



EBPU
Evidence Based
Practice Unit

A partnership of



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

What young people in HeadStart
told us about:

Having difficulties and getting support

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester



What is HeadStart?

HeadStart is a five year programme set up by the National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HeadStart looks at how to help young people with their wellbeing and how to stop them developing serious mental health issues. To do this, HeadStart provides different types of support to young people in schools, online and where they live.

HeadStart is happening in six areas of England: Hull, Wolverhampton, Newham, Cornwall, Blackpool and Kent. These six areas are making sure that young people are part of the whole project, as young people have lots of knowledge about what works and what they need.

The HeadStart Learning Team is a group of researchers from the Evidence Based Practice Unit (UCL and the Anna Freud Centre), the University of Manchester, the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) and Common Room.

The Learning Team researches the ways that HeadStart is supporting young people and looks at whether this support is helping. They produce reports and share messages about what the research shows.

This booklet is based on findings from interviews with young people. These interviews took place during the first two years of HeadStart. It focuses on how young people's experiences of difficulties in their lives, and support to cope with these difficulties, have changed over time.

Booklet by Emily Stapley and Lauren Garland, with thanks to the Research Champions at the Anna Freud Centre and the Common Room Young Advisors.

Derived from *Learning From Young People in HeadStart: A Study of Change Over Time in Young People's Experiences of Difficulties and Support* by Emily Stapley, Mia Eisenstadt, Ola Demkowicz, Sarah Stock and Jessica Deighton.

What is this booklet about?

We wanted to find out whether young people's experiences of difficulties in their lives, and the support they received to cope with these difficulties, had changed during the first two years of HeadStart.

We spoke to 78 young people at two separate times. We first spoke to them in 2017/18, and we interviewed the same young people again in 2018/19. Doing this meant that we could see what may have changed for these young people between the first and second time we interviewed them. We asked them about:

- what had changed at school, with friends and family, and in themselves;
- what problems or difficult situations/feelings they had faced;
- how they had handled these problems and difficult situations/feelings, including coping strategies and sources of support;
- what they thought of HeadStart.

This booklet explains what the young people told us.

This booklet talks about young people's experiences of some difficult issues, like bullying and family problems. If you find anything covered here upsetting, speak to an adult you can trust, like someone at home or school. You can also find a list of other support options at the end of this booklet.

About our research

The HeadStart programme will run for

5
years

£58.7
million

National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund.

The aim is to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

6

local authority led HeadStart partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton.

The HeadStart programme works with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to make young people's mental health and wellbeing everybody's business.

78
young people

were interviewed by researchers from the Learning Team once in 2017/18 and again in 2018/19.

What did we find?



Young people's experiences of life varied over the first two years of HeadStart.



Many young people said that they had had support from HeadStart by the second year of the programme.



HeadStart has had a positive impact for many young people.



There are some common problems that most young people seem to struggle with.



Young people who are having a hard time in their lives seem to struggle more with anger and arguments with friends and family.

What do these findings tell us?

- Young people have different support needs and priorities.
- Providing information about support is important.

What did we find?

Finding #1

Young people's experiences of life varied over the first two years of HeadStart.

For some of the young people we spoke to, life had been going well over the first two years of HeadStart, or had recently improved. Often, these young people said they had supportive relationships with their family, friends and school.

"I think things have got better because in Year 7 you're just kind of settling into the school, and then you have all the problems and you're trying to find out who your friends are. Now, I kind of know who my friends are and who to trust"

"When I get mad I just walk out the room, like take myself out of it so. I've like, I've learnt stuff to like control my anger and everything"



For other young people, the picture was mixed.

By the second year of HeadStart, some parts of their lives had been going well or had got better, while other areas of their lives had stayed difficult or become more difficult.

"My confidence did decrease, but now it's okay. It's like, not really good but it's not bad too"

A small number of the young people we spoke to were also going through real challenges, which had either stayed the same or had got worse over the first two years of HeadStart. Often, these young people talked about the problems they had been experiencing with their family or friends, at school, and/or with their feelings and emotions.

"My mum and I do argue a lot. We both get like stressed easily. And like she, she starts having her voice up and then I start giving her attitude because I don't like it and it turns into a big, massive argument"



Figure 1. Examples of what young people told us about changes in their lives over time.

