



Implementing HeadStart

a review of Year 1 delivery in schools
from the perspective of Youth Practitioners and school staff

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in partnership with



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HeadStart

This report focuses on HeadStart Newham. HeadStart is a National Lottery funded programme developed by the Big Lottery Fund. It aims to understand how to equip young people to cope better with difficult circumstances, preventing them from experiencing common mental health problems before they become serious issues.

The programme supports a broad range of initiatives for building resilience and emotional wellbeing in 10 to 16 year olds in order to:

- improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people
- reduce the onset of mental health conditions
- improve young people's engagement in school and their employability
- reduce the risk of young people taking part in criminal or risky behaviour.

The programme is being delivered in six local authority areas between 2016 and 2021: Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton. HeadStart Newham is delivered in partnership with the London Borough of Newham.

The Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund is the largest distributor of money from the National Lottery. Every year it distributes around £600 million pounds for good causes, all thanks to the players of The National Lottery. A significant proportion of this funding goes on strategic programmes. HeadStart is one of those programmes.

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Summary

Introduction

HeadStart Newham¹ is an early help service for 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. HeadStart works with young people in schools, the community and with parents, through a combination of whole school work and targeted interventions.

During the first year of the programme, HeadStart partnered with eight secondary and twenty primary schools across Newham. At the end of the initial delivery year research was conducted to collate the lessons learnt, from the perspectives of delivery staff and schools about the facilitators and barriers to implementation.

Methodology

A qualitative research design included a focus group with HeadStart Youth Practitioners, an interview with a Senior Youth Practitioner and five interviews with school staff. Fieldwork took place during summer 2017. All research encounters were audio recorded and thematically analysed.

Summary of findings

The first year of HeadStart delivery was a learning curve for both Practitioners and schools. Youth Practitioners were excited to be part of a new youth service. However, they experienced setbacks in finding their place in the team and felt their skillset was underutilised. Practitioners encountered challenges to implementing interventions, such as a lack of training and guidance, and navigating how to support young people on group-based, short-term interventions. Practitioners had a clearer sense of their role by the end of the year and had suggestions to strengthen provision. They advocated for time to support the whole school

work and provide some one-to-one support to young people, alongside group interventions. They highlighted a need to standardise intervention materials for consistency. Practitioners wanted management to acknowledge their contributions, include them in decision-making and integrate with wider council youth services. Despite frustrations with service organisation, Practitioners remained ambitious for HeadStart.

Schools were positive about HeadStart support. Partnering with HeadStart could enable schools to prioritise pupil wellbeing, but this required buy-in from senior leadership and required a designated staff member with support from other staff, to develop. The combination of whole school support with a dedicated Resilience Training Lead and targeted interventions by specialist Youth Practitioners were welcome resources. School leads explained that a bespoke and gradual approach to implementing whole school change worked well, as did having interventions for particular Year groups, delivered to suit the school timetable. By the end of the first year, leads had a clearer understanding of HeadStart, its work and the time commitment required by the school. Leads believed that small positive steps had been made to support pupil wellbeing, but that whole school change would take time. There remained uncertainty about how to describe interventions to pupils and parents due to the stigma attached to mental illness. Leads explained the tension around taking pupils out of lessons for non-academic interventions, and therefore expected delivery to strike a balance between fun and learning, pupil behaviour to be managed, no late session cancellations, and session feedback and a measure of pupil outcomes. Schools suggested a need to engage parents in the

¹ <https://www.headstartnewham.co.uk/>

progress that their child had made during the intervention. For a sustainable whole school approach, an induction for new school staff was required.

Making use of the findings

The findings identify areas of delivery that HeadStart Newham may wish to review:

- Training needs of Practitioners to deliver consistent and effective interventions
- Supporting schools and Practitioners to address challenges to intervention delivery
- Utilising Practitioner skillset to enhance service provision through dedicated one-to-one support for pupils and integrating with wider council youth provision
- Supporting schools to develop a sustainable whole school approach
- Engaging schools with intervention delivery and pupil outcomes
- Review communications and schedule planning with schools.

Our learning

HeadStart Newham is committed to refine service delivery, based on evidence and our learning. This section sets out how HeadStart has responded to the research findings.

Training.

Practitioners reported gaps in induction/ training, e.g.:

- job role of the team
- the target population criteria and assessing if a pupil meets it
- how to deliver interventions, the intended outcomes and change mechanisms

- We are now clearer about roles
- Recommendation forms have been refined. The target population criteria is clear. However, saying 'no' to a pupil that doesn't meet the criteria remains a challenge
- In 2017/18 Practitioners received intervention training, but training remained largely 'on the job'. We're piloting a quality assurance framework for all interventions

Delivering interventions.

Practitioners experienced challenges to delivery, e.g.:

- inconsistent intervention materials across Practitioners
- low quality equipment and resources
- low awareness of HeadStart among school staff, limited communication between the Practitioner and the designated school lead, unsuitable rooms and handovers between practitioners
- confidence that young people's needs are met, rushed 1:1s and scope to tailor interventions, no links to other youth services in the borough

- We now have session plans and templates, that retain scope to tailor materials to the group's needs
- We order equipment termly, newly appointed Support Practitioners will ensure sufficient stock.
- We've recruited Support Practitioners to provide cover and the use of session plans will help with handovers. We could benefit from a central system for school/intervention information.
- We have improved communication with schools, e.g. recommendation forms, marketing packs, the introduction of HeadStart Early Mental Health Teams
- We know we need to start planning HeadStart delivery before the start of a new academic year
- We need to provide a differentiated approach to different groups and pupils and document this in session plans
- We're trialling mini-interventions, providing 1:1 pupil support
- We've started to connect with wider youth services

Job satisfaction.

