



A Better Start



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Supporting families to improve the lives of babies and very young children



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Better Start Bradford, Bradford

A Better Start

A Better Start is a ten-year National Lottery funded programme set up by the Big Lottery Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

Working in five diverse communities across England, it aims to improve the life chances of babies and young children from pregnancy up to four years of age.

It is one of five major programmes set up by the Big Lottery Fund to trial new approaches to service design, which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier, from babies and very young children through to those in later life.

Big Lottery Fund believes that strong communities are built by those who live in them, and that people with first-hand experience of living with an issue are best-placed to identify and shape potential solutions. A Better Start develops and tests new approaches to promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD). From 2015 to 2025, five voluntary-organisation-led A Better Start partnerships will be working in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Southend and Nottingham.

Cover top image: A Better Start Southend, Southend.

Cover bottom image: Lambeth Early Action Partnership, Lambeth.

Why we're investing

Pregnancy and the early years is a critical period in a child's development and a unique opportunity to lay good foundations for a child's life.

The environment in the womb can affect the development of a baby. Good maternal mental health and nutrition promotes healthy development, while factors such as maternal obesity, smoking or drinking alcohol can all increase risks during pregnancy. Once babies are born, development continues at a rapid pace and early care can have far-reaching impacts. Through this investment we hope to promote positive experiences in pregnancy and the early years, and prevent those that can cause harm.

Healthy pregnancy and infant development means that babies are more likely to grow up to be children and adults who are happy, healthy and fully contributing members of society and less likely to need additional support from the public and health sectors.

“I strongly support the work of Big Lottery Fund's A Better Start programme, which aims to improve the life chances of children in their first years.”

Professor Dame Sally C Davies,
Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2012,
Our Children Deserve Better: Prevention Pays



A Better Start Southend, Southend



Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham

What A Better Start is doing

A Better Start is aiming to improve children's lives by strengthening local support and services for families.

Our key aims

- Improving children's diet and nutrition

Good nutrition during pregnancy and the first four years of life is vitally important for a child's growth, development and long-term health. A healthy diet in pregnancy, breastfeeding and in childhood are all key to promoting healthy development and protecting against illness in later life.

- Improving children's social and emotional development

Social and emotional skills include the ability to experience, express and manage emotions, establish positive and rewarding relationships, and cope with difficult experiences. These life skills are essential to children's later learning, health, behaviour, success in employment and life satisfaction.

- Improving children's speech, language and communication

Speech, language and communication skills are important for many aspects of life, including healthy behavioural and emotional development, developing relationships and doing well at school and work. Communication skills help children to engage with the world around them and share their feelings.

A Better Start brings together a range of partners from local communities, health and education to work together to change the way services are delivered, focusing on prevention and offering more evidence-based, joined up support.

“We have seen our children's social skills develop.
Not only do our children love to read books, they
are also building their knowledge and skills.”

Darryl, Better Start Bradford



Key principles

Every activity is focused on improving the life chances of children.

People in the lead: The Big Lottery Fund's approach to funding focuses on the skills, strengths and energy that people can draw upon and the potential in their ideas.

Place-based: Each partnership has developed its own strategy and approach, responsive to local needs and strengths.

Co-production: Building reciprocal and sustained relationships between the community, parents and professionals to design and deliver support for children and families.

Test and learn: It's important to test things on a small scale in order to learn from them. It means adapting and refining our services and programmes along the way, sharing what works and what doesn't.

Using evidence: All A Better Start services and support draws on the best available evidence. The programme is also committed to research and innovation to address gaps in evidence.

Long-term investment: This ten-year investment provides the time and space to rigorously design, implement and evaluate the programme, ensuring that its impact can be thoroughly understood.

Sustainable: The five partnerships are putting in place plans to secure the long-term sustainability of A Better Start services and interventions beyond the lifespan of the programme.

Evaluating impact and capturing learning

The national evaluation of A Better Start is led by the Warwick Consortium, will run throughout the 10-year programme and includes:

- evaluating the set-up and delivery of the programme
- impact and economic evaluation of the area programmes, including a study of families in the funded and comparison areas.

The partnerships are also evaluating and capturing learning from local programmes and services.

We hope that the learning from this programme will be useful to others outside of our funded areas so many more children and families can benefit.

National Lottery funding has also supported two associated programmes, which are working with a number of our A Better Start areas.