When young people's lives had been

going well	up and down	difficult
Improvements in managing anger	Difficulties managing anger	Difficulties managing anger
Some issues with friends/peers (e.g. arguments)	Difficulties with friends/peers (e.g. arguments, bullying)	Difficulties with friends/peers (e.g. arguments, bullying)
Improvements in behaviour and learning at school	Some improvements but also difficulties around behaviour and learning at school	Difficulties around behaviour and learning at school
Improvements in family relationships	Some improvements but also arguments and conflict in family relationships	Arguments and conflict in family relationships

"I just try my best to not listen to them and just ignore them. And then, like then I would try to cheer me up and just say, stay positive, just don't listen to the negative people"

"I try and control my anger as much as I can. And then if I don't control it then I've got to just try and breathe and try and just relax and if that doesn't work then I know that I'm going to get in trouble"

"You two are adults, I am a child, I've got school, I've got schoolwork. I want to get to college, and I want to succeed in life. I don't want to be in the middle of two parents"

Finding #2

Many young people said they had received support from HeadStart by the second year of the programme.

The types of HeadStart support that young people talked about receiving included:

- peer mentoring, which involved being supported by an older student at their school;
- co-production activities, for instance being involved in the way HeadStart is run in their area;
- creative, sports, and other leisure activities, such as going to a youth club or a theatre group;
- talking in a group (for example in lessons) about different emotions and ways of coping;
- one-to-one support from an adult, such as counselling.

However, there are some young people experiencing difficulties in their lives who might not yet have been offered HeadStart support, as not all young people who we interviewed mentioned receiving support from HeadStart.

"My HeadStart counsellor is someone to talk to, and, kind of like a diary in a way. But, one that talks back and makes you feel better"

"I'm not as stressed or worried now because I've got like more advice from people that might have had different experiences or just like thoughts and that"

Finding #3

HeadStart has had a positive impact for many young people.

Many young people told us how HeadStart support had had a positive impact on them and their lives in lots of different ways, including:

- boosting their confidence and self-esteem;
- feeling less angry, sad, worried, or stressed;
- having fun and enjoying HeadStart;
- allowing them to have time to relax;
- receiving helpful advice from other young people and from adults involved in HeadStart;
- gaining more knowledge about ways of managing problems or difficult situations and feelings;
- feeling more able to cope with or deal with problems;
- helping them to make more friends;
- helping them to take part in activities outside of school;
- feeling more able to tell other people about their feelings and problems;
- feeling that they had someone to talk to if they needed to.

"HeadStart takes my mind off things. And it gets me away, from my, like because my house is always busy, and just hectic, it sort of just lets me lift that weight off my shoulders to just chill for a bit"

But for some young people, the HeadStart support they had received might not have been enough. Some young people told us about problems they were still struggling with, even after getting support from HeadStart. It also wasn't always clear from the interviews whether young people knew how to get extra help from HeadStart if they felt that they needed it.

"I feel like I still need HeadStart because it's like, it helped. But then like I got all the worries back again. So, like going there just helped like it all go away"

"Now when I think about it, it didn't really like, it helped me, I benefitted from it a little bit, but not really a lot"



Finding #4

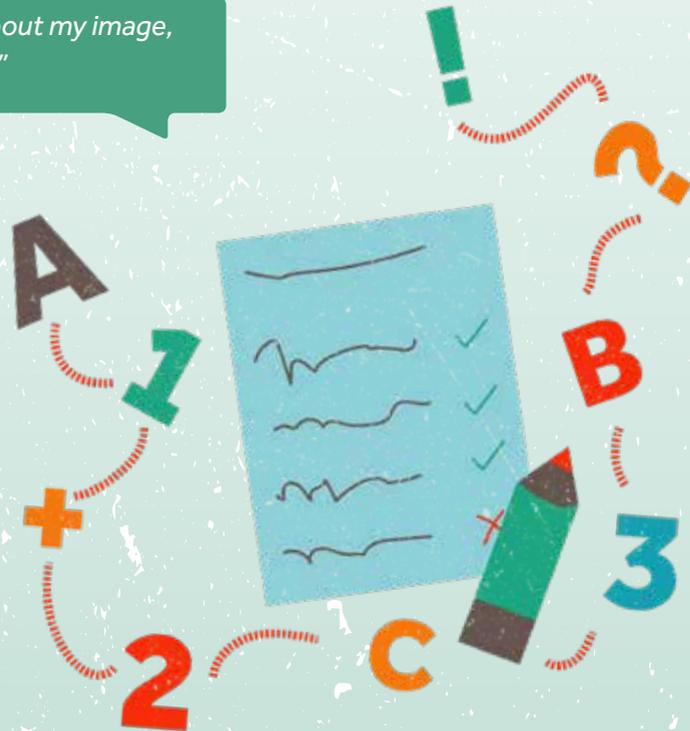
There are some things that most young people seem to struggle with.

