HeadStart Newham

More than Mentors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction and study aims

HeadStart Newham[1] is an early help service for 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. More than Mentors (MtM) is a targeted peer mentoring intervention delivered by a HeadStart Youth Practitioner and a Mental Health Practitioner in secondary schools. The aim of this qualitative study was to assess MtM delivery as perceived by pupils, school staff, and Youth Practitioners.

Methodology

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

Summary of findings

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

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

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

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

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

[1] https://www.headstartnewham.co.uk/

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

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

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

Early exits. There were pupils who left the intervention early because of the session structure, the time commitment, or because they did not develop good relationships with their peers. The experience of leaving the intervention early was not pleasant for pupils. They reported feeling guilty for not completing MtM. This guilt could be exacerbated if pupils were questioned by the Practitioner and school staff about leaving. This could make pupils feel they had done something wrong.

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

Making use of the findings.

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

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

Our learning

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

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
Recommendation and 1:1 • The reason pupils were recommended by school staff, and selected for progression by Youth Practitioners varied across schools and Practitioners, and did not always align to the HeadStart target population selection criteria. • Communication with pupils, and pupil choice; 1:1s were not seen as an opportunity to opt-out nor did they provide detailed information about what the intervention would include.	**What we have done:** • Developed our recommendation process for mentor recruitment, explicitly asking questions around historical experience of emerging mental health difficulty, and assessing pupil suitability for the role. **We are working on:** • How to engage a variety of school staff in the recruitment. • Recruiting pupils who have taken part in HeadStart interventions in primary school to be mentees and support their transition to secondary school. • Involving pupils who have completed the intervention previously in mentee taster sessions. • A review of how 1:1s are done to ensure that all young people get the same information about MtM, and to enable pupil choice to take part or not.
Engaging schools and parents • Communication and engagement with parents/carers and schools, to improve understanding of the aims and benefits and their expectations of the intervention, particularly for mentees. • Supporting school engagement with the intervention, communicating pupil progress and outcomes, and identifying ways in which schools can further support both mentees and mentors, after the intervention.	**What we have done:** • Developed intervention factsheets, and information on the website. • Developed a parent/carer pack which provides information about HeadStart, MtM and how taking part may benefit young people. • Introduced pre and post intervention surveys to quantitatively assess pupil progress across key outcome measures. This information is reported to schools and can be used to inform future support for pupils. **We are working on:** • Updating parent/carer pack so it is short and easy to read, emphasising skills pupils can develop and potential outcomes. • Ensuring parent/carer pack is sent before an intervention begins. • Addressing concerns about after school sessions and how to support pupils to feel safe travelling home. We are reviewing alternative delivery approaches to shorten sessions. • Ways to align HeadStart intervention delivery schedules to school calendars. • Including schools in setting intervention objectives for pupils. • Reviewing the intervention design and whether Year 9s could be mentors.

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
Mentor training • A review of the mentor training length and content, with a view to reducing both.	**What we have done:** • Developed mentor assessment criteria to ensure consistency across groups, and to inform Youth Practitioners decisions on pupil progression to the intervention. The criteria can also be shared with pupils during 1:1s to help manage mentors expectations. • Created new materials to refine content of training and allow depth over breadth, and facilitate consistency across training groups. • Ran focus groups with Youth Practitioners to gather feedback about mentor training and ensure that learning from previous cohorts was implemented. **We are working on:** • Reducing the number of facilitator role plays during training. • Bringing the training cohorts of mentors together mid-way through the intervention and at the end. • Alternative delivery methods for bitesize training, such as drop down Saturdays or half term days across schools. This would make weekly sessions shorter. • Including mentees in mentor training so that mentors and mentees can meet before the intervention begins. • Liaising with Community Links MtM team to share learning of mentor training
Mentee pathway • Preparing and supporting mentees through the intervention; a clear mentee pathway.	**What we have done:** • We are developing a mentee taster session to explain what mentoring is, the benefit of taking part, and help mentees make an informed choice to take part. **We are working on:** • Ways to involve mentors in mentee taster sessions. • Creating a certificate of attendance for mentees who attend the taster sessions. • Promoting MtM to pupils in Year 6 and their parents/carers, who have participated in other HeadStart interventions to continue their HeadStart journey. • How to provide sufficient 1:1 Youth Practitioner time for mentees before the intervention. • Other ways to further support mentees before and during the intervention, so that they feel more prepared for their first session, and involved throughout. • Referring mentees after the intervention onto in-house school opportunities, other HeadStart interventions, or other locally available community provisions. • Building in time for Youth Practitioners to follow up with mentees after the intervention.

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
Consistent delivery • How to ensure consistent delivery across Youth Practitioners. • A review of the session structure and prioritising 1:1 mentoring time and pair consistency.	**We are working on:** • A review of the session structure, to set how long the 1:1 mentoring is, and ensure consistency across Youth Practitioners. Practitioners will continue to be empowered to use their expertise to plan sessions and judge the needs of each group. • Alternative means of providing a mentor with a mentee, or vice versa, should pupils exit the intervention early or not attend e.g. hold a reserve pool of mentees.
Early exits • A young person friendly exit strategy for pupils who choose not to complete the intervention.	**We are working on:** • Setting a best practice approach to manage mentor/mentee drop outs, both for the pupil who is exiting early and for their mentee/mentor. • Safeguarding time in Youth Practitioner schedules to do follow up 1:1s if a pupil exits the intervention early. • How to manage mentor expectations so that they are aware a mentee might drop out, and how that may impact on their accreditation. • Follow up procedure for pupils who exit early e.g. feedback to schools and capturing their reasons for leaving.
Behaviour management • Pupil behaviour management in sessions, specifically, disruptive behaviour.	**We are working on:** • Reviewing school behaviour policies to adopt relevant approaches to intervention delivery. • Reviewing Youth Practitioners approach to implementing disciplinary measures for repeated poor behaviour. • Setting clear behaviour expectations with pupils at the first session e.g. ground rules, respect, code of conduct; and ensuring these are adhered to in every session. Pupils will be involved in determining appropriate/inappropriate behaviours and the procedures for addressing poor behaviour. • How to ensure mentors are clear on expectations of behaviour, so they can set a good example for their younger peers.

Main report

Background

HeadStart is a preventative early help service that promotes the resilience and wellbeing of 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. More than Mentors (MtM) is a targeted intervention delivered by HeadStart Youth Practitioners and a Mental Health Practitioner in secondary schools. This qualitative research study was commissioned to seek feedback from key stakeholders about MtM at the end of the first year of programme delivery.

More than Mentors

MtM is a targeted peer mentoring intervention, run by HeadStart in participating Newham secondary schools. Year 10 pupils can train to be a Mentor, to a Year 7 or 8 pupils. It is a novel intervention developed by a steering group led by University College London and has been implemented in a number of settings including HeadStart.

Recruitment to intervention

Young people can be recommended to the intervention by a professional (such as a teacher) or they can self-recommend. To take part, young people must attend a secondary school that HeadStart is working with, mentees must be in Year 7 or 8 and mentors in Year 10, and have at least one indicator of emerging mental health difficulty (a mild or moderate emotional, behavioural, attention, or relationship difficulty) as assessed by the professional recommending or them self. For mentors this could be a historic difficulty. Pupils under the care of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are excluded. Following receipt of a recommendation form, a Youth Practitioner has a 1:1 discussion with the young person to check they meet the inclusion criteria, explain the intervention and confirm they would like to take part.

