

Written evidence from Big Lottery Fund

[Introduction](#)

The Big Lottery Fund is the largest community funder in the UK. Last year we awarded over £500m of good cause money raised by National Lottery players to more than 11,000 community projects. Our ambition is to enable communities to thrive.

We welcome the focus of this inquiry on the first 1,000 days of life.

This response is based upon the Fund's learning from investing in a diverse range of early intervention and prevention projects. As a national funder, we are well placed to comment on a national strategy for changing outcomes for babies and young children.

The Fund has identified four key funding priorities that we want grant-holders to build into their projects:

1. They **put people in the lead**, by giving people the opportunity and power to make a difference.
2. They are **place-based** and adapted to the local context. Partnerships are taking an evidence based approach to improving local service provision and developing integrated pathways of support for families that take a system-wide, holistic approach to delivery.
3. They deliver **preventative** programmes, which aim to give children the best start in life, intervening before something becomes a problem.
4. They **work collaboratively** to ensure that services are delivered efficiently.

This paper applies these funding priorities to making suggestions for an effective national strategy for early years.

[A Better Start](#)

In particular, this response draws on evidence and learning from our A Better Start programme, a ten-year, £215 million strategic investment focused on developing and testing new approaches to promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD), prevention and early intervention. A Better Start focuses on three key areas:

- Improving children's **diet and nutrition** to support healthy development and protect against illness in later life;
- Supporting children to develop **social and emotional skills** so they can develop positive relationships and cope with difficult situations; and
- Helping children with **speech, language and communication**, so that they can engage with the world around them.

We have funded A Better Start programmes in socio-economically disadvantaged wards in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham, and Southend-on-Sea for a period of ten years. To date, over 6,000 children and their families have accessed A Better Start provision, over 20,000 times in total.¹

¹ Big Lottery Fund (2018) Knowledge and learning programme briefing: A Better Start. *Forthcoming*.

The A Better Start strategy can be summarised as:

1. Preventative (primary prevention) - and early action (secondary prevention)
2. Evidence and science based - it uses and builds on what works in pregnancy and the early years and innovates where there is a gap in the evidence
3. Changing systems and developing integrated pathways of care. A Better Start is child centred and builds on what is already there.
4. Through involvement in decision making and service design local parents are engaged in the services so that they are acceptable and more likely to work
5. Engaging both parents, practitioners and the wider community in the programme to help change local attitudes and understanding of early childhood development , why it is important, and their role in it so that change is more likely to happen.
6. Taking a test and learn, continuous improvement approach. Learning what works, for whom and under what circumstances. This takes time, which is why we have funded for 10 years. We will also share what we are learning more widely to inform the work of others.

Three of the A Better Start programmes are responding separately to the Committee's inquiry, focussing on their experience of designing and delivering local service provision, as well as responding to the specific call for evidence from local councils and commissioners.

[Putting people in the Lead](#)

Central to our funding priorities is the recognition that ordinary people are best placed to make decisions about what the services they use look like, and how they are run. Many of the organisations and projects that we fund value the experiences of those closest to the social issues being addressed.

In, Nottingham, the A Better Start partnership has created a new workforce of paid Family Mentors to deliver a programme called 'Small Steps at Home'. All families are offered access to a Family Mentor if they are expecting a child or have a new baby.² Family Mentors are recruited from the community through an assessment process that focuses on their approach, attitude and personal qualities, rather than on specific work experience or qualifications. The mentors complement the existing workforce of child health, education and development professionals, contributing their knowledge and experience to the programme, and improving their own skills.

There is huge value in enabling parents and members of the local community to offer peer support and share their knowledge and experiences to help others.³ Projects that put people in the lead can access people with a diverse set of skills and experiences, and a vested interest in the effective delivery of local services. At the same time, the people they work with are given the opportunity to make a difference in their communities.

This approach can also be seen in projects we fund across the country. For example, Home Start Kernow are using a grant of £490,000 to deliver Connecting Communities, a home befriending project that will support 620 families over three years. Volunteers are recruited to provide regular emotional and practical support for families within their

² Ibid.

³ Parents 1st and IVAR. (2016) Volunteering and early childhood outcomes: A review of the evidence. London: Big Lottery Fund

homes. The volunteers are themselves parents, and so can provide advice and support using their own experiences and knowledge.

Home Start Kernow are also creating a steering group, made up of families involved with the programme, to help improve and redesign the programme as it is delivered. This approach, which is in common with all of the Home Start projects around the UK, gives people greater confidence and control over their lives. For example, Home Start's 2017 Impact Report found that, as a result of their interventions, 94% of parents reported that they had improved self-esteem.

Place-based

There are real and enduring benefits to taking a place-based approach to early years support. This is an approach that puts people in the lead, harnessing local assets and resources, whilst keeping child outcomes at the centre.⁴ By understanding the context that early years' services are working in, and by working closely with local partners and experts, the A Better Start partnerships are developing ways to co-ordinate the efforts of the voluntary sector, local authorities, early childhood and health services, academics, local community, and parents.