No matter how difficult or easy life had been over the last two years, many young people said that they still had a hard time with:

- their levels of confidence and self-esteem;
- feelings of worry, stress, and anxiety, particularly in relation to schoolwork, school grades, and exams.

"I get worried about a lot of things and um, one in particular is that I feel that I'm not good enough"

"I'm really insecure about my image, about, like, how I look"



Finding #5

Young people who are having a hard time in their lives seem to struggle more with anger and arguments with friends and family.

Young people who were experiencing the most difficulties in their lives by the second year of HeadStart told us that:

- they were struggling to manage their anger, and that they were letting their anger out by kicking or hitting objects or people, or by shouting, screaming, crying, or snapping at others;
- they were finding it hard to get along with other young people, and some had been involved in fights and arguments;
- they had been having arguments (and sometimes physical fights) with their parents and siblings, or they had experienced their parents arguing or fighting.

"And that's just the way my anger goes. I feel sick. I feel like I want to punch someth- like, I have done before, I've turned round and punched a wall"

"My mum knows that if she'll go on my side in an argument, my stepdad will leave her... so she can't really say anything"



What do these findings tell us?

Young people have different support needs and priorities, and some may benefit from more support than others.

We found that some young people had experienced consistency, or improvement, in their experiences of life and support over the first two years of HeadStart. These young people currently have the lowest need for extra support, as they have most access to existing sources of support or may have been able to get what they need from previous or current support.

We also found that some young people had experienced less consistency in support, and had experienced ongoing or new challenges in life, over the first two years of HeadStart. These young people have a higher need for extra support at this point, as they may not have been able to access existing sources of support easily, or may have not been able to get what they need from previous or current support.



These findings make us think about whether all young people in need are being identified for support, are receiving or engaging with support, and are getting what they need from support. This includes both formal sources of support, like HeadStart, and informal sources of support, like family and friends.

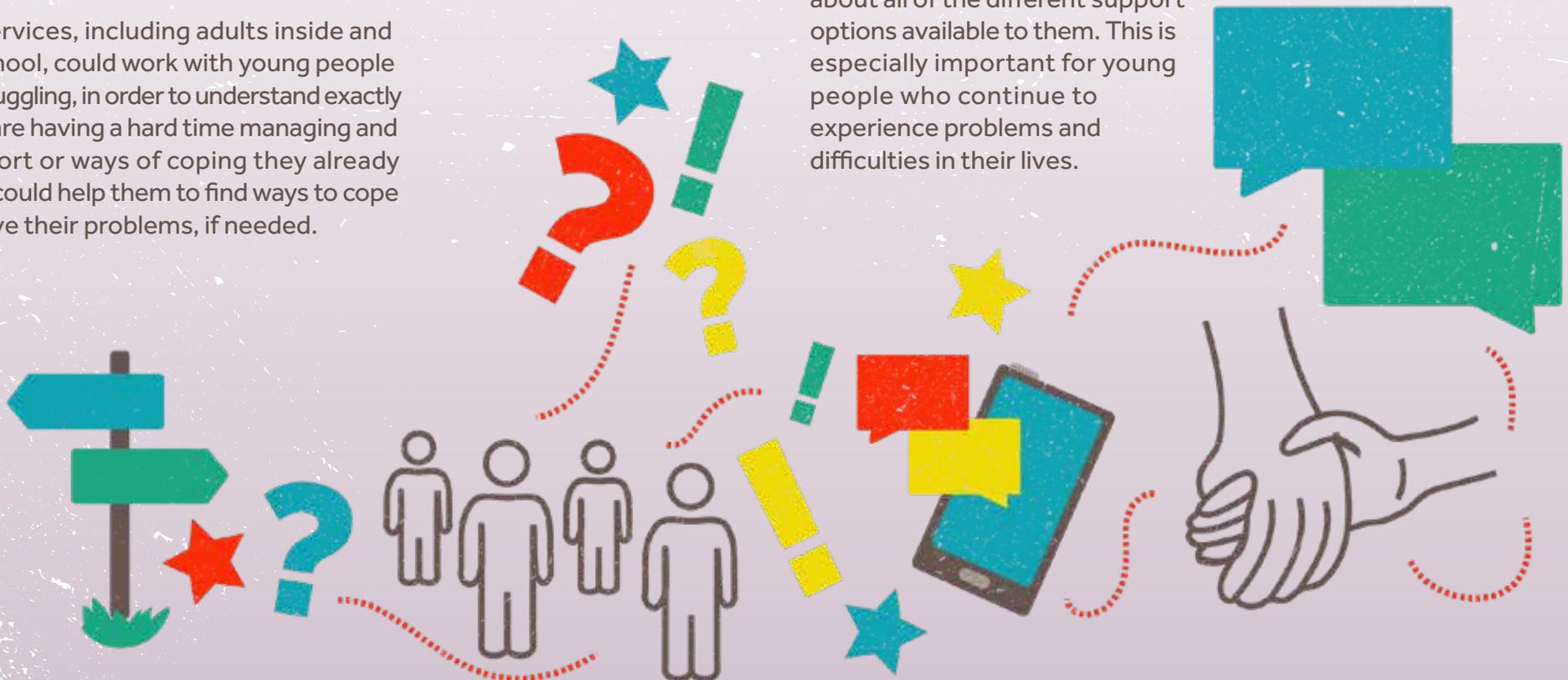
We also found that many young people need support with building confidence and self-esteem, and how to deal with worries and stress. However, managing anger and coping with difficult relationships with family and friends are important areas that some young people need help with.

