

HeadStart Kent - Co-production

[HeadStart Kent](#) ensures that children and young people's thoughts, wishes and feelings are at the heart of the services they offer, by involving them in decision making, working with them to design and co-deliver services, and partnering with Kent County Council and the Kent Clinical Commissioning Group (KCCG) to provide co-production opportunities up until the age of 23. As of February 2020, 2,322 young people had engaged in participation and co-production work with HeadStart Kent, with the majority having participated for over one year and 38% for over two years.¹ Only 14% of the young people involved had received support from HeadStart services for their mental health previously, 82% were between the ages of 10 and 16 and 60% were female.² Feedback from young people has been positive. Of 623 feedback forms collected from HeadStart Kent Participation Workers, 92% scored participation sessions either '4' or '5', on a scale of 1-5 where 5 is 'great'.³ Over the years, young people have fed back that what they enjoy most about co-production with HeadStart is how it enables them to meet new people and make friends, engage in activities and learn new skills.⁴ These outcomes mirror the aims of the broader HeadStart programme, which seeks to promote the mental health and wellbeing of young people through building social networks, promoting engagement in the community and developing new skills, via a range of universal and targeted mental health interventions.

Engagement began before HeadStart programmes themselves had launched, when in 2016 young people led on what they thought needed to be in place for co-production to be effectively embedded throughout its projects and services. Their responses were for a clear and consistent flow of information from staff to young people, transparent evaluation processes, training for staff to be delivered by young people, and for adults to be clear on their expectations and understandings of what young people could offer them. Since this time, young people have co-produced, co-delivered, consulted and campaigned on a diverse range projects, including the [Kent Youth Charter](#), face to face

¹ HeadStart Kent. (2020). Participation and Coproduction: what effect do they have on the outcomes of young people? Retrieved from: [Co-ProductKentresiliencehub.org.uk/headstart-participation-evaluation-report-2019-20-participation-and-coproduction-what-effect-do-they-have-on-the-outcomes-of-young-people/](https://www.kentresiliencehub.org.uk/headstart-participation-evaluation-report-2019-20-participation-and-coproduction-what-effect-do-they-have-on-the-outcomes-of-young-people/).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

coproduction training and recently the coproduction [e learning](#). Young people are able to be involved with HeadStart support up until the age of 16, but since HeadStart collaborated with colleagues in Kent County Council (KCC) and KCCG, they are now able to engage in co-production opportunities up until their 23rd birthday without the need to change services or end projects they have worked on up until their 16th birthday. This collaboration has produced a seamless service for young people that will continue to run after HeadStart funding has ended.

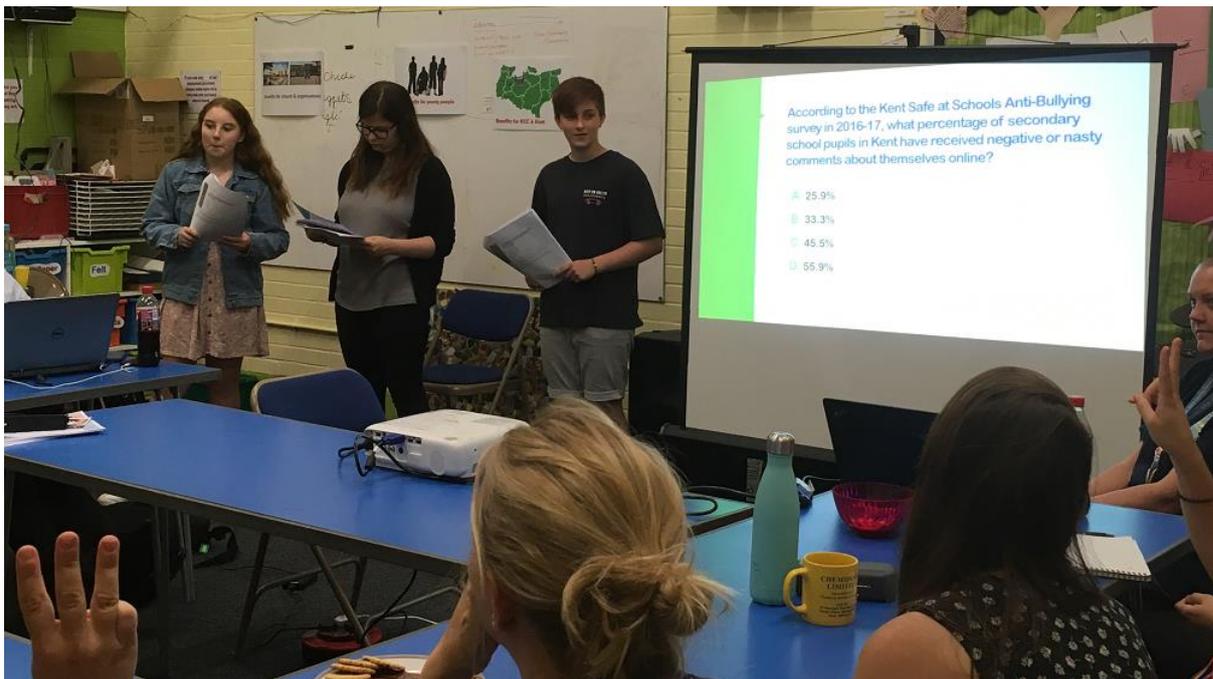
SpeakOut

'SpeakOut has been really important to me. It made me feel part of something [...] I have been able to use my own experiences and struggles with mental health, to help others. I have also learned more about myself and how to manage situations, and I know that I'm in control, developing my own resilience for difficult times' – Young Person