A family may access a number of services and support networks in pregnancy and after the birth of a child, so is important that these different services are joined up and working together. By sharing their experience and insights with each other, individual organisations can improve the quality of services for pregnant women, babies and very young children.

Sharing data

A Better Start's approach to joining up services includes the improved use of data. In Blackpool, local organisations are being supported to build a town wide system, to make it easier to share and compare data. In addition, services have been encouraged to avoid using jargon and technical terms, and adopt a common language that is more inclusive and easier for everyone to understand. In Nottingham, a single patient medical record system, used by community health providers of the 0-5 Healthy Child Programme and NHS Acute Trust Maternity Services, ensures that all parent and child records are accessed and shared across services, and that all services have the same information.

Involving the whole community

A key lesson from the delivery of A Better Start is the importance of enabling people to influence the design of the services that are supporting them. A Better Start has been working with families to ensure that their views are heard. To make this work, it has been really important to develop strong relationships built on trust.

The A Better Start Partnerships have found that off-the-shelf evidenced based programmes are not enough on their own. By taking a service design approach, that involves families and local services in modifying and improving their programmes, they can create services that properly meet the needs of beneficiaries.^{5 6}

The impact of this approach can be seen in Blackpool, where A Better Start has invested £1million into transforming the health visiting service across the town. The new service

⁴ <https://bernardvanleer.org/ecm-article/2018/a-better-start-tackling-inequity-through-community-wide-action-on-early-childhood-development/>

⁵ <https://abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/new-service-design-framework-launches/>

⁶ <https://borninbradford.nhs.uk/what-we-do/pregnancy-early-years/toolkit/>

has been created with the help of Blackpool parents and healthcare professionals, who have been consulted extensively in the redesign of a health visiting service model.

The new service includes an increase in the minimum number of health visitor checks (from the statutory 5 to 8) to identify child development needs as early as possible, and share public health messages more consistently. Additionally, the content of the visits was revised to better identify and support parental and infant mental health. This new model ensures that all families receive access to a high quality evidence-based service, with additional support being provided to families who need it most.⁷

Another example is Baby Steps, a science-based perinatal education programme which supports parents to manage the emotional and physical transition into parenthood. An evaluation of Baby Steps showed that, as a result of the programme, parents are better equipped to provide sensitive, responsive care to their babies.⁸ As a result, Baby Steps has now been scaled up and is offered across the whole town.

Proportionate Universalism

A Better Start follows Professor Sir Michael Marmot's principle of 'proportionate universalism', which means all children, regardless of need or circumstance, should have the best possible start in life, and those with greater needs should receive additional support in order to reach their potential.⁹ A Better Start provides a strong universal offer to parents and families and a range of targeted support based on identified local need. We are funding A Better Start over a ten year period to see if this approach results in an improvement in our three child outcomes at a population level over time.

Prevention and Early Intervention

A Better Start primarily relies on a preventative approach and aims to promote healthy early childhood development. We recommend this approach is used more widely in early years' service provision.

Prevention is about intervening before something becomes a problem. There is good evidence that projects that employ elements of prevention and early intervention are particularly effective at supporting people to maximise their potential, and enjoy a better quality of life.¹⁰

For instance, it is important to provide support to children and adults affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences as they can lead to a number of serious health-harming behaviours, as well as damaging levels of stress. If a child or parent has been negatively affected by ACEs and are provided with the right support, it is possible to interrupt this trajectory.

Healthier Nutrition

The Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP) Community Activity and Nutrition (CAN) service supports pregnant women with a high Body Mass Index (BMI) to adopt healthier food choices and increase physical activity with the intention of improving birth and longer-term outcomes for them, their babies and families.¹¹

⁷ Marmot, M. (2011) Fair society, healthy lives. HM Government. Retrieved from. <https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review-strategic-review-of-health-inequalities-in-england-post-2010>

⁸ Hogg, Sally, Coster, Denise and Brookes, Helen (2015) Baby Steps: evidence from a relationships-based perinatal education programme: summary document. London: NSPCC

⁹ Marmot, M., Goldblatt, P., Allen, J. et al. (2010) Fair Society Healthy Lives, the Marmot Review. London: Institute of Health Equity.

¹⁰ Early Action Task Force (2011) The Triple Dividend: Thriving lives. Costing less. Contributing more.

The service was developed following research by Kings College Hospital, London, which found that support from health trainers had a significant positive impact on women's diets. The programme was tested in the Lambeth community. It has now been modified to take account of the prevalence of obesity amongst the Black African and Caribbean populations. CAN has given women who wouldn't otherwise benefit from this type of support the opportunity to access it for the first time. Their regular weekly relationship with the CAN practitioner can also help identify other issues where they might benefit from support. Data shows that target groups are being reached and retained, and there are now 100 women enrolling in CAN each year.