The intervention

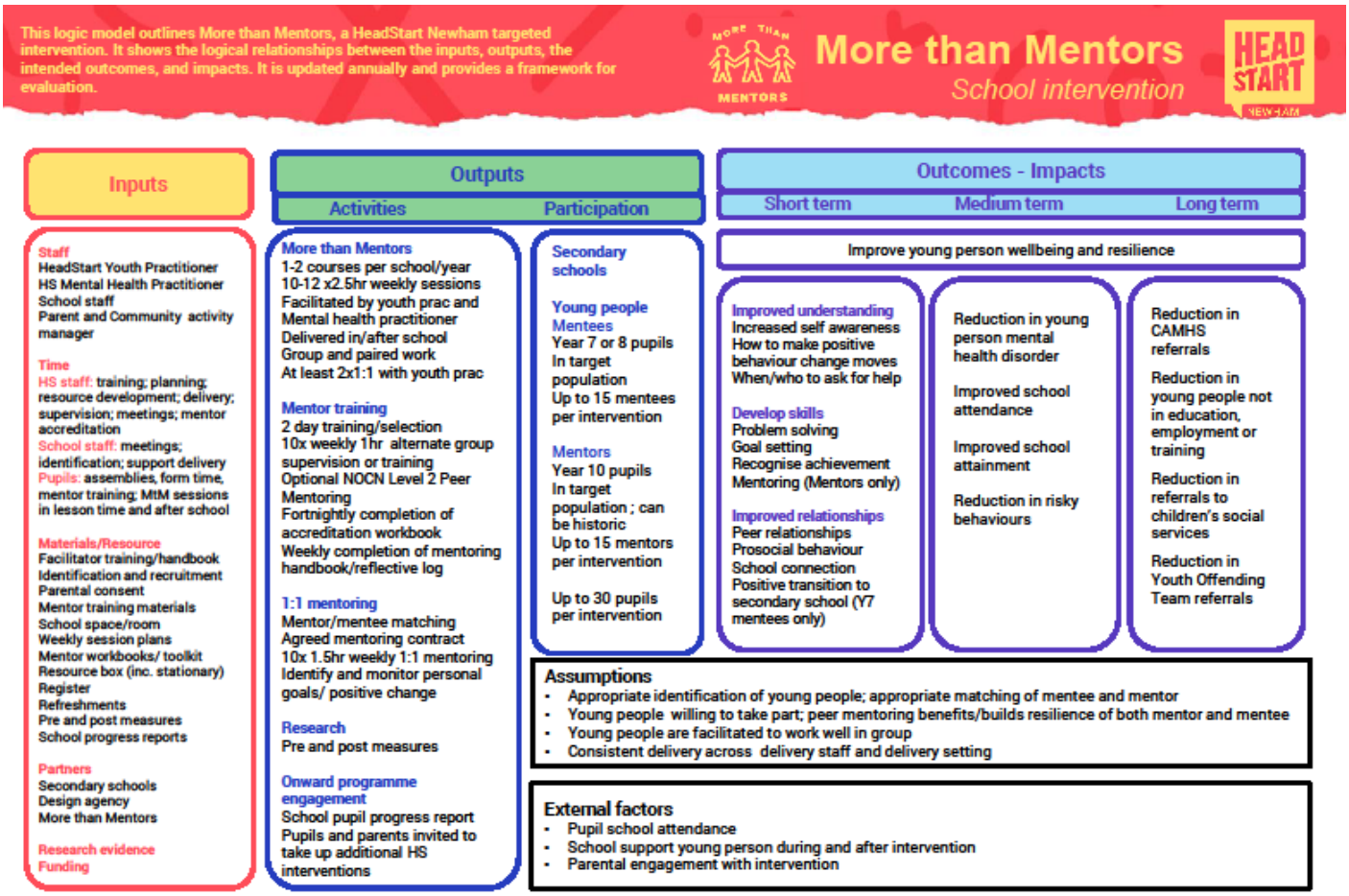
MtM involves a mentee working with a peer mentor over 10-12 weekly sessions at their school. Sessions start at the end of the school day and are facilitated and supported by a HeadStart Youth Practitioner and a Mental Health Practitioner. Light refreshments are provided.

Mentors attend a two day training course to learn mentoring skills and assess their suitability for the role. Mentors receive fortnightly group supervision led by a Mental Health Practitioner and bitesize training led by a Youth Practitioner, to problem solve and reflect on the mentoring relationship.

Weekly MtM sessions entail group activity, followed by a 1:1 mentoring. A mentor works through a toolkit with the mentee to explore different areas the mentee may like to focus on, and identify and set goals linked to the mentee's wellbeing and emotional resilience.

MtM aims to improve mentees and mentors wellbeing and resilience, facilitate a positive transition between primary and secondary school, support positive relationships with school and peers, and develop problem solving and goal setting skills. These short-term outcomes are intended to reduce the onset of diagnosable mental health conditions, improve school attendance and attainment, and reduce risky behaviours in the medium to long term. The logic model (Figure 1) below outlines the intervention selection, activities and intended outcomes and impacts.

Figure 1. More than Mentors logic model



Study aims

During the first year of the programme, MtM was delivered in four Newham secondary schools, 68 pupils took part (34 mentors, 34 mentees) and 59% of pupils completed the intervention as planned.

The aim of this study was to provide a qualitative assessment of the experiences of MtM delivery, as perceived by young people, school staff, and Youth Practitioners.

The aim was to qualitatively map and explore the range of views among participants, and specifically:

1. *Pupil experience of the journey through the intervention, from start to end.*
2. *The facilitators and barriers to taking part.*
3. *The perceived outcomes of the intervention for young people*.

This research does not provide findings relating to how prevalent a view may be, nor is it a formal impact assessment. It sought to ascertain the views and experiences of select stakeholders to support a review of delivery and inform areas for service improvement.

Method

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study. Experienced researchers facilitated:

- seven focus groups with pupils *(n=23)* that had taken part in MtM across three secondary schools in Newham;
- one focus group with HeadStart Youth Practitioners and one interview with a Senior Youth Practitioner that delivered MtM; and
- three interviews with members of school staff with pastoral responsibility.

Focus groups allowed for narratives, views and experiences to be discussed, and the areas of consensus and differences of the intervention to be explored, as well as the opportunity to generate suggestions and recommendations for service delivery, based on participant experiences.

Topic guides were agreed with the HeadStart Newham management. The guides were used by researchers to ensure consistency of coverage across data collection activities.

Research fieldwork took place between June and July 2017.

Sample and recruitment

This study included 23 pupils, 14 mentees (13 Year 7s, one Year 8) and nine Year 10 mentors. All had participated in MtM in the academic year 2016/17.

Participants were recruited across three secondary schools. These schools were chosen as they included a range of group sizes and a mix of where the intervention had run “as planned”, and where there had been challenges, such as (perceived) school engagement with the intervention, and where some pupils had not completed the intervention. To explore consistency of delivery, schools selection ensured interventions were facilitated by different Youth Practitioners.

The school and associated Youth Practitioner supported the study by arranging focus group logistics, including acting as gate keepers to recruitment, ensuring a diversity of pupils were included and that pupils provided informed consent to participate in this study. The researcher explained the study and sought consent to participation directly before each focus group.

