

HeadStart Newham



More than Mentors

a review of Year 1 intervention delivery
from the perspective of pupils, school and delivery staff

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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

Summary

Introduction and study aims

HeadStart Newham¹ is an early help service for 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. More than Mentors (MtM) is a targeted peer mentoring intervention delivered by a HeadStart Youth Practitioner and a Mental Health Practitioner in secondary schools. The aim of this qualitative study was to assess MtM delivery as perceived by pupils, school staff, and Youth Practitioners.

Methodology

A qualitative research design included focus groups/interviews with pupils that took part in MtM, HeadStart Youth Practitioners, and school staff. Fieldwork took place in summer 2017. Research encounters were audio recorded and analysed using a thematic approach.

Summary of findings

Recommendation to More than Mentors. Schools selected mentees that met the target population criteria but were less adherent when selecting mentors. Schools and Youth Practitioners took different approaches to recommending pupils to the intervention. There were pupils whose first engagement with MtM was their 1:1. Pupils felt participation was an expectation, rather than a choice, and were not aware of why they had been selected. Mentors were happy they had been chosen, but would have liked to know why. Mentors who were provided clear information about next steps during 1:1s felt more prepared than those who did not receive these details. Mentor's parents/carers had a positive perception of the role of a mentor, while

mentees, and their parents/carers could assume MtM was for 'naughty' pupils. This perception changed where the Practitioner clarified the aims and benefits of the intervention to the parents/carers.

Mentor training and resources. Mentors enjoyed the two day training and felt the content provided sufficient information to feel prepared for the role. Nevertheless, mentors did not feel ready to put their training into practice. Mentors reported that the amount of information covered could feel overwhelming and the continuous assessment through role play could cause anxiety. The ongoing training and clinical supervision helped mentors to remember the initial training and reflect on their progress. Mentors suggested that training to deal with challenging situations and difficult topics would be beneficial. The resources in the mentor toolkit were helpful, and provided mentees with an alternative method for communicating with their mentor. Mentors valued the handbook and noted that it supported session reflection and monitoring of mentee progress.

A mentee pathway. Mentees reported that they were not provided with an introduction to, or training for their role in MtM. There were mentees who believed they were on an intervention because they were in trouble, or had done something wrong. However, mentors noticed this perception changed during the course of the intervention.

First impressions. There were pupils who had a bad first impression of HeadStart as the first session was unorganised and attendance was low. This was thought to improve in later weeks.

Weekly sessions. The session structure varied across schools and Youth Practitioners. Mentors

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

felt that the same weekly format provided a sense of familiarity and helped mentees to feel at ease. Pupils valued the provision of refreshments at after school sessions. Sessions generally started with group games, which pupils reported enabled the group to socialise and facilitated positive peer relationships. However, doing the same game each week could feel boring. Protecting sufficient time for 1:1 mentoring was important to both mentors and mentees.

Working with a Youth Practitioner. Facilitation by an external Practitioner was valued by schools and pupils alike. Pupils appreciated Practitioners informal education approach. Pupils suspected teachers had preconceptions about them, whereas they assumed Practitioners did not. Pupils felt able to speak freely about school related issues in sessions. School staff valued the Practitioners ability to build relationships and work with young people holistically.

The value of a peer mentor. The peer mentor relationship could become important to both mentors and mentees. Pupils felt their mentor/mentee was counting on them which facilitated attendance. Mentees appreciated having someone to listen to them and valued the honesty, empathy and understanding of a peer mentor. However, mentor-mentee pairings did not work when their personalities did not complement each other. Additionally, disruption to an established mentor-mentee relationship (such as a mentor joining an existing pair) could feel like an intrusion and create a barrier to the mentee sharing with their mentor.

Early exits. There were pupils who left the intervention early because of the session structure, the time commitment, or because they did not develop good relationships with their peers. The experience of leaving the intervention early was not pleasant for pupils. They reported

feeling guilty for not completing MtM. This guilt could be exacerbated if pupils were questioned by the Practitioner and school staff about leaving. This could make pupils feel they had done something wrong.

Pupil outcomes. Pupils and school staff attributed participation in MtM to a range of benefits including improved peer relationships; self-control among mentees; self-confidence; empathy and communication skills among mentors; and/or connections at school or home. Pupils believed that MtM may have long term benefits, for their future e.g. getting good grades. There were also pupils who did not feel any benefits of the intervention beyond enjoyment. School leads suggested a need for pupil progress and outcomes.

Making use of the findings.

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

- Recruitment and communication of the intervention by schools and Youth Practitioner; including intervention information and an opportunity for pupils to opt-out.
- Improving parent/carer understanding of MtM, particularly for mentees.
- Ensuring a good first session, that feels organised and has full attendance.
- A review of mentor training.
- How to ensure consistent delivery and session structure across Practitioners, prioritising 1:1 mentoring time.
- Pupil behaviour management.
- Engaging school to support pupil learning and outcomes.
- Ensuring a young person friendly exit strategy.

Our learning

The research suggested areas for learning and improving how More than Mentors (MtM) is delivered. Headstart Newham is committed to learn and refine the MtM intervention so that it works for young people and schools; and is delivered consistently well. The table below sets out how HeadStart has responded to the research findings.