Practitioners wanted to enhance the service and professional development, e.g.:

- provide 1:1 support to pupils
- shadow/learn from each other
- involvement in decision-making
- included in communications to schools
- contribute to whole school work
- reward and recognition
- a better office space

- Mini-interventions provide opportunities for 1:1 support for pupils
- This remains limited but useful. Peer observations and sharing best practice will be part of the quality assurance framework
- Practitioners are included in communications, yet some information is still missed. School Team Reflection help to share information and problem solve.
- Co-delivering school staff training and meetings with the RTLs happens more frequently.
- We recognise good practice in a range of ways, e.g. featuring Practitioners in films, case studies, presenting at local and national events and across HeadStart partnerships.
- We moved to a bigger office with a variety meeting spaces.

Embedding whole school work.

- Ensuring Head Teacher buy-in
- Support the designated school lead to deliver whole school strategy
- Supporting the induction of new staff for sustainable change
- Facilitate schools to share learning from one another
- Consider inclusion of wellbeing support for school staff
- We have bi-annual check-ins with senior leadership to discuss the WMF survey, the annual review and resulting actions
- Based on our learning we've developed an organigram to support schools to delegate HeadStart responsibility at a senior level
- We run school forums to support networking and sharing learning, and centralised staff training
- We recognise the need to support Staff wellbeing, however, this is not a discrete part of our funded remit. We hope that staff do benefit from the strategies and approaches that we share with young people around building resilience

Delivering interventions.

- Provision of recommendation criteria
- Consider Year 9 pupils to be mentors for More than Mentors
- Marketing materials about interventions for teachers, pupils and parents
- Intervention information, e.g. session plans, to support schools to understand the intended learning outcomes
- Review behaviour management
- Invite school staff to observe/support interventions
- Regular session feedback to ensure schools are aware of activity and can address issues
- Avoid cancelling sessions
- A measure of pupil outcomes at the end of intervention and a report for parents
- Supporting pupils to consider next steps, after interventions
- Recommendation forms have been refined, include the criteria and must be submitted digitally via the website
- We've taken on board school feedback, they can now choose to have Year 9 or 10 mentors
- We now have branded resources and available in print and online
- This have been done for all targeted school interventions.
- RTLs have provided behaviour management training to all Practitioners. Learning walks are being introduced to monitor all aspects of interventions, including behaviour and pupil engagement
- It's accepted good practice for Practitioners to involve relevant school staff in interventions, and we encourage this
- Regular session feedback is not yet standard practice, as it's dependent on the relationship between the school and the Practitioner. There are examples of good practice which we hope to build on
- We are appointing Support Practitioners to provide cover for sessions, in case of absence
- Schools now receive pupil and group outcome reports at the end of interventions to highlight progress and facilitate exit pathways for young people

Partnership working with HeadStart

- Limit the number and frequency of email communications to schools.
- Communications to be from a dedicated contact
- Provide an activity schedule so schools can plan for it.
- HeadStart have a communications strategy and take a more considered approach to who contacts school, when and with what information
- Schools receive a schedule of planned activity at the start of the academic year

Main report

Introduction

Background

HeadStart Newham is a preventative early help service that promotes the resilience and wellbeing of 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. HeadStart works with young people in schools, the community and with parents, through a combination of whole school work and targeted interventions. The logic model (see Figure 1) outlines the programme activities and intended outcomes and longer-term impacts.

HeadStart Newham has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund for five years, 2016-2021. In its first year, HeadStart partnered with eight secondary and twenty primary schools across Newham. At the end of this initial delivery year the HeadStart research team conducted qualitative research to understand the experience of implementing HeadStart from the perspectives of Youth Practitioner team and school staff.

This report outlines the findings and collates the lessons learnt, including the facilitators and barriers to implementation.

Study aims

The aim of this study was to provide a qualitative assessment of the experiences of school intervention delivery, as perceived by school staff, and Youth Practitioners, specifically:

1. *The experience of working with HeadStart Newham.*
2. *The facilitators and barriers to implementing interventions.*
3. *The perceived outcomes of the intervention for young people.*
4. *Suggestions to improve service delivery.*

This research does not provide findings relating

to how prevalent a view may be, nor is it a formal impact assessment. It sought to ascertain the views and experiences of select stakeholders to support a review of delivery and inform areas for service improvement.

Method

A qualitative research design was chosen.

Researchers facilitated:

- one focus group with HeadStart Youth Practitioners and an interview with a Senior Youth Practitioner; and
- five interviews with school staff, both primary and secondary, with pastoral responsibility.

Topic guides were agreed with the HeadStart Newham management. The guides were used by researchers to ensure a consistent approach across data collection encounters.

Research fieldwork took place between June and July 2017.