Analysis

Each research encounter was audio recorded, with participant consent. A thematic approach to analysing qualitative data, known as Framework, was used for this research. Following familiarisation of the focus group recordings, an analytical matrix framework was developed in Excel; whereby key themes were listed in different column headings and each row represented a focus group. Data from each focus group was summarised under the appropriate column heading, allowing for systematic and comprehensive analysis and comparison of themes between groups. Data was compared and contrasted between cases (looking at what different groups said on the same issue) and within cases (looking at how a group’s opinions on one topic relate to their views on another) investigation of the data. The analysis was fully documented and conclusions could be linked back to the original source data.

Findings

Before the intervention

Pupils, school staff and Youth Practitioners were asked to reflect on their journey from beginning to end of the More than Mentors (MtM) intervention. Findings are discussed below. Suggestions from those who took part in this study are at the end of each section.

Recommendation to MtM

Schools took different approaches to introducing pupils to MtM, including:

- An assembly or in Personal Social and Health Education (PHSE) class, where pupils were informed about MtM by a teacher and/or HeadStart Youth Practitioner and encouraged to self-recommend.
- Professional recommendation by a teacher. In some instances young people were not involved in the decision and found out about their recommendation during the 1:1 with a Youth Practitioner. Hence, it could feel like participation was expected, rather than a choice.
- Mentors and mentees, in particular schools, recalled receiving a letter from school staff or a Youth Practitioner that provided information about the intervention; and a form for them to complete and state the reason they wanted to take part.

Identification of target population and professional recommendations

Schools seemed clear that mentees needed to meet a target (i.e. should show a sign of emerging mental health difficulty). However, this was less apparent in the selection of mentors.

Schools reported two different approaches to selecting pupils for recommendation to be a mentee:

- Schools either took a systematic approach to recommendation to the intervention; based on a review of school pupil records staff identified pupils for whom concerns had already been raised such as looked after children, those with behavioural difficulties, and those struggling to settle in class; or
- Schools recommended pupils based on who they believed would most benefit from building resilience and the guidance of an older peer.

However, the HeadStart target population criteria was not always the deciding factor for schools when recommending mentors, who should show an emerging or historic mental health difficulty. Schools recommended pupils who staff believed would make the best mentors. For example, in one school, pupils recommended to be mentors tended to be pupils who were known to engage in extra-curricular activities, and were likely to take on further responsibilities in the schools, such as become prefects.

"I basically chose those I knew would be prefects later on."
School staff, Head of Year 10

This finding was supported by Youth Practitioners, who suspected that some young people on interventions may not have met the target population. Practitioners reported that they lacked understanding about the target population criteria at the start of delivery. By the end of Year 1 delivery Youth Practitioners felt they had a 'better sense' of the target population and a clear intervention pathway.

1:1s

Following receipt of a recommendation, each pupil had a 1:1 with a Youth Practitioner. Pupils described these as "interviews", and believed the

aim was to determine which pupils would most benefit from the intervention. The selection criteria for progression were not clear to mentors or to mentees. Selection for mentor training was received positively by pupils; but they would have liked to know why they were selected over others.

"I'm happy that they picked me, there must be good reasons. I don't know why they picked me"
Mentor

There was evidence of variance in the information provided by Youth Practitioners in 1:1s. Mentors in some schools were provided with information about training dates, content and what to expect after they completed training. These pupils felt more prepared for the intervention. By comparison, pupils in other schools (and working with different Practitioners) felt the 1:1 did not provide them with a clear understanding of the intervention and were not sure what to expect following the 1:1.

Youth Practitioners felt that 1:1s were too short to fully prepare mentees for the intervention, or to get to know them well enough to consider suitable mentor-mentee pairings.

"We need to know if we've got the right kids, and I don't think you can make that decision in ten minutes."
HeadStart Youth Practitioner

Pupil choice

The level of choice pupils felt they had about taking part in MtM differed by pupil, across and within schools, for both mentors and mentees. Some felt they had a choice whether to take part, whereas others were selected by teachers. According to staff in one school, mentors were asked if they wanted to be involved, and encouraged to make a decision for them self. Whereas mentees, within the same school, were told they were taking part, and participation was not presented as a choice. School staff believed being selected for an extra-curricular intervention made pupils 'feel special' and therefore they would want to take part. However, Youth Practitioners sensed that not feeling they had a choice could pose a barrier to pupil motivation and attendance. Practitioners stated a preference for self-recommendation over professional recommendation, as they felt that pupils who actively chose to take part had clearer expectations and wanted to participate in the intervention. Youth Practitioners reported that in this first year of delivery, recommendations were largely received from professionals (teachers), rather than pupil self-recommendation.

Pupil motivations to take part

Mentors and mentees had distinct motivations for taking part.

Mentors

Mentors' initial perception of the role was that it would involve talking to a younger pupil and trying to help them. Their motivations to be a mentor were both short and long term. They wanted to take part because they:

- wanted to do something interesting and fun after school;
- wanted to help others; and thought that helping others would be positive for them; and
- to enhance their Curriculum Vitae (CV) and job applications in the future.

Mentees

Mentees believed mentoring would provide a space where they could talk to someone older**,** express their feelings and share problems. They

expected to receive advice and help with personal goals from their mentors. Similar to mentors, mentees also had both short and long term motivations to take part.

Short term motivations:

- because they felt they had to;
- having fun - Youth Practitioners had told pupils it would be a fun and 'happy place';
- an opportunity to miss some regular lesson time;
- they had friends or siblings that were taking part as mentors; so they would know other people in the intervention, and mentors had suggested it would be fun;
- hope that a peer mentor would help improve their confidence, social skills, and behaviour management, by giving them ways to express negative emotions.

Longer-term motivations

- In turn, mentees hoped these expected short-term improvements would put them in a better position to do well at school, including achieving good GCSEs and reducing the risk of school exclusion. Mentees noted that doing well at school would improve their future job prospects.

Parent/carer engagement

Parental engagement with the intervention varied across schools. One school drafted their own letter for parents/carers about the intervention, and invited parents to attend an informal discussion to find out more.

Mentors felt supported by their parents/carers to take part, whereas recommendation to the intervention could raise concerns among parents/carers of mentees.

Mentors reported that their parents had a positive perception of the role of a mentor, and thought that their involvement would be beneficial for their CV. Pupils, who had discussed participation with their parent/carer, reported that their parent had actively encouraged them to take part, and were proud of them for being selected to be a mentor.

In contrast, mentees felt that their parent/carer could be alarmed that they were selected to receive mentoring. Mentees felt parents/carers were unsure what the purpose of the intervention was, and perceived it to be for "naughty pupils", or those with behavioural difficulties. A conversation between the Youth Practitioner and parent/carer, where Practitioners provided information about the intervention, explained the potential benefits of mentee participation, and helped to dispel misconceptions facilitated improved parent/carer engagement.

"My mum thought it was for bad children…she was asking me why are you involved in that…but she found out it's not like that. [the Youth Practitioner] talked to her…"
Mentee

Participant suggestions for the recommendation process

To improve pupils understanding of the aims and benefits of the intervention, and to encourage self recommendations, *school staff* suggested inviting pupils that have completed MtM to share their experience in a school assembly. *Mentors* advised the use of positive messaging during promotion. They felt this would minimise the potential for the intervention to be viewed as being for 'weak' or 'problem' pupils.

