



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

www.annafreud.org

September 2017

HeadStart Year 1: National Qualitative Evaluation Findings

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HeadStart Year 1

Staff Member Perspectives

Background

HeadStart is a five-year programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The aim of HeadStart is to support children and young people, aged 10 to 16, in improving emotional wellbeing, reducing the onset of diagnosable mental health problems, improving engagement in education and academic attainment, improving employability in the longer term, and reducing engagement in risky behaviour (such as criminal activity or substance abuse). As part of HeadStart, a broad range of school- and community-based interventions are being trialled at six local authority led partnerships across England (Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham, and Wolverhampton).

The Fund has also contracted a Learning Team to help evaluate the impact of the programme and to generate formative learning for the partnerships over the course of the programme. The Learning Team is led by the Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU), a partnership of University College London (UCL) and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, and includes the University of Manchester, the London School for Economics (LSE), the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), and Common Room.

This document summarises learning from the first year of the HeadStart programme, drawing on research interviews conducted with staff members at each partnership as part of the qualitative evaluation of HeadStart led by the Learning Team in the EBPU.

Method

Ethical approval for qualitative evaluation was granted by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (ID Number: 7963/002). Twenty-two telephone interviews with HeadStart staff members were conducted in total in year one of the programme (from November 2016 to February 2017), ranging from three to four per partnership. The interviews were conducted with the programme lead at each of the six partnerships, as well as project managers ($N=4$), evaluation leads ($N=1$), schools leads ($N=3$), digital work leads ($N=2$), coproduction representatives ($N=4$), and voluntary and community sector representatives ($N=2$). The interviews ranged from approximately 27-65 minutes in length ($M=44.34$, $SD=10.93$). The interview schedule was semi-structured (see Appendix A) and explored such topics as staff members' perceptions of the challenges that they and their partnership had encountered so far in relation to programme delivery, projected challenges that could be faced over the course of the programme, suggested solutions for overcoming these challenges, and the partnerships' processes for identifying young people in need of support from HeadStart. Two focus groups were also conducted with staff members; one around how partnerships selected interventions for their programmes and one focusing on partnerships' definitions of risk in the context of young people's emotional wellbeing.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and field notes were subsequently taken from the audio recordings. Field notes were also taken at the focus groups. All audio recordings and field notes were kept confidential and only accessed by the Learning Team. Field notes were anonymised, with identifying details (e.g. names) removed. For the purpose of this document, the field notes were analysed using framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) to examine the challenges (and solutions) identified by the staff members. As part of this process, relevant excerpts from the field notes were coded to 15 overarching categories or themes derived inductively or 'bottom-up' from the dataset.

Findings

The 15 overarching themes relating to the challenges identified by the staff members are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Challenges to programme delivery identified by HeadStart partnership staff members in year one of the programme.

| Challenge | Prevalence |
|--|-----------------|
| Working with schools | 22 interviewees |
| Capacity | 21 interviewees |
| Contextual issues | 19 interviewees |
| Reaching sustainability | 19 interviewees |
| Avoiding duplication | 12 interviewees |
| Delays to delivery | 11 interviewees |
| Working with external providers | 11 interviewees |
| Issues around identification | 11 interviewees |
| Measuring impact | 11 interviewees |
| Intervention or programme engagement | 10 interviewees |
| Managing expectations | 10 interviewees |
| Staff recruitment issues | 9 interviewees |
| Challenges relating to the Fund | 6 interviewees |
| The need for innovation and creativity | 5 interviewees |
| Complexity of selecting interventions | 4 interviewees |

The challenges (and their corresponding suggested solutions) will now be described in detail.¹

¹ NB. "*Italicised excerpts*" throughout this section indicate verbatim quotes from interviews/focus groups. 'Non-italicised excerpts' indicate extracts from interview/focus group field notes.

