own hands, organising regular catch-up meetings with fellow participants. In one LA, a senior manager arranged for participants to be able to meet quarterly for action learning sets as well as informal meetings to catch up with one another. Another middle leader talked about the "Grit fam" (family) which now check in with one another on a regular basis.

of people who completely oblivious to what Grit aids. So are there going to be any arrangements for them because we all work under the same service and we want the same results. We work with same

"I'm not quite sure that this was ever the outcome that was intended for Grit, but when you see our Grit fam, which we are, you end up hugging them, even if it's weird, it's just like, oh, it's just like, no, you just feel this real sort of sense of connection.

"... This is why we thought, you know what? We can't just let this go off into the sunset. We need to really, sort of, keep it going, and develop it as best as what we can and make sure that everyone's alright."

63. Not everyone felt they had the autonomy to be able to ensure that the Grit conversations continued: they remained passive even though they felt there would be benefits in continuing the conversations.

"It would just be nice to be able to kind of keep that conversation going. Really it seems to have gone quite quiet and I know from the work that I do with my team in terms of Signs of Safety that the only way you keep something going is to keep it fresh in conversation."

3.4 Workload issues

64. Although several participants raised issues of workload, these were, with only one exception, all from the same LA. This theme may therefore be quite specific to that particular context, and is certainly not reflected across all of our participants.

65. Comments about the compulsory nature of the training within this LA might also explain some of the negativity, in comparison with the other two LAs where engagement with Grit appeared to be voluntary: if people have chosen to take part in a training programme they are possibly more likely to regard it positively than if they feel they are under an obligation to take part.

66. Those participants that complained about workload suggested that although Grit training had encouraged them to make time for themselves, the oppressive workload did not allow for this to happen. People talked about feeling tired and unwell but not being able to take time off, completing work in their own time in the evenings and at weekends. Within this context, the activities of Grit felt like an indulgence.

"We talk about personal growth and learn to challenge your conversation for yourself. But the case load, the high level of work, the speed where you have to learn, and how you have to work doesn't give you the time to. Sometimes you want to treat yourself. You wanna help yourself. You wanna take time off, but you can't."

67. Some participants in this LA were critical of leadership (at all levels) which they felt was preventing them from applying lessons learnt in Grit. These views were limited to a very small number of people and are at odds with those expressed by most participants, even from the same LA. They also clearly laid blame for not continuing with Grit principles at the door of other people, even though these same respondents talked about how Grit had given them confidence in their own agency.

"It hasn't changed much. We made decisions. Oh, great training. We're gonna do this. We're gonna do that. It never came to materialise."

[Q: As an organisation, it's not done as much as it could have done?]
"Oh no, I don't think so. I don't think so. We don't even talk about it in our team meeting. I was thinking that we're gonna talk about it in our team meeting. We're gonna have time in centre meetings. We're gonna have time to reflect on it. We're gonna have time for it. There's nothing like that."

68. In this same LA there was also a view that the high workload demands might have prevented colleagues from attending the training, as they would have too much work to catch up on afterwards and could not put urgent or pressing issues on hold while they attended training.

"I had so much work to do. Three whole days in a row I think is too much for people in our line of work. That's too much, ... if it was one day, three weeks in a row that would be fine. But three days is just too much and that's why again, why a lot of people didn't attend the three day course."

3.5 Challenge

69. Participants often talked about the personal challenges that they were faced with in the training sessions. This meant that, although they usually felt they had benefited from the training, they didn't always find it enjoyable. Part of the challenge related to the openness that was demanded of participants, which made it potentially difficult

in two ways: the honesty to speak openly about one's own feelings; and the awkwardness of dealing with professional colleagues who were speaking very frankly and openly themselves.

"And I actually found Grit really, really very challenging."

70. This last comment about the power of the training was echoed by several other participants, all of whom stated that the real power of the training was to change the way they viewed themselves, and thereby to change their behaviour.

"Some of the time I felt like I was getting information about people that they wouldn't have chosen to share with me so early on. And that made me feel privileged on the one hand, but also sometimes uncomfortable."

"I think every everything that we did really challenged us in some way to think deeper, to explore further, and you know, explain where we were coming from."

"And it was really challenging I found. Definitely challenging, but I think in terms of kind of team building, really powerful. Really, really powerful."

4. Personal change

71. Individual or personal change was by far the strongest theme to be identified in this evaluation. It was mentioned by almost every individual, and most respondents went into some detail to explain precisely how they and their practice had been changed by the training. These details are discussed under sub-themes in sections 4.2-4.7 below.

4.1 General comments

72. Lots of participants talked about general changes that the Grit training had brought about, usually in relation to how they felt about their work. They talked of a renewed zest for their work, greater calmness in the face of pressure, and new ways of approaching problems in their work. It was clear that many respondents felt they understood themselves better and carried a self-awareness into the workplace. Some participants used words like liberating, and several said they had been transformed by the experience.

“Overall, I do think that Grit as a three day training was excellent, because you know I definitely had a transformational experience.”

“And for me in terms of myself, I've really been able to kind of understand some of my own kind of past experiences, and how that affects me, and how I bring that into my work, and how I see things through my own lens, and how I may liken certain scenarios with my work too.”

“It's very refreshing because you feel liberated by some of the emotions that you've carried before you even opened your mouth in a conversation, in a dialogue. You feel like you've thrown all of that off, so you're starting with a fresh perspective. And so you're not carrying that weight and I think that really helps, even if it's it only helps me.”

“I feel like I've got a lot more a bigger toolkit to be able to get through life and relationships now.”

73. Often the participants made reference to specific metaphors and models that had been used in the training, such as the grey area between yes and no, viewing things through different personal lenses, or the idea of being on fixed train tracks. Most commonly they talked about the inner conversations they had with themselves; this is picked up in section 4.6 below.

74. Some responses showed that the training had gone beyond professional practices, and helped participants to manage busy personal lives as well. Some talked about how their relationships with partners and family members had changed. There were also comments about how general work practices had changed, above and beyond the specifics of working with families and young people. The changing practice of individuals obviously contributes to institutional and cultural change discussed in the sections below.

*"It also helped me to actually build in how to balance my family life and this job, because, I mean this job is really, really time demanding, and [description of personal home circumstances]. ...
As I said, the whole overarching theme of resilience has kind of permeated various facets of my life."*

"I think maybe I don't always actively listen to someone and I might get a bit frustrated if someone isn't sort of moving as quickly as what I am. So I think I probably sit and listen to my husband, maybe, a bit more. And my elderly parents that live with me and try and be a bit more in the moment for them."

