

Local Evaluation Qualitative Insight Report

HeadStart Year 1 – Early Help & Preventative Services Implementation Interviews

June 2018

Introduction

This document summarises learning from the first wave of interviews with Early Help & Preventative Services (EHPS) staff involved in the delivery of HeadStart Kent (HSK). The interviews were conducted primarily to discuss the implementation of HSK and explore certain elements of the programme, with the view to learn what is working and identify any opportunities for change. Findings are based on ten in-depth interviews conducted between December 2017 and February 2018.

Initial experiences, expectations and understanding

Most staff were aware of HSK prior to Phase 3 and several were involved in writing the Case for Investment. The perception of some staff was that services delivering mental health support to young people are overwhelmed, resulting in staff exploring for alternative ways to assist young people. Staff were confident explaining how their role contributed to HSK ambitions, however, some staff outside of the HSK team reflected it took a while to understand how their role contributed.

Implementation and adjustments

Overarching implementation plan deliverables did not alter, however, more detail was added as a result of learning and in reaction to arising situations. Staff recalled some challenges, most notably relating to various aspects of the commissioning process and described how adaptations were made to ensure deliverables were achieved. Staff explained how structured meetings and the introduction of processes had assisted them to reach deliverables.

Awareness and reach

Staff explained various methods of communication adopted to raise awareness and understanding of the programme among stakeholders, with many attributing the increased awareness to the launch of the online Resilience Hub. Staff described how schools were delivering elements of the HSK locally and how they were working with community organisations. The direct work with young people was an area associated by staff with the engagement of those who would benefit from HSK. However, it was recognised that those outside of this cohort may not be aware of the programme. Staff acknowledged additional work was needed to reach parents, young carers and those living in a refuge.

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Involvement of young people

The involvement of young people in the central and local SpeakOut groups was most often mentioned by staff. They explained how these groups are now regularly attended and reflected how diverse they had become, with young people from a broad range of ages, mixed abilities and levels of resilience attending. The importance of the HSK Participation Worker role in young people's involvement with the programme was described by several staff.

Integration and working in partnership

Staff explained how schools acknowledge that cultural change was needed to support young people with emotional wellbeing issues at an early stage and welcomed assistance from HSK in doing that. However, there was recognition that the HSK agenda was competing with other school priorities. Staff described how Domains Based Conversations (DBC)s were being utilised by EHPS staff to capture the voice of older children. However, staff explained a variance in confidence levels among staff using DBCs but recognised that all new tools or changes in practice take time to embed. One staff member acknowledged that further work may be needed to develop the understanding of colleagues within Specialist Children's Services around the programme's purpose and their role within it.

Challenges and successes

Challenges described by staff related to various aspects of the process to commission HSK delivery partners. Staff also felt they underestimated the volume of information to be recorded to support the evaluation of the programme and explained the subsequent challenges faced to ensure requirements were satisfied. The launch of the online Resilience Hub and its subsequent use as a stakeholder resource was seen as an achievement, as was the direct work with young people, especially the one to one work with those in refuge.

Future development

Several staff explained how a clearer message to stakeholders around the programme's aims and how their role contributes could be beneficial going forward. An improvement in the sharing of learning and good practice was also expressed by staff.

Conclusion

The programme has developed well over the past year and although there were some challenges during implementation, there have been numerous successes and deliverables are being achieved.