Working with schools

Challenges:

"You go into a school one week and they're having a good week and they're receptive and they're excited and they're full of ideas, and then you can go in two weeks later and in that time they've had a really difficult exclusion happen and they've had the press on their back, or Ofsted have been in and they've got serious issues around Ofsted, and the pressure on them, their agenda shifts because of that"

Working with schools was a challenge mentioned by all 22 interviewees in various ways. Interviewees described how schools have had differing levels of engagement with the programme so far due to such factors as inherent differences in their structures and ways of working (e.g. academy schools versus community schools), varying attitudes of headteachers towards the HeadStart agenda, and variations in individual school staff members' levels of time and capacity to put towards HeadStart implementation. In turn, interviewees felt that lots of HeadStart partnership staff time and capacity was also needed to build and maintain effective relationships with schools. According to interviewees, it can be more difficult bringing some schools on board with the programme than others, *"You can go to two high schools and you can get completely different reactions"*. These difficulties can be particularly pronounced when schools have their own improvement plans that they need to be working on and when it is not the right time in the school year for a school to implement the programme, *"The rhythm of the school year is critical"*.

Interviewees also commented that schools have varied in terms of their levels of consistency so far in implementing the programme. The following description given by an interviewee at one of the partnerships exemplifies this challenge:

'Consistency in implementation of a parent-focused intervention in schools has varied because some schools have not put the necessary processes in place to facilitate the delivery of the intervention, including having a dedicated room for the intervention to take place in, having a staff member available to show parents where the room for the intervention is, and having a dedicated slot for the intervention in their calendars'

Interviewees also described how schools could misunderstand the nature or intentions of the programme, such as viewing it with suspicion and scepticism, or mistakenly seeing it as simply being 'an extra pair of hands to help us to deal with those children who are a problem'. Related to this, it was felt that there may be a need to ensure that schools sufficiently understand that the aim of any HeadStart investment is to impact on young people's emotional wellbeing, it cannot be swallowed up to fill other holes in schools' budgets. Indeed, interviewees reported that persuading schools to prioritise emotional wellbeing could also be a

challenge, particularly when schools are under so much pressure to achieve academic results, *"If I wasn't there pushing that then [HeadStart activities] would just get put to the bottom of the pile"*.

Solutions:

Interviewees explained how school buy-in and engagement with the programme could be helped by the partnership team forming good working relationships with schools, including having a personal connection with at least one staff member at each school. Ultimately, school senior leadership team (SLT) buy-in was felt to be integral, as senior members of staff will drive the cultural shift within the school, while other school staff members (with more capacity) may be leading on the ground in terms of programme implementation. According to interviewees, the development of effective partnership-school relationships could be facilitated by having a dedicated schools lead as part of the partnership team to lead on schools engagement, and to represent a consistent and accessible point of contact for schools. Regular communication and check-ins with schools (e.g. a face to face meeting at least once every halfterm) were also felt to be important factors in relation to this.

Interviewees described learning over the course of the programme development phase that flexibility and breadth in the partnership's offer to schools could be helpful in terms of facilitating the roll out of the programme, as every school is different and has different needs. Schools appreciate recognition of their differences. Consequently, every school will want to implement the programme in their own way, which best fits with their own particular environment and ways of working, *"A 'one size fits all' offer is not going to work"*. However, this must be within the context of what the HeadStart partnership team deems to be good practice and has to happen with clear steerage from the partnership about expected outcomes. Ensuring that HeadStart systems fit with existing systems in schools and would require very little changing of established school routines/processes was also felt to be important, particularly when schools have Ofsted plans that they are working on, which are going to be their priority, *"So we've got to ensure that whatever we're asking them to do links to that"*.

Interviewees alluded to the necessity for the partnerships of clearly communicating the value of HeadStart to schools, such as in terms of highlighting the links between young people's emotional wellbeing and academic attainment. Interviewees also felt that the unusually long duration of the programme would be useful in terms of enabling schools to actually see the potential long-term benefits of implementing such a programme. The following description given by an interviewee at one of the partnerships exemplifies the value that HeadStart can add to schools:

'HeadStart has brought to schools: Precision in school staff members' conversations with young people around wellbeing and vulnerability; a tighter action plan to support young people around issues relating to their emotional wellbeing; increased opportunities for schools to support young people in a timelier manner and in a range of ways'

Interviewees also emphasised the need for the HeadStart programme to be communicated to schools in simple, layman's terms, clarifying what exactly the partnership needs and expects from schools, as well as what the programme can offer, *"Schools are so busy and have so little time, the simpler the process the better"*.