"I notice that I'm better when I meet people in person. So I tend to come to the office a lot more now, especially when I when I'm dealing with new staff. And I spent time with them. So, you know, we say time is also important. So we're not rushing into anything. And I think that's worked out to be a good, good strategy."

"I kind of feel a lot of what I've gained from Grit has been on a personal level that's intrinsic to me. That's obviously then reflected in my work and how I am at work."

75. Some leaders said that they now had a better understanding of how others viewed them, and of the effects their own behaviour had. They were more likely to hold themselves accountable for their own actions, and to apologise if they got something wrong. Again, these personal changes are important in changing organisational culture.

"I think people find me a bit difficult to read. And it's made me more conscious that I may be projecting that impression unintentionally."

"It challenged me also, because I always thought I was quite good at sort of picking up a bit of emotional intelligence with people and, being a [leader role], I think that's sort of a compassionate type style of leadership and things, but actually Grit made me question that. Because actually I don't think I was maybe that good at listening, and things which I thought I wasn't too bad at. So it made me reflect on my skills."

"I've written apologies. When I've had a chance to reflect and think, that wasn't in connection to what I said I was going to do and how I was going to be like. So that's been very meaningful for me and now I think what's helped is: hold myself accountable. I think the Grit has helped me recognise how I really want to be in my leadership role."

76. A second theme for leaders that was repeated several times was a greater peace about actions, decisions and relationships with their teams. The Grit training seemed to give them a confidence in their own work, and helped them to let go of those aspects of other people's lives which they could have no control over.

"So I'm a fixer and like to fix everybody and fix things and you know, part of that leadership role I think that's really helped within my team. Again, similar to what I described with you know, personal relationships, you can feel more at ease just to steer your ship where you need to steer it with absolute compassion for your sailors on board. But you can only control what you can control, and you can't control the dialogue in their head. And I think that has really helped me focus more on what I need to focus on, instead of all the other woolly stuff that I perhaps used to worry about."

4.2 Seeing things differently

77. Participants often talked about how the Grit training had helped them to see things differently. Sometimes this was specifically in relation to understanding the point of view of someone else—this is discussed in section 4.3. More generally, people talked about how the training had helped them to think differently and how to take a different perspective on issues at hand. This was not universally interpreted as a good thing—trying to see things differently inevitably creates conflict with accepted practice and common habits.

Participants often talked about using different lenses to look at the

situations they found themselves in.

“What I think they managed to do immensely is to allow me to see things differently.”

“It was hard to explain when my wife asked what did you learn? That was really difficult, to say what I'd learned. All I could say is like, you know, we were learning about thinking differently. That was all I could say.”

“But I suppose it made me think differently by being in the unknown and also trying to think differently about situations, and how I could do things differently for the people that we work with.”

“I always like to think that I, you know, I look at things from a different point of view. I think it's sort of reminded me why that's important.”

“Looking at things differently and trying to kind of be more authentic, I suppose, and I guess that probably was the biggest challenge for me because I have a work mode and my personal, you know, activities, or things that are impacting on me.”

“But actually, if you apply a different lens, we can work differently with families. You know, it doesn't cost anything more to actually work in a more relational way or in a more strength-based way than it does not to, if that makes sense.”

78. Sometimes the ability to see things differently was framed as understanding the work and role in a different way—which in turn made it more manageable or less stressful. Participants gave very specific examples of this, in their work with young people, families and other agencies or departments within their own organisation. The common factor in these comments was the importance of seeing the actual problem that needed to be addressed through the multitude of other priorities and pressure.

“This program really helps you think about focusing on: the problem is the problem. And you're there to guide them through with good intentions, with positive intentions et cetera et cetera, but rather than it being all consuming it gives you perspective.”

“It's understanding the part you play in that situation, the part you play in that problem, however not taking ownership for the problem because in most cases it's collective, and quite often as professionals

you can take things away with you and take home ownership for them, when actually the only thing that you do of ownership for is your own actions.”

“It really has helped to remind me—I know this already—but it reinforced, you know, that idea of slowing your thinking, slowing your pace, so that you can slow your thinking so that you can get a deeper understanding and insight and awareness and how critical that is. We work in an incredibly busy environment and we're fire engines. A lot of the time we're dealing with a lot of crises so to be in a space where there was time to really think very deeply about different areas, it's very, very helpful, and being very reflective, that opportunity to be very reflective, I found very impactful.”

“The exercises we did: the one with the box you know, it had the nine dots—that was brilliant because that was literally thinking outside the box, and I do like the fact that, you know, we have to problem solve in this job quite a lot. We have to see a problem and find a solution and sometimes the solution's not the easiest obvious thing. So it has reminded me that when you sort of get to a crux in a situation there will be an answer. So in that way, yeah, it's helped me to continue that belief that you just need to. There will be an answer. You might not see it straight away.”

“I think it gives us a number of things to think about, not just for myself, but equally as well. Thinking about the team that I manage and how we can think about and do things differently. It's a bit of a that, if you see your problem differently, you see a different problem, or you see a situation differently. You can see it, and you can see the situation differently. “

4.3 Understanding others

79. A specific and common example of seeing things differently was the ability to understand others better. This might have been described in terms of increased empathy, or simply a recognition that others might have a different view or interpretation of events, or that their context and background might cause them to see things in a different way. For some this introduced more fairness into their work: a recognition that a lack of empathy might lead to unsympathetic or unjust decisions and actions. This applied to professional relationships within the service, as well as to the young people and families which the participants work with.

"It allowed me to be more conscious about the people that I'm working with. It made me understand them even better. You know, I believe if you do understand yourself very well, you get to understand other people even better."

"So it's an it's an awareness of you as a person, and being also able to realize that other people have had their own life experiences, so that in your interaction you're conscious of how life experiences shape us into who we are."

"In the sense that now I can understand certain behaviours better. I'm not saying I'm a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but all I'm saying is that I can understand why this particular person is behaving that way."

"Thinking about other people's perspective all the time, I mean, I use the word lens so much more now than I ever did before, but I just think it's just really it. It just really has helped me every time I'm communicating with somebody to be thinking, this is how I'm viewing the situation. How are they viewing it? Trying to think about how they're viewing this situation, and communicating in a way that asks those questions rather than making assumptions."

"I think I've changed the way I manage. So rather than being like, oh this is what's wrong and this is a bit like OK, so this is what's right and wrong. But then this is ... trying to, I guess, manage different people in different ways because their view of the world is different. If that makes sense."