SpeakOut is a co-production group run by HeadStart Kent that hosts fun and interactive sessions where young people can contribute towards designing new HeadStart services and evaluate existing ones, as well as learn new skills and make friends. HeadStart staff, including Evaluations Officer and Senior Manager, also attend the groups to gather learning from the young people directly. The groups are facilitated by young people and trained staff, and young people are invited to participate in a range of activities that improve services and equip them with professional skills, including:

- Learning presentation skills
- Designing resources for HeadStart
- Speaking to stakeholders
- Peer reviewing grant applications for the [Pay it Forward](#) scheme
- Recruitment of HeadStart staff
- Development and evaluation of the [MoodSpark](#) website

A key piece of work produced by young people in SpeakOut has been the [Kent Youth Charter](#), which formally lays out young people's expectations of how staff and volunteers should behave during their work with them. They agreed upon six principles, including being 'respectful and kind', 'including and accepting', 'honest and working to earn young people's trust', and 'supporting young people to grow and learn from their experiences'. They have also developed training for adults on co-production which is available for all staff to complete within KCC, and compulsory for all HeadStart staff and young people involved in co-production with HeadStart.



Pay it Forward

In 2017, young people created and launched the Pay it Forward grant fund, a scheme that provides grants between £250 and £1,000 for young people aged 11-16 who want to organise something that will benefit the wellbeing of a group of people or an individual person, of any age, in Kent. As of 2020, over 140 grants had been awarded to young people who went on to improve the mental health and wellbeing of others. These grants have funded projects such as:

- [Born Again Pond](#), where young people made a community pond more accessible and enjoyable for other young people by installing a handrail and some additional paving, solar panels, planting trees and adding seating benches and plant boxes.

- [Homely Hampers Project](#), where young people in one school made 30 hampers containing items such as blankets, biscuits and artwork to give to residents at local homes for the elderly. The intention of the project was to support the wellbeing of elderly people and to build relationships between different ages that don't normally mix.

'It's been lovely meeting the [young people] as we don't get many visitors their age' – resident from one of the homes

- [Lego Club](#), a club for young people with autism designed to help them build friendships, share, take turns and develop communication skills. Young people work together to build Lego models, and each month they agree on themed nights where they all dress up and work together on a model of the same theme.

'To be honest, at the beginning it was just something to do. I thought, I may as well go and try it. But what made me want to stay was actually being part of something that mattered, at HeadStart the things you do actually matter and make a difference' – young person

Young people have been fully involved in the Pay it Forward scheme since it began, designing the processes and paperwork involved during the planning stages, reviewing applications and deciding on winners, and then visiting the successful projects to find out how the money has been used and to retrieve feedback from young people involved.

'It made me feel powerful' – young person



Kent Youth County Council

HeadStart Kent is also involved, alongside KCC and the local CCG, in [Kent Youth County Council](#): a group of elected young people between the ages of 11 and 18 who represent and act upon the wishes and opinions of young people in Kent, as well as campaigning for broader issues. Any young person who lives and goes to school in Kent, and is

between 11 and 18 years of age, can apply to be in the Youth Council. To do so, they are asked to complete a form saying why young people should vote for them, what they're passionate about and what they want to campaign on. They then create their own manifesto and present the areas and topics they are most passionate about to young people in schools across Kent, where voting takes place with ballot papers and boxes, as in a general or local election. The Youth Council elections are promoted through the HeadStart Kent website and social media pages, as well as in-person dissemination of posters and leaflets in schools and youth clubs across the County. Recent campaigns include:

- Mental health and wellbeing: ***'We need more awareness and support for young people around mental health and to ensure that mental health services are accessible and suitable for young people's needs'***
- Tackling poverty: ***'Do more to tackle poverty and reduce pressures on families. For example, the cost of school uniforms and educational resources'***
- Climate change and environmental reaction: ***'We need to take action now to tackle climate change, this includes reducing pollution levels and reducing plastic waste, while making more sustainable choices'***

Once elected, the successful young people sit as a Youth Council group within KCC. There are 8 elected members and 12 community seats for underrepresented young people, including those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, young carers and those with disabilities. The Youth Council produce their own [newsletter](#) to keep young people in Kent up-to-date on their work, things they have produced and local services and events they can get involved in locally.

In 2018, HeadStart Kent and the Youth Council formed the Building Resilience Group, which aims to increase awareness and understanding of resilience, and share practical ways that young people can build and practice resilience in their everyday lives. They launched an online hub called [Draw Your own Solution](#), which pulls together a broad selection of articles, playlists and videos designed to meet these aims. In March 2019, the group co-hosted and participated in the [Big Conversation](#): an annual event led and facilitated by young people from HeadStart and the Youth Council. The Big Conversation brings young people across Kent together to explore ways of improving

their own and their peers' emotional wellbeing and resilience, and this event was also attended by CAMHS, school nursing and early help teams, with guest presentations from Kent Mind, the Self Esteem Team and Tree Light Yoga. Overall, young people's feedback on what they appreciate most about their co-production work has been:⁵



⁵ Ibid.