Capacity

Challenges:

Almost all of the interviewees referenced issues around capacity as being a challenge for them in their roles and within their teams. Interviewees commented on how their roles on the programme were very busy and demanding, which could sometimes be overwhelming, *"It's a little bit like I've got this huge juggernaut and I'm trying to get it up to 90 miles per hour and I've just taken the handbrake off"*. In relation to issues around capacity within their teams, interviewees at some of the partnerships mentioned that they had experienced delays in recruiting new staff to build necessary capacity. Interviewees across the partnerships also referenced the increased scale of the programme and the challenges that this had brought with it in terms of capacity for them in their roles and for their teams. The following description given by an interviewee at one of the partnerships exemplifies a challenge surrounding the latter:

'Breadth versus depth? Given their large caseload of schools to work with, implementers have limited time to spend at each school and their capacity is quite stretched. There is a risk of implementers overworking because of this and the quality of their work being lost. Therefore, at the moment there is a question of whether the programme would perhaps be able to have more impact overall if implementers were working more intensively with fewer schools. However, this would reduce the spread of the programme and it could then increase the risk of implementers being seen or treated as support staff or teaching assistants by the schools, which is not what the role is. Thus, the issue can be argued both ways'

Solutions:

In terms of mitigating the challenges surrounding capacity, interviewees commented on the importance of getting the right people doing the right jobs within the partnership. For one of the partnerships, this had been achieved through allocating funding specifically to recruit a project manager to take over this responsibility from the more strategic role of the programme lead. In turn, it was felt that senior members of staff needed to support their teams to manage any potential anxieties around the big workload of the programme, *"I say, 'Don't look at five years' worth of deliverables, look at them one at a time"*. Finally, taking a pragmatic stance to the roll out of the programme and recognising the limits as to how far the programme could be rolled out within the partnership (e.g. rolling it out in select areas, rather than across the whole region) was deemed to be important in terms of managing capacity.

Contextual issues

Challenges:

When thinking about current challenges faced or the challenges that could arise over the course of the programme, many of the interviewees alluded to various issues within the wider context that could affect programme implementation. Some of these issues related to the various geographical contexts within which the programmes were operating. Specifically, interviewees referred to the difficulties that could arise in maintaining effective communication across the partnership team when staff members were based in various different settings and locations across the region. Rurality was also raised as an issue by interviewees at some of the partnerships, in terms of the geographical isolation (e.g. poor transport links) and digital isolation (e.g. poor internet access and mobile phone signal) that this could lead to, which could hinder young people's and families' involvement in the programme. In addition, interviewees at some of the partnerships described how linguistic diversity and high levels of population churn could also potentially hinder intervention engagement among young people and families within the area. The latter was also highlighted as a possible issue influencing longitudinal collection of data to evidence impact.

Other wider contextual issues spoken about by interviewees related to the local authority context within which the programmes at all six partnerships were operating. Interviewees described how working as part of the local authority had meant that there were often lengthy processes to follow and extensive bureaucracy to wade through ('red tape') when decisions needed to be made, such as those around recruitment or commissioning. The following description given by an interviewee at one of the partnerships exemplifies this:

'There is little capacity within the local authority to make decisions and then revise decisions regularly as needed, which can hold things back, particularly when such areas as digital innovations are moving so rapidly. There is more appetite for contained risk and creative thinking in the voluntary sector. This raises the question as to whether the local authority is the right place for this sort of programme. To enable the programme to tap into existing structure within the area, the local authority is the right place. Yet, in terms of delivery, perhaps the voluntary sector would be a better fit'

One interviewee also alluded to the challenges that had stemmed from launching HeadStart, a spending and investment programme, within a context of cuts to jobs and public services, *"Here we are saying let's spend money and let's do it creatively and let's do it in a way that we believe will make a significant systems change difference . . . [yet] youth services have been decimated up and down the country"*. Indeed, challenges for the programmes within the current economic context were also highlighted by interviewees. In particular, concerns were raised about further potential cuts to public services, which could affect the future sustainability of the programmes, should the programmes be working with or drawing on the resources of these services, *"The economic environment is the biggest challenge for HeadStart moving forward"*.