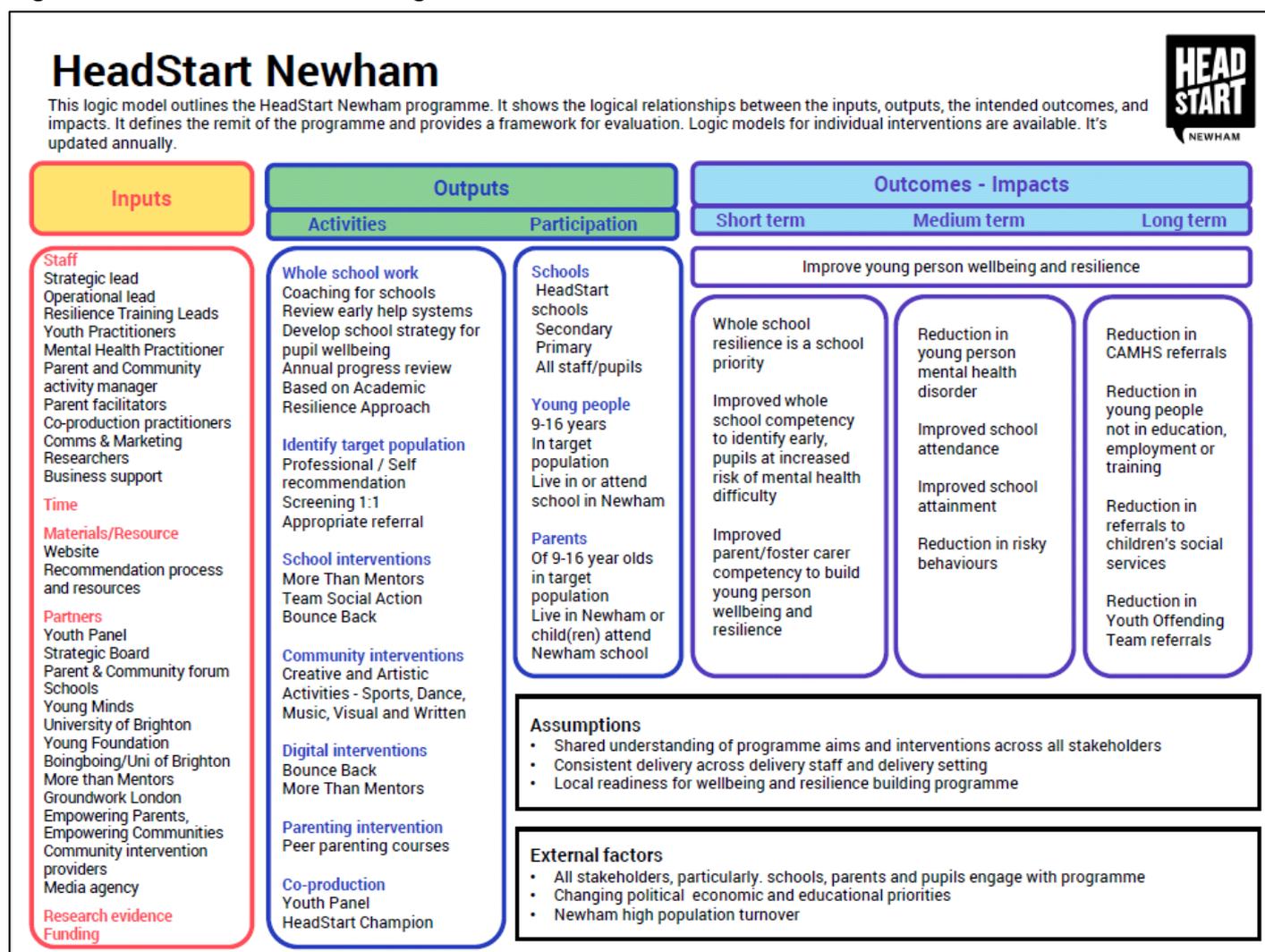
Sample and recruitment

This study included four Youth Practitioners and a senior Practitioner. They had all delivered targeted school interventions during the academic year 2016/17. This study did not include other HeadStart staff such as Resilience Training Leads, who lead the whole school work.

School staff were selected because they were either the designated HeadStart school lead, the contact for an intervention, or worked with the pupils that participated in interventions.

Practitioners and staff were invited to take part in this research by the HeadStart Newham Research team. The researcher explained the study and sought consent to participation before each focus group/interview.

Figure 1. HeadStart Newham logic model



Analysis

Each research encounter was audio recorded, with participant consent. Framework is a thematic approach to analysing qualitative data and was used in this study. Following familiarisation of the focus group recordings, an analytical matrix framework was developed in Excel, whereby key themes were listed in different column headings and each row represented a focus group. Data from each focus group/interview was summarised under the appropriate column heading, allowing for systematic and comprehensive analysis and comparison of themes between groups. Data was compared and contrasted between case (looking at what different participant groups said on the same issue) and within case (looking at

how a participant's opinions on one topic relate to their views on another) investigation of the data. The analysis was fully documented and conclusions could be linked back to the original source data.

Findings

The findings are presented in two sections: the Youth Practitioner experience of implementing Headstart interventions is discussed followed by the school experience.

Implementing HeadStart Newham

the Youth Practitioner experience



When I went to the first away day I thought this can change

Newham



Youth Practitioner, HeadStart Newham

A team of Youth Practitioners were recruited and appointed in August 2016, ahead of the start of programme delivery. The appointed Practitioners were experienced in youth work and familiar with working in Newham. Practitioners are assigned to schools and support coordination of recommendations of young people to interventions and deliver interventions. Practitioners are not responsible for delivering the whole school work.

Why work for HeadStart Newham: Initial motivations and expectations.

Practitioners were initially excited to work for HeadStart Newham. They described three motivations when initially applying and starting the position:

A new youth service. As experienced Practitioners, they were excited by the prospect of being part of a new youth service, and working in a multi-disciplinary team. In the context of austerity and wider cuts to youth services, Practitioners were keen to be involved in this new initiative, in Newham. Practitioners had expected that the service would offer an opportunity to work differently to existing youth services and provide a holistic service for young people. Practitioners had expected to work closely with young people to support their needs.