80. Understanding others was seen to be very different from some of the professional practices prior to Grit. Some participants talked about particular targets which needed to be achieved, and how the need to do this might have taken precedence over a proper understanding of people and their situations. For some, this was seen as a significant and profound change.

"I guess it's just trying to give people a fair chance, and there's so many policies and procedures, even like eviction policies and things where it's sort of three strikes and you're out, that aren't really fair to the reasons why someone might be behaving in a certain way."

"All the leadership things that in the [service] were all very sort of transactional, you know, assessing, planning, doing, evaluating all

that sort of thing. But actually I feel Grit is little bit more sort of compassionate. It's a bit more person focused, cause it's very much, it has got the context of the issue, but actually it's very much about the people."

"The language from the most senior people, senior managers I'm talking about: I believe that Grit has helped them too, to tone down a little bit, because although they want everything to turn green they still remind us not to overwork and have time for ourselves and all those kind of things. We have a performance indicators that we have to turn everything into green."

"You know we should not really, you know, make any assumptions wherever we come from that everyone has to fit in with our expectation, with our way of looking at the world or looking at an issue, and so on. So I think it was very, very deep, and I think the heaviness was there."

4.4 Communication

81. The move from transactional to relational interactions supported improved conversations, with outcomes for families and young people restored to the central purpose.

"Being prescriptive, the questions of we've got to ask as part of a legal document, you know it is about trying to get other information out of people and enticing other information out of people.

You know, we all sort of do this job, for the same reason ultimately, but sometimes it is easy to forget and just having that reminder to take you back to, you know, why we're all sort of doing this job in the first place and just starting these conversations with people and trying to engage with people. "

"You have to have very difficult conversations, but what I find now is that they flow a lot better."

"It's those subtle differences in how you talk to people, and how it makes them feel better and motivates them as well."

82. A better understanding of self and others was seen to be a driver for improved conversations in the workplace, whether on the front line with clients or with colleagues within the organisation. In some cases specific examples were given regarding the changed nature of conversations.

"And this just really supports communication skills, but also looking at other behaviours and also really aiming high; really aiming high and thinking about getting the best outcome for all of the people that we serve. So that includes young people, all of our residents, all of our visitors doing my very, very, very best to get the most out of those conversations that I'm having multiple times a day with agencies, partners, and just using those communication skills as effectively as I possibly can really."

"I think communication has really increased. I think trust really increased in the service and for me personally, I think what I began to learn more about is that relationship between choice, consequences and control."

"Grit is about the conversation and it's about the relational aspects. It's about the awareness."

"We're basically asking people to slow down the thinking so when they are speaking to young people, or when they are speaking to colleagues, they use really plain language, to communicate and use language mindfully. To empower as opposed to put some distance between them and the person they're trying to engage. So if I use social work jargon for instance, I'm instantly disengaging the person because they might not understand what I'm trying to ... communicate. And you just feel too often, it's loaded with power dynamics."

83. There were a number of comments about feeling able to have more challenging conversations, and the fact that Grit had supported clarity in conversations that maintained the challenge without threatening the relationship.

"Grit challenges us to have more challenging conversations and be able to empower young people through the use of challenging conversations, so from what we learn in terms of safety goals and scaling questions within Signs of Safety, we adapt to that within Grit. Break it down with the young person or a family and empower them to identify their own next steps."

"You know, it wasn't a judgmental conversation, but it was quite a blunt conversation, very honest and open. And the way the social workers were commenting that, you know, they couldn't do that before Grit."

"In terms of challenging conversations, we were able to use that kind of goal focused approach and say, well, this was your goal. I didn't set that goal. You set that goal. You said you'd do this. Why didn't you? What happened there? What do you think you could do to, kind of, stop that from happening again? What do you think the influence was there? So, kind of, holding them more accountable, having those challenging conversations. It was easier to do once I understood what we wanted, what the Grit process was, and I mean it. It took a lot of thinking and a lot of planning, but we got there in the end."

84. In some cases there was specificity around using different forms of words or different language, especially in front-line conversations. This often related to use of I/we, or understanding "which sort of yes" might have been implied, and it also included prompting clients to change the way they spoke to add clarity of understanding.

"Something that I'll be thinking about is the real thing of conversation, and using language that is empowering and language that cares."

"Sometimes it's just about, right okay I've described it that way. It's not working. Let's think of different ways of describing the same thing."

"When we're trying to engage new people onto our programme and we're getting that sort of "no" response, we're able to give that a certain amount of language that we didn't give before ... We do quite often go, "I wonder which 'yes', this is"."

"I do think that there is a bit of a shared language that we've shared with the new people. So I've heard people talking about the, yes/yes/yes, for example."

"So we were changing their language. They were speaking. You need to say "I". The "I" we're putting, emphasizing the "I": I will do this; I will do that; I am going to speak with the person. It's not like we will do this, we will do. So we are focusing more on the "I"."

85. The two-way nature of conversations was also noted, with some respondents talking about how they had improved their listening skills, taking more care to be present in the conversation and avoiding the temptation to either let the mind wander or to seek predetermined outcomes.

“So I mean I'm already quite conscious of the way I listen, but I did learn more about my style of listening and also that that wealth of difference between people's sort of listening styles and communication skills. And something that really also has struck me, and stuck with me, is the module we did around yes, yes and yes. And now I listen for it very actively and know the difference.”

“When we listened to people perhaps we're not always focused on that. We always sort of look at the bits we agree and disagree with and know about. And actually what we should be listening for is the other bits and pieces, which are how someone else is thinking differently, and offering a solution that might not be what we agree or disagree, or even think about.”

“One of the real things that struck me, I suppose, was about listening to hear. Rather than listening to respond, and I think I am probably guilty of listening to respond sometimes.”

“And whilst I might be progressing a conversation, it's about listening and reading the person I'm talking to, to see if they're with me or actually they're not with me and I need to step back. To, you know, be in the moment with them so then, when they're ready to move up a step, then I can, you know, pursue the conversation further.”

86. In common with other aspects of the training, improved communication skills were seen as beneficial in wider professional and personal contexts.

“Working with other people that weren't on that training that that practice is still there. With wider people, they won't have a clue that in my head I'm thinking along Grit terms, but I definitely think it's made a difference to my communication.”

4.5 Confidence

87. The development of better communication skills contributed to increased personal confidence in the job. This confidence related both to front-line conversations with clients as well as to internal conversations within the organisation—which might in turn lead to improved internal relationships. As with previous personal developments, improved confidence was also seen as something that could bring benefits outside of the job.