Solutions:

In terms of the current economic climate, interviewees commented on the importance of ensuring that the development of the programme did not rely on services that may not be there in the future. Interviewees at some of the partnerships also referenced the advantages of having an in-house partnership team, rather than a team consisting primarily of external providers seconded into the programme. Specifically, these interviewees commented on how having a solely in-house team trained by, rather than relying on, external providers could provide more sustainability, flexibility (as the programme was no longer limited by how much time an external provider could offer), and consistency in terms of the programme's policies and offer. Indeed, as one interviewee reflected, learning from the programme development phase showed that having multiple versions of safeguarding procedures and other policies, as a result of having a partnership team consisting primarily of external representatives from various organisations in the voluntary sector, was not an upscalable model for the programme.

To address geographical challenges around language barriers and rurality that could affect young people's and parents' engagement with the programme, interviewees highlighted that providers delivering the interventions needed to understand the needs and languages of particular communities. It was also felt that when face-to-face contact with young people and families was not feasible for reasons such as poor transport links, the digital elements of the programme (including social media) could enable the reach of the programme to be extended. However, as one interviewee pointed out, the programme did not want to just rely on the internet to maximise its reach and so it could be important to collaborate where possible with existing organisations in the local area to enable sharing of resources, e.g. minibuses.

Reaching sustainability

Challenges:

Many of the interviewees reflected on the importance of ensuring the sustainability of the programme over time and enabling the programme to outlast its funding from the BLF. Interviewees commented on the need to lay the foundations for programme sustainability and long-term systems change now. However, there was some uncertainty as to how and whether this was being or could be achieved at this early stage in the programme, *"My main worry is that I have spent too little on training and too much on targeted services. We are thinking about things on a two years rather than a five years cycle [at the moment] in terms of adding value"*.

Solutions:

Interviewees primarily referenced upskilling the school workforce around the HeadStart agenda and use of 'train the trainers' models as ways of influencing the sustainability of the programme. One interviewee also described developing an 'intervention pack' (written schemes of work and training around intervention delivery), which could be used in schools to

facilitate wider roll out of a particular intervention. In addition, interviewees voiced their thoughts around the importance of working with the system around the child (school, family, and community) to make any form of long-term, sustainable shift in mental wellbeing. Finally, interviewees spoke about how the programme as a whole needed to integrate with services in the local area and thus build capacity within the existing system in this way, as a way of influencing sustainability and systems change.

Avoiding duplication

Challenges:

Interviewees alluded to the importance and challenge of ensuring that the programme did not simply duplicate support or services that were already available for young people and families in the area, *"We don't want to reinvent the wheel"*. In line with this, interviewees indicated that there was a need to protect the identity of HeadStart and stop it from becoming synonymous with specialist child and adolescent mental health provision, rather than prevention. Ultimately, interviewees described how HeadStart needed to effectively integrate with other services in the area, such as social care, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and education, but at the same time needed to have enough identity that it was possible for external bodies to understand what was being delivered. Protection of and clarity on HeadStart's identity was felt to be particularly important because there was likely to be pressure on HeadStart from external bodies to plug gaps in existing funding in the area, even if such gaps fell outside its remit, *"HeadStart is about implementing additional services, [it is] not about providing what we should be anyway as part of statutory services"*. In relation to this, interviewees also raised concerns about the risk that other local services would stop being commissioned because HeadStart was seen as a cost-saving solution.

Solutions:

Interviewees highlighted the importance of having a clear system for identification, referral, and signposting to support for those young people who fell within the HeadStart remit, rather than under the remit of CAMHS provision. One interviewee commented on how their partnership's now clearly defined theory of change had really helped with their own understanding of what exactly fell within the HeadStart remit, *"It became clearer [after the programme development phase] which is the business of HeadStart and which is the business of other services or in other words things that should be happening anyway. And our theory of change helps me manage that"*. The following description given by an interviewee at one of the partnerships provides an example of thinking around what clear processes for identification and signposting to support for young people could look like for HeadStart:

'There are currently two referral routes for HeadStart: (1) A simple nomination route whereby professionals or school staff recommend young people for HeadStart support based on observable changes in the young people's feelings and behaviour; (2) A self-referral route.

