



HeadStart Kent Learning from the local evaluation



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About this booklet



HeadStart was a 'test and learn' research programme, so learning about what was and wasn't working was very important to the development of programme from the beginning.

Where things weren't working as well as hoped, they could be adapted to make them better based on what people were feeding back and saying.

This booklet pulls together key learning from the local research that was carried out over the past six years in one place to give a summary of what was found.

Evidence was gathered from lots of different people and in various ways. Some people took part in interviews or focus groups and others may have answered a survey.

Lots of routine data, like the names of young people accessing support, were also collected to build a picture of what was happening.

All the local evaluation reports are available on the [Kent Resilience Hub Research and Evaluation pages](https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/about-headstart-kent/research-and-evaluation/)¹

¹ <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/about-headstart-kent/research-and-evaluation/>



About HeadStart Kent

HeadStart was a six-year, £11.25 million programme, set up and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund which aimed to provide resources to develop approaches that support young people to build their resilience to cope with everyday pressures they may face throughout their lives. Being resilient means you can 'bounce back' when you face difficulties.



The mission:

“Young people and their families will have improved resilience, by developing their knowledge and lifelong skills to maximise their own and their peers’ emotional health and wellbeing; so to navigate their way to support when needed in ways which work for them.”

Children and young people in Kent, together with their parents, told HeadStart what they needed in place to build their resilience.



My wellbeing is not impacted by the pressure to achieve or 'be perfect'

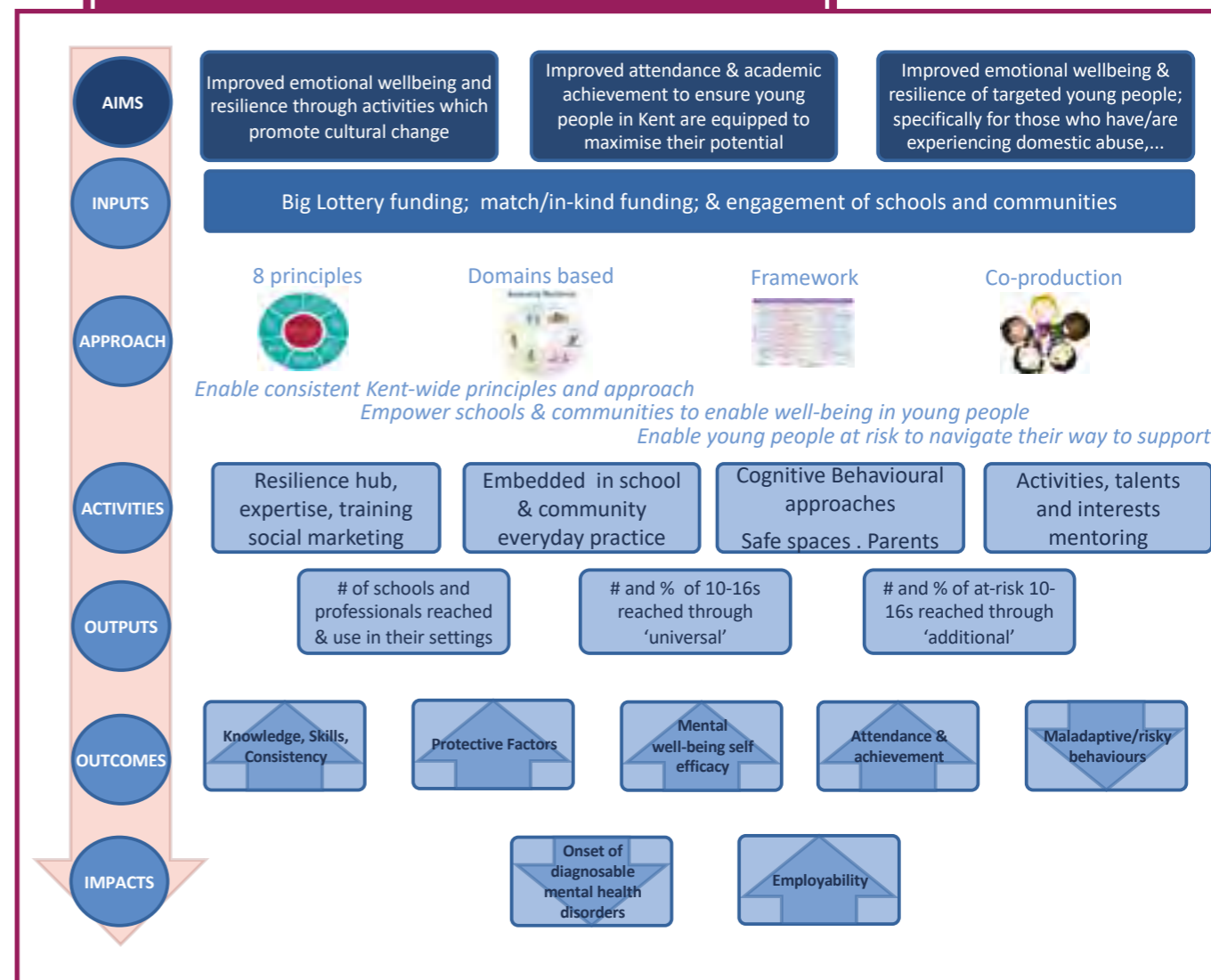
There is always someone for me to talk to

People around me understand wellbeing and how to promote it



About HeadStart Kent

Below is a summary of the aims, inputs, approaches, activities, and outputs to achieve their short term and longer-term outcomes.





About HeadStart Kent

The programme operated at three levels. There were different activities at each level, but they worked together to create a whole system-wide approach to improve the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people.

Everyone gets something, but some more than others



Level 3: Additional A targeted approach support focusing on the early identification of young people who, as a result of domestic abuse and trauma may benefit from additional early support to help retain and/or build their resilience and emotional wellbeing to prevent adverse outcomes.