"I would previously have struggled a little bit with the communication side of it and trying to get people to see other perspectives and things like that. But since doing Grit I'm a lot more able to kind of jump into those conversations, rather than thinking am I good enough to have this conversation?"

"I feel like I've got the confidence more to speak to them because some of these are the people that we're dealing with, you know, they're very high up strategically, in the organizational structure. And that before I might have previously thought, oh, I'm too small fry really, to bother them about something, but now I feel like no, no, they're not."

"Confidence. Oh my God. My confidence has gone so high after Grit training."

"Now I feel like I've got the confidence ... because I know where I'm coming from and it's OK."

"I'm starting to do things which previously I wouldn't have done and at work for instance, I used to, when I first started work, I would put [other colleagues] on a pedestal and be a bit like, oh, you know, they're way better than I am. And all this, which isn't true, you know."

"I don't think I would be where I am right now, and I apologise for repeating again, for me it was confidence, and that's what I focused on within Grit and since finishing with Grit, I have gone on to do things and say things and I've made working relationships with [sports club]."

"But definitely I think Grit changed everything for me in that respect because, as I say, I've done everything that I would never have done beforehand."

88. Sometimes participants spoke about bravery rather than confidence, usually in terms of going against the flow within the organisation where there was a need to advocate for the clients. Such advocacy is an important part of the role of front line workers, and would be expected by Ofsted.

"I suppose maybe I think I feel braver. Yeah, I think I feel braver, which for me is great because sometimes I think that you can feel like you perhaps shouldn't always. I don't know. It's not about sharing your opinion, but I think maybe you think that you shouldn't."

"So it's all of that that I was sort of summarizing in my mind, and you're only gonna get that if you're brave enough to be creative, try something different. But with the best intention of love and kindness, and that is really how I set myself up on a day to day basis."

"And so I feel brave and I feel like I'm, I feel like I feel like I'm a stronger advocate."

89. Improved confidence was also seen to reduce stress, because it took away some of the nagging fears that people may have felt in unresolved situations or after long taxing days.

"I think I'm more boundaried and being real about what I can and cannot manage, and I don't see it as before, maybe a failure of my competency about my ability to match if I can't manage. I feel more confident to say so and reach out more for help whereas before you'd probably struggle quietly or work late in tonight or work at weekends. I don't do that anymore. I find if I am struggling I am happy to say I need support."

90. Several people (in LAs X and Z) talked about a very particular example of increased confidence leading to behavioural change: applying for promotions when previously they might not have done. These are difficult to exemplify without compromising anonymity.

"I've always wanted to become a [higher post]. But after Grit training, a position came in for me to apply for [higher post] and I went for it!"

"Going into Grit and coming back, I have developed like the most extreme confidence now and trust me, believe me or not, apply for a [promoted] role. I would never have applied for [promoted] role. ... now I have applied. I sent an e-mail to the [line manager]: I am good, you know, I can do this job. Take me on. Try me. I'm ready for the challenge. Look at Grit. Grit has made me. Even if they don't take me on, I'm not saying 100% they're gonna take me, but at least I've tried."

"And I've got an interview for the [promoted] role, which I wouldn't have ever even dreamed of before. But I was like, why not?"

91. Confidence was linked to a sense of personal empowerment, so people felt they had regained agency and autonomy in their situations.

"I think it was very empowering. I think you know elements of it really empowers one's confidence."

"And so today after Grit I am going for it. I feel so empowered. I'm

like, sending an e-mail. Dear God. Right, let's start at the top!"

Ohh and so much has changed. You know that Grit training empowered me to go for what I really believe in, because of something that I was so scared to do, that I wasn't really thinking I can do it. But after the Grit training I've got so empowered."

"It's really empowering, like genuinely, genuinely empowering, like not just, that's a word that a lot of folks use and means nothing, but it genuinely is, you know. In the wrong hands it could be dangerous."

4.6 Internal conversations

92. The notion of internal conversation was a specific concept from Grit that was repeated by many respondents. Often they gave particular examples of situations when they had used this technique, while at other times it seemed to be more of a general approach to life, relationships and challenging situations. Internal conversations were strongly related to confidence building.

"So I'm trying to have a sort of discussion with myself that internal conversation to stop apologising for being who I am, if that makes sense."

"I'm more comfortable with silence and letting myself talk. Talk to myself. You know when I'm driving, rather than sort of trying to block those thoughts out, I will just have a little chat with myself and now I'm not frightened to do that..."

"And something like that has been massive for me and just being sort of comfortable with my own internal monologue."

"And then I'm sat there in the chair and the whole hand starts to shake when I'm about to go up into this room full of 120 people to run a [-] session. Nobody had any idea, you know, I was gonna do this, and I just had to sort of have a little internal Grit pep talk with myself."

"And a lot of it was also about ourselves and our internal voices and how we frame things by that little critical voice in our heads that says x, y and z."

"And I was struggling to balance, like, my new job and my family life. So, kind of, it's actually helped me. Especially if I remember the one that I say talk, do the conversation. I mean, talk to yourself in the

morning. ... Since then, I always do the talking within me. If I feel things are kicking in and you make me feel like, OK, you can do this."

"But the Grit training about the conversation we have with ourselves was the icing on the cake. I said, "This conversation needs to change. This conversation needs to change. I have to have a different conversation for myself.""

93. The idea of changing the conversation was common, but arose in two different ways: changing one's own internal conversation; and changing the conversation with others, often in a collective sense rather than a specific interaction.

"So obviously Grit was about, you know, changing your internal dialogue and having a different path and all those things."

"If someone was saying something negative in the meeting, we were like, you need to change the conversation."

"Yeah, I think ultimately it is about and enabling other people to see that we can change the conversation. We absolutely can change the conversation, and I think Grit just heightens that in you intensely."

94. In some instances the internal conversation brought to light workplace tensions (see section 3.4), with a sense that the principles of the training did not sit comfortably with the pressure of the workplace. These feelings were limited to only one or two individuals.

"So the reality of it, the theory is, we can come in and learn, and listen to our conversation about this, but in practicality it doesn't really help given the complexity, the vulnerability of young people that I work with. For me just that's just the criticism of it all."

4.7 Time for self

95. Respondents talked about the need to dedicate some time to their own wellbeing. They frequently mentioned the need for internal reflection, and often discussed the need to have a manageable work-life balance. Despite the benefits they articulated, there were still indications of guilt associated with time spent on self.

"That sort of inner criticism that I have with myself quite often, and I guess it gave me the chance to sort of pause and reflect on things like that, on these negative thoughts that I have about what I do."