The subject matter. The service focus on mental health was of personal interest to Practitioners. Working for a preventative programme was appealing, as Practitioners believe in the value of early help.

Professional development. There was an expectation that Youth Practitioners would bring their existing skillset to HeadStart, while developing professional skills and having opportunities to learn from working in a multi-disciplinary team.

Understanding the job: Induction and training

Practitioners reported that their induction to the HeadStart service was lacking, as was the training and resources for delivering interventions. The gaps in their training and induction are outlined below.

Understanding each job role. Practitioners did not feel that they received an induction about who was in the team, what their job involved, and how each role supports the service. At the end of the first year, Practitioners remained unclear about this.

Understanding the target population. HeadStart Newham work with 10-16 year olds with signs of emerging mental health difficulty. To participate in targeted interventions, young people must meet the target population criteria.

Practitioners reported that the phrase 'the target population' was often used by middle management across the service, however, they did not feel that they were clear on what was meant by 'the target population' and which young people would meet inclusion and exclusion criteria. While the Senior Youth Practitioner was clear on the criteria, a key distinction is that Youth Practitioners were not.

Understanding each targeted intervention.

Practitioners would have liked an induction about each of the targeted interventions, including specific information about the activities involved, the intended outcomes and why these specific interventions had been chosen to be part of the HeadStart programme. They felt this would have helped their understanding of the interventions and feel confident in explaining them to schools.

Practitioners described their training as 'on the job', and in the absence of formal training or detailed information, they taught themselves

about what the interventions should look like and how to deliver them. They felt this lack of training and information left them with gaps in knowledge about the interventions and the best way to deliver them to achieve the intended outcomes for young people.

Delivering interventions

Intervention materials. Practitioners had expected the service to have existing materials. However, on joining the service Practitioners had to develop their own materials for interventions. While this helped them to develop their session plans and understanding of the interventions, they reported two drawbacks: firstly, they felt this was an inefficient use of time, as each Practitioner developed different versions of similar materials; secondly, they suspected that interventions were delivered inconsistently, both in terms of content and quality, across each Practitioner as a result.

Equipment and resources. Practitioners reported that the equipment and resources they had access to, were of low quality, for example, marshmallows, spaghetti, hula-hoops, arts and crafts. The Senior Youth Practitioner did not share this concern and believed that while equipment and resources can enrich interventions, the facilitation of the Youth Practitioner remains the key component to running high quality interventions.

Challenges to delivery. Practitioners outlined the challenges the experienced to delivery:

- Low awareness of HeadStart among school staff, and particularly a lack of understanding of the interventions.
- A lack of communication or responsiveness from the designated school lead, particularly for interventions such as Supported Volunteering (renamed Team Social Action) when school support is required for project

delivery; Practitioners could find it difficult to be assertive with unresponsive school leads;

- Room venue for interventions and 1:1s being unsuitable or changed frequently, which was disruptive to pupil and their attendance;
- Handovers between Youth Practitioners when covering sessions for one another had been inconsistent and sometimes lacking.

Meeting the needs of young people. Practitioners felt that the time allocated by Headstart and schools to deliver interventions did not provide sufficient opportunity to get to know each young person or allow room to tailor the provision to meet the needs of each young person.

- Practitioners reported that the time given for the initial 1:1 (typically 10 minutes) was too short to get to know the young person, and that 1:1s typically felt rushed.
- During a one hour, weekly, group intervention, it was difficult for the Practitioner to get to know the young people, especially as the interventions are short-term. Practitioners explained that it could take a few weeks to get to know the young people in the group, gain their trust and find the best way to work with them, by which time the intervention would be nearing the end. Practitioners explained the challenge of developing meaningful relationships with a group of 15 young people. While short-term interventions were sufficient input for some young people, they felt that there were young people that could benefit from further support which Practitioners would be well positioned to deliver.
- Practitioners wanted to meet the needs of young people. As such, they suggested alongside delivering the targeted group interventions, they could work with a small number of young people to provide individual, one-on-one support. Practitioners envisaged that they could identify these young people

through the group intervention work. Extra support could be provided in Youth Zones, HeadStart community based Creative, Artistic and Sports Activities and centres, or by arranging group activities. Practitioners felt this would align with the Academic Resilience Approach framework² by having fun with young people and creating a sense of belonging.

"I feel like sometimes I'm ticking a box, rather than giving quality work to the young people and looking after them"
Youth Practitioner

- Practitioners saw opportunities for them to work collaboratively with wider council services, such as Social Services and the Youth Offending Team to maximise the support provided to young people, and provide greater job satisfaction.

Practitioner job satisfaction

Supporting young people. Practitioners had expected to work closely with young people, using their expertise to tailor and adapt the HeadStart offer to the needs they recognised in young people. They found that running group interventions in a school setting did not allow sufficient time or flexibility to support all young people. Practitioners described how signposting young people to support rather than working with them directly, when a need was identified, was not fulfilling.

"I thought it was going to be more hands on with the young people, instead of delivering a session and then going"
Youth Practitioner

Professional development. Delivering manualised interventions was repetitive and therefore a source of frustration for Practitioners. They did not feel it made the most of their existing skillset, nor did it feel like they could develop new skills. Practitioners felt that they were not able to make the intervention 'their own' or make too many changes when tailoring the interventions to the needs of the young people in the group. Practitioners wanted the opportunity to share learning and delivery approaches from their peers, but felt there was not enough time or emphasis put on shadowing one another. As mentioned above Practitioners wanted greater autonomy to tailor interventions to the group/school needs and the opportunity to do targeted one-to-one work with some young people.