Baby Buddy is a free mobile phone app developed by the charity Best Beginnings for parents and expectant parents. It is available in the A Better Start areas of Blackpool, Bradford and Nottingham. The app includes relevant personalised information and support endorsed by health professionals and approved by parents, from pregnancy to six months after birth.

Mums and Babies in Mind (MABIM), a Maternal Mental Health Alliance and Mental Health Foundation project, is running in Blackpool Better Start and A Better Start Southend. The project supports local leaders to improve care and quality of life for mums with mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year of being a parent.

Partnerships

Better Start Bradford was awarded £49 million to work with families in four wards in Bradford.

Central to Better Start Bradford (BSB) is a strong partnership between parents, the community, public agencies and the local university, which builds on years of successful collaboration. Bradford Trident, a local community-led charity leads the partnership. Informing and evaluating BSB is the Innovation Hub, a partnership with the research study Born in Bradford (BiB).

The partnership offers a range of services and support including: Health, Exercise and Nutrition in the Really Young (HENRY), a childhood obesity prevention programme; Talking Together, a programme to support communication and language development of two-year-olds and a doula service, offering practical and emotional support to pregnant women and their families through trained volunteers.

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Lambeth Early Action Partnership was awarded £36 million to work with families in four wards in Lambeth.

Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP) is led by the National Childrens Bureau, and has at its core the delivery of a range of services for parents, early years professionals and practitioners, that have been co-designed with parents, local partners and community members. The development of these services has been underpinned by a public health approach, meaning that they are supporting individual children and families as well as their wider environment.

The partnership's services and support includes: Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL), a programme to help parents of 0 to 2-year-olds support their children's literacy; Community Activity and Nutrition, a programme to support healthier nutrition in pregnant women who are overweight; and a Parent and Infant Relationship Service which provides therapeutic support for parents and infants.

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A Better Start Southend was awarded £40 million to work in six wards in Southend.

A Better Start Southend, led by the Pre-School Learning Alliance, brings together professional and volunteer workers with parents and carers of children up to the age of four, transforming the way that children's services are delivered in Southend. Local families are at the heart of decisions about the services they depend on, and are involved in every stage of developing new ideas and ways of working.

The partnership's services and support for children and families includes: a new strategy to promote healthier nutrition for pregnant women, babies and young children; Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED), a programme designed to encourage dads to read to their child or children every day; and Let's Talk, a project to equip parents with the skills they need to develop their child's communication skills.

facebook.com/abetterstartsouthend
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Small Steps Big Changes was awarded £45 million to work in four wards in Nottingham.

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) positions parenting at the heart of the programme. Driven by local parents and communities, the programme has developed an innovative community connection process. This is where parents and communities are at the centre of design, commissioning and decision making services for children in Nottingham. SSBC is led by CityCare, a third sector provider of community health services.

The partnership's services for children and families include: a peer workforce of paid Family Mentors to complement existing family relationship professionals; Bump, Birth and Baby, an antenatal programme to support social and emotional development; and Triple P – Positive Parenting Program, which helps parents with simple and practical strategies so they can confidently manage issues and develop their relationship with their child, creating family environments that help children realise their potential.

facebook.com/SmallStepsBigChanges
[@ncitycare_SSBC](https://twitter.com/ncitycare_SSBC)
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Blackpool Better Start was awarded £45 million to work with families in seven wards in Blackpool.

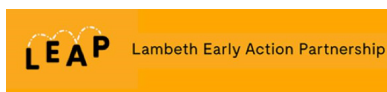
Blackpool Better Start's strategy focuses on reducing critical pressures on families, like drugs and alcohol, mental ill health, domestic abuse and social isolation. It also helps with building parenting knowledge and skills, and working on parent-child relationships.

The partnership, led by NSPCC, offers a range of services to improve local support for children and families. This includes: redesigning the health visiting service using the latest evidence of what works; introducing Baby Steps, a universal, perinatal education programme for parents and the Survivor Mums Companion, a programme to support pregnant women who have a history of childhood trauma. The partnership is also developing parks and libraries so parents have safe public spaces designed around babies and very young children. These are activities such as Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) and outdoor play supported by trained early years Park Rangers. There is also an effort to improve children's oral health through supervised toothbrushing and collaborating with local dentists.

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blackpoolbetterstart.org.uk

Endnotes

1. Heckman, J. J. (2008). Schools, skills and synapses. *Economic Inquiry*. 46 (3), 289–324.



For more information call

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