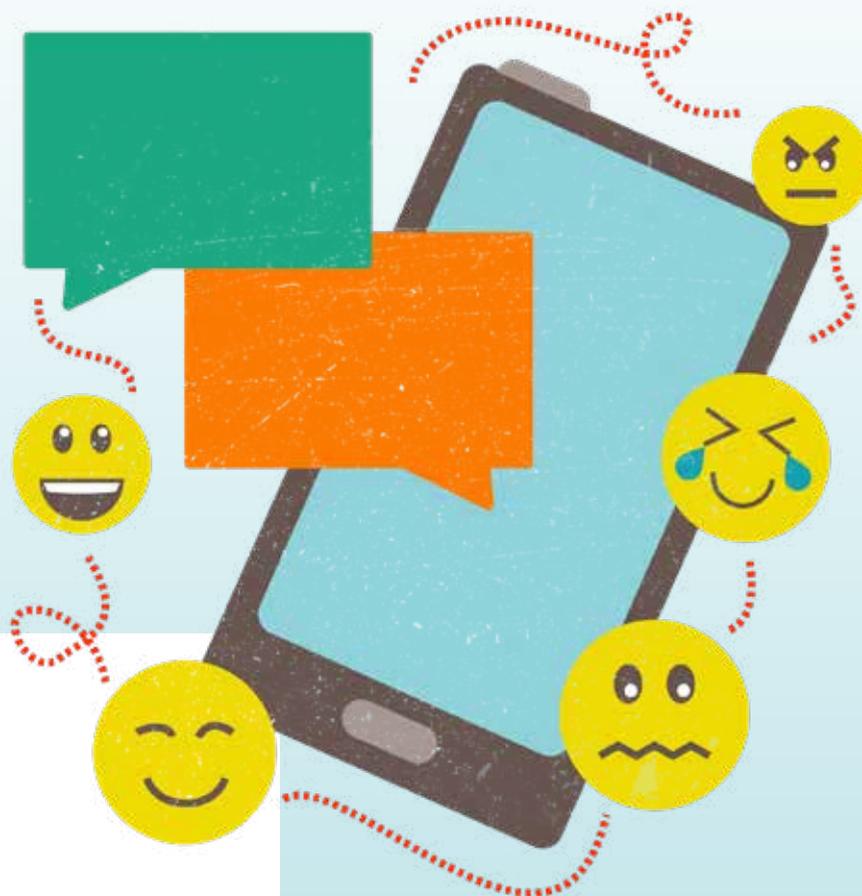
Support services, including adults inside and outside school, could work with young people who are struggling, in order to understand exactly what they are having a hard time managing and what support or ways of coping they already have. This could help them to find ways to cope with or solve their problems, if needed.

Providing information about support is important

It's important to make sure that young people know why they have (or have not been) offered support. It is also important that young people are told how they can access support, what it is for, and when and why it stops.

Our findings also suggest that even when young people have received help, sometimes they may still be experiencing difficulties, and they may need more support. When support is ending, it is important for support providers to talk to young people to find out whether they need any more help, and to make sure that they know about all of the different support options available to them. This is especially important for young people who continue to experience problems and difficulties in their lives.





Where can I find support?

Childline: 0800 1111

The Samaritans: 116 123

On My Mind: www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind

The Mix: www.themix.org.uk



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Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU)

The Anna Freud Centre, The Kantor Centre of Excellence,
4-8 Rodney Street, London, N1 9JH
Tel: 020 7794 2313

www.ucl.ac.uk/ebpu

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