To improve understanding of the target population for the intervention, *pupils and school staff* suggested there should be clear promotion in schools before starting recruitment.

To facilitate pupil choice, *pupils* suggested that 1:1s need to provide clear information about the aims and benefits of MtM, the selection criteria, why they were chosen, as well as outlining the typical session structure and mentor training.

To encourage parent/carer engagement, *pupils* advised that parents should be informed about the intervention during the recommendation phase, including the aims and benefits, what participation will involve for pupils. *School staff* proposed a parent workshop or evening about the intervention.

During the intervention

Mentor training and support

Mentor training

The initial two day mentor training aims to equip pupils with the necessary skills to work with a mentee effectively and safely.

The key information mentors recalled from the training, included, how to:

- build a relationship with the mentee and encourage them to talk/share information;
- work empathically;
- maintain boundaries/be a professional friend; and
- respond to safeguarding concerns.

Mentors reported directions to the training location were unclear, which resulted in some young people arriving late and having to join another training cohort at a later date.

Pupils explained that the training was challenging. The training is an assessment process and participation did not guarantee they would become mentors. Mentors could therefore feel they were constantly being tested, particularly in the role play. Mentors recalled feeling nervous throughout and some considered leaving. There was no evidence to suggest that pupils raised these concerns with the HeadStart team. Pupils said they persevered because they found the training sufficiently enjoyable and learnt new skills. Mentors explained that the training prepared them for their mentoring role to an extent, but they felt a level of apprehension about putting their training into action.

"I felt ready, but not mentally ready"
Mentor

Mentors could feel overwhelmed by the amount of information covered during the two training

days, and suggested reducing the content or having more (but shorter) training days. There was a preference for consecutive training days; mentors felt it was more challenging to absorb all the information when trained on non-consecutive days.

Mentors had expected to take up their mentor role soon after the training. However, there was a delay between completing training and starting mentoring across schools. This unexpected change was a cause of frustration for mentors and was echoed by Youth Practitioners. Mentors felt this time-lag made it harder to remember the skills learnt during training and could exacerbate mentor's apprehension about the role. Mentors that were worried reported they spent extra time doing independent revision of the materials to alleviate their concern that they may forget the information.

"We had learnt everything and were ready to do on the first week back…it made it more scary to meet mentees, had to look back on the training. The longer it took the more worried I would get"
Mentor

Bitesize training and clinical supervision

During the intervention mentors are provided with bitesize training to reinforce key learning from the initial training. Mentors felt this ongoing training enabled them to be more effective in their role, and particularly recollected training on how to have a good ending. They found the resources and role plays useful, and felt supported by the Youth Practitioner. Mentors recalled clinical supervision where they discussed how their mentoring sessions were progressing, how to improve their practise and plan for the next session.

Mentor training is based around role play with peers which could feel different to being in a similar situation, with a mentee, expecting guidance and reassurance. Mentors felt they would have benefitted from more practical support in how to run their mentoring sessions specific to their mentee. During 1:1 mentoring, mentors could initially struggle to think about where to sit, how to structure the session, and how to use the activities effectively. This was especially relevant for mentors that struggled to develop a relationship with their mentee.

Additionally, mentors highlighted the importance of emotional support provision for mentors. Some found themselves in challenging situations that they felt unprepared for, such as a mentee becoming upset, but they were able to request the support of the HeadStart team to help manage this.

"[Youth Practitioner] was like a mentor in a way. She told me I didn't do anything wrong, not to worry, it's ok to cry"
Mentor

However, they did not always feel reassured when they spoke to the Youth Practitioner. Sometimes Practitioners would provide guidance or suggestions, when mentors wanted a concrete solution to the presenting issue. A perceived persistent lack of support from Youth Practitioners in resolving mentor concerns about their mentoring role, could contribute to a mentor's decision to exit the intervention early.

Mentor resources

Mentors were provided with HeadStart resources: a mentor workbook which provided space to document written reflection, session plan and revise training content; and a mentor toolkit which contains activities to use with mentees.

Mentors found the resources helpful. The workbook helped mentors to reflect on previous

sessions and plan for the next. In instances where the mentor forgot to bring the workbook to the session, they noticed they felt less prepared without their session plan to hand.

The toolkit provided mentors with a way to facilitate discussions with their mentee, particularly when conversation alone was challenging. For example, the blob tree, an activity depicting characters of different emotions, was particularly useful. Mentors used this with mentees at each session, asking them to describe which character on that day most resonated with them.

Likewise, mentees found the activities helpful as an alternative way to communicate with their mentor, especially if they felt emotional or overwhelmed.

"You can express your emotions but not through talking. Sometimes when I talk I cry"
Mentee

This feedback implies that the resources were appropriate, useful and facilitated the mentoring process; providing a creative way for mentors and mentees to communicate and express themselves.

Participant suggestions for mentor training

To prepare mentors, *mentors* suggested training, bitesize training, and supervision should especially focus on:

- difficult scenarios; provide psychological and practical support to mentors in how to respond effectively;
- how to practically apply their training;
- how best to use their mentor handbooks to support them through their mentoring experience, such as updating the progress they have made on goals set during training; and the activities in the toolkit to enhance 1:1 time with their mentees, for example, using the specific sections of the toolkit which are most appropriate to their mentees.

To reduce mentor anxiety and ensure training is not overwhelming, *mentors* proposed:

- a review of the course content/length;
- schedule training days and the start of the intervention close together;
- clear directions and signposting to the training venue.

Weekly mentoring sessions

The following section outlines pupils, staff and Youth Practitioner experience of weekly intervention sessions and their reflections on the facilitators and barriers to participating in the intervention.

Initial sessions

Pupils across schools had a poor first impression of the intervention and described it as unorganised.

There was low attendance in some schools due to poor communication between HeadStart, schools and intervention pupils. Low attendance in the first session could increase pupil apprehension about taking part. Mentors were concerned that mentees' non-attendance meant they no longer wanted to take part, and felt disappointed each time there was a delay to starting mentoring.

"It was really a panic situation, because we didn't know if we would be able to continue. At first it seemed like none of the mentors or mentees were willing to do it, but they were, it was just really unorganised"
Mentor

At the start of the intervention, there were mentees that were under the impression they were selected to take part because of difficult behaviour they had displayed at school. During the intervention, mentors detected mentees could be unsure, confused, and in some cases upset as to why they had been selected to take part.

"They thought they were in trouble and that's why we were doing it; they felt maybe they were a problem child or something"
Mentor

Mentors felt this perception changed over the course of the intervention as mentees understood the aim was to help them, and not that they were in trouble.

School staff noted that once the sessions commenced and pupils were in regular attendance, Youth Practitioners took over the logistical organisation and some collected pupils from their classrooms each week, which facilitated a more organised session, and a prompt start. However, pupils noted that initial experience of a poorly organised intervention could make them hesitant to sign up to other HeadStart interventions in the future.

Structure of weekly mentoring sessions

The delivery of weekly sessions across schools and by Practitioner was not consistent. Some Youth Practitioners started with group games or activities whilst other Practitioners split the group into mentees and mentors to prepare them for the session.

Mentors and mentees found the games and group activities fun, and a good way to get to know other people in the session and bond as a whole group.