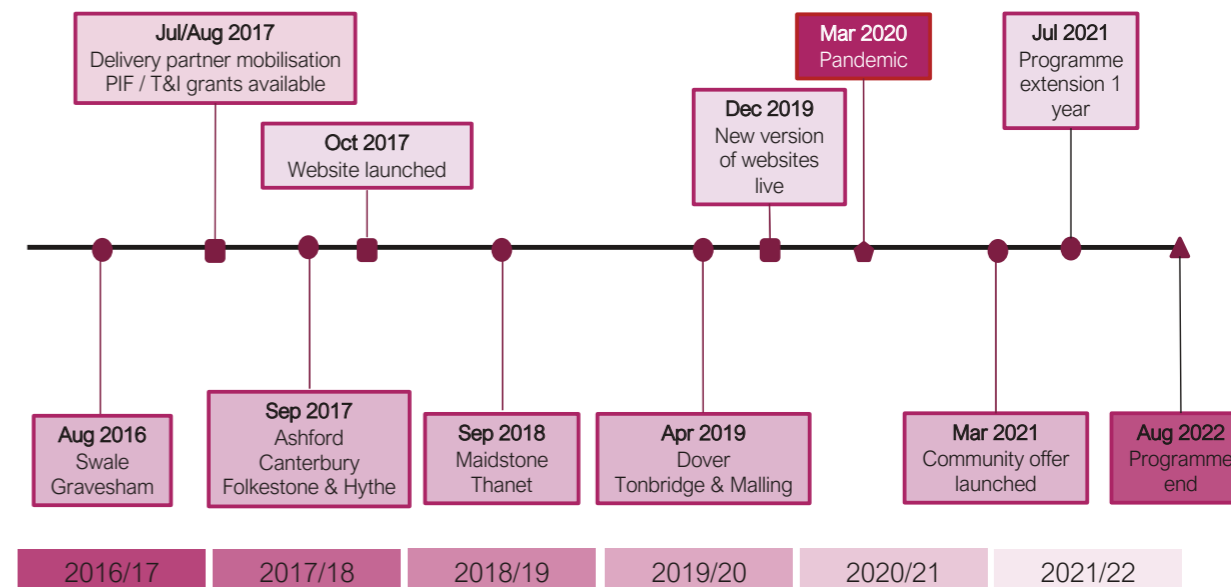
Level 2: Universal Plus to support system change within discreet geographies based on groupings of schools identified on the basis of need across Kent, providing a range of opportunities to achieve the three young people's goals to be resilient.

Level 1: Kent-wide activity to promote an understanding of the factors impacting on a young persons emotional and mental wellbeing and the actions that can be taken to support them in building their resilience.



About HeadStart Kent

The HeadStart team worked intensively with schools in nine district areas, called groupings, for 18 months in a phased approach. Staff training and access to additional support for young people were provided during this time. The starting month for each grouping is shown in the timeline below, along with other key activities for the programme.





Who did HeadStart Kent help?

From the beginning of the programme in 2016 up to March 2022, HeadStart has helped lots of people by providing access to training, funding, resources, and services focused on young people's emotional wellbeing and resilience.



Young people

52,532

benefitted from support in schools

1,308

trained as peer mentors

2,785

participated in activities and some helped coproduce the programme

4,046

had a resilience conversation

15,197

accessed online support and counselling

25,422

accessed a safe space in school

3,509

were 'kept in mind' by notifying their school of an incident of domestic abuse, which may have led to support provided by the school.



Who did HeadStart Kent help?

598

supported by family focused work

1,120

were supported by an intensive mentor

225

Pay It Forward grants were planned and delivered

748

supported by a volunteer mentor

825

received a Talents & Interests grant

242

supported by an iCan mentor



Based on the 2020 mid-year Census population estimates, Kent had **138,400** young people aged 10 to 16.

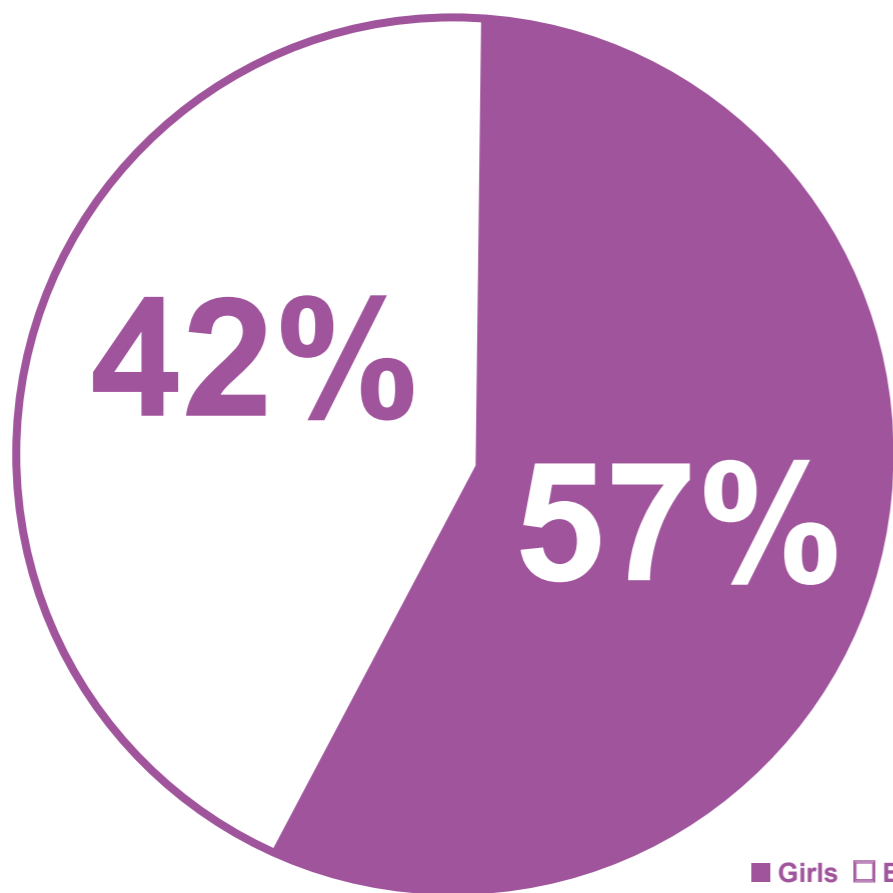


Who did HeadStart Kent help?

Young people taking up HeadStart support

11%
ethnic minorities²
vs 9% in the overall
Kent population

average age
13.5
years old



■ Girls □ Boys



² 5% unknown ethnicity



Who did HeadStart Kent help?

Schools and organisations benefitting

121

secondary schools

394

primary schools

38

other school settings
(like colleges)

59

statutory organisations
(like Kent County Council,
Kent Police or the NHS)

143

private sector
organisations (like
privately run sports clubs
or dance studios)

330

community and
voluntary organisations
(like charities, trusts or
community centres)

53

schools received the
Award for Resilience and
Emotional Wellbeing



Who did HeadStart Kent help?