“And it's so important to me to be able to be my whole self, and I find I thrive and deliver better when I'm able to do that, and I just feel like my memory from Grit is almost like aggressive relief, to be able to

“And it's so important to me to be able to be my whole self, and I find I thrive and deliver better when I'm able to do that, and I just feel like my memory from Grit is almost like aggressive relief, to be able to have that space and that time. I think the time as well, for professionals, it's so, so difficult to get thinking time, and time to work on you, because some people sort of say, I've got other stuff to do, but this has to come first because how can you grow, thrive, do better every day if you're not working on the foundation?”

“I give time to myself. I'm more and more selfish. I put myself first, so that I have all the energy necessary for my kids, a lot.”

“My time is my time. I've got kids and they come, and I come, first. My work, obviously I love my work. I love my kids, and everything. But you know, I switch off. That is something that I really took quite seriously, but I'm still, you know, I'm still struggling.”

“And yeah. And Grit training has helped me to take time out. At first, I was overworking myself all the time and not looking after my own health and my own emotional wellbeing. ... With Grit training I'm able to separate myself from the work as well. You know what I mean? Yeah. So Grit training has helped me in that sense.”

96. Some leaders also recognised a need to give their coworkers time and space for more reflective activity.

“And I've also encouraged my staff to have the same approach. If one of us aren't entirely in that frame of mind and we have the ability to move [meetings] to another day. Then we'll do that. So you know, kind of acknowledging how I feel, or accepting how my staff feel, to know that if we do [activity] whilst we're both feeling this way, we might not get the best.”

“I think we've gotta work hard as a team to keep that going, and spend more time, you know, sort of giving ourselves the time and the space to spend time with each other in a different way, rather than just having a meeting and providing updates.”

“The leadership that I'm doing now is not just looking at myself, but

looking at the people that I'm managing. You're using the social work values to help them. Yeah. So what, like, I did. The Grit training said take time out, reflect, reflection do that. So it's not just me only taking time. I'm making sure that the people I'm supervising, I'm enabling them to take time out. I'm reminding them to pause. I'm enabling them to see the good in them."

4.8 No effect

97. A small minority of participants claimed that the Grit training had no effect on them, either personally or on their practice, and one said that it had made no difference to the team. The response from one individual suggested that the training had come at the wrong stage in their career, while another said that the way they worked was driven by their personality rather than anything Grit had done. Others said they had enjoyed the training but that its effects had not been long lasting.

"And I think that during the Grit spirits was higher. But even when I went to the reflection session the other week, I couldn't remember really what we was doing in Grit. ... I didn't put anything into practice if I'm very honest with you."

"I've never done a course of this nature. It would have been more helpful to me probably 20 years ago than it is now. ... Because, you know, I've had to work this out for the last 20 years. You know, on my own. So, you know, all I'm gonna say is where were you 20 years ago? Just saying."

"That's not something coming from Grit. That's my personality"

"I felt like before Grit, we had a really good work culture anyway. Like it's quite, you know, it's really friendly place to work. ... I wouldn't say it's improved anything because I think we had quite a good team culture anyway."

"In the sessions I'm like, yeah, this is great. And actually when doing the work I'm doing a little crisis management and the Grit just doesn't kind of come into play."

5. Cultural change

98. Participants were asked if and how the culture of their organisation had changed since the Grit training. It was left to them to decide what they understood by “the organisation”, whether that meant their section or department, the local authority itself, or the wide multi-agency teams that work with vulnerable families and young people. Responses largely fell into three groups: relationship changes within the organisation; observable impacts on the operation of the organisation; and effects on the service provided.

99. Apart from the small number of respondents who could perceive no change, detailed in section 4.8, all responses talked about improvements within their service—there were no comments about anything having become worse. Most suggested that they experienced a positive culture within their workplace, but that the Grit training had supported and enabled that to develop further.

“And what I see is people really being sort of inducted into the morale and the feeling of the service and the support that you can get from one another. And you will literally hear people saying openly, publicly, God, I love being in this team. And that’s the people that have been in the team for years, and I think that it’s really good for new starters to hear that. You know, even though the workload is really hard, the work is gruelling, it’s really tough, but actually there’s real joy in it: massive reward, and enormous support from your colleagues.”

5.1 Relationships

100. The nature of the Grit training, which required participants at all levels in the organisation to share some very personal issues with absolute candour, enabled participants to see beyond one another’s roles and job titles. This seems to have cultivated greater openness within the workplace, and better mutual understanding. For many it was also clear that, because the training helped them to think from someone else’s point of view, this greater openness extended beyond those who were able to take part in the training, though there was a clear closeness with other training participants.

"Because we've worked together and we've built up these relationships as part of the Grit, I feel like we are all in it together now, and it isn't just an us and them. There aren't gonna be these boundaries anymore and it just feels, well, like an exciting opportunity really."

"Our working relationship as colleagues has completely, I mean we were good anyway, but now that we've got the Grit training, we can use that to go forward. So we use that in our work. ... It's definitely changed those conversations that we have as colleagues as well."

"What I've realised is that, after training, people engage more and people appreciate each other in the sense that people are more supportive than before."

"I think the sort of relationships have really grown. I feel the trust more and I've received more thanks for my service as well for the things that I do and how I contribute. And I can see the acknowledgement of one another rippling as well, and as well as acknowledging all the incredible things that our children, young people are achieving and how that's being shared more as a village."

"But when I reach out to people I've trained with during the Grit programme, I do feel close to them. You know, I can have a little bit of a banter or they might, you know, come and talk to me about belonging."

"I think working within that you know, it's quite an intimate learning space and we learned a lot, learned about each other and I think that has improved things in terms of interpersonal relations."

"For the vast, vast majority of those people, I now have a completely different relationship, both in my head, and how that transpires in working together."

"And it was very wonderful to hear Ofsted talk, particularly in their feedback around the young adults who said that we are, you know, a real family. And I think Grit really helped us to build on the relationships that we already had, but take it that step further."

"I'm very pleased that we've done it and pleased as a whole. So not just my team in my service, but the leadership team of the whole"

Directorate, I think that it has really and cemented our relationships and understanding of each other, much more, sort of respectful and kind.”

101. A large number of respondents talked about trust that had grown within their teams. It was notable that this was more likely to be mentioned by those with leadership positions; front-line workers tended to talk about trusting relationships with their clients.

“I feel like we've got that trust for the ones that have been part of the Grit to be able to have those conversations and be a bit more honest with each other really.”