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
<p>Recommendation and 1:1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reason pupils were recommended by school staff, and selected for progression by Youth Practitioners varied across schools and Practitioners, and did not always align to the HeadStart target population selection criteria. Communication with pupils, and pupil choice; 1:1s were not seen as an opportunity to opt-out nor did they provide detailed information about what the intervention would include. 	<p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed our recommendation process for mentor recruitment, explicitly asking questions around historical experience of emerging mental health difficulty, and assessing pupil suitability for the role. <p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to engage a variety of school staff in the recruitment. Recruiting pupils who have taken part in HeadStart interventions in primary school to be mentees and support their transition to secondary school. Involving pupils who have completed the intervention previously in mentee taster sessions. A review of how 1:1s are done to ensure that all young people get the same information about MtM, and to enable pupil choice to take part or not.
<p>Engaging schools and parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and engagement with parents/carers and schools, to improve understanding of the aims and benefits and their expectations of the intervention, particularly for mentees. Supporting school engagement with the intervention, communicating pupil progress and outcomes, and identifying ways in which schools can further support both mentees and mentors, after the intervention. 	<p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed intervention factsheets, and information on the website. Developed a parent/carer pack which provides information about HeadStart, MtM and how taking part may benefit young people. Introduced pre and post intervention surveys to quantitatively assess pupil progress across key outcome measures. This information is reported to schools and can be used to inform future support for pupils. <p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updating parent/carer pack so it is short and easy to read, emphasising skills pupils can develop and potential outcomes. Ensuring parent/carer pack is sent before an intervention begins. Addressing concerns about after school sessions and how to support pupils to feel safe travelling home. We are reviewing alternative delivery approaches to shorten sessions. Ways to align HeadStart intervention delivery schedules to school calendars. Including schools in setting intervention objectives for pupils. Reviewing the intervention design and whether Year 9s could be mentors.

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
<p>Mentor training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of the mentor training length and content, with a view to reducing both. 	<p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed mentor assessment criteria to ensure consistency across groups, and to inform Youth Practitioners decisions on pupil progression to the intervention. The criteria can also be shared with pupils during 1:1s to help manage mentors expectations. Created new materials to refine content of training and allow depth over breadth, and facilitate consistency across training groups. Ran focus groups with Youth Practitioners to gather feedback about mentor training and ensure that learning from previous cohorts was implemented. <p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing the number of facilitator role plays during training. Bringing the training cohorts of mentors together mid-way through the intervention and at the end. Alternative delivery methods for bitesize training, such as drop down Saturdays or half term days across schools. This would make weekly sessions shorter. Including mentees in mentor training so that mentors and mentees can meet before the intervention begins. Liaising with Community Links MtM team to share learning of mentor training
<p>Mentee pathway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing and supporting mentees through the intervention; a clear mentee pathway. 	<p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are developing a mentee taster session to explain what mentoring is, the benefit of taking part, and help mentees make an informed choice to take part. <p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ways to involve mentors in mentee taster sessions. Creating a certificate of attendance for mentees who attend the taster sessions. Promoting MtM to pupils in Year 6 and their parents/carers, who have participated in other HeadStart interventions to continue their HeadStart journey. How to provide sufficient 1:1 Youth Practitioner time for mentees before the intervention. Other ways to further support mentees before and during the intervention, so that they feel more prepared for their first session, and involved throughout. Referring mentees after the intervention onto in-house school opportunities, other HeadStart interventions, or other locally available community provisions. Building in time for Youth Practitioners to follow up with mentees after the intervention.

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
<p>Consistent delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to ensure consistent delivery across Youth Practitioners. • A review of the session structure and prioritising 1:1 mentoring time and pair consistency. 	<p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the session structure, to set how long the 1:1 mentoring is, and ensure consistency across Youth Practitioners. Practitioners will continue to be empowered to use their expertise to plan sessions and judge the needs of each group. • Alternative means of providing a mentor with a mentee, or vice versa, should pupils exit the intervention early or not attend e.g. hold a reserve pool of mentees.
<p>Early exits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A young person friendly exit strategy for pupils who choose not to complete the intervention. 	<p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting a best practice approach to manage mentor/mentee drop outs, both for the pupil who is exiting early and for their mentee/mentor. • Safeguarding time in Youth Practitioner schedules to do follow up 1:1s if a pupil exits the intervention early. • How to manage mentor expectations so that they are aware a mentee might drop out, and how that may impact on their accreditation. • Follow up procedure for pupils who exit early e.g. feedback to schools and capturing their reasons for leaving.
<p>Behaviour management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil behaviour management in sessions, specifically, disruptive behaviour. 	<p>We are working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing school behaviour policies to adopt relevant approaches to intervention delivery. • Reviewing Youth Practitioners approach to implementing disciplinary measures for repeated poor behaviour. • Setting clear behaviour expectations with pupils at the first session e.g. ground rules, respect, code of conduct; and ensuring these are adhered to in every session. Pupils will be involved in determining appropriate/inappropriate behaviours and the procedures for addressing poor behaviour. • How to ensure mentors are clear on expectations of behaviour, so they can set a good example for their younger peers.

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