Training provided

3,851

school staff
trained

2,770

other
professionals
trained

1,021

mindfulness

1,747

Youth Mental
Health First Aid

1,954

mental health
online

852

resilience and trauma
(including resilience
conversations)





Who did HeadStart Kent help?

Parents and carers

514

trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid or the Wellbeing Toolkit

578

were supported with their child through the transition to secondary school or by HeadStart Senior Early Help workers

24,983

accessed the parents resilience webinar on the Kent Resilience Hub



Who did HeadStart Kent help?

Communication

Kent Resilience Hub

217,990

Resilience Hub webpage views

105,071

MoodSpark webpage views

MOOD SPARK



1,699

Twitter Followers

1,467

Facebook Followers





What difficulties have young people been experiencing?

Children and young people's mental health needs have increased.

National data shows that in 2021

1 in 6

children aged 6 to 16 years old had a probable mental disorder, an increase from one in nine children in 2017³.

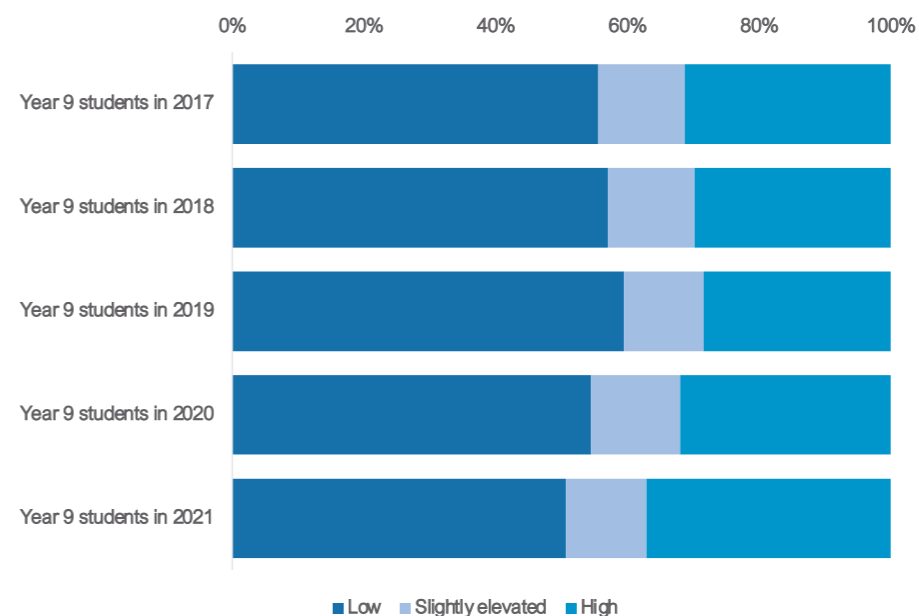
The main difficulties young people involved with HeadStart told us they were experiencing were:

- Managing their emotions – anger, anxiety, stress, confidence
- Relationships with friends and family



What difficulties have young people been experiencing?

Through the annual Wellbeing Measurement Framework⁴ survey carried out in HeadStart schools between 2017 and 2021, over a **third of young people** consistently reported high or slightly elevated level of attention difficulties.



1/3

"I am restless, I cannot stay still for long"

"I am easily distracted, I find it hard to concentrate"

"I am constantly fidgeting or squirming"



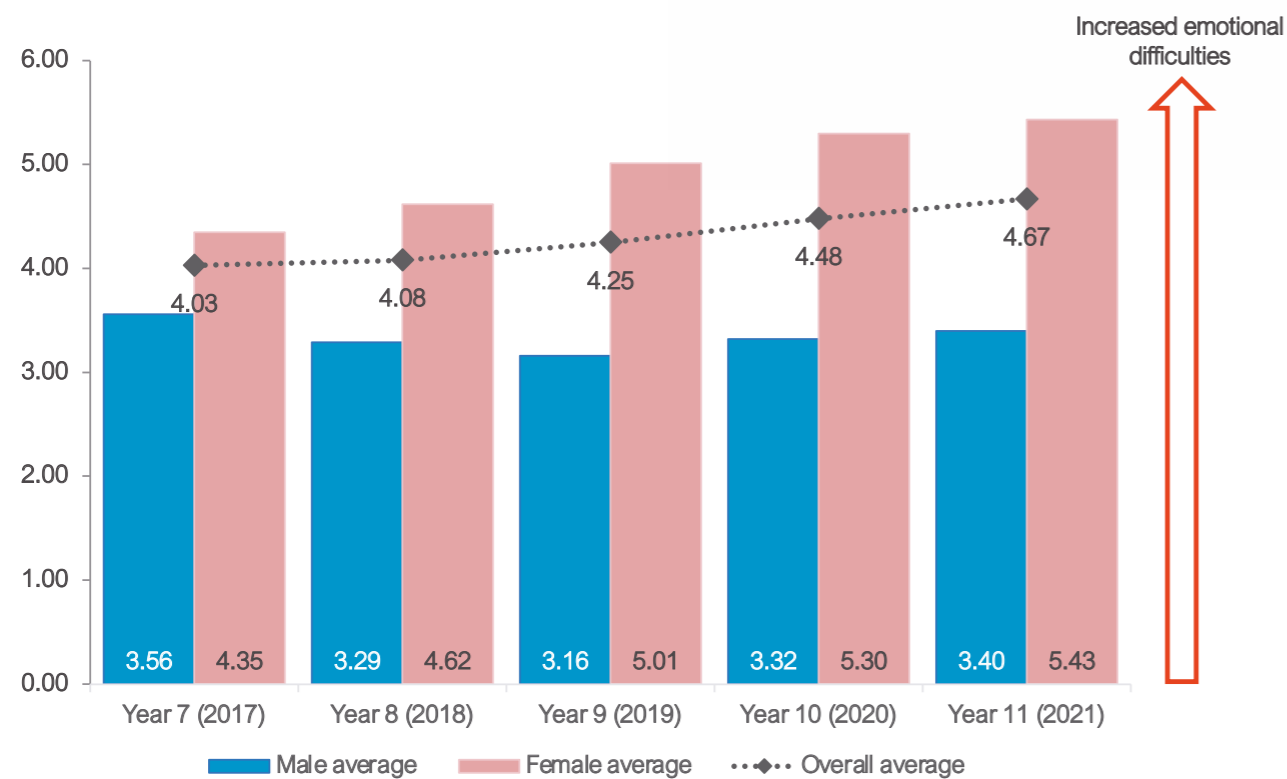
³ Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2021: Wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey, Mental Health of Children and Young People Surveys, NHS Digital

