

HeadStart Kent - Talents and Interests Grant

HeadStart Kent's mission is for young people and families to improve their resilience through the development of knowledge and lifelong skills, to maximise their own and their peers' emotional health and wellbeing. To make this mission a reality, it offers a range of programmes, opportunities for young people to be involved in shaping and designing elements of the programme and resources for young people, parents, and carers across Kent. Through consultation with young people, HeadStart Kent adapted Daniel and Wassell's [six domains of resilience](#) to produce a unique model, which is embedded through all services, projects and resources. These six domains are emotions and behaviours, talents and interests, education, feeling secure, friendships, and health. Young people in Kent felt that these domains better reflected their needs and were conveyed in more relevant language to them.

[Talents and interests](#) are described as things that young people like doing in their free time and that they are good at or enjoy. These are important for giving young people a sense of identity and belonging, improving mood, leading to further opportunities, providing enjoyment and reasons to feel good, and helping them to make new friends. Talents and interests are promoted across HeadStart Kent programmes, such as the [iCan service](#), through [co-production and participation groups](#), and the [Talents and Interests grant](#). The iCan service takes a mentoring approach, supporting young people to realise their talents and interests with the support of a trusted and trauma-informed HeadStart-trained practitioner. Talents and interests are encouraged through HeadStart Kent's co-production programmes, where young people are supported to learn and develop new skills and contribute towards improving and shaping programmes according to their own interests and those of their peers.

The Talents and Interests grant enables young people to pursue their talents and interests in a direct and practical way, by providing financial support to children from families without the means to pursue their hobbies and interests, or for independent, older young people without the financial resources themselves.

The scheme offers grants to children and young people aged 5-19 in Kent, of up to £300 for one young person, or up to £1000 for a group of young people. Young people must be living or attending school in Kent in order to apply, and have identified a talent or interest that they feel would be beneficial to their wellbeing. Young people must have a trusted adult to apply for the grant on their behalf,



A young person received a pair of binoculars to pursue their talent and interest through HeadStart Kent

and this should be a professional working with them such as a teacher, a youth worker or a coach. Activities can be funded for up to 1 year, and a breakdown of the costs must be provided by the adult applying for the grant, who also holds responsibility for purchasing what the young person has applied for. Grants may be used to afford memberships to clubs or lessons, such as for dancing, music and sports, for personal items such as clothing and equipment needed to pursue activities, or for transport to and from an activity.

'I came out of the boxing session feeling great. I learned a lot of new skills in this one lesson that I went to and I want to learn more and more. Before I went into the session, I was feeling stressed about some personal things, and then after it I felt much better and I was able to do some work when I got home. I really want to try and pursue a career in boxing. The exercise was great for my emotional wellbeing' – young person

Accessing nature to promote wellbeing¹

A young person I have been working with has been struggling to communicate with her family, friends and teachers, and has displayed challenging behaviour at school. I recently applied to the Talents and Interests Grant and the young person received a subscription to the RSPB so that she could develop her knowledge and passion for birds, as well as travel expenses to a nature reserve. The young person was shown all around the reserve and given detailed information about the wildlife and the ways the centre works to preserve and care for the animals and plants.

¹ The following case study was written by a trusted adult who supported a young person experiencing difficulties communicating with family, teachers and friends, to apply for a Talents and Interests Grant. All identifiable information has been changed to preserve the young person's anonymity

The young person had a truly remarkable experience and I have emailed the centre to express my deepest gratitude for creating such an amazing memory for her. The young person has since said she has clear aspirations for a future career working with wildlife.

She engaged brilliantly throughout the support from HeadStart and is better able to communicate with family, peers and school staff, reducing problematic situations, and now has more clearly-defined aspirations for her future.

Outcomes

An application for a Talents and Interests Grant starts with a [resilience conversation and action planning between a young person and](#) their trusted adult. This ensures that the talents and interests contribute towards improving resilience and, in turn, their mental health and wellbeing. This aim is supported by data collected by HeadStart Kent, which suggests that the Talents and Interests Grant has contributed towards a significant improvement in young people's resilience. The end of year outcomes [report](#) for 2019/2020 found that 81% of young people awarded a Talents and Interests Grant in that year either strongly agreed or agreed that taking part had improved their resilience, alongside 93% of trusted adults who also felt that the grant had helped build the young people's resilience and emotional wellbeing. 96% of young people said that they enjoyed taking part in the activity afforded by their grant, and qualitative feedback from young people has been positive:

'[Before] going to the youth group, I didn't like speaking to people and felt isolated. I have more confidence [now] and feel I have like-minded people I can talk to about how I feel' – young person

'[The Talents and Interests Grant] gave me the opportunity to learn a new skill and helped me with my anger. I feel less angry, and stronger' – young person

'It makes me feel good to get out of the house and do something positive. I get to socialise with other people. It [the activity afforded by the Talents and Interests Grant] has made me feel more confident about doing other activities. My self-esteem has improved' – young person

Adults have also fed back on their perceptions of the Grant's impact on young people:

'I saw less of the young person, which means he was in his lessons. He looked happier when I saw him around the school. I heard his name mentioned less in situations that have arisen around the school' – school staff member

'Boxing offers the young person a healthy outlet, supporting him to manage his emotions. He attends regularly and has received good feedback from the coach, so much so they have offered him further sessions, having sourced funding elsewhere'

and supported him to join a local boxing club. They have also offered him an opportunity to become a qualified instructor, supporting his future employability' – trusted adult

'The young person has been better able to form and maintain lasting friendships. He met others who he previously would not have spent time with, which has broadened his social circle, which is very positive' – trusted adult

'The young person was buzzing after her sessions and really got in a regular pattern of attending gym sessions. I could see her self-confidence grow and she found something she enjoyed for herself that took her thoughts away from being low and negative to being positive and having something to look forward to doing' – trusted adult

Setting up a grant scheme

The HeadStart Kent team have developed recommendations based on this approach.

Key learning from their reflections are:

- Ensure application process and language is accessible to both trusted adults and young people, even if it is the adult who has to submit the form.
- Young people should be made aware of the time it will take for a grant application to be processed, be awarded and become available, and supported to plan for this by their trusted adult.
- Grant funds can't be transferred to young people, their families or the trusted adult, and must go either to the service itself, a local authority or school bank account.
- Administering funds to a new organisation or service in the community that has had no previous involvement with another young person can take time, and it needs to be made clear to organisations how this works and how long it can take.
- Clear guidelines and information sheets in a range of mediums for trusted adults, young people and organisations are useful in providing a smooth process where everyone involved understands timelines and processes for securing funds.