Once a young person has been recommended for support or self-referred, they then have a conversation with a HeadStart staff member to discuss the support on offer and gain a joint sense of whether HeadStart is the right programme for that young person, e.g. is there existing provision in school that the young person could be signposted to instead? Does the young person want to receive HeadStart support? Are the young person's needs more significant and they need to be referred to CAMHS? A clinical psychologist is consulted to help determine the latter'

Finally, one interviewee alluded to the importance of ensuring that the HeadStart programmes at the six partnerships did not duplicate each other's work unnecessarily, when useful resources and ideas could simply be shared between them.

Delays to delivery

Challenges:

Interviewees commented that although the programmes were moving progressively forward, there had been some delays in programme implementation and intervention delivery so far due to:

- Lengthy administrative processes within the local authority that had to be adhered to, e.g. in terms of getting approval for decisions and recruiting new staff members
- The time-consuming nature in general of recruiting a new staff team
- Difficulties forming relationships with schools
- Delays in commissioning providers – one interviewee described how they felt that there had been an expectation from the Fund that all service specifications would have already been written by the start of the programme, even though the partnerships had not known for certain that they would win the programme funding
- Delays in getting necessary paperwork signed off by the Fund and/or by the local authority

For some interviewees, there was a concern that there would be a loss of momentum from the programme development phase and that these delays had created some uncertainty among providers and schools about HeadStart, in that while these organisations were on board at the moment, they may lose interest if promised interventions did not start running soon.

Solutions:

Interviewees highlighted the importance, with hindsight, of initiating processes around staff recruitment, commissioning, and approval for decisions as early as possible within the local authority, with providers, and with the Fund, *"What I should have done was meet people as soon as the bid went in last year and started to have conversations with them and draft the commissioning plan"*. One interviewee also noted that providing an effective initial pitch to schools about the programme had helped to mitigate their worries about schools losing interest in the programme due to delays in intervention delivery, *"We were worried that the schools might leave en masse as the interventions won't start for a while but they are still on board. We've done a good pitch to the schools. We've really got that right"*.

Working with external providers

Challenges:

In terms of the challenges that working with external providers could bring, interviewees indicated that delivery from providers was not always necessarily up to the standard that the programme required. Thus, interviewees highlighted the need to establish an effective performance monitoring system for external providers and the need to ensure that providers received ongoing training and supervision from the partnership team for quality assurance. One interviewee also referenced the challenges that they had experienced around forming and managing relationships with existing providers in the area, *"Some of them think we're coming to take over, and that's not what we want to do, we just want to join the dots up . . . we've all got the same aim"*.

Solutions:

Holding regular meetings with providers and ensuring frequent, open communication channels between the partnership in-house team and external providers was highlighted by interviewees as being an effective way of managing relationships. For instance, one interviewee described how internal partnership staff members held monthly informal meetings with representatives from external providers to troubleshoot problems or challenges, talk about what was going well, and share advice.

Issues around identification

Challenges:

The need to ensure that HeadStart reached the right target populations and that schools were effectively implementing the identification procedures prescribed by the partnerships, were further challenges mentioned by interviewees. For instance, one interviewee described how initially some schools in their area had mistakenly seen HeadStart as primarily being an opportunity to move young people with difficult behaviour into the programme to try and change their behaviour.

Interviewees commented on how it would take time for schools to become competent with the use of new tools to facilitate identification, despite having training, as school staff members have been having conversations around risk, vulnerability, and support needs with young people for years, but now they are being told by HeadStart to do this in a different way.

Finally, one interviewee spoke about how when deciding which populations to identify for targeted support as part of their area's HeadStart programme, existing restrictions on data sharing had ruled out certain target groups, *"We know that children of [parents with substance misuse disorders] need support but we don't have access to the data"*.