“And people understand each other better, I think, and with people understanding each other better. I think it fosters some levels of trust”

“It was a complete contrast to when we started because we were all disjointed everywhere, very individualistic ... not trusting each other, and the perception was people feeling they need to be fixed, that's why Grit was put in. But 3 days down the line and people will be able to reflect on Grit and say OK, this wasn't the case. This this is a good thing for all of us, so it's to repair, the restoration of trust: there was no sinister motives.”

“There's a lot more trust within the group. ... I think Grit has really enabled that kind of trust to develop. And it's just been wonderful to notice really that there is an ease between people internal and even external.”

“If you're asking people to be vulnerable you have to, you know, be brave enough to be vulnerable yourself. So you're kind of modelling a lot of things. That means that you're building trust.”

“Trust. I think that's the key word, really. That trust, that ultimately you want the same outcome.”

“So it doesn't really matter about thresholds because both sides want the same outcome.”

102. This last comment refers to thresholds which, when met, would lead to “effective, proportionate and timely” interventions (Ofsted 2024). It is important to understand that the comment arose in the context of statutory thresholds which may not be the same as the standards which young people and families might have: Grit training

helps the conversation to be robust but not focus on mismatched thresholds; there is no sense that thresholds are ignored.

"Because we can only do so much. We've got our own thresholds that we have to stick to legally. They've got their own threshold. So, as you can imagine, there are very difficult conversations when it comes to some of the people that we work with, especially the young people, especially the care leavers, especially the ones that are coming up to the end of their involvement with social services."

103. Development of trust seemed to have arisen from those aspects of the training where participants had to be very candid with one another. This openness led potential vulnerabilities; participants shared how this openness continued into their working relationships. Again this was more common amongst the middle and senior leader, who felt that their teams are more aware of their humanity.

"I think what Grit helped do is just get us to get to know one another on a slightly different level and it exposes more of your vulnerability. ... You know, I wouldn't normally show my vulnerability in that way."

"When I lead people look at you as invincible. The leader knows it all. The leader has, you know, she deals with it. But people forget that underneath the leader is a human being with the same feelings and same normal responses, yeah, yeah, yeah."

"I suppose it humanizes, humanizes us all, and it actually brings us all to the same playing field actually, that's what it does. There's no power or authority. There it's everyone is on the ground together as it were in the trenches, I suppose."

"And you know, even now, sometimes when we're together, I'll sit and look at someone and just have a recollection of that conversation that, you know, is just very private and secret and confidential. But it just, sort of, made us humanistic to each other in a way. A bit more, maybe, compassionate and kind maybe. So I think our relationships within the leadership team have improved massively. I'm not saying we were fighting or anything, but it was all just very professional. Whereas I think there's some sort of compassion level under there as well now, which connects us."

"I think there was a barrier between people that I think has started to come down and I think people are understanding that we've got shared experience and challenge in the work that we're doing, and

that we're all battling away in our own bits of it, and that, yeah, we're all finding it tough. And there's a shared support that, I guess, it's, you know, we're all human and I think it helped for everyone to see one another's challenges in that sense as human beings."

104. Supporting these observations, some front-line workers mentioned how they had noticed changed behaviours in their managers, and that this had contributed to better working relationships.

"But the other day I was in the office and she put a hand on me. She goes, "[name], how are you? Are you OK?" And I was like, wow. Like I've been here all this time and you've noticed me now! And she was just like, you know, it's just small little changes like that I think helped build that human side."

"Speaking personally about, you know, my relationship with certain senior managers. ... This one particular person, ... I think now our relationship has greatly improved, which has meant that work is more pleasant. ... And I think I'm more heard and understood about how that person works, and how they see the world, and how I work and how I see the world."

"And she admitted throughout the three days that she and her style of management was mainly to manage via emails ... And I think it was really good for her to admit that in the training. And I think she went away. And she reflected on it. And now when we work together, she comes into the office once or twice a week."

"But it was really nice to kind of have some of the [LA] Culture challenged and to see my new managers as humans."

"I think I've seen some changes with them. The language from the most senior people, senior managers I'm talking about. I believe the Grit has helped them too. To tone down a little bit because although they want everything to turn green they still remind us not to overwork and have time for ourselves, and all those kind of things (we have performance indicators that we have to turn everything into green)"

"The language has changed, and you don't feel labelled leaving early, and all those kind of things. And sometimes when [managers] are going they tell you don't stay behind. I don't want you to stay. So it is

that kind of culture change that is a helping a lot, so we are all seeming to say we want the good things done. We want the work to be done very well, but we have to leave for that to happen. And that is the language coming from even the top down, which is very encouraging and good.”

5.2 Impact on the team

105. Participants talked about how improved relationships made a difference to the ways their team worked. We use team as a general term here: in some cases it may relate to a very small group of individuals working together; in others to the whole Directorate or even wider team of agencies. The common thread is the effect of thinking more relationally.

“I think it has made us a better team. Well, I thought we were a good team, but I think I now we're a good team now, that's probably the difference.”

“So, and I mean the amazing thing is, I am not only experiencing the positive benefits of Grit myself, but I also work alongside the partners who are in meetings with me, working on cases together, who I can see have changed so much from the Grit experience themselves. And so that's, yeah, it it's just a beautiful thing to say, to be honest.”

“And I wonder, I mean the question that I've pondered since is obviously, the people who were directly engaged in it now have what they consider to be a special bond because they've been through the experience together. I wonder whether it will ripple outwards, you know, to others that they work with. Who weren't directly involved in it. It made us.”

“I think the Grit has really put a really good solid foundation on our relationships as a leadership team. So it's definitely strengthened it, and I think we'd just maybe watch out for each other just a little bit more, and possibly, you know, as opposed to before Grit I would have been that person saying yes when really I was saying no, because I wanted to please, whereas actually now I feel like it's OK to say you know what? I can't really do that.”

“I don't think there was ever bad relationships and I don't think we were ever a fragmented team, but I think there's a much better collective understanding of what we all do.”

“And we're OK with each other no matter what, because we're all one team going towards the same thing. So the minutiae of challenging conversations that we have to have along the way are in no way personal. It's not you, don't bat an eyelid about it.”

“And I think in seeing the vulnerabilities in others and their history and sharing that, you can move on as a more productive team.”

“So it's quite positive. I mean, one of the big positives out of the session was bringing people together as a team.”

106. There was some concern that if only a small number of people took part in Grit it would be difficult to effect system change. Others were more optimistic, with an idea that they might infiltrate the organisation and bring about change from within.

