

# HeadStart Newham



## Supported Volunteering (Team Social Action)

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

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## Acknowledgements

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## HeadStart

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

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

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

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

## The Big Lottery Fund

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

## Summary

### Introduction and study aims

HeadStart Newham<sup>1</sup> is an early help service for 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. Supported Volunteering (SV), (renamed Team Social Action, TSA) is a targeted intervention, whereby a HeadStart Youth Practitioner supports a group of pupils to develop and implement a social action project. It was developed by HeadStart Newham and Groundwork London. The aim of this qualitative study was to assess delivery as perceived by pupils, school staff, and Youth Practitioners.

### Methodology

A qualitative research design included focus groups with pupils, Youth Practitioners, and an interview with school staff. This study comprises a small sample and focuses on one intervention group only. The findings should therefore be treated with some caution. Fieldwork took place in summer 2017. Research encounters were audio recorded and analysed using a thematic approach.

### Summary of findings

*Recommendation to SV.* The school recommended pupils for who there were known concerns. This school was not given the HeadStart recommendation form, which includes the target population criteria. They recognised that some pupils did not fit the criteria and on reflection, noted that the pupils may have been different, had they had the form. Pupils reported that they were not consulted before being recommended to take part, nor were they aware of why they had been chosen. Pupils appreciated the 1:1 with the Youth Practitioner. They described the Practitioner as attentive and

engaging, and that this helped them to initiate a trusting relationship. However, 1:1s did not provide pupils with an explicit choice to opt-out, or clarify why they had been recommended.

*Working with a Youth Practitioner.* Facilitation by an external Practitioner was valued by schools and pupils. The findings suggest that the Practitioner is central to a positive intervention experience. Pupils noted that the Practitioner's informal education approach felt different to the traditional pupil-teacher relationship. The school noted the Practitioner's ability to build positive relationships with young people.

*Choosing a social action project.* In this school, the social action project was chosen by pupils. However, Practitioners encountered schools that had a preference for particular projects, related to existing school affiliations with community and voluntary organisations. Negotiating the project topic with the school could delay the project, or result in the project not being completed. This could be frustrating and disappointing for pupils. Youth Practitioners recognised that agreement about potential topics with the school lead early on may avoid delays to future intervention delivery.

*Peer relationships and the group dynamic.* Pupils liked that the initial sessions focussed on building peer relationships. Sessions usually started with group games. These activities facilitated pupils to get to know one another, particularly for less confident pupils. They also facilitated interaction with peers from different social circles, who pupils may not usually engage with. Pupils stated that working as part of a team felt different to regular school lessons and made them feel part of a shared experience. Youth Practitioners and pupils reported that the group dynamic could be challenging, due to inappropriate behaviour and a perceived unequal workload between pupils. A concern of school

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

staff was that a negative group dynamic could inadvertently effect pupil confidence, and hinder development of communication and social skills.

*Pupil differentiation.* Pupils had different interests, skills and abilities, but felt that their individual qualities were not taken into account by the Practitioner during project task allocation. Similarly, there were pupils who did not want to take part in the school assembly, but felt expected to, which could cause anxiety. The school echoed this finding and expressed a concern that timid pupils may not have been included in decisions about project task allocation; and, pupils with low confidence may have felt excluded from participating in the assembly and were therefore not part of the final project delivery and celebration the group's achievement.

*Behaviour management.* Pupils and school staff shared frustrations about behaviour management during sessions. They had expected the Practitioner to be firmer and enforce the school's behaviour policy. Pupils reported the Practitioner's behaviour management approach was only temporarily effective. Inappropriate behaviour could consume the Practitioner's attention and leave pupils disappointed that their time with the Practitioner was disrupted. If left unaddressed, poor pupil behaviour could generate feelings of discomfort and frustration for the group and make it difficult for pupils to concentrate on their tasks.

*Parent/carer engagement.* As part of the recommendation process, the school provided a letter and hosted a parent/carer meeting about the intervention. The letter was drafted by the school and not approved by HeadStart, which could lead to inconsistent intervention information. Pupils reported that their

parents/carers did not engage with them about the intervention.

*Working with schools.* The school lead felt well informed by the Youth Practitioner about the intervention. Pupils reported that some teachers did not value non-academic activities and were negative about their involvement in the intervention or made it difficult for them to leave class early to attend sessions.

The school lead would have liked more notice from the Practitioner about the project requirements to better support activities, such as the assembly. With more notice they could have minimised disruption to regular lessons.

*Pupil outcomes.* Pupils and school staff attributed participation in the intervention to increasing pupil confidence, and/or improved communication and social skills. The school lead would welcome formal feedback about pupil progress and outcomes as a result of the intervention.