Mentors felt that having the same format each week and starting with group activities enabled mentees to feel more at ease in the group, ensured they were aware of what to expect, and provided structure to the session. However, both mentors and mentees reported it could be repetitive and boring if the same game was chosen each week.

"It's predictable that's why it's boring"
Mentee

Mentors and mentees in one school (and working with particular Youth Practitioners) felt that a disproportionate amount of time was spent

playing group games, rather than 1:1 mentoring. Pupils had expected to have more time devoted to 1:1 mentoring. Limited mentoring time could make it difficult and/or longer for mentors and mentees to establish a comfortable trusting relationship or work through issues the mentee was having. Furthermore, this could leave mentors feeling that they were not actually helping their mentee or doing what they had signed up to do.

"Now we're actually giving the help I thought yeah maybe I can actually give people in Year 7 the help that I actually wanted. But when I found out it was only 15 minutes of mentoring, I felt that wasn't actually helping"
Mentor

Similarly, mentees at this school felt 'supported but not mentored'. Mentees generally found their mentor helpful but would have liked more 1:1 time to talk with their mentor.

"All they done was play games and eat food so it wasn't really nothing that helped you…I thought it'd be something different that would actually help you"
Mentee

Both the predictability of the session structure and insufficient 1:1 mentoring time were seen as barriers to attendance, and resulted in some pupils leaving the intervention early. These pupils implied that they may have completed the intervention, had there been more 1:1 mentoring time.

Conversely, mentors and mentees in another school felt they had sufficient time for 1:1 mentoring. This intervention group was smaller in size and pupils and described how the group activities helped the whole group to bond, which was an unexpected benefit and enhanced their intervention experience.

These findings suggest a consistent weekly intervention session structure, with some variation, for example, different group warm-up activities, are important to maintaining pupil interest in the intervention. Although there is a benefit to group activities, pupils expected to have sufficient time allocated the mentoring, as the core activity. Furthermore, the size of cohort group may influence pupil's experience of the intervention.

The mentoring relationship

The mentor-mentee relationship could become very important to the young people who took part in MtM. Both mentors and mentees described a journey from the initial meeting, through getting to know each other, building trust, and ultimately being able to share freely, without judgement. The mentor-mentee relationship journey is shown in Figure 2 below.

Knowing someone was there to listen to mentees encouraged them to attend. They felt a sense of responsibility to, and respect for, their mentors, and did not want to disappoint them.

"Would go there for her sake as much as mine. If I just went home it would be rude and disrespectful to her"
Mentee

Similarly, mentors reported that they attended each week because they knew their mentee was relying on them to show up. Mentors felt a sense of obligation to their mentee, and did not want to disappoint them or disrupt their progress. They were committed to building a relationship with their mentee, and the sessions could give mentors a sense of belonging.

"We just became an after school family…we were so comfortable with each other it was like we're brothers and sisters now"
Mentor

Conversely, mentor-mentee pairings did not always work. Pairings that were deemed unsuitable by one or both party could lead to a negative intervention experience if left unresolved. This occurred where the mentor and mentee personalities did not complement each other, for example, if a mentor felt intimidated by the mentee, or a mentee did not feel they could trust their mentor. As a result, mentors could feel less confident in their role as a mentor, and disappointed in the intervention, as they did not achieve what they had expected to.

Such concerns were either addressed by the pupil notifying the Youth Practitioner, or the Youth Practitioner detecting a difficulty and actively seeking to resolve it. Youth Practitioners sought to resolve pupil concerns by having a conversation with the mentor or mentee, or by changing the pairing, which enabled a positive experience for those young people.

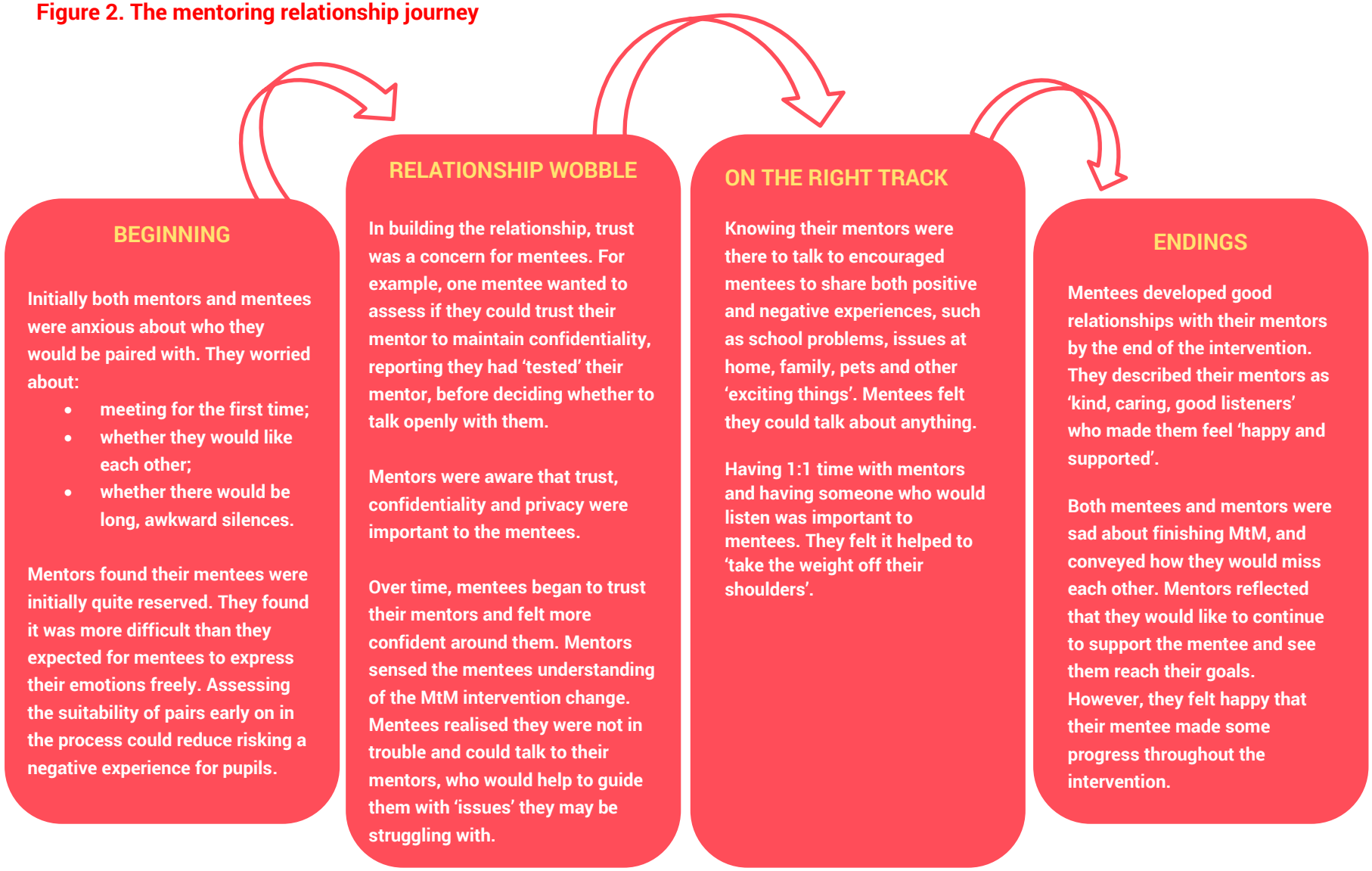
"[Youth Practitioner] spotted during the group activity that it wasn't working and switched to another mentee"
Mentor

Gender matching was also raised by participants, as something that may be important to some mentors/mentees when assigning pairs. Furthermore, pupils observed that there were more female than male mentors, and suggested a need to ensure more male mentors are recruited in the future.

