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HeadStart **Heads Up**

How are systems change and sustainability being approached in HeadStart?

Key Policy Findings

1. Representatives from the HeadStart partnerships, the HeadStart Learning Team and The National Lottery Community Fund see HeadStart as having the potential to act as a lever or a catalyst to reshape the existing system of support for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in several ways. These include:

   – increased emphasis on coproduction and on prevention and early intervention;

   – improved joined-up working;

   – movement towards a shared language for children and young people's mental health.

2. Approaches to sustainability and embedding systems change should consider a range of facilitators including coproduction, building relationships and securing local buy-in.

3. Achieving systems change in the short-term can be challenging. Even small changes that HeadStart (and programmes like it) can bring to complex systems should be celebrated, and could lead to greater change in subsequent years. One potential example comes from HeadStart practice in Kent, where work is being done to facilitate communication between the police and schools in an effort to support young people with experience of domestic violence.

What is this briefing?

Heads Up is a briefing for policymakers based on learning from the evaluation of HeadStart, one of the biggest ongoing interventions and studies of young people's resilience in the world.

It aims to highlight policy implications emerging from this pioneering evaluation at the forefront of child mental health research.

Heads Up will be emailed to those signed up every other month.

The HeadStart Programme

Started in 2016, HeadStart is a five-year, £58.7 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It aims 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.

To do this, six local authority-led HeadStart partnerships are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design and try out new interventions that will make a difference to young people's mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

The HeadStart partnerships are in the following locations in England:

1. Blackpool
2. Cornwall
3. Hull
4. Kent
5. Newham
6. Wolverhampton.

The Evidence Based Practice Unit at the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families and UCL is working with The National Lottery Community Fund and the HeadStart partnerships to collect and evaluate evidence about changes in young people's mental health over time and whether the interventions being put in place are making a difference. Partners working with the Evidence Based Practice Unit on this evaluation include the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), Common Room and the University of Manchester.

Background to this briefing

Eight interviews relating to perceptions of sustainability and systems change were conducted with representatives from the six HeadStart partnerships, the HeadStart Learning Team, and The National Lottery Community Fund.

Following a thematic analysis of the interviews, findings were presented in a report, with the aim of encouraging reflection and discussion about:

–   how the terms 'systems change' and 'sustainability' are being defined in the context of HeadStart;

–   what effective systems change and sustainability could look like in this context;

–   how these goals or processes might be achieved or enacted.

–   While the findings provide only a snapshot of views, they raise questions and suggest important points for consideration for those working towards sustainability and systems change in the context of HeadStart, or programmes like it.

Findings

Findings include definitions of systems change and sustainability used by interviewees, and facilitators to reaching systems change and sustainability in HeadStart.

These findings are summarised on the next page.

Systems change and sustainability in the context of HeadStart

Interviewees spoke about HeadStart as being a catalyst, tool or lever to reshape the existing system in a range of ways, as outlined below. Definitions of systems change and sustainability within HeadStart given by interviewees suggest that these concepts are viewed as processes, as well as end goals:

Workforce, organisational or individual transformation, achieved through training and upskilling staff and young people across schools, mental health services and community organisations.

Increased emphasis on prevention or early intervention.

Improved joined-up working between organisations, services and individuals, enabling them to share learning and information more easily, for instance.

A shift to a shared or embedded language, understanding or approach, for example by taking 'whole city' approaches to mental health and wellbeing.

A continuation of 'what works' in HeadStart through sustained funding, embedding aspects of the programme within existing local agendas, or because local organisations are maintaining delivery beyond the funding period.

Influencing local and national policy and practice, and improving commissioners' knowledge of early intervention and prevention.

Increasing emphasis on coproduction in policymaking and commissioning.

> *"[It's] about how schools work. It's about how communities work. It's about how parents, teachers and others work. So, whole systems change is about all of those systems interlocking more efficiently."*
> **Learning Team Representative**

Facilitators to reaching systems change and sustainability

Interviewees highlighted a range of factors that could facilitate sustainability and systems change in the context of HeadStart. Those involved in the planning and delivery of programmes like HeadStart may wish to consider the relevance of these facilitators to their programme:

Building relationships, alliances and networks, for example through the participation of diverse stakeholders on local HeadStart governance boards.

Securing local ownership, buy-in and leadership of HeadStart, so that all those involved in the programme understand its importance, view funding and delivery of the programme as a priority, and engage with the agenda.

Coproduction of HeadStart programmes with school staff, young people and others, to ensure that intervention design and selection meet their needs.

Embedding HeadStart within existing systems, for instance by writing HeadStart into local area or national plans and policies.

Aligning with and building on local or national policy agendas.

Securing continued funding, for instance by sharing evidence of 'what works' and the potential for longer-term return on investments with commissioners.

Early thinking and planning, including establishing which individuals and organisations could take responsibility for elements of the programme beyond the funding period.

> *"...a changed system is the ultimate form of sustainability. HeadStart ceases to exist. A changed system goes on, which has long-term, lasting impact on outcomes for children."*
> **Partnership Representative**

Moving forward

We are halfway through the evaluation of HeadStart. The Learning Team will continue to collect and analyse data from HeadStart throughout the delivery period and subsequently. This evaluation data will offer insights into the extent to which HeadStart achieves its ambitions, and will help to provide a firmer basis from which to sustain the programme and embed systems change. Based on our learning to date from the interviews and the literature[1], the following key questions may help those involved in the planning and delivery of HeadStart, or programmes like it, to develop their approach to sustainability and systems change:

1. What are the needs that we need to address across the system?

2. What does the pathway through the existing system look like for a young person and how might this be improved, with the perspectives of young people (and other relevant stakeholders), the existing evidence base and the evaluation data in mind?

3. What assets (e.g. within our team, within the community) do we already have that we can draw on in our approach? Who could we collaborate with to make this happen?

4. Are we set up to evaluate the impact of our delivery and adapt/maintain aspects of the programme in response to our evaluation data?

5. How could we align our programme with local and national policy?

6. Is there the necessary capacity, resource and local ownership to sustain the programme (or elements of the programme) beyond the initial funding period?

7. Are we effectively communicating our work to key audiences such as young people, parents, schools, voluntary sector organisations, commissioners and policymakers?

8. Do we have a logic model which clearly outlines our theories of systems change and sustainability, and how these could be achieved in the short-, medium- and long-term? Logic models[2] can provide a structured way to approaching planning. They support thinking about the mechanisms that link programme activities to outcomes, and why change occurs. Logic models can be used to test hypotheses, monitor progress and facilitate the move beyond ambition to concrete action.

1. Abercrombie, R., Harries, E., & Wharton, R. (2015). *Systems Change: A Guide to What it is and How to do it.* UK: New Philanthropy Capital (NPC).

Billiald, S. & McAllister-Jones, L. (2015). *Behaving Like A System? The Preconditions for Place Based Systems Change.* UK: Collaborate CIC.

Randle, A. & Anderson, H. (2017). *Building Collaborative Places: Infrastructure for Systems Change.* UK: Collaborate CIC.

Schell, S.F., Luke, D.A., Schooley, M.W., Elliott, M.B., Herbers, S.H., Mueller, N.B., & Bunger, A.C. (2013). Public health program capacity for sustainability: A new framework. *Implementation Science*, 8, 1-9.

Wiltsey Stirman, S., Kimberley, J., Cook, N., Calloway A., Castro, F., & Chams, M. (2012). The sustainability of new programs and innovations: A review of the empirical literature and recommendations for future research. *Implementation Science,* 7, 1-19.

2. www.annafreud.org/media/3498/ebpu-logic-model-200416final.pdf