“Within our Grit cohort, I would say all of the things that I've already mentioned in terms of the benefits, what we need to do as the silent assassins is spread that throughout our organization. And I'm lucky enough to work alongside people who, you know, we'll talk: can we really say that? Can we really challenge back on that? Can we really? And I'm, absolutely. Always. Absolutely. Course you can. If you believe in it then then yeah, of course you can.”

“And so the workplace culture is being driven elsewhere. It's being driven by a central engine that has ideas, thoughts, other external providers, support. And then with that, however, I am part of the change champion network, which is all about pushing cultural change and I will use my Grit skills in that arena.”

“So people have joined our team later, or people that couldn't be there at the time, we have disseminated the Grit information. They clearly haven't been Gritted, but they've got some understanding. So we felt that we could still use the terminology and people understand, you know, the menu and the meal, because we've talked about it, we've gone through different sections and tried to explain our words.”

“We have very set ways of doing things. And my God, if we're gonna change something it's difficult, but we have to, and we have to change the direction we're going in and trying new things. Some of it's easy because you can say well, instead of doing this, why don't we do it this way? And some of it's a lot harder and we have tried to push boundaries.”

107. Echoing some of the earlier comments about the need to maintain ongoing training, or at least some regular meetings or check-ups, occasional comments noted the “Grit effect” was beginning to fade, or that some intentions had not been followed through.

“I think there was a lot more appreciation of one another, genuine appreciation and acknowledgement, and I think that continued for a little while. I don't think it's sustained as much as we would have wanted or wished, and I think, for me, there's something about business as usual that, you know, it is really difficult to navigate through, and keep hold of.”

“It really did unify us, which was really nice, and obviously we made all these pledges of all these different things that we were going to do. Somebody was going to lead with this, and somebody was going to lead with that. But we've never really spoke about them again.”

“I think that yes, it's a very friendly team anyway, and a very welcoming team, and I like the fact that during Grit, you know when people was becoming upset we really did support one another.”

“But in terms of like less pressure or less deadlines to meet, or less emphasis on performance, now that's not changed.”

“I think that [busyness] makes it quite difficult to bring Grit to the forefront, and I think more of it needs to come from like management. So obviously we meet as a team in our small teams every week, so maybe if they kind of bring it back to the forefront, that would be a space where we could talk about it and think about how we use it in our work or in our personal lives as well.”

“What we want to do in the next stage, I suppose, is how we broaden it to our own teams and use, you know, sort of those concepts. And I think we've started to do that, but it's how we do it on a wider scale. But I think we've gotta work hard as a team to keep that going and spend more time, you know, sort of giving ourselves the time and the space to spend time with each other in a different way, rather than just having a meeting and providing updates.”

108. Only one person used the word morale, but others made comments which support the notion that morale within their organisation had improved.

“There's a great team spirit that's been that's been a consequence of Grit, I think.”

"I think of that we've bonded as a team a lot better, especially because that was one of the first times that we as an entire service, including managers and sat around together since COVID as well."

"I really think a lot of people shared things in those trainings that have brought us together. So that was really positive and I think that maybe we wouldn't be like as a service. It's always kind of had a family feel anyway. But I feel like there really is a lot of respect for each other and a lot of better understanding for each other. So I do think Grit helped to strengthen that for us. Yes, I think we already had it, but I feel like Grit really strengthens that. Obviously there has been quite a shift."

5.3 Impact on the service

109. As described above, there was an abundance of comments from individuals about how their own professional practice had changed, and how this was having an impact on those that they worked with. This was particularly notable for front-line workers, and by implication would suggest that the service as a whole might have improved. In this section we draw from explicit comments that suggest improved service—half of respondents made reference to this.

110. In some cases leaders looked at the collective improvements that come about when members of their teams had experienced Grit.

"We did have quite a number of people who directly influence their operations with young people and directly influence day-to-day activity with young people, and so of course we'll have influenced that positively. But I think we'll have influenced everything else as well."

"People who followed the group programme and are involved in those discussions, involved in those referrals, will get us better outcomes, and we'll also have a more efficient way to have those good quality conversations as well."

111. Others spoke more personally, about how their own practice was leading to a better service, either as a front-line worker or as a manager. Often they provided specific examples to illustrate the use of ideas from Grit in improving the service to clients.

"And that has actually brought a lot of change professionally, and in whatever I do. And in in my engagement with my clients and with their families and it makes the job a lot easier, you know."

"I'm able to kind of also manage them better and the work that I'm getting from them is a lot better, which then kind of that ripple effect means that the families are getting better work, so it's kind of got that huge knock on effect in terms of my work."

"it's just been really beneficial basically to work with the young people following Grit because it is allowed me, aside from the Signs of Safety thing, just generally, my direct work with them has changed for the better, I would say."

"I think it's just a mode of working with everything. So yeah, young people was our original focus. Let's give them the priority thought that they need, but I think once you start thinking this way, you'll think this way about everything."

112. Coherence between teams was touched on by some respondents: they felt that because there were better personal relationships across the organisation, they were better able to work together between their respective teams.

"And I know I'm sort of talking more about the statutory services, but everyone wants the same outcome for the person, you know. Same with criminal justice, social services, housing. We all want the same outcome now. I feel like we've got that trust for the ones that have been part of the Grit to be able to have those conversations and be a bit more honest with each other really."

"So I think Grit's helped to just go, right? We're not just looking for one project that works. We're looking for an all-encompassing theme that many things can hang off and we're still going in the same direction of travel. And I think what's helped us to rationalize that in our own brains and see it that we're not all pulling in different directions. Just with different projects and things. It's not that we're pulling away, it's that we're all galvanized on the same thing going in the same direction."

113. Ultimately, for some people Grit provided a reminder that the whole service is about people—a couple of people felt that this had got lost behind the need to meet targets. If nothing else, Grit training reinforced the idea that "children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships and engagement with social workers" (Ofsted 2024), and supporting front line workers to be the human face of the corporate body.

"We're changing the way that we're doing things as a consequence of that with our partners and focusing on those things, rather than the actual NEET number, if that if that makes sense. Or not just the number, we, you know, sort of really go underneath and focus in on the positive stories in a very strength-based way."

"So I think it's about not only trying to encourage them to be more resilient and giving them the practical tools to achieve that, but also it kind of surprised me, and that there is still good in the world, especially when it comes to these kind of organizations that for them might come across as like these kind of corporate bodies that just, you know, they're not human, they're just [LA]. There's actually, there is a human face. I am that human face. And I will continue to advocate for them."