Feeling valued. Practitioners felt undervalued by the HeadStart Newham service. Practitioners had expected to be part of a multi-disciplinary team, but on joining the service, they felt that they were at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. Additionally, they thought that their views, experience and opinions were not valued by management. They felt respected on a personal but not on a professional level. For instance, Practitioners felt they were only involved in team meetings to run ice breaker activities or games, as opposed to presenting or leading on discussion items. This could make them feel that the wider team did not understand or value youth work which contributed to their sense of being undervalued by management.

"I feel like youth work is a swear word in the office. As a person I feel respected loads, but as youth worker, no. It's the best team I've ever worked in but I don't feel my professional judgement is listened to that much"
Youth Practitioner

² A resilience framework that summarises a set of ideas and practices that promote resilience, developed by Angie Hart (<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/use-resilience-framework-academic-resilience/>). The framework underpins HeadStart Newham's approach.

Furthermore, Practitioners had expected senior management to shadow and observe their

sessions to see the work they do, but this had not happened.

Sharing information and decision-making about the service. Youth Practitioners reported that they were not privy to particular information about the service. They felt that managers had information and made decisions about the service without involving Youth Practitioners. Practitioners had expected a youth service to value their input from their direct work with young people.

"We're always going to look to see what we can do more...because we're reflective practitioners, we're professional, we want to ensure the quality level is incredibly high and we want to be able to meet the need of the young people at this grass roots, we want to see that we're able to have real, meaningful, early intervention that's going to make a difference in regards of the needs of those young people"
Youth Practitioner

Communications to schools. Youth Practitioners wanted to provide a seamless service to schools. A drawback of the multi-disciplinary model was that multiple staff could be in contact with schools, and these communications sometimes excluded Youth Practitioners. Youth Practitioners outlined instances when school staff asked them about HeadStart activity/communications that they were not aware of. Practitioners felt this made them and the service appear unprofessional to schools. Furthermore, it added to their sense of exclusion from aspects of the service.

Opportunities to contribute to whole school work. Practitioners were keen to work closer with the Resilience Training Leads (RTL) to understand, be aware of, and contribute to the specific whole school work running in their allocated schools. Youth Practitioners wanted to contribute to the whole schools picture, but felt excluded from it. For example, Youth Practitioners were not invited to participate in end of year school reviews

which left them with a sense that their work in the school had not been valued. Practitioners suggested RTLs could shadow their interventions, and that Practitioners could shadow whole school training/coaching.

Reward and recognition. Youth Practitioners believe that they are the lowest paid staff group in the service. This perceived financial discrepancy contributed to their perception of how the service values them and their skillset. However, there was acknowledgment that Practitioners have a higher salary compared with other youth workers and practitioners in the borough, outside of the HeadStart service.

Practitioners highlighted that they had exceeded the Big Lottery Fund key performance indicators, as such the number of young people taking part in interventions. Practitioners reported that there had been no reward or recognition of this.

Physical work environment. The Practitioner team felt the office space, specifically the community office, could affect how they felt about work. The office did not have sufficient meeting rooms, areas for 'downtime' for after or between delivery, and lacked resources such as projector.

Implementing HeadStart Newham

the School experience

“ We spend so much time talking about subjects, grades and data, it's rare to spend a day looking at wellbeing, those days are invaluable.”

*Designated school lead
Newham secondary school*

In the first delivery year, HeadStart Newham partnered with eight secondary schools and twenty primary schools. Each school was offered support with developing a whole school pupil wellbeing and resilience strategy, and targeted interventions for pupils with emerging mental health difficulties.

Five staff across four schools -three secondary and one primary - took part in an interview about their experience of HeadStart. The primary focus of these interviews was the implementation of the targeted school-based interventions. Where staff discussed the whole school support, this information has also been included.

Making pupil wellbeing and resilience a priority.

School staff were positive about the value of working with HeadStart Newham and its overall aims of supporting schools and pupils to develop their wellbeing and resilience. Staff explained that partnering with an external specialist provider, helped to make pupil emotional wellbeing and resilience a priority for them and the school. The combination of the whole school work and targeted interventions expanded the school's capacity to focus on and develop this pastoral support. Staff explained that without partnering with an external specialist provider, schools may lack the time, expertise or confidence to develop and run such work themselves. Staff discussed how schools generally have an academic focus that can run through the range of support they offer pupils, whereas an external provider, such as HeadStart may take a holistic and child-centred approach.

Whole school work

The whole school work was not the focus of this study, however, school staff that had worked with a Resilience Training Lead (RTL) discussed this aspect of the programme alongside the targeted interventions. They outlined their

experience of it and the factors that facilitated or presented challenges to its implementation.

Whole school work: what worked

A designated school lead and a day-to-day contact for specific programme elements. To ensure that HeadStart was adopted in the school, a designated lead was key, alongside buy-in from the Head Teacher. The lead was typically a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team. However, due to the number of elements of the programme (whole school work, targeted interventions, parenting courses), leads found that they had to share and delegate elements to relevant staff in the school to mobilise HeadStart and ensure a manageable workload. The lead retained an overview of all programme elements and provided introductions between the HeadStart staff and day-to-day school contacts.

A dedicated Resilience Training Lead. One RTL worked alongside the designated school lead to support the development of the whole school work. Over the course of the year the lead developed a positive working relationship with the RTL. Working with a RTL with prior school career facilitated the lead to trust that the RTL understood how schools operate.