⁴www.headstartlearning.info

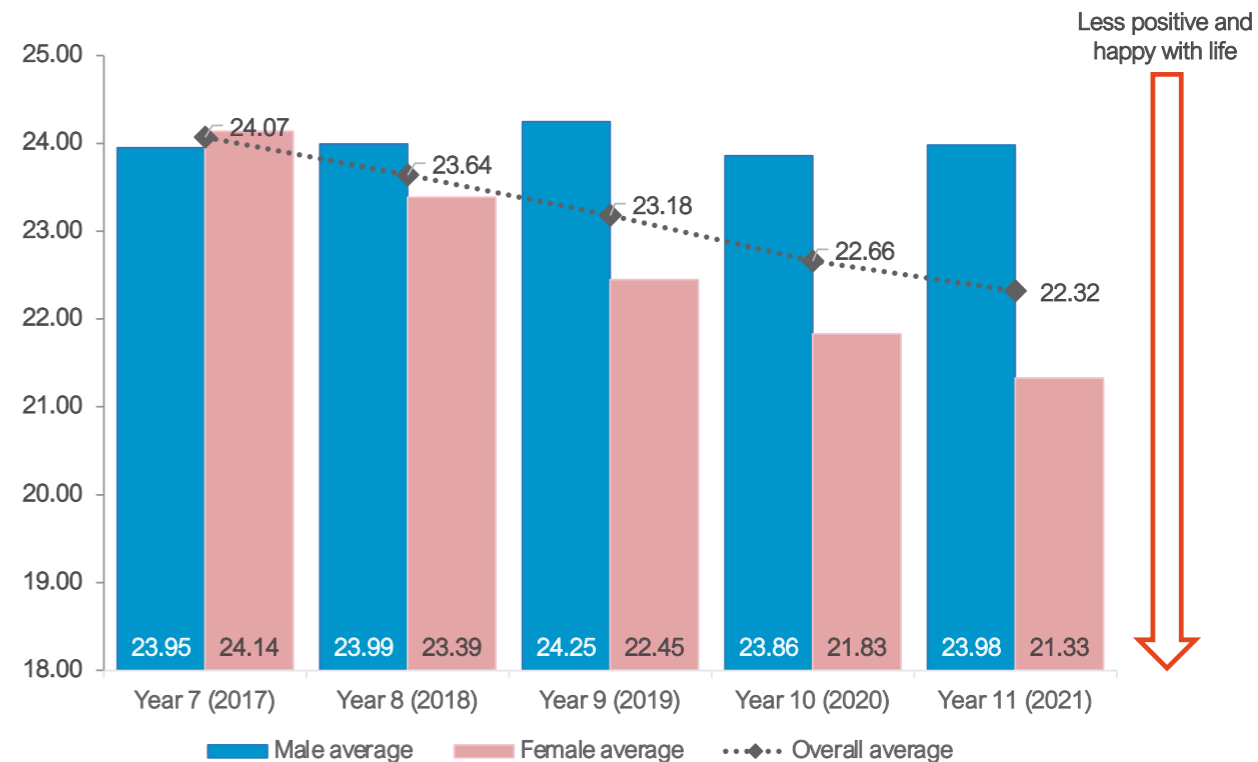


What difficulties have young people been experiencing?

Increasing levels of emotional difficulties were reported by females as they got older. Females in all year groups surveyed between 2019 and 2021 reported significantly more emotional difficulties than males⁵.



What difficulties have young people been experiencing?



Females also reported they felt less positive and happy with life as they got older. Females in all year groups surveyed in 2020 and 2021 were significantly less positive than males⁶.



⁵Year 7 and Year 9 in 2019, Year 9 and Year 10 in 2020, Year 9 and Year 11 in 2021

⁶Year 9 and Year 10 in 2020, Year 9 and Year 11 in 2021



What difficulties have young people been experiencing?

When the young people surveyed were asked about their experiences during the pandemic, they said their **feelings of frustration and ability to concentrate had got worse**. They were also much more worried about their future.

A significantly higher level of need was reported by young people when they were aged 12 to 13 who went on to be supported by HeadStart when they got older, compared to those who did not go onto receive support⁷.

This shows that **HeadStart was supporting the right young people with the most need**.

Before they were supported by HeadStart, they reported:

- More emotional, behavioural and attention difficulties
- More difficulties with peers
- Less positive appraisal of their wellbeing
- Felt less able to manage their emotions, solve problems, cope with stress and set goals
- Felt less supported by an adult in their home
- Felt less likely to make positive contributions at home and in school

Young people still just want someone to talk to. A non-judgmental person they trust and can talk to in confidence.

“I think being that person that can listen, I think that’s the biggest thing that they can get out of it, that somebody’s actually taking what they have to say seriously or to heart...”



What difficulties have young people been experiencing?

Young people taking up HeadStart support

30%

had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

vs 15% in the overall Kent population

31%

were eligible for Free School Meals

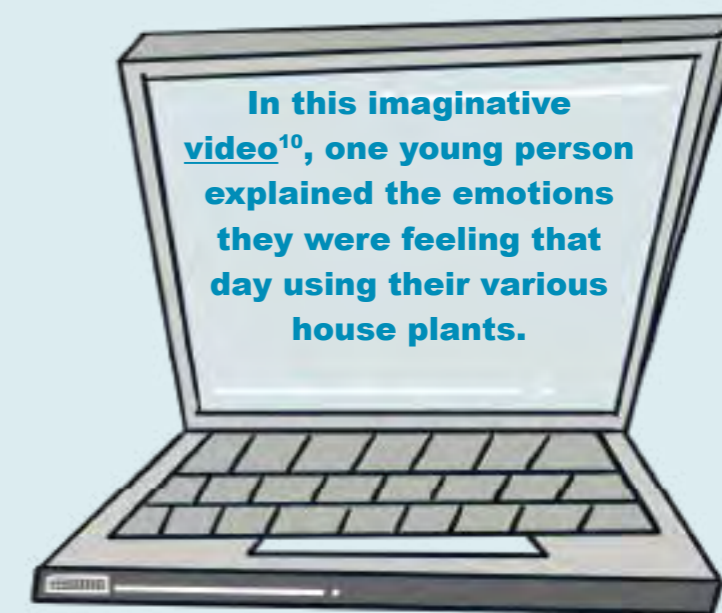
vs 20% in the overall Kent population

8%

experienced domestic abuse⁸

33%

lived in the top 20% most deprived areas in Kent⁹



⁸ A domestic abuse incident notification was received from the police by HeadStart and sent to the young person's school

⁹ Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Kent & Medway Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdAejlSDvoo>

⁷ From Wellbeing Measurement Survey data for Year 8 students in 2018. 518 received support from HeadStart after 2018.