6. Signs of Safety

114. Through happenstance, both the LAs that use Signs of Safety had arranged some refresher training that interleaved with the Grit workshops. Consequently, it was uppermost in some people's minds, so some participants brought up their use of Signs of Safety without prompting, but all those from the two LAs that use Signs of Safety were simply asked if and how Grit supported that work. The responses were mixed, and in some cases confused.

115. A number of people simply said that they could see a link between Signs of Safety and Grit, without expanding further. Others could see a link but struggled to articulate it. The most positive responses suggested that tools developed in Grit would support work within the Signs of Safety framework.

"But you know, there is a close link between Signs of Safety and Grit, and I think in Signs of Safety you are looking at things that you are worried about. How do you understand things that you're worried about is understanding that particular person that you are interacting with, understanding the young person as well."

"Grit gives you the tools to be able to understand the young person, what they are worries are. And if they are not compliant, they're not engaging with you, Grit you know gives you the tools to say what conversations are going on for this young person."

"In the language of Grit you need to get to a point where the young person is assured I can hear you, I can hear what you're worried about, I can help you to make decisions and so on. And so on. Because you're listening to the young person. The young person feels they are being listened to so there is an interlink."

"I think that's what Grit sort of almost holds, gives you a different way of embedding Signs of safety in your practice. Somehow, it's like a carrier."

"Grit challenges us to have more challenging conversations and be able to empower young people through the use of challenging conversations. So from what we learn in terms of safety goals and scaling questions within Signs of Safety, we adapt to that within Grit. Break it down with the young person or a family and empower them to identify their own next steps."

"Obviously it was linking Grit in with Signs of Safety, so it was kind of looking more about the work we do, and we use case studies that are quite similar to the cases that we work with."

"So once we got to the end of that, I was able to kind of reflect on some of the things that we learned and how we could use the principles of Grit, align them with Signs of Safety, and use those."

"Yeah, that's what I think to use the Grit in collaboration with Signs of Safety, it's like eating cake with ice on it. You know what I mean? You. Yeah, it becomes better."

"So I think it's about sort of doing something with people as opposed to to them and Signs of Safety is about doing it with people, and Grit is about with people, and where those people are and not doing it to people."

116. Some people tried to draw a distinction between a structural framework (Signs of Safety) and a relationship-based approach (Grit), articulated to a greater or lesser extent.

"So Signs of Safety, I guess, is the structure for, you know, how we're gonna interview with them. The Grit is about the conversation."

"Grit I just looked at in a simple person's viewpoint. You know, so Grit is me, and the Signs of Safety is the service user."

"In terms of Signs of Safety and Grit, there are links about how Signs of Safety uses an appreciative inquiry, and Grit then kind of appreciates their lived experiences."

"So obviously Grit was about, you know, changing your internal dialogue and having a different path and all those things, so using the framework of the Signs of Safety, it's like Grit is the, I don't know, is like the model, and then Signs of Safety is the framework. So we're using it within that."

"The signs of safety approach, you know, cannot be done, you cannot practise in this way without having built a bit of a rapport with a person. So Grit is all about, you know, engagement and building a relationship, and then Signs of Safety is the tools."

117. Some middle and senior managers did not do Signs of Safety training themselves, but they felt they could express a view on the link to Grit.

"[Grit] wasn't your traditional teaching and was experiential and to revive people, re energise people. We engage people and I think it really helped to do that, to then be able to go on and do Signs of Safety and learn. I think if we'd gone straight to Signs of Safety we wouldn't have had the same result."

"I think it has been helpful in the fact that those that attended Grit are more open minded."

"You know, we were stuck in rut in a way. And families would be the same. So I think the principles can definitely be lifted and put on top of Signs of Safety, because I think the conversation, the listening, the thinking differently, all of that would support practitioners and families."

"Some of the purpose of doing Grit was around the Signs of Safety and how we implement a different model, and how we take, you know, that that different approach. Whether I think everybody's seen it in the in the context of how we implement Signs of Safety, I think it's certainly given us the tools to talk about."

118. Our initial exploration prior to beginning the evaluation revealed the fact that Signs of Safety is implemented in different ways in different authorities. Some of the evaluation respondents felt that it was not done properly or completely in their own LA, and this frustration might make it difficult to use Grit effectively. They shared specific examples of how the system mitigated against good use of either Signs of Safety or Grit. Others felt that even partial use of Signs of Safety was useful and aligned with Grit.

"One of the biggest difficulties we've got in [LA] at the moment is our system doesn't completely align with the Signs of Safety framework."

"What we've done is we've taken a really useful bits from the model that fit within our service department and tweaked things."

"I think the Grit has helped understand that there are so many [practice models] and Signs of Safety is just one, one amongst the many that we use, and to not get too hung up on that."

"We don't use the full breadth of it ..."

"I think that strengths-based approach is definitely being strengthened as well through Grit"

119. Others found it harder to see the link. In some cases this was because they felt that Signs of Safety was not really relevant to their particular role.

"So there was some lack of clarity for me, and also, how does that link to the Grit? How do we incorporate Grit into the Signs of Safety?"

"For me the Grit training is, I can see the connection with Signs of Safety to some extent, but I'm not 100% sure."

"[Can you see a sort of link between Grit and what you know about Signs of Safety?]

No. Because it didn't. ..."

"You know, that's like talking about how you do open heart surgery to social workers, and they don't need to do that in their job. So yeah, it's sort of like, it just felt, so no, the answer that, the short answer is no."

"The whole overarching theme of resilience has kind of permeated various facets of my life."

"But then we then had the Signs of Safety training and I just found it completely the opposite. I found it really unhelpful, because I think we don't have enough time to do what is now being asked for us to do."

7. Conclusions

120. This evaluation suggests that Grit training can lead to a qualitative improvement in the work done by Local Authority social work teams and associated agencies.

121. Change appears to be sustained over the medium term (~18 months) but can be better maintained with regular refreshers for participants. These may be arranged autonomously by the participants themselves.

122. Systemic or cultural change is mediated through the actions and behaviours of individuals who have been challenged and changed by the Grit training.

123. This applies at two distinct levels: at the front line, where Grit supports challenging conversations, based on strong relationships with young people and families; and within the organisation where Grit supports openness and honesty in professional relationships.

124. In the second case this can generate a ripple effect such that the impact of Grit training extends to the wider team, beyond those individuals who took part in the training.

125. On the front line, practitioners say they are more confident, more people-focused, and consequently more effective than they were before Grit.

126. Grit programmes can potentially support Signs of Safety where this is used, but the link between the two is not explicit enough for all practitioners to understand.

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