### *Making use of the findings*

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

- The recommendation process: promoting self-recommendation; ensuring pupils can opt-out; and considering the group dynamic.
- Working with schools: aligning social action projects to the school ethos while retaining pupil choice; and engaging whole school staff understanding and support.
- Pupil differentiation: meeting pupil needs in a group setting.
- Positive pupil behaviour management.
- Supporting parent/carer communication and engagement with the intervention.
- Pupil outcomes: supporting pupils, school and parent/carer engagement of pupil learning and outcomes.

## Our learning

The research suggested areas for learning and improving how Supported Volunteering (Team Social Action) is delivered. Headstart Newham is committed to learn and refine the SV/TSA intervention so that it works for young people and schools and is delivered consistently well. The table below sets out how HeadStart has responded to the research findings.

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
<p><b>Recruiting pupils to the intervention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendation forms and the target population criteria were not provided to school ahead of pupil recruitment.</li> <li>• Pupil self-recommendation was not promoted.</li> <li>• The importance of assessing the group dynamic at recruitment stage.</li> <li>• 1:1s did not provide clear expectations of the commitment and engagement required by pupils, an explicit opt-out opportunity, nor information on why the pupil had been selected.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What we have done:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recommendation form has been revised and the target population criteria are clearly defined. Each school has received whole school training and support to identify target population pupils.</li> <li>• Recommendation forms must be completed and submitted before 1:1s are done.</li> <li>• Pupil self-recommendation is encouraged by Youth Practitioners.</li> <li>• The recommendation forms are on the HeadStart Newham website.</li> </ul> <p><b>We are working on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of how 1:1s are done to ensure that all young people get the same information about the intervention, and to enable pupil choice in deciding to take part.</li> <li>• An introductory TSA taster session for all recommended pupils. Where possible, we do this before 1:1s so that pupils can make an informed choice to take part.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Working with schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning social action topics with existing school affiliated organisations or ongoing projects, whilst retaining pupil choice and HeadStart co-production ethos.</li> <li>• Engaging and encouraging whole school staff to show support of pupils on the intervention e.g. letting pupils leave class early, providing positive reinforcement.</li> <li>• Communicating pupil progress and outcomes with the school.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What we have done:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have tried to ensure the project pupils choose is supported by the school by having an explicit sign off point. Where this has happened, it has been positive to the progression and timeliness of the project.</li> <li>• Introduced pre and post intervention surveys to quantitatively evaluate progress of pupils across key outcome measures. This information is reported back to schools and can be used to inform future support for pupils.</li> </ul> <p><b>We are working on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing partnerships with community and voluntary sector organisations in Newham to partner and support social action projects.</li> <li>• The whole school work will continue to support staff understanding of targeted interventions and the importance of supporting pupils wellbeing</li> <li>• We are developing an assembly to share the TSA project with the wider school community.</li> </ul>

Our learning	HeadStart Newham's response
<p><b>Pupil differentiation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils had different levels of need which may need to be considered by Youth Practitioners, particularly for task allocation and celebrating achievements.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What we have done:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run best practice workshops for Practitioners to share what works.</li> <li>• Our resilience training leads have run Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) workshops to support Practitioner understanding of SEND and how to best work with all pupils.</li> </ul> <p><b>We are working on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways to increase 1:1 contact with young people, outside of the group session, to ensure pupil needs are met.</li> <li>• Embedding differentiation into every session plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Behaviour management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to manage difficult pupil behaviour in a challenging group dynamic, and enabling pupils to resolve minor conflict themselves.</li> <li>• Managing expectations of school staff, agreeing behaviour management approach and process for reporting misbehaviour. Ways to align behaviour management approach with school policy.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What we have done:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our resilience training leads have run training on behaviour management. The aim of this training was to provide Practitioners with a toolkit of techniques to use and increase their confidence to manage the behaviours, e.g. a HeadStart top tips approach to running school interventions.</li> <li>• We have tried to work more closely with the school contact to report project progress, including behaviour incidents where appropriate.</li> </ul> <p><b>We are working on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing Professional Development to support learning and sharing best practice around behaviour management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ending the intervention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting pupils through the end of the intervention and ensuring pupils receive exit 1:1s.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What we have done:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit 1:1s are now standard practice to discuss pupil progress and next steps.</li> </ul> <p><b>We are working on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building in a final group reflective session to support young people to identify their own learning and facilitate a good ending.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communicating with parents/carers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing consistent information to parents.</li> <li>• Engaging parents on the aims and benefits of the intervention, and how to further support the young person's learning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What we have done:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a parent/carer pack which provides information about HeadStart, TSA and how taking part may benefit young people.</li> </ul> <p><b>We are working on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending postcards home at intervals across the intervention to report pupil progress to parents/carers</li> <li>• Practitioner presence at school Parents' Evenings in schools to promote TSA and Headstart to parents/carers.</li> </ul>

If you would like a full report, please contact:

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