Coaching, not telling. The RTL's coaching approach, to provide suggestions and being adaptive to the school's starting point was noted. For example, a RTL facilitated group sessions with year group form tutors to develop and implement pupil wellbeing activities. The lead explained that the form tutors decided to run a wellbeing day for pupils, and that the RTL and Youth Practitioner provided support and guidance on the suggested content. The lead noted that HeadStart input ensured that the day was child-centred.

An inclusive, all staff, approach. RTLs provide an induction to HeadStart and training to all school staff about the importance of supporting pupils' emotional needs alongside academic needs. The training was open to all staff, and not limited to teachers, which staff felt was important to developing a whole school understanding. However, the school leads were clear that the training alone did not embed whole school change, it was dedicated time with the RTL and a group of teachers that could bring about shifts in staff approaches.

Making the whole school work manageable. The RTL and school lead planned a suitable approach to drip feed the whole school work with a group of teachers, with a longer-term view to progress and reach a wider pool of pupils and staff in future years. For example, a joint decision to initially focus on Year 7 staff team, through training and provision of a suite of resources to identify pupils with emerging need. This made the approach to whole school work manageable and consistent across a full year group.

Connecting schools across the borough. School leads found the HeadStart school lead forums to be one of the standout and useful activities. There were two experienced benefits of the forums: firstly, they provided time to speak to other school leads, learn and share how they were addressing pupil wellbeing. Secondly, school leads were briefed about upcoming HeadStart work and requirements, information which may otherwise get lost in emails. However, it was felt that these forums happened infrequently; staff suggested termly forums would be valuable.

Long term support and planning for the year ahead. Schools appreciated the long-term support offered by HeadStart. Schools reported that during the initial year, the HeadStart programme

was implemented in an ad-hoc fashion as each lead figured out how to best embed the programme in their school. However, leads felt that by the end of the first year they had a better understanding of HeadStart, the work involved and that they could plan ahead to integrate HeadStart activity into coming years.

Whole school work: *what didn't work*

Capacity of the designated school lead. When initially partnering with HeadStart, the amount of time and work involved for school staff had been underestimated. Therefore, a challenge for the designated school lead, and sometimes the day-to-day intervention contact was that the HeadStart work was additional to their existing job role and responsibilities. Leads could therefore feel excess work pressure as a result of facilitating HeadStart.

Staff turnover. Changes to school staff, particularly the change of designated school lead could present a challenge to effective and consistent implementation. Staff explained that they may not receive a thorough handover about HeadStart from the school, particularly if they were new to the school.

Reaching the whole school. School leads were not convinced that all staff and pupils in the school were aware of HeadStart and the school's concerted focus on supporting pupil wellbeing. Leads believed that in the initial year of delivery, a limited pool of staff and pupils had engaged with the aims of HeadStart, because they had direct involvement with the programme or an intervention, or because they had involvement in the annual HeadStart pupil survey (Wellbeing Measurement Framework).

There was a view that the whole school work, including the Academic Resilience Training for all staff should occur before the implementation of

targeted interventions, to provide context and staff engagement.

A strategy employed by some schools to encourage all staff to make pupil wellbeing a priority, was to ask all members of the senior leadership team to put it into their action plans for the coming year. However, ensuring this would be acted on, remained a challenge.

Targeted pupil interventions

This section outlines school staff experiences of implementing the HeadStart targeted pupil interventions³ and the facilitators and challenges to implementation.

Before the intervention: *what worked*

Identifying the target population. The HeadStart targeted interventions are intended for pupil with or at risk of having emerging mental health difficulty. Schools took different approaches to identifying pupils. There were schools had existing systems in place to identify children with emerging needs, such as schools with student service managers with access to such information, identification was straight forward.

The HeadStart whole school Academic Resilience Approach training for all staff alongside dedicated time with an RTL supported the development of a system to identify pupils that met the target population for schools that did not have an existing or systematic process in place.

Understanding the interventions. Having a member of the HeadStart team, be it a Youth Practitioner or an RTL explain the intervention, the specific activities involved, and the expected pupil outcomes aided staff understanding of the

³ Information about HeadStart interventions is available: <https://www.headstartnewham.co.uk/activities/>
Detailed evaluation reports are available for each intervention on the website also: <https://www.headstartnewham.co.uk/resources/>

intervention. This informed consideration of which pupils to put forward.

Considering the group dynamic. All the interventions are group based therefore, some schools considered the group dynamic of the recommended pupils to facilitate a positive group dynamic.

Interventions for specific Year groups. The different HeadStart interventions target specific year groups. School leads explained that a year group focus was helpful to organising and running interventions. It also meant that fewer Heads of Year/ staff were involved and fewer timetable disruptions.

Before the intervention: *What did not work*
Staff leads described the following challenges in implementing the targeted interventions.

A lack of information about the recommendation criteria and interventions. Schools had a high-level understanding of HeadStart and the interventions, however, some schools had lacked detailed information about the pupil recommendation criteria for interventions, because the staff training had not taken place or the school had not received recommendation forms with the criteria. In the absence of clear information, schools made assumptions about who to recommend and how to describe the interventions, which was not always in line with HeadStart. Youth Practitioners noted that some pupils had a higher level of need than HeadStart target population criteria.

Finding the words. School staff explained that they found it challenging to describe the interventions to pupils and parents. Specifically, staff were cautious about using the term 'mental health' to describe the intervention. They acknowledged the stigma around this term, and

therefore did not want to put parents and pupils off from participating. However, staff did not want to mislead parents and pupils about HeadStart provision of early mental health support. Secondly, on a practical level, staff did not fully understand what the intervention activities involved and therefore did not know how best to describe them to parents and pupils.