"Boys have problems too, and if they boys who have problems are not being noticed because only girls in there [mentoring]…boy mentors might actually understand more about what the boy mentees are going through"
Mentor

One reason pupils gave for leaving the programme early was not having a consistent mentee or mentor. This indicates that a consistent mentoring experience is important. Unexpected changes to the mentoring relationship were not always welcome, and required management.

Figure 2. The mentoring relationship journey



"It's been a long road, a bumpy road. It's like the bumpy road and then you come to a really nice place, the place you wanted to go, the perfect place…the beautiful sparkly castle"
Mentor

The value of a peer mentor

Mentees appreciated having a peer mentor rather than a teacher or another adult, as they assumed adults might 'sugar-coat' certain issues. They felt they could trust their peer mentor to be honest with them and to preserve their confidentiality.

Mentees also assumed their mentor could relate to their situation better than an adult, as they had recently been in a similar position in the same school. They believed parents, or even friends, might not understand, so it might feel uncomfortable talking to them.

School staff believed that having consistent one to one attention and someone to talk to each week was important to mentees. Staff thought that having their own protected time with a mentor made mentees feel valued.

"…every time during the week, if you're having a bad time, and it's hard to keep it to yourself, then Tuesday you can finally tell someone about it that won't tell a teacher" Mentee

Behaviour management

School staff stressed that managing challenging pupil behaviour in the sessions was important. They were concerned that if not managed by the Youth Practitioners, there was potential for pupils to be unpleasant to one another, which could be damaging for a young person's confidence. Some Practitioners were seen to manage behaviour well, which enabled young people to feel safe and speak openly.

Youth Practitioners discussed how they could struggle to balance the challenging pupil behaviour and deliver a high quality intervention for the rest of the group. This may support previous findings that some pupils were inappropriately selected to take part in the intervention. It could also suggest that Practitioners may benefit from support around effective behaviour management of pupils, and/or in some groups may require more Practitioners, or extra behavioural management support, for intervention delivery.

Barriers and facilitators to attendance

Mentor and mentee attendance was a concern for Youth Practitioners. Not only was attendance important to building a consistent mentoring experience, but also for mentors to obtain the minimum number of mentoring hours required to qualify for the NOCN Level 2 in Peer Mentoring accreditation. Practitioners believed non-attendance could also lead to inconsistent pairings each week, which young people reported as a barrier in itself.

After-school commitment

Although not always convenient, pupils considered after school the best time to hold the sessions. However, after school scheduling could pose a barrier to attendance and interfere with pupil's family commitments, curfews, responsibility to accompany siblings home after school, taking part in other after school activities, or concern about missing out on time with their friends.

Furthermore, the time commitment was too much for some pupils who wanted to prioritise other activities which they believed to be:

- a better use of their time, for example activities more relevant to GCSEs and therefore their future development; or;
- that they already knew they enjoyed, such as art club.

Pupils explained that their parents were supportive of MtM, but expressed concern about the time commitment required, particularly for mentors, who are required to stay longer after school, to attend both the mentoring session and

either a bitesize training/supervision. At times, Year 10 mentors could find it challenging to meet both their mentoring and academic commitments. After mentoring sessions, mentors reported sometimes having to work later into the evening to complete school work. School staff echoed this concern about the potential disruption to how well mentors managed their homework, and believed they could struggle to concentrate after getting home late. Staff suspected that the length of after-school sessions may have been a barrier to consistent attendance.

"One of them wrote a letter bless her, because she had to miss a session, she was really worried...but she had exam prep to do"
School Behaviour Specialist Class Practitioner

Additionally, school staff reported that parents, and especially parents of mentees, could be concerned about them travelling home alone after mentoring sessions.

Across the schools, there were some instances where flexible scheduling was agreed and this facilitated attendance. For example:

- the start time of MtM was changed to start in school hours, which increased attendance, according to Youth Practitioners;
- pupils were given permission by the Youth Practitioner to leave the sessions early, or start late, which enabled them to continue with other after school activities.

Youth Practitioners tried to meet with pupils after missing a session to check in and encourage attendance the following week. However, Practitioners found that some schools would not allow meetings outside the mentoring sessions, which limited their ability to address pupil non-attendance, and minimise early exit from the intervention.

Practitioners suggested a more formal attendance policy might increase attendance. For example, having a limit to what is an acceptable number of missed sessions.

Opportunity to socialise

The opportunity to socialise, meet other people and have fun was important to both mentees and mentors. For mentees it was comforting to see familiar faces in the sessions and have friends from their year group there, as this encouraged them to attend. This finding supports pupil suggestions to start building relationships early on by mentors and mentees meeting as a group before the intervention begins. Pupils also valued the party in the last session to celebrate their intervention journey.

Provision of food

Mentors and mentees agreed that having snacks at the sessions was a reason to attend, as they were always hungry after school. However, the same refreshments were provided each week and pupils felt this could become boring.

Location

Youth Practitioners stressed that location was an important contributor to the feel of the intervention. Poor room selection could contribute to an unorganised physical space. Furthermore, school staff complained that rooms were sometimes left in a mess.

In one school, some sessions were held off school grounds, which according to mentors felt more private and ensured fewer distractions for mentees.

The value of Youth Practitioners and non-academic learning

Facilitation by a Youth Practitioner was valued by mentors and mentees. Pupils thought it was important that the delivery team were not school

staff, as this enabled them the freedom to talk about issues happening at school. Mentors appreciated that the HeadStart Youth Practitioners did not share the preconceptions about the young people that they suspected school staff might have. Therefore pupils felt that delivery by school staff would have changed the experience of the intervention.

Mentors particularly liked that the Youth Practitioners did not act like teachers and were called by their first name. They understood there were still rules, but it was a more relaxed atmosphere to school. This made mentors feel comfortable, replacing the traditional hierarchical relationship experienced between pupils and teachers, with a more friendly one. Pupils described MtM as somewhere they were taken seriously and where they felt comfortable to speak up, as Practitioners valued their opinions, thoughts and ideas.

"The HeadStart staff make you feel [like] you make a difference. Kids our age don't get a say in what we want. We get told what to do…It makes you feel more heard, they always ask for your opinions"
Mentor

One trait particularly appreciated in a Youth Practitioner was a good sense of humour. This created a friendly, relaxed and inclusive atmosphere, putting pupils at ease.

"My favourite thing was [Youth Practitioner] because he always makes us laugh…When we felt down he would help us and I think it was just his mood put everyone else in a good mood cos he was usually friendly and inviting and inclusive"
Mentee

School staff were mindful that not all teachers understand the different challenges young people may face, with the focus often on academic achievements. Therefore, they too valued intervention delivery by Youth Practitioners, who they assumed worked with young people more holistically than teachers.

These findings suggest young people enjoyed learning in a more relaxed environment, in comparison to a traditional school environment. Pupils that had established a good relationship with the Youth Practitioner described how their less formal approach facilitated a comfortable, open space for sharing.

Youth Practitioner capacity

Youth Practitioners reflected on the capacity required to recruit to, train and deliver MtM.