Solutions:

In terms of solutions to these issues, interviewees suggested that use of case study examples to clearly show schools who HeadStart was designed to work with could be helpful. Interviewees also highlighted the utility of involving school staff representatives in the development of the HeadStart identification and referral pathways from the beginning, so as to ensure that processes fit with schools' existing systems and established procedures as much as possible. In addition, one interviewee described how in providing an additional offer to schools specifically for the students with behavioural issues who were perceived as being more difficult to manage; this could then encourage schools to also identify additional students with other difficulties for whom the programme could be relevant.

When asked about how to avoid the potential stigma for young people that could be associated with being identified as being in need of support in school, interviewees alluded to the importance of ensuring the use of appropriate terminology around HeadStart, identification, and support, e.g. use of the term 'conversation' rather than 'screening'. Interviewees explained how finding the most appropriate terminology could be effectively achieved through consultation with young people, *"The young people told us we don't want to be described as 'targeted' as it sounds like being shot. So we use 'additional support' instead of 'targeted support'"*.

Measuring impact

Challenges:

Interviewees mentioned the challenges that they foresaw around obtaining the right evaluation data locally that was needed to really evidence the impact of and learning from the programme, beyond anecdotal evidence, which would be important for the sustainability of the programme, *" . . . what we have all got away from is just off-the-shelf interventions but it's hard to demonstrate outcomes and it makes it a danger that it's too woolly, difficult for others to replicate"*. Interviewees noted that in order to conduct an effective local evaluation, there needed to be enough capacity within the partnership team, sufficient independence of local evaluators in order to minimise potential for bias, and consistency in terms of the type and level of data collected from providers and schools. The latter was identified as being a challenge particularly in terms of potential burden for providers and schools, as one interviewee described:

'There is a big expectation on staff and schools to record and share huge amounts of information, and it is always a concern when you add to schools' workloads. The worst case scenario is that this is too burdensome for schools and they opt out of the programme, or schools do not collect data, or they only partially collect data'

Solutions:

Interviewees alluded to the importance of reducing the administrative burden on schools and providers through streamlining and simplifying data collection and data management systems, and potentially employing a staff member specifically to work with these organisations around data.

Intervention or programme engagement

Challenges:

Minimising intervention attendee drop-out and ensuring sufficient engagement of hard to reach young people and families in the programme were also described by interviewees as being challenges faced by the partnerships. Interviewees explained how young people and parents could be hard to reach due to language barriers, population churn, suspicion about the nature of interventions and the programme as a whole (e.g. not wanting to be labelled as a bad parent), young person school non-attendance (e.g. through truancy, health reasons, or home education), and lack of parent engagement with school.

Solutions:

Coproduction, in terms of working with young people, parents, and schools in the area to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of interventions and programme content, was described as a key way of maximising the potential for young people's and families' engagement with the programme. Interviewees also highlighted the need to raise awareness of HeadStart in their local area, such as through having an online presence, having a presence in schools, making time to meet with young people, parents, and schools about the programme, and holding events in school and community settings to increase visibility.

Managing expectations

Challenges:

Interviewees alluded to three challenges that they had perceived around managing people's expectations of HeadStart:

1. Speed of implementation and impact:

Often when people hear about HeadStart, they want it to happen now and quickly, whereas this programme is about building an ethos or a long-term culture or systems change over time, *"It's not a quick fix, it's a piece of work that will take some time"*.

2. Use of the funding:

HeadStart has a lot of funding in a time when there is little funding, so there might be an expectation on HeadStart to fill gaps in the system and existing services' budgets, but this is not what the programme is for, it is for adding value to the system.

3. Reach of the programme:

Explanations about the limitations of the reach and funding of the programme need to be given to schools that are not involved in the programme, e.g. because they are outside of the catchment area or the age group.

Solutions:

Interviewees indicated that having clarity and consistency around the remit and purpose of the programme was important in relation to being able to manage other people's expectations around this. In terms of managing expectations around the reach of the programme, one interviewee described how they were now looking at implementing a 'HeadStart Lite' model, including the development of an intervention information and instructions pack that schools not involved in the programme could then buy in as a starting point to delivering a particular intervention themselves.