Parental engagement and pupil choice. When recommending pupils to interventions, schools took different approaches, specifically in relation to parental engagement, and pupil choice differed. For example, one school consulted parents and each child before recommending them to the intervention, while another school did not consult pupils as it was assumed that pupils would feel special to be recommended.

Low uptake of pupil self-recommendations. Pupils can self-recommend to interventions. In this initial year, there were very few self-recommendations. Schools acknowledged and expected that once pupils start telling each other about interventions, there will be an increase in self-recommendation.

Pupils did not want to participate. Staff explained that some pupils chose not to take part in the interventions because they:

- did not feel comfortable with the prospect of taking part in a new unknown intervention and with pupils they did not know;
- They did not want to miss a particular lesson to participate, and for after school interventions they either could not or did not want to give up their time, especially older pupils; or,
- had other extra-curricular commitments.

School staff time. School leads across schools explained that the initial set of intervention groups involved more time and work for school staff than expected, particularly in relation to the

recommendation process and organising 1:1s with pupils, as well as ensuring pupils attended each week.

During the intervention: *what worked*

Flexible intervention timetable. Schools appreciated the flexibility offered by HeadStart with regards to when intervention sessions were held. Staff explained that it is easier to take Year 7 and 8 pupils out of lessons for interventions, but it becomes progressively contentious to take older year groups out of lessons for non-academic interventions. HeadStart intervention sessions were held either in school hours or directly after school. This flexibility allowed school to avoid pupils missing core lessons.

Youth Practitioner facilitation. Schools valued delivery by specialist Youth Practitioners. Specifically, schools:

- viewed and expected Practitioners to be expert facilitators of each intervention, who bring a different approach for learning compared with teachers that may take an academic focus;
- school leads noted that pupils had formed positive relationships with Practitioners;
- leads felt that it is positive for pupil's personal development to have opportunities to work with external organisations and people.

During the intervention: *What did not work*

Missing lessons. Staff explained that for some pupils missing lessons is a motivator to take part in interventions, and this was no different with HeadStart. However, an eagerness to miss lessons may not guarantee pupil engagement with the intervention.

Conversely, taking pupils out of lessons was and may remain a challenge to implementing

targeted interventions. Teachers tend not to want pupils, particularly quiet, studious pupils to miss their lesson for any interventions.

Timely Practitioner feedback. To ensure the school remains connected to the intervention, school leads suggested that the Youth Practitioner should provide the relevant school lead with an update following each session. Feedback should include pupil attendance, an overview the session, and any behaviour incidents. This information would allow the school to address any issues as they arise.

Cancelling intervention sessions. School leads explained that some intervention sessions had been cancelled. This was viewed as disruptive for schools and pupils, particularly when cancellations happened at short notice.

A balance of having fun and learning. Staff noted that pupils enjoyed interventions. While staff acknowledged that having fun was an important element, they expected learning to be equally prioritised. In the absence of Practitioner feedback after sessions or a measure of pupil outcomes, some leads were unsure whether the intervention had provided a balance between fun and learning.

Behaviour management. School leads had expected pupil behaviour discipline to be in line with the school policy. HeadStart Practitioners were perceived to take a lenient approach. Leads discussed that consistent behaviour management was important to ensuring positive intervention experiences for all pupils. Leads suspected that boisterous pupils may have overpowered quieter pupils, where behaviour management was lacking. Leads emphasised that pupils were recommended to interventions to have a positive experience, help them

recognise their assets and learn new skills. Staff were concerned that in the absence of firm behaviour management there was potential for the intervention experience to reinforce a negative self-view.

End of intervention: *what worked*

Pupil experience. School leads noted the benefit of the interventions for pupils. They believed that most pupils enjoyed the interventions and had noted small positive behaviour changes in some pupils. For example, BounceBack was felt to help pupils understand and express their emotions, Team Social Action helped to build pupil confidence, More than Mentors was felt to support mentees to develop positive behaviour strategies and support mentors to develop leadership and coaching skills.

In addition, school leads noted that the invitation to the annual HeadStart Celebration event helped pupils to feel a part of a Newham-wide youth initiative. Leads also discussed how participation in HeadStart interventions could support positive contact between the school and parents, for example at a primary school, parents thanked the school for selecting their child to the celebration event.

End of intervention: *what did not work*

A measure of pupil outcomes. Leads explained that from a teacher perspective there was not always a visible or notable change in pupils following the intervention. To understand the value of HeadStart and help justify continued support of the service schools wanted a measure of progress for each pupil after interventions. Leads understood the theoretical link between the interventions and the potential to improve behaviour and increase educational attainment, but suggested a need to have evidence of this progress.

Next steps for pupils. Schools did not tend to have planned next steps for pupils after interventions. School leads explained that with so many pupils in the school, they had to share the available resources across the whole pupil population.

School suggestions to enhance the HeadStart service

Limit emails to schools. Leads across schools felt overwhelmed by the number of emails sent by HeadStart and by a number of different HeadStart staff. Leads explained that they could receive multiple emails from HeadStart in the same day from different staff. Furthermore, email requests were perceived to make last minute requests. Staff explained that HeadStart emails were sent during office hours, whereas schools keep different hours.

Suggestion: Schools suggested fewer emails, and from a dedicated contact. That more notice is given so that schools can plan in activity.

Capacity of the designated school lead. The role of a designated school lead required more time than initially anticipated. Setting up and embedding a whole school wellbeing strategy alongside the targeted interventions was described as a full-time commitment.

Suggestion: HeadStart to advocate to safeguard the time commitment of the designated school lead. To accommodate school staff changes, leads suggested the need for HeadStart to provide an induction for new staff about HeadStart and the associated responsibilities. Staff suggested a HeadStart information pack, as well as a handover between departing and new staff.

