

HeadStart Kent – iCan

Alongside universal and systems approaches to meeting its programme aims, HeadStart Kent have also adopted a targeted approach to identify and support young people whose mental health, wellbeing and resilience are at risk of being affected by domestic violence.

Up to March 2020, 1,371 young people were identified as potentially requiring support because of domestic abuse incidents within the family. This information was shared with 40 secondary and 23 primary schools who implemented a HeadStart-designed conversation tool¹ which helps direct pupils to the most appropriate channels of support. Referrals to HeadStart Kent to support these young people recognised by schools as needing help have been signposted and redirected to specialist HeadStart domestic abuse services for young people. One teacher described this as having 'a big influence for us in shaping the way we manage safeguarding'.²

iCan is a HeadStart-funded service developed with Rising Sun³, for boys aged 13-16 who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence in Kent. The programme offers one-to-one strengths-based and trauma-informed support, working with young men who are managing a range of challenges such as handling emotions and maintaining relationships. There is a programme [toolkit](#) which has been developed by the Kent Domestic Abuse Consortium, containing resources freely-available for use. As part of the programme the consortium has also delivered workshops across the children and young people's workforce using the toolkit to inform the sector how to work with young men in a trauma informed way.

The programme has a flexible approach with adaptable timescales depending on each young person's needs, allowing time for practitioners to get to know the young person,

¹ <https://kentsiliencehub.org.uk/schools/resources-sc/resilience-conversations/>

² *HeadStart Programme: Year End Report 2017-2018*, p.48

³ Rising Sun is an organisation working to prevent and end domestic abuse for children, young people, families, and provides 1-1 mentoring and counselling for young people in Kent.

and adapt the work to meet their personality and interests. Young people shape their own paths with practitioners, set their own objectives and engage with the programme in a way that suits them. They are involved in collaborative decision-making with a range of agencies and the support is delivered in a setting that reflects their choices and goals. The programme focuses on relationship building at the start, using an introductory 'resilience conversation' tool called the Resilience Wheel⁴ that displays six areas contributing to resilience in adversity. Although the programme refrains from a prescriptive approach, these six areas help structure and guide the work with the young person and build resilience across those elements in their lives as the work progresses:

1. **Feeling Secure** – How secure they feel in themselves, with the people around them and in different physical spaces
2. **Education** – Learning, trying new things and receiving support from others to do so
3. **Talents and Interests** – Accessing enjoyable or new activities that they are interested in or want to try
4. **Emotions & Behaviours** – Being able to manage emotions and behaviours, and feeling positive about the future
5. **Health** – Their health and wellbeing and those of the people around them
6. **Friendships** – The important of having friends, being a good friend and having a supportive network

Within each of these six areas, there are a range of support and interventions on offer, with titles including, 'who is in my supportive network?', 'finding joy in learning', 'men and friendships', 'taking care of myself', 'anger as a secondary emotion' and 'what are my values, what do I believe in?'. The focus for each young person depends upon the key areas highlighted within the resilience conversation and as the programme continues. The programme and young person's progress are evaluated with three quantitative outcome measuring tools, including using the Resilience Conversation tool,

⁴ <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/schools/resources-sc/resilience-conversations/>

the young person's CORE⁵ and the shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale⁶, and through qualitative feedback from young people, families and schools.

Of the 61 young people that completed support up to March 2020, 71% reported an improvement in their wellbeing and this was a significant improvement.⁷ One young person⁸ who previously displayed aggression and violence in the family home was able to manage and substantially reduce this behaviour following full engagement with the programme. The allocated practitioner helped the young person develop self-de-escalation techniques through visualising scenes and journeys to places he described as calm and peaceful. Once the young person had practised this technique he was able to see situations from a new perspective and, with the development of mentalisation techniques, was able to reflect upon his behaviour towards those close to him. He became able to recognise that often situations at home were not an attack on him, and was therefore able to respond in a more adaptive, healthy in an interaction with a family member that may previously have involved conflict and violence. The young person's mum fed-back that the programme had significantly improved relations at home and had supported the young person to manage his emotions in effective and healthy ways. The practitioner taught the young person mentalisation strategies to help him calm down during periods of stress and, building upon the young person's interests, helped him develop visualisation techniques to bring them back to a calm place.

Referrals are received from various places, particularly from schools, early help and social workers, and CAMHS. The programme has a strong relationship with local schools, which helps them make contact with young people at the beginning of each programme. Referrals may also be made internally, such as through parents, family members or siblings. They tend to be for young men who have witnessed or

⁵ The Young Person's CORE (developed by the [Child Outcomes Consortium](#)) is a 10-item scale that was designed for use in the 11-16 age range. It addresses global distress and is therefore suitable for use as an initial screening tool and outcome measure

⁶ The Shortened Edinburgh Warwick Mental Wellbeing Scale (developed by [NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh](#)) considers wellbeing in relation to functioning on personal and social levels. It looks at how the young person evaluates their life as a whole, as opposed to focusing on the internal, emotional component to mental health and wellbeing.

⁷ [Year End Report 2019/20: Outcomes of young people supported by HeadStart Kent - Kent Resilience Hub](#)

⁸ Consent has been given from HeadStart Kent and iCan to share this case study, and all details have been changed to preserve anonymity.

experienced domestic violence, and occasionally they may be at risk of abuse in a relationship. This may be as a victim or a 'perpetrator', but coming from a trauma-informed approach, iCan does not perceive young people as perpetrators. Most young people referred are exhibiting challenges with their emotional and mental health. Some are very anxious, many have poor attendance at school and some are school refusers. Some young people are engaged in antisocial behaviour at the point of referral, and some attend PRUs instead of mainstream provision.

As the programme supports young men exclusively, all of its workers are male, and developing a professional relationship with a trusted male adult is considered an important factor of the work. The service acknowledges that trust is very difficult for many of their young people, especially for those with experience of working with many other professionals, and the programme's strength-based approach means that young people are not required to discuss their previous life experiences, unless they wish and feel safe enough to do so. Young people are supported to consider future plans, goals, understand and manage their emotions and realise the impact of anxiety, anger and conflict in family and peer relationships.