Staff recruitment issues

Challenges:

Interviewees at some of the partnerships spoke about the difficulties that they had experienced around staff recruitment due to slow recruitment systems and processes within the local authority, a lack of suitable candidates with the right skills for the job, and difficulties attracting potential candidates into the area. One interviewee also spoke about having difficulties including a young person on all interview panels, which was viewed as an integral part of the interview process, as the interviews were often scheduled during school hours.

Solutions:

To overcome staff recruitment difficulties, interviewees spoke about using the budget to advertise positions more widely than they usually would and making salaries competitive to attract applicants. Interviewees also alluded to their learning that, in future, staff recruitment processes needed to begin as soon as possible to allow for long-winded processes and potential delays.

Challenges relating to the Fund

Challenges:

Some interviewees spoke about the challenges that they had experienced in working with the Fund, including: Needing to flexibly build new requirements from the Fund into the programme and respond to new information requests; a misaligning of the Fund's timelines with those of the partnerships; the Fund not necessarily being aware of the time-consuming processes that have to be followed within the local authority setting.

Solutions:

It was suggested that there could be more negotiation between the partnerships and the Fund around timescales and deadlines.

The need for innovation or creativity

Challenges:

Some interviewees alluded to the need to implement a creative and innovative, rather than prescribed, programme as being a challenge that they needed to work through, "*We need to show that this is a new way of working, not just a service that is going to come in and fix things*". Interviewees spoke about this challenge in terms of needing to ensure that their programme offer kept up with new knowledge and changing landscapes, e.g. in the digital world, to stay relevant, and in terms of having to convince more risk-averse others, such as local authority colleagues, that taking such an approach was a positive step.

Solutions:

In terms of solutions, interviewees spoke about the importance of 'thinking outside the box' when it came to programme development, such as through drawing on relevant programmes and resources already in use in the UK and elsewhere for ideas, and through coproduction with young people, "*For too many years people in suits have sat around and talked about what they think is needed to fix the system, and they're often the ones who made the system in the first place*".

Complexity of selecting interventions

Challenges:

Finally, interviewees described the challenges around the complexity of selecting interventions to deliver as part of the programmes, which included the complexity of the decision-making process within the partnerships about this, the need to draw on evidence-based models for interventions but adapt them as appropriate based on local activity or need, and ensuring the

breadth of the programme offer, "Are there other ways of building resilience that might mean more to other young people and be more effective for them that we haven't thought of?".

Solutions:

Interviewees described how the complexity of the decision-making process around intervention selection could be managed through drawing on established frameworks (e.g. the Boing Boing Resilience Framework)² for guidance, reviewing the research literature around interventions, and collaborating with 'critical friends' for advice and an outside perspective (e.g. Deloitte or Mutual Ventures, who provide coaching support for the HeadStart leads on programme implementation and development).

Key learning and points for reflection

Table 2 highlights areas of key learning drawn from the findings from the staff interviews presented above, and presents points for reflection or further questions arising from this.

Table 2

Areas of key learning and questions arising from this.

| Key learning | Further questions |
|--|---|
| <p>To encourage school buy-in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish good working relationships with schools (e.g. through having a dedicated schools lead and ensuring regular communication with schools) ○ Provide flexibility and breadth of programme offer to schools ○ Set the programme up with schools' involvement from the start (including design of identification and referral pathways) ○ Convey the value of HeadStart to schools in the language of academic attainment ○ Reduce the administrative burden on schools (e.g. through provision of additional support around data collection) | <p>How can we prevent success in programme implementation from being contingent on the individual school?</p> <p>What skills/experience/attributes does an effective schools lead need?</p> |