Effective targeted interventions. School staff made suggestions to improve the logistics of the targeted interventions. Specifically:

- Promoting interventions with the support pupils that had previously taken part, to

increase the uptake of self-recommendations.

- Information packs about each intervention, including weekly session plans and learning outcomes to support Heads of Year and learning mentors to understand and support interventions.
- Engaging school staff in interventions by inviting them to observe sessions.
- A measure of progress for pupils at end of the intervention and a parent report to facilitate parental engagement.
- School leads suggested that Year 9 pupils could be mentors on the More than Mentors, as Year 10 pupils have a larger workload.
- Youth Practitioners could have a dedicated day of the week in the school rather than arranging ad-hoc visits.

Supporting the wellbeing of school staff. Staff leads suggested a missing element of the HeadStart programme was support for school staff to manage their own wellbeing.

Suggestion: HeadStart to provide wellbeing support for teachers and school staff.

Conclusion

The Headstart Newham programme is an ambitious programme to support young people's wellbeing and resilience. The first year of HeadStart schools delivery was a learning curve for both Practitioners and schools.

Youth Practitioners were passionate about delivering quality youth work and working for a new youth service. Practitioners experienced setbacks in finding their place in the HeadStart team, felt their skills were underutilised, and expressed limited job satisfaction. Practitioners experienced challenges to implementing interventions, including a lack of initial training and guidance regarding delivery and how to provide sufficient support to young people in a group-based, short-term intervention. Practitioners had a clearer sense of the role by the end of year one and shared suggestions to strengthen provision for young people, schools and to enhance their contributions to the service. They wanted to support the whole school work and provide one-to-one support to young people that could benefit from dedicated time, alongside group interventions. Furthermore, Practitioners highlighted the need to standardise intervention materials for consistent delivery. Practitioners wanted management to acknowledge their contributions and were keen to be included in decision-making and find ways to integrate HeadStart provision in wider council youth services. Despite frustrations with aspects of service, Youth Practitioners remained ambitious for HeadStart Newham.

Schools were positive about HeadStart support. Partnering with HeadStart could enable schools to make pupil wellbeing a priority, but this required buy-in from the Head Teacher, senior leadership and required a designated staff member with support staff to develop and

embed. The combination of whole school support with a dedicated Resilience Training Lead and targeted interventions by specialist Youth Practitioners were welcome additional resources. School leads explained that a bespoke and gradual approach to implementing whole school change worked well, as did having interventions for particular Year groups that could be delivered to suit the school timetable. By the end of the first year, leads had a clearer understanding of HeadStart, its work and the time commitment required by the school. Leads believed that small positive steps had been made to support pupil wellbeing, but that whole school change would take time. There remained uncertainty among school staff about how to describe and explain interventions to pupils and parents, particularly with regards to discussing mental health, due to the perceived stigma attached. Leads explained the tension in school to take pupils out of lessons for non-academic interventions, and therefore expected sessions to strike a balance between fun and learning, pupil behaviour to be managed, no late cancellations of sessions, and to receive regular feedback about sessions and a measure of pupil outcomes. Schools advocated a need for HeadStart to engage parents in the progress their child may make during an intervention. For a sustainable programme of work, school leads suggested a need to consider how new school staff are inducted to support pupil wellbeing.

Considerations for the service

Based on these research findings, the HeadStart Newham service may wish to review the following areas of delivery.

To support Practitioners

Training. Practitioners reported gaps in their training and induction. They wanted to be better informed about:

- job roles of the multidisciplinary team
- the target population criteria and how to assess if a young person meets it
- understanding how to deliver each targeted intervention and the intended outcomes and mechanisms for change.

Delivering interventions. Practitioners experienced challenges to delivery and suggested a need to consider:

- consistent intervention materials and quality equipment and resources to enrich interventions
- address challenges in schools, such as low awareness of HeadStart among school staff, barriers to communication between the Practitioner and the designated school lead, suitable rooms, Practitioner handovers.
- meeting the needs of young people, including time for 1:1s and scope to tailor interventions, working with wider youth services in the borough.

Job satisfaction. Practitioners identified areas to enhance support for young people and support their professional development:

- supporting young people with the greatest need through 1:1 time
- opportunities to shadow and learn from peers.
- to be part of service decision-making
- Practitioners wanted to be aware of communications to schools
- to contribute to the whole schools work
- reward and recognition
- a better office space.

To support schools

Embedding the whole school work. Support whole school activity, by:

- ensuring Head Teacher buy-in of the HeadStart programme
- supporting the designated school lead to protect time to deliver whole school strategy

- supporting the induction of new school staff for sustainable change
- facilitate schools to partner with one another to share learning
- consider the inclusion of wellbeing support for school staff.

Delivering interventions. To support effective interventions, through:

- provision of clear recommendation criteria
- consider Year 9 pupils to be mentors for More than Mentors
- intervention information for teachers, pupils and parents and detailed information about interventions, including session plans to support schools to understand the intended learning outcomes
- consider behaviour management
- invite school staff to observe/support interventions
- regular feedback after sessions to ensure schools are aware of activity and can address arising issues
- avoid cancelling session
- a measure of pupil outcome at the end and communication of this to parents
- supporting pupils to consider next steps after interventions.

Partnership working with HeadStart. To support better partnership working through:

- limited email communications to schools. Communications to be from a dedicated HeadStart contact.
- provide a long-term plan and sufficient notice of activity so that schools can plan for it.



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