What went well?

Coproduction and participation

The involvement of young people in the programme was one of its major successes. Young people from many different backgrounds were supported and encouraged to take part in the full variety of activities and training offered. This ranged from interviewing staff to sitting on a panel deciding grant awards, or even just having fun learning how to cook.

Joining the Kent Youth County Council and HeadStart central SpeakOut groups was a particular achievement. Young people, who may not normally have the opportunity to meet, worked together on topics important to them. By having young people from different backgrounds and areas working together, this meant that the views of young people, who are potentially less represented, were heard.



The need to coproduce the programme with young people was embedded into the plan from the start. Staff were given the time and resources needed to make sure young people were able to lead and make decisions. They were trusted as professionals and given independence to do things differently. Many colleagues saw the value in coproduction and have adopted the principles in their work.



What went well?

"...the coproduction and the participation work has been outstanding."

"To do coproduction properly, you need time."



Adaptations and challenges

At the start, there may have been too much freedom and flexibility in the participation work and the priorities of what was supposed to be delivered needed to be made clearer for staff.

Young people did not like the You're Welcome standard as it was more focused on assessing health services and they felt the language used in the documents wasn't suitable for what they needed. As an alternative, they developed the Kent Youth Charter, which sets out six principles of how young people want staff to engage and work with them.



What went well?

Working with schools

HeadStart supported schools to embed a whole school approach to resilience and emotional wellbeing. Using the Resilience Toolkit as a basis to plan and review their work against eight principles to promote mental health and wellbeing¹¹, schools delivered on actions that benefitted students, staff and the wider community.

“The more you make it part of your day to day, the more impact it will have...”



“I think it has really focused our minds. I think it's really made us sit back and think, right, what do we do as a school and what can we do?”

HeadStart staff made sure they were approachable and readily available to work together with the school staff. They were flexible in their approach and the work was 'done with the schools, not to them'. They built strong relationships with the schools and continue to be highly regarded.

School staff felt that being involved with HeadStart had made a positive impact on the ethos and environment within their schools. They valued the support and guidance from the HeadStart staff and, as well as the funding provided, felt this enabled the success of the programme in their schools.



What went well?

“[HeadStart] have a really good relationship with the schools, they're well-respected. The whole-school approach has been really well-embraced by those schools.”

“The funding and training offered by HeadStart has been invaluable.”



Adaptations and challenges

The Resilience Toolkit was updated many times and improved based on feedback from schools. At the start there was too much paperwork, so a simpler online version was created.

Early on, HeadStart staff realised that one standard approach to supporting schools wouldn't work as all schools are different. So, the support provided was tailored for each individual school based on their needs.

More than just one or two people are needed to deliver change within a school. Ideally, a team of staff at varying levels need to support one another to embed a programme such as HeadStart. The right person needs to drive it forward within the school and backing from senior leadership is essential.

Schools are busy and time is limited so clearly communicating what needs to be achieved and breaking down what needs to be delivered into manageable chunks is helpful for staff.

¹¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing



What went well?

Training and workforce development

The reach of training provided directly by HeadStart staff or through delivery partners was wide. Participants thought the training was delivered well and that what they learned was useful. They were confident applying what they learnt and, as a result of training, they felt more confident supporting young people's emotional health and wellbeing.

School staff and other professionals in the community felt that having access to free training around the topics of mental health and wellbeing was needed, as that type of training was not always available in their existing continuing professional development plans.



“When talking to a young person and their family that was struggling with the difficulties that mental health brings up, I felt able to effectively support and offer strategies to help further.”

“I think the key thing for us was the amount of training that it has enabled us as a staff to have, it has been massive, and we would never have been able to access that without HeadStart.”



What went well?

“When students disclose suffering of ill mental health incidents, I feel more comfortable with identifying their symptoms.”

“I think it's helped us to have more of a universal vocabulary when we're supporting people.”

Adaptations and challenges

Because of the pandemic, many of the courses delivered by HeadStart were adapted and delivered online rather than face to face. Lots of people attended the online sessions and the feedback was positive.

The date, time and location of training courses need to be flexible to maximise attendance and fit around the timetables of potential participants, particularly teachers who have training days set many months in advance.





What went well?

Direct support for young people

The grants that young people could access through the programme were seen as a real benefit.

It was felt that one of the main advantages was that the young people themselves, rather than adults, decided on the activity or interest to take up through a Talents and Interests grant and they developed and worked on the Pay It Forward grant projects.

PAY IT FORWARD



School staff thought that the development of safe spaces was a very successful part of the programme within their schools.



Young people asked for online support and counselling to be made available by HeadStart and this support has been accessed by thousands of young people.



The mentoring provided by delivery partners through the programme was considered a valuable resource.

School staff explained that it could be difficult to find support from external organisations. They said that support from people outside of the school was needed at times as some young people preferred to be supported by an adult not linked to the school.





What went well?

"I think the fact that we have been able to tap into the funding bids [...] What's been brilliant is it has got to be student led and that makes a massive difference as well. Some of our students with the highest need have been the ones that have been involved doing the [Pay It Forward] bids."

"The ability to create a 'safe space' has allowed for some of the most vulnerable students a place they can access to support them."



"The Talents and Interests grant was a really good idea too because there are so many kids that, for whatever reason, come from a home where they don't have the finances to support a child with an interest. For me that was brilliant, and it's worked really well."

"It's very hard to find support for students, particularly external support in the form of things like mentors because one to one work, it takes a lot of time [...] To have that time for a mentor to spend one to one quality time with a student is so beneficial to them, so I think that works really well, I think it's valued, definitely."



What went well?

Adaptations and challenges

At the start, the Talents and Interests grant application form had lots of questions and was too long. The form was made shorter and only the really important information was collected.

It took a while for one of the mentoring delivery partners to get up and running as it was a completely new service they were offering. It takes time to recruit volunteers, set up administrative processes and promote a service, so this needs to be factored in at the start.