Youth Practitioners expressed concern over limited time available to conduct 1:1s as part of the pupil recruitment and selection process. They found it difficult to assess whether they had recruited the appropriate young people for the intervention during a short 1:1. Practitioners explained how it was only once they had started working with pupils on the intervention that they gained a better sense of which pupils had emerging mental health difficulties.

Youth Practitioner capacity was also thought to be under resourced during mentor training, which made it difficult to ensure the appropriate pupils were selected as mentors. For example, a pupil considered to be unsuitable to be a mentor remained in the intervention as the Practitioner did not have time to address this during training. This implies that there was either not enough Practitioners during mentor training, or that there was not sufficient time planned into the Practitioners' schedule during training, to allow them to assess which pupils would be appropriate mentors and provide this feedback to young people.

"We didn't have the right kids, but [management] was expecting that this year so it wasn't a problem.

You can't really find out if you have the right kids until it starts."
HeadStart Youth Practitioner

In addition, Practitioners expressed a preference to follow up with mentors/mentees that missed a session. Where a school granted permission, lack of capacity was a barrier to fulfil this. Practitioners reported a workload that did not allow for ad hoc meetings with young people.

Early exit from the intervention

Some young people chose to leave the programme early, either due to personal reasons which affected their attendance such as a change in circumstance at home, or because the intervention was not what they expected. More specifically, the latter included reasons, such as:

- not having as much 1:1 mentoring time as pupils would have liked;
- the time commitment was too much;
- inconsistent mentor/mentee pairing ; or
- Experiencing the weekly sessions to be boring and predictable.

These reasons are all discussed in more detail in previous sections of this report.

Participant suggestions for weekly sessions

To improve the weekly sessions, *pupils* advised prioritising 1:1 mentoring time over group games, ensuring sufficient time for peer mentoring.

To facilitate stimulating group work, *pupils* suggested changing the game each week, and holding some sessions outdoors, where mentees may expel excess energy.

To enhance trusting relationships *pupils* recommended consistent pairs, and meeting as a whole group before the intervention to get to know each other. *Mentors* suggested that mentees could be included in selecting their mentor, which may increase mentees' confidence in their compatibility, and facilitate a more trusting start. *Mentors* suggested considering gender when matching pairs.

To reduce the mentor workload, *school staff* suggested Year 9 to be mentors, as Year 10s, have a substantial academic workload.

To facilitate attendance and punctuality, *pupils* suggested a note in their planner to show classroom teachers to leave class early. *Youth Practitioners* proposed having a maximum allowable number of missed sessions. *School staff* advised sharing the attendance register with the school after each session, so that they can check in with pupils who did not attend. They also recommended parental engagement throughout the intervention, e.g. pupil progress report.

To ensure regular mentoring opportunities *mentors* proposed having extra mentees on standby for when a mentee does not attend, so that the mentor can continue to develop their skills (although this contradicts findings that consistent pairs were important to mentees).

To manage pupil behaviour *school staff* expected Youth Practitioners mirror the school's behaviour policy, and report poor behaviour to the school contact on a weekly basis.

Communication with schools

School staff who took part in this study felt they had a good understanding of MtM, as Youth Practitioners had been clear about what it involved. Staff hoped pupils would:

- gain confidence;
- develop maturity;
- become more aware of their behaviour, and how it affects others;
- improve communication skills.

There was a perception among intervention pupils their teachers had little or no awareness of MtM; and that understanding of HeadStart and MtM was limited to staff who were directly involved in co-ordinating the intervention. Pupils at some schools reported that staff had initially likened taking part in MtM to being 'in a club' that would help build their confidence. This was echoed by school staff, who felt only those directly involved in preparation for the intervention, had a good comprehension of what it involved.

During the intervention, pupils across schools experienced teachers refusing permission to leave class early to attend the weekly session. Additionally, mentors felt teachers did not recognise the responsibility of being a mentor.

School staff who observed the sessions taking place described the intervention as 'outstanding', and felt the activities catered to different pupils. They said pupils looked engaged, which indicated to staff that pupils were enjoying it.

Youth Practitioners found that a school's understanding was dependent on individual members of staff. In their experience, support from their key contact heavily influenced the overall perception of HeadStart.

This suggests internal communications in schools, regarding HeadStart and its interventions, may have been wanting.

School engagement

School staff felt a lack of support from the HeadStart team in the initial set up of the intervention, and had not expected to have as much responsibility for the logistical organisation of the intervention. They found it difficult to balance their time supporting MtM alongside their other commitments.

Schools wanted different levels of communication with HeadStart. Some were keen to receive ongoing feedback on pupil progress, and to intervene when they felt appropriate, such as to address poor pupil behaviour. Whereas others would have liked to be informed of outcomes – both for mentees and mentors, at the end of the intervention, but were otherwise happy for the Youth Practitioners to manage the sessions.

Where staff wanted to be informed of issues as they arose, a perceived lack of feedback presented a barrier to them supporting the HeadStart team, and vice versa.

Participant suggestions for communication and engagement with schools

To aid initial set up of the intervention in schools, *school staff* suggested HeadStart should liaise with schools early to relieve pressure from school staff who may feel overwhelmed by last minuet requests. They also proposed school intervention packs are provided, containing:

- a schedule with dates for all elements of the intervention i.e. recommendation window, 1:1s, intervention delivery
- pupil selection criteria
- an overview of weekly intervention session plans
- a final measure of pupil progress and success.

To facilitate shared outcomes for pupils, *school staff* advised liaising with school learning mentors, who may already have set goals with mentees, which could be incorporated and supported through the intervention.

To improve school staff understanding and engagement, *school staff* recommended sharing measurements of success, regular feedback, pupil progress, and outcome reports with schools.

Pupil outcomes

School perception

Across schools, staff reported noticeable change in intervention pupils, who displayed improvements in:

- communication skills,
- behaviour in class,
- increased confidence,
- being able to express feelings more effectively, or
- generally being more relaxed.

"They feel anxious and then react in the wrong way...they do struggle as children to express how they're feeling...they know they're upset but they can't express that...so I think being able to sit and speak was a way for them to grow in communication, especially with adults and older children"
School Head of Year

One school staff member likened MtM to a leadership and coaching programme for the mentors. The school were keen to build on the skills mentors had developed for other school responsibilities, such as break and lunch duties, or prefect work. However, there was no evidence of plans to develop mentees learning.

In contrast, staff at other schools commented how it was nice for pupils to work with an external organisation, but they were concerned the intervention may be superficial, a 'tick box exercise'. Staff wanted evidence of pupil progress and outcomes.

For example, staff were aware that mentors were working towards a peer mentoring qualification but were not informed if they were successful.

"[It] would be helpful to have a measure of student's progress. We need to see if the students have made progress and where they have made progress, it would be really nice to have that. Otherwise we're

just delivering interventions...[without knowing impact]"
Behavioural Specialist Classroom Practitioner, School staff

Pupil perception

Pupils that completed the intervention in full were asked to reflect on what they gained from taking part in MtM. Pupils did not explicitly mention wellbeing or resilience, however mentees and mentors described personal outcomes which could contribute to building resilience and positive wellbeing.

There were also mentees and mentors who felt they did not benefit from participation, which included those that did not complete the intervention. Furthermore, those that exited early reported feeling low self confidence during the intervention, and guilt about exiting the intervention.