Language and Communication Development

Approximately 50% of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have significantly poorer language and communication skills than other children of the same age. Without effective communication skills, children can struggle to thrive in later life in terms of achievement, making friends, and having positive interactions with the world around them¹².

The impact of prevention and early intervention on improving life chances can be particularly seen in the speech and language development of babies and young children. This is a key strategic area of focus for A Better Start.

A Better Start is also helping parents to develop skills to talk, read and sing to their children, as well as to play with and praise them through a range of science and evidence-based programme. Activities range from speech and language home visiting services to reading groups encouraging fathers to read to their children. For instance, Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED), delivered in Blackpool, Nottingham and Southend, has encouraged dads to develop a shared interest in reading with their children that has lasted beyond the length of the programme.¹³

An independent evaluation of the impact of FRED on more than 300 children found that, for children who participated in the programme, there was marked improvement at above expected levels in reading, writing and numeracy, when compared to peers who did not take part. Among participating children, two fifths (42%) made progress to a greater than expected extent in their reading. Among those children who did not take part in FRED, only 11% made greater than expected progress in their reading levels. More than a fifth (22%) of children participating in the intervention made progress in numeracy to a greater than expected extent, compared to 9% among those children who did not.

Such early, sensitive involvement by fathers continues to deliver benefits. At age five, their children know and use more words, can pick out letters more accurately and are better at problem solving; by age ten, their vocabulary is wider and their maths skills are better too.

Working in Partnership

Through our grant programmes, the Big Lottery Fund is supporting more people to work in partnership with one another. We bring together diverse organisations and individuals to contribute their strengths and perspectives to achieve a joint aim.

The Big Lottery Fund is committed to sharing the high quality learning from the A Better Start with other organisations, particularly those working in Early Childhood Development. This is a key to our working in partnership approach, as it allows other organisations to

¹¹ Big Lottery Fund (2018) Knowledge and learning programme briefing: A Better Start.

¹² Bercow Review of Services for Children and Young people (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (2008) Nottingham: DCSF Publications

benefit from our research and programme delivery; and equally for our work to be informed by their learning.

To do so, the Big Lottery Fund is appointing a new contractor, whose dedicated aim will be to share what we know about what works, and what doesn't, in early years programme delivery; alongside supporting the further development of A Better Start partnerships. They will work across the A Better Start partnerships, within the Early Childhood Development sector, and beyond.

Partnership working deliver real benefits. It allows services to run more efficiently by cutting down duplication and making it easier to share information, and it should be a key feature of any national early years' strategy.

For example, A Better Start partnerships have worked with national and international academics and experts. They have then supported the local partnerships to adopt this knowledge into their services, helping to bridge the gap between the theoretical academic learning and the practical day-to-day delivery of programmes.

A good example of what this approach looks like in practice is the Mums and Babies in Mind (MABIM) project, led by Maternal Mental Health Alliance and the Mental Health Foundation, which has now closed and is producing learning and evidence from its evaluation. MABIM was funded by the Big Lottery Fund through our Reaching Communities programme. It was also working within two of the five A Better Start sites.

The project helped local leaders to improve the quality of life of mothers experiencing mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year of their baby's life.

In the places that it worked in, the project identified the barriers to service improvement, came up with solutions to better help mothers access support. By tapping into the knowledge of members of the local community, the project built partnerships within local services.

Each local A Better Start area has partnership boards, which are the decision-making bodies for A Better Start programmes in their neighbourhoods. The boards bring together representatives of partner organisations with community representatives. The partnerships also ensure that senior leaders are working together to ensure that the changes planned by A Better Start can become embedded and sustainable in the long term. They also help to 'make things happen', for example by removing barriers and bringing in additional resources.

In order to build effective partnerships, the different organisations and individuals involved need to acknowledge and respect each other's strengths and the value of each other's perspectives and roles in achieving their long term vision.

[Conclusion](#)

Pregnancy and the first few years after birth are a crucial period in a child's life. Through the delivery of the A Better Start programmes, the Big Lottery Fund aims to improve the life chances of babies and children, whilst at the same time, strengthening local partnerships and pathways of support. By investing in children's Early Childhood Development our aim is to increase the likelihood that children will have healthier, happier lives, and reduce pressure on services and the public purse.

In light of the learning from across the Big Lottery Fund's portfolio, we recommend that a national strategy for delivering effective early years programmes should include and be built around the four areas outlined in this paper:

- Place-based
- Intervening early
- Delivered in partnership
- Putting people in the lead

We welcome the Health and Social Care Select Committee's focus on this vital issue and would be delighted to provide oral evidence to the committee to further share our expertise in this area.

We are also proud to be able to offer Committee members the opportunity to witness our interventions in action, and meet some of the beneficiaries of our strategic programmes. Please find below contact details if you would like to take us up on this offer.

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