There weren't always mentors available or suitable when delivery partners were getting started, so it was difficult for schools to manage some young people's expectations.

The transition support intervention was based on learning from the previous phase of HeadStart. When this was scaled up it didn't work as well because the strong existing links between the primary feeder schools and secondary schools weren't there.





What went well?

Websites

The Kent Resilience Hub and Moodspark websites are considered valuable resources. They are simple to use, clear, accessible, and visually pleasing. The range of tools, resources, activities, and information is suitable for all the audiences they serve.

At the start, awareness of the websites was mainly achieved through promotion by HeadStart staff and paid advertising directed a lot of people to view some of the pages. More recently the websites have been promoted through partner organisations in education and health settings.

"I think being able to go somewhere that [schools] could trust to access the different types of resources is important."

"The fact it caters for a range of audiences in one place is a good thing."

"Clear, accessible, user friendly, loads of useful information."



What went well?

Adaptations and challenges

Lots of work went into developing the websites and there have been a few versions. It took a while to get them right.

Resources and content need to be refreshed and kept current, so they must be reviewed and updated regularly.





What went well?

Building relationships and working in partnership

HeadStart has raised the profile of the emotional health and wellbeing agenda and encouraged discussion about the topic amongst partners. Many of the HeadStart staff worked on the programme for a long time. They were knowledgeable and experienced in their area of work and dedicated to making the programme a success. They were skilled at building productive and long-lasting working relationships with the right people. HeadStart shared their learning in many places and built a good reputation with partners.

They made connections and created openings for key people from different parts of the 'system' to work together towards a shared goal, where they previously may not have had that opportunity. This was especially highlighted during the pandemic when HeadStart connected various organisations to create 'back to school' guidance, a resource that was used widely.

"People working together, talking, taking away barriers to working together and thinking how they can fund, finance, support young people's mental health together."

"It's making sure the right people are around the table and that they stick at it. I think that's been crucial."

"I think HeadStart has sort of had this funny place in the middle, but actually joins a lot of things up."



What went well?

Adapting and improving delivery

HeadStart was designed to be rolled out in phases to different areas over the years, so intensive work could be done in those areas for a limited time. This approach was useful as feedback and learning gathered from rollout in the first areas was used to adapt and improve how the programme was delivered in future areas.

There was a top-level plan of what had to be delivered but HeadStart had the flexibility to adjust the programme when needed to adapt to different circumstances and arising situations.

As time went on, starting the programme in the new areas got easier. This was because of the improvements that were made but also because of increased confidence and understanding between HeadStart staff around what needed to be delivered and improved general awareness of the programme overtime.

"...in the beginning people weren't sure what HeadStart was and what the benefit was, whereas now, people are finding out from other schools that actually there is a benefit."

"...I think it was just us being honest as a team and knowing and reaching out and saying this isn't working and this needs to change."



"...there's always been a progression, not a standing still."



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Overall

The areas of strength for young people in HeadStart schools, who completed the Wellbeing Measurement Framework survey from 2017 to 2021, were:

Empathy “I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt”

Family support “At home, there is an adult who believes I will be a success”

Peer support “There are students at my school who would invite me to their home”

Relationships with peers “I have one good friend or more”

It was felt that HeadStart had made a big difference to the lives of young people who were directly supported by the programme due to the strong evidence in the form of stories.

However, many people thought it would be hard to prove that HeadStart had helped young people wider than those directly supported, because data or stories would be harder to collect.



“...I think young people might not even realise that they've been impacted on by HeadStart.”

“...those kind of little more personal success stories I think are so important.”

In this [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVOanqH90GA)¹², CJ shares their experience of being involved with HeadStart and the positive difference it has made to their family.



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Using the Wellbeing Measurement Framework survey as evidence to show the difference HeadStart may have made to the wellbeing of young people they supported was challenging for several reasons and no clear conclusions could be made.

There were the following limitations to the data:

- The number of young people completing the survey and who also received direct support from HeadStart was quite low.
- The average age that young people accessed support from HeadStart was around 13 or 14 years old and only certain year groups in schools completed the survey each year, so it was hard to get survey data for before and after support from the survey for some young people.
- HeadStart started in different areas at different times, so some young people didn't receive support until much later in the programme.
- The pandemic meant that young people weren't in school, and the survey was difficult to carry out, so the number of young people completing it in 2020 and 2021 was a lot lower than in previous years so there was less data.

Although the survey was carried out in HeadStart schools, young people in those schools may not have linked completing the survey to support they might have received through the programme. When they completed the survey each year, it was just a reflection of how they were feeling on that specific day and any number of issues could have been affecting them, so changes in their wellbeing may not be directly related to HeadStart.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVOanqH90GA>



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Coproduction and participation

The young people that participated in HeadStart were encouraged and supported to take part. Some young people were looking for emotional support, while others were looking for personal development opportunities or to make a difference in their community.

They enjoyed taking part in the activities, making friends, socialising, and learning new skills. By having the opportunity to lead, they felt empowered, and this improved their confidence. They were able to build their resilience, better deal with their emotions and develop friendships. Experiencing different situations and connecting with a wider range of young people and adults than normal helped improve their communication skills and has better equipped them to deal with later life events.

Coproduction or participation itself actually helped many young people to improve their resilience because they were helping others and helping the programme.



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

"To be honest, at the beginning it was just something to do. I thought I may as well go and try it. But what made me want to stay was actually being part of something that mattered [...] At HeadStart the things you do actually matters and makes a difference."

"The HeadStart programme (SpeakOut) has been really important to me. It made me feel part of something [...] I have been able to use my own experiences and struggles with mental health, to help others. I have also learned more about myself and how to manage situations, and I know that I'm in control, developing my own resilience for difficult times."



"We've got individuals who we've seen really grow. I think we can be quite proud of ourselves."



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Case Study

Jack (16 years old) started to get involved with HeadStart around four years ago after having a resilience conversation at school. He took part in residential, attended the local SpeakOut group and Kent Youth Voice, helped develop the Youth Charter and among other things, was also a peer mentor.

When asked how being involved with HeadStart helped his resilience and emotional wellbeing, Jack said...

"My favourite experience was probably going to Blackpool in 2019 for the national residential. It was really cool to meet other HeadStart areas and lots of new people and to go to a place I'd never been to before. I've kept in contact with some of the people I met there so that's cool."