Young people, particularly mentees, could struggle to articulate the effect of the intervention. Although they could identify areas they considered had benefitted due to their participation in MtM, at times they could not articulate the reasons behind any changes.

Building relationships

Developing existing relationships

Young people reported that skills developed as part of MtM enabled them to improve relationships with siblings, friends or teachers. For instance, mentees reported that improved self-control learnt through MtM had positively affected how teachers perceived and engaged with them.

"In the beginning most teachers didn't like me at all, but now I've calmed down and been more respectful they see the good side of me"
Mentee

Mentors felt that working with mentees gave them insight to a younger person's perspective, which helped them to be more understanding of views and opinions of other younger peers. They were able to transfer and apply this understanding, along with their training on empathy and differences (recognising and accepting those who have different beliefs and values), to improve relationships with their siblings.

"A specific change for me was with my younger brother…it helped me understand younger people more so I could talk to my little brother on a better standing point…it's helped me develop a stronger bond with him"
Mentor

Developing new relationships

Pupils developed new relationships outside the mentor – mentee relationship. Mentors met new young people from other schools at the training, as well as getting to know peers from the same school who they did not know prior to the intervention, the mentees, and the HeadStart staff. Furthermore, mentors and mentees could feel more confident to start new relationships outside the sessions as a result of the intervention. MtM gave them the confidence to 'talk to anyone'.

Mentors: empathy and communication skills

Mentors felt they gained new skills through the training, and working with their mentee, such as how to:

- use tools to communicate with others;
- be empathetic;
- mediate difficult conversations and situations;
- be less judgmental; and
- remain unbiased.

Mentees: developing self-control strategies

A consistent outcome for mentees was improved self-control and self-awareness. Through techniques gained from working with their mentor, mentees felt increased awareness of, and better able to control, their emotions and behaviours. This enabled them to react differently to situations in school. Prior to MtM they may have reacted in a particular way, whereas using positive approaches developed in the intervention, they said they were now in trouble less often. For example, mentees reported changes such as not immediately 'answering back'. They now allowed themselves time to calm down out of the classroom, or used counting techniques to control anger.

"When I get angry now I just walk, or count to ten…I have barely gotten angry so I guess its ok."
Mentee

They were also more self-aware and conscious of what they said to others. They now 'think before they speak', as a result of learning on the intervention.

This finding was supported by school staff who described how the intervention had given mentees a platform to develop skills, and help them control their behaviour.

"He's really learned to use the people around him when he needs to when he's in a situation where he feels like he's losing control. So he's learnt to do that, so that's a lot of growth for him. He was a little firestarter when he had his moments"
School Head of Year

Mentees also reported having more patience and an enhanced understanding of the importance of respecting others, as a result of taking part in MtM. They planned to apply this in other areas of their lives, and endeavoured to be more respectful towards others.

Building confidence

Both mentees and mentors reported that taking part in the intervention had increased their confidence.

Mentors felt good about themselves because they felt they were enabling and aiding mentees' personal development.

"It makes you feel like you make a difference"
Mentor

Knowing they could initiate conversation and that someone would listen, gave them an increased self-confidence to talk to other people outside mentoring.

"I learnt that I shouldn't be scared to initiate conversation"
Mentor

Pupils explained how the confidence they gained through MtM encouraged them to challenge themselves, for example, by applying for prefect roles within the school, and planning to complete a Level 2 peer mentoring qualification. It could also be positive for pupils outside school, for example, one pupil joined the police cadets, which they related to an increased self confidence developed during MtM. Staff had also noticed an increase in confidence among mentors, who they reported were now more willing to come up with their own ideas for upcoming extra-curricular school projects.

Mentees attributed their increase in self-confidence to working with their mentors and the positive relationship developed. They reported it helped them face things that they would not have before, and taught them to 'never give up'. Benefits were personal to individual mentees, for example, for some mentees it was newfound confidence to speak in class. Some reported

plans to pursue other HeadStart interventions, including an ambition to be mentors themselves.

> *"…I'm not very confident putting my hand up and everything, and then when I met my mentor she really helped me build up my confidence"*
> Mentee

Mentors explained that their confidence fluctuated throughout the intervention, increasing as sessions progressed, and as relationships with their peers and Youth Practitioner developed. Mentors could initially feel anxious about their new role and unsure that they were ready; others struggled to build a relationship with their mentee, were not paired with a suitable mentee, or felt unable to help the mentee; and some felt uneasy when not fully prepared for their session.

Participants were generally positive about More than Mentors. Reservations about certain aspects of delivery were expressed and suggestions for areas for service improvement. Pupils that completed the intervention enjoyed it and generally felt they got something from taking part including:

- building relationships at school and home;
- improved confidence;
- mentees developed self-control strategies;
- mentors developed empathy, and communication skills.

Nonetheless, there were pupils that did not like the intervention due to the session structure, time commitment, or because they did not develop relationships with peers. As a result, some pupils chose to exit the intervention early.

The findings suggest there are delivery inconsistencies across schools and Youth Practitioner, including 1:1s and the structure of the mentoring sessions.

Mentors confidence could be adversely affected if they did not feel they were part of the group, and where mentors did not develop a positive relationship with their Youth Practitioner.

Furthermore, the experience of leaving the intervention early was not pleasant for pupils. Some reported feeling guilty for not completing it. This guilt could be exacerbated if pupils were questioned by the Youth Practitioner and school staff as to why they were leaving. This could make pupils feel they had done something wrong, and suggests a need to have a young person friendly approach to those that choose to exit the intervention early.

Conclusion

MtM felt distinctly different to regular school lessons and teaching and pupils liked the informal learning approach and facilitation by an external Youth Practitioner. In particular, pupils valued Practitioner's relaxed and fun approach. Mentees valued a peer mentor, as they could easily relate to an older peer and trust them to maintain confidentiality, as opposed to an adult.

Considerations for service development

The HeadStart service may wish to review the aspects of intervention delivery where the research findings suggest inconsistent approaches across school or Youth Practitioner; namely:

- Professional recommendations; the reason pupils were recommended by school staff, and selected for progression by Youth Practitioners varied across schools and Practitioners, and did not always align to the HeadStart target population selection criteria.
- Communication with pupils, and pupil choice; 1:1s were not seen as an opportunity to opt-

out nor did they provide detailed information about what the intervention would include.

- Communication and engagement with pupils, parents/carers, and schools to improve understanding of the aims and benefits, and their expectations of the intervention, particularly for mentees.
- Preparing and supporting mentees through the intervention; a clear mentee pathway.
- A review of the mentor training length and content.
- Supporting school engagement with the intervention, communicating pupil progress and outcomes, and identifying ways in which schools can further support both mentees and mentors, after the intervention.
- A review of the session structure and prioritising 1:1 mentoring time and pair consistency.
- Pupil behaviour management in sessions.
- How to ensure consistent delivery across Youth Practitioners.
- A young person friendly exit strategy for pupils who choose not to complete the intervention.

Using this report

It is recommended that these research findings are discussed with HeadStart Newham's Youth Panel, and the delivery team and management group. It may be beneficial for the delivery team to provide an update to this report, including how research findings and participant suggestions have been addressed.

East Ham Town Hall | 328 Barking Road | London E6 2RP
T: 020 3373 8600
E: headstart.programmeteam@newham.gov.uk
www.HeadStartNewham.co.uk