² <http://www.boingboing.org.uk/resilience/resilient-therapy-resilience-framework/>

| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure that HeadStart systems do not require changing of established school routines/processes ○ Ensure that buy-in from the school SLT is achieved | |
| <p>The now greater scale of the programme (e.g. in terms of number of schools working with), as compared to during the development phase, has put pressure on capacity.</p> | <p>Is it better to work with lots of schools in less depth (i.e. with less time spent in each school and working with fewer young people within each school) or fewer schools with more depth?</p> |
| <p>Programme delivery and implementation can be affected by contextual issues, including those associated with working within the local authority (e.g. bureaucracy, 'red tape').</p> | <p>What steps can be taken to manage difficulties that may be inherent to working within the local authority?</p> |
| <p>Planning for programme sustainability needs to begin now.</p> | <p>What are some concrete examples of how the foundations for programme sustainability are being laid?</p> |
| <p>It will be important to manage expectations and protect the identity of HeadStart, resist pressure for HeadStart to become a CAMHS-like service, and not duplicate support that young people already have in the area.</p> | <p>What does a specification detailing how HeadStart differs from, complements, and fits with existing services look like/include?</p> <p>How can pressure on HeadStart to do things beyond its funding remit be managed?</p> |
| <p>Importance of starting early in initiating recruitment and commissioning processes.</p> | |
| <p>Collaborating with external providers is a more viable model than relying on external providers.</p> | |
| <p>Ensuring that schools and other organisations effectively implement HeadStart identification processes and that HeadStart reaches its target groups are key challenges at this stage.</p> <p>Use of case studies to show schools and other organisations who the programme is designed to work with, as well as the provision of additional support to schools around managing difficult young people who may not necessarily fall within the HeadStart remit could be important.</p> | <p>How can we ensure that schools and other organisations are effectively implementing HeadStart identification processes to enable the right target groups to be reached?</p> |

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| <p>There is scope at the moment for much more explicitly working up local evaluation plans to ensure that impact can be sufficiently measured and goes beyond anecdotal evidence.</p> | |
| <p>Making sure that hard to reach young people have the opportunity to engage with interventions will be a challenge to overcome, particularly when the community strand of the programme has not been set up yet (e.g. to enable young people who are not in school to access the programme).</p> | <p>How are the programmes set up to ensure the engagement of hard to reach young people in interventions, evaluation, and coproduction?</p> |
| <p>The partnerships' ideas and timescales do not always align with the Fund's ideas and timescales.</p> | <p>What would more negotiation between the partnerships and the Fund around this look like?</p> |

Conclusions and future directions

The findings described in this document provide learning relating to the types of the challenges (and solutions) that a sample of staff members at the six HeadStart partnerships described during their evaluation interviews in year one of the HeadStart programme. The next timepoint of interviews for this strand of the qualitative evaluation of HeadStart will begin in November 2017. These interviews could be used to generate additional learning in this area through following up with the same staff members (and/or other relevant roles) about if/how these challenges have evolved and if/how these challenges have been overcome. Another important area for this component of the qualitative evaluation to focus on now could be systems change, in terms of how the foundations for this cornerstone of HeadStart are laid in the early stages of the programme and if/how this is achieved over the course of the five years of the programme.

References

Ritchie, J. & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman & R. G. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (pp. 173-194). London, UK: Routledge.

Appendix A

Staff interview schedule:

1. What is your role in your area's HeadStart programme? What do you do as part of your role?
2. What do you like about being involved in HeadStart? What do you not like so much about being involved in HeadStart?
3. How does your role differ now compared to during the programme development phase?
4. Can you give me some examples of key ways in which your area's programme now differs from your area's programme in the development phase? How did these changes come about?
5. What do you think is working well in your area's programme? What do you think could be improved?
6. What challenges have you faced so far in your role in your area's programme?
7. What challenges do you think that your partnership may face over the course of the programme or over the next five years?
8. What has been/would be helpful in terms of helping you to overcome these challenges? What has been/would be less helpful?
9. What barriers to successful programme delivery do you think that you/your partnership face now? Do you have any thoughts on how you/your partnership might overcome these barriers?
10. What is your partnership's approach to identifying young people for support?
11. Are there any particular characteristics, or risk factors, unique to [partnership] as a geographical area, which you aim to address within your programme?
12. How did you/your partnership come to decide on your criteria for identifying young people who could benefit from the interventions in your programme?
13. How do you avoid the risk of stigma in terms of a young person potentially feeling singled out for support?