"I have made so many friends from HeadStart. I have become so much more confident as a person and learned so many skills, like public speaking and overcoming that anxiety. I have learned things like mindfulness, which is very beneficial to my emotional wellbeing. When I joined, I was getting picked on at school but joining HeadStart made me more resilient and not afraid to be myself."

"All HeadStart events I've been to have always had great snacks."



THOUGHTS

FEELINGS



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Schools

Schools played an important part in providing opportunities for young people to build their resilience and emotional wellbeing. In the schools that adopted a whole school approach, both the school staff and young people said it was really important to think about how language is used, and situations are approached. They also felt it was essential to have a variety of staff available at different levels to support young people and to be champions at promoting resilience and wellbeing throughout the school.

School staff said the benefits of a whole school approach were:

Empowering young people – by introducing a peer mentoring programme, young people were empowered and keen to support their peers. This was done with understanding and empathy.

Calmer school environment – the development of safe spaces, where young people have time to themselves or access to support from staff, improved the atmosphere at school.

Improved attendance and behaviour – staff noticed an improvement in young people’s engagement and willingness to learn.

Happier and healthier students – having access to support through additional interventions or grant funding improved the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people.



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?



“All of the HeadStart plan is now an integral part of nurture and wellbeing within the school.”

“You can always talk to someone in this school. You can talk to them about anything. I trust them.”

The young people were **happiest at school** when they:

- Built relationships with their peers
- Had creative and engaging forms of learning
- Had the option to choose subjects that interest them
- Took part in extra-curricular activities



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Additional support

Young people really benefitted from one to one or group support provided by delivery partners or the HeadStart Senior Early Help workers. The young people were given tailored support to help with their individual needs and many built strong relationships of trust with their workers.

On average young people were supported from between 3 to 6 months depending on the type of support they had.

There was a **significant improvement in the wellbeing** of those that successfully completed the interventions.¹³

“Having a mentor is comforting, not to feel judged and having someone that I can talk to, and trust has been so helpful. I feel listened to.”



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

“My mentor has helped with my emotions and feelings around friends and family.”

“Having a mentor has helped a lot with my goals...I can now deal with a lot more situations and not get angry or emotional.”

“I feel like I have come so far with my anxiety. I feel happier, I was just so unhappy. I was so negative about myself and that's changed now. I've come so far.”

“I worry a lot less. The different strategies we covered have really helped in my day-to-day life.”



¹³ Warwick Medical School (2015). Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/platform/wemwbs/

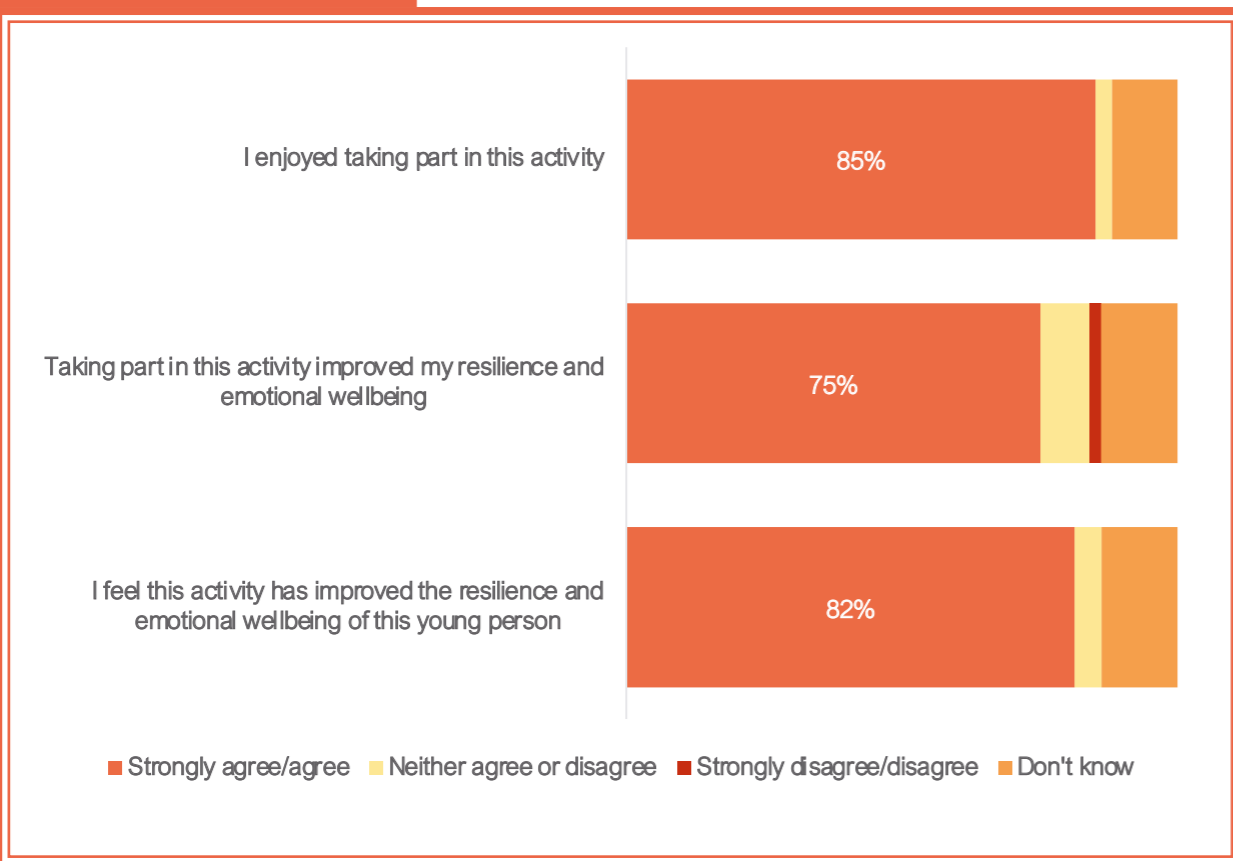


How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Grants

A real advantage of HeadStart was the availability of money so young people could develop a talent or interest. Most young people used their grant funding to access sports, such as a gym or swim membership, or to take part in creative arts, like dancing or singing lessons.

The young people enjoyed the activities and most agreed it improved their resilience and emotional wellbeing. Most adults also agreed that taking part had helped the young people.



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?





How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Pay It Forward grants gave the young people the opportunity to plan and deliver projects that would help others in their community. Young people also assessed and approved the applications submitted by their peers. They enjoyed the responsibility of making decisions and felt more confident speaking in a group.



The most popular type of project chosen was safe spaces. HeadStart funded 26 indoor and 22 outdoor spaces in schools and the community. It was a great way for young people to get creative with their designs.



Clubs and groups were also another popular project type, allowing young people to make friends and pursue hobbies. They funded cookery clubs, a wide variety of sports, arts and crafts and Lego clubs.

Young people were able to make a difference in their community by leading environmental projects. These included creating garden spaces, growing food for the community and litter picking.



How has the resilience and emotional wellbeing of young people changed?

Case Study

Youth Ngage is a community Youth Group for ethnic minority young people in Gravesham. In 2021 they applied for a Pay If Forward grant for the members to learn about healthy food and cooking. Seventeen young people attended weekly sessions for ten weeks and learnt how to prepare simple, healthy lunches and quick meals.

The healthy meals they cooked included pasta bake with butternut squash, fresh and healthy pizza, chicken fajitas, healthy soup for the winter and festive cookies.

"The young people bonded and learnt how to work together as a team and achieved good results. The project was very entertaining, educating, and creative.

They developed valuable skills, made new friends, developed their confidence, look happier and feel good."

Social



What were the challenges?



Awareness and understanding

Raising awareness of HeadStart and making sure people understood what it was trying to achieve was a frequent challenge for the programme, especially at the start. HeadStart shared key messages through various methods, such as workshops, newsletters, and social media. In the first few years, most people said they found out about the programme by attending meetings, through colleagues or their supervisor/manager. It was accepted that communicating with such a wide and varied audience could be difficult.

It was suggested that communication and promotion of the programme could have been better, especially to celebrate the successes. There was recognition that awareness had improved in recent years, but it was felt that this could have been done sooner.



"...the biggest let down of HeadStart was our ability to communicate what we were doing and to celebrate [it]."

"It was no point having a programme if only a few people knew about it. And yet our stakeholders, being the whole of people in Kent, it's almost impossible to do in an easy way."



What were the challenges?

Resilience conversations

The resilience conversations, previously known as domains based conversations, was an area of the programme that had many developments. At the start, the people who were using them felt that there was too much paperwork involved and based on this feedback they were made shorter and simpler to complete.

Following this, the self-reflection tool was developed and added to the collection of tools available to enable conversations with young people. The language was changed to make them more accessible, and a widget symbol version was developed for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The details of young people having these conversations were needed for local and national evaluation and to access some types of support. To start with, the number of conversations reported was quite low as people found it time consuming recording them. We knew that the number of young people actually having a resilience conversation was probably much higher than the number reported. However, after the changes were made, the number reported did increase.

HeadStart felt that resilience conversations weren't as successful as they could have been, due to the understanding of the tool, the perceived lack of use and the challenges with their development and the administration of them. However, schools felt this was one of the parts of the programme they most wanted to continue to use.



What were the challenges?



"Resilience conversations didn't really work as well as they could have done, because by the time it got much better, a lot of people had given up on it."

"...having the domains-based conversations has enabled me to be more targeted and succinct in my supportive conversations to young people."



What were the challenges?

Commissioning and contract management

The process to commission the HeadStart delivery partners was one of the difficulties at the start of the programme. In the absence of a dedicated commissioner, either working within the HeadStart team or directly supporting them through the process, there were challenges navigating unfamiliar systems and procedures. This led to a delay in the additional support interventions and training providers starting in the first areas.

It was suggested that having a dedicated commissioning resource would have helped the programme, especially around the management of provider and school deliverables.



"I just think with the commissioning, that we've kept finding new departments and new hoops, new things that it needs to go through. New process, new systems, again, just you're not aware of unless you've done it before. I think we all thought it would just be this, this and this and then it's turned into maybe five more stages."



What were the challenges?

Integration within Kent County Council

"I think we should've been integrated more into the wider workforce rather than us always being this team that kind of sat to the side... it always felt like we were separate."

"I think probably one of the biggest barriers was that, because it was with a different service, a lot of staff and teams probably thought, well that's HeadStart that's over there. That's for them to worry about and not necessarily something for us to worry about in our teams."



Another perceived challenge was how HeadStart may have been seen as separate from Integrated Children's Services, or wider Kent County Council. It was felt that at times colleagues outside of HeadStart were not using the available tools/resources or adopting the general ethos of the programme.

However, being seen as separate from Kent County Council, especially because of the branding, potentially enabled engagement with those who may have in the past been reluctant to engage with support or services.



What is carrying on?

Many of the elements of HeadStart, such as whole school approaches or behaviour change through training, will continue long after the programme has ended as they have been embedded in schools and communities.

In addition to this, the following parts will be continued once HeadStart comes to an end:

Kent Resilience Hub and Moodspark websites	Kent Community Health Foundation Trust – Public Health School Nursing Service have taken ownership.
School Resilience Toolkit / Award for Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience	Kent Community Health Foundation Trust – Public Health School Nursing Service have taken ownership.
Resilience conversations and trauma training	Kent Community Health Foundation Trust – Public Health School Nursing Service will offer free training to schools every term. Kent County Council staff can access training on Delta.
Youth Mental Health First Aid training	The Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership will offer free training until March 2024.
Mental Health Support Teams (project management)	Two team members from HeadStart have been funded by the Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group to continue to lead the recruitment and engagement of schools, and manage the implementation of the service, until March 2024.



What is carrying on?



Participation workers	Kent County Council Integrated Children's Services has committed to continuing the work of the HeadStart participation workers as these staff support Kent Youth County Council. The workers will lead on: Kent Youth Voice, local SpeakOut groups, UK Youth Parliament, commissioning engagement, leading the Kent participation community of practice, Try Angle Awards, Youth Charter implementation, Coproduction training, Big Conversation, peer mentoring train the trainers, supporting the Voluntary Community Sector in delivering emotional wellbeing programmes
Emotional wellbeing participation workers	Two team members from HeadStart have been funded by the Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group to continue to focus on the voice of young people, parents, and carers with lived experience of the mental health system.
Kooth (online support and counselling)	This support is now funded by the Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group until April 2023.
Intensive mentoring	This support will be funded by the Reconnect programme until August 2022.
Volunteer mentoring	This support will be funded by the Reconnect programme until August 2022.
Talents and Interests grants	This support will be funded by the Reconnect programme until August 2022.



Thank you to everyone that took the time to provide their views around different topics for the evaluation over the course of the programme.

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