HeadStart Kent Knowledge Seminar Four – What Have We Learnt? Where Are We Going?


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Alex Hassett welcomed attendees to the fourth HeadStart Kent Knowledge Seminar. The first Seminar in September 2014 focussed on defining resilience and the second seminar in January 2015 focussed on measuring outcomes of resilience. The third Seminar in May was an opportunity for current HeadStart projects to discuss their progress so far. This fourth Seminar will be focussing on HeadStart’s aims for Phase Three, developing a theory of change and why this is so important.

Angela Ford provided attendees with an update on the HeadStart programme and what the aims are for Phase Three. HeadStart has secured more funding from the Big Lottery between January and July 2016 to help us develop Phase Three ready for implementation, building on what we have done in Phase Two. Resilience is still central to HeadStart but the focus has shifted to building the mental wellbeing of 10-16 year olds. Grace to send out the Big Lottery slides. Angela said the Big Lottery have emphasised the client journey. We need confidence in local leadership and sustainability beyond the HeadStart programme. The Big Lottery have liked the use of match funding in Kent. We have recently appointed two participation workers (one in East/South Kent and one in North/West Kent) so young people will be continually robustly involved in HeadStart and supported to do so. Big Lottery have said they want to see a clear mission, target population, outcomes and then from this to design the programme.

Outcomes and short term activities that Big Lottery want to see are trusted adults, the domains, safe spaces etc. They encourage workforce development and see emotional wellbeing being everyone’s business. BIG want to see commitment and engagement from leaders and stakeholders, with clear accountability, strategic thinking and sustainability. BIG will tender out for a support and development partner to work with us. We ran an Academic Resilience workshop over the summer and are looking at how this can be taken forward. During September the theory of change will be drafted, and we have got Board meetings coming up in October. We are planning on running market engagement workshops early November. The draft strategy for Kent for Phase Three will enable discussion and we want partners to feel like they have been involved and had a say. Schools are the ‘funnel of activity’ universal service.
Learning from Phase Two and the Seminars

Alex Hassett discussed what we have learnt so far during the HeadStart programme. Some challenges have been that there was a big lack of clarity from the beginning from the Big Lottery, there have been systemic and strategic issues with implementation, evaluation has been difficult, and there have been tensions between KCC needing a strategic view as well as collaborating with services and providers. However HeadStart has also had a lot of strength-based activities going on with a focus on universal approaches. We have discovered there has been very little happening regarding talents and interests from the programme. Evaluating was difficult as there was no baseline to begin with.

Creating a Theory of Change will answer the question - what are we hoping to achieve? How do the projects link together? What is HeadStart as a whole and the individual projects based on? We need to be clear with assumptions when developing ToC. Alex emphasised it is hard to display evidence in these social situations, rather than commissioned services portraying what they are doing as having a robust evidence base, and it is okay to admit the specific project might not have made specific impact. The HorseCourse provide a ToC example. What will the role of the Knowledge Seminars be going forward? We need a coherent framework so staff/agencies can ‘sign up’. Measuring, how will this be done?

Creating a Theory of Change; the Process so far and Plan going forward

Eileen McKibbin explained that creating a Theory of Change is needed for Big Lottery’s third aim for Phase Three - developing a robust evidence base. ToCs explain the outcomes we want to achieve, how we plan to get there, and connections. Doing this at the start is important. The presentation outlined standards of evidence (NESTA): Level 1 is having a ToC, before you can even get to Level 2 (Monitoring). Level 3 is an impact evaluation. HeadStart has to have to have a ToC in its programme design.

The formative evaluation of HeadStart activities so far has shown it has benefitted from considerable good will from others. The evaluation so far has shown that interventions were accepted more when families/young people were involved and local context plays a big role in the success too. (See presentation slides). Learning so far will inform the developing ToC.

The current ToC draft is a working document, and begins with need to identify cohorts/context/problem in order to achieve outcomes. A coherent ToC will result in everyone being clear why we’re doing what we’re doing, strategically. We can then develop a more detailed ToCs and local/intervention ToCs. Jim Winter said about the links between specialist and universal services and accessing between the tiers (universal, additional, intensive, specialist). Jim said Universal should cover the whole spectrum. Jo Tonkin asked about the barriers for this, are there barriers within practice, understanding, or the voice of the young people? Jim said it had felt like the link between Universal and Specialist had been lost, this has started to change within KCC. Angela emphasised that HeadStart is Universal and Early Help. Jo said the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusses on all aspects of a young person’s life. Elizabeth Bull said years ago there was a mantra “don’t refer, collaborate”, and this is worth thinking about.

David Weiss said models like the tiers spectrum are good for us to understand where the money is being invested, however individuals and whole families can change, so we need no barriers/thresholds for young people and their families, we need to be flexible/intelligent and sometimes models do not portray this coherently. Rebecca O’Neill gave an example of a young person being mentored through Brogdale, this mentor followed the young person through school to a PRU, then back again to school. Jo said this example linked in with the domains model (secure base) and that consistency works for young people. Jim said about the potential conflict between emotional wellbeing and resilience with school academic agenda focus. Eileen said will need to work with schools to see if improved wellbeing impacts attendance/attainment etc. Jim said schools often focus on short-term progression rather than long term wellbeing. Angela said HeadStart has a challenge over 5 years to show we can make a difference in this aspect. Jo said we can influence schools and share the ‘message’ of HeadStart. Eileen linked this back to BIG’s third aim – Big Lottery want HeadStart to contribute to the national and local policy debate. Angela
said HeadStart needs to show adding value to existing interventions, this is the difference.

**Activity: Appreciative Enquiry to inform developing ToC**

Related to the draft ‘contexts/problem/goal’, Eileen McKibbin asked attendees in groups to:

Discover – What has been working well throughout the HeadStart programme?
Dream – What would improve it?
Design – Planning and Prioritising
Destiny – Actions

**The Importance of Providers Developing their own Theory of Change**

Mark Kerr discussed the steps to creating a ToC (need a goal, preconditions, interventions, indicators and a narrative). Logic models should not be a fixed graphic, it is up to the organisation to create their own model. ToCs are timely processes, at least 6 months to a year to create. The idea is to work backwards from the desired goal. Evaluation is from beginning to end. Soft outcomes can be refined as project moves forward and discovering new positive outcomes. Angela emphasised clear outcomes and the reasons behind doing what we are doing. Jo emphasised the importance of young people being able to articulate what it is that they need.

**AOB**

Alex and Mark have developed an innovation project to support individual practitioners to assess, refer and evaluate outcomes for four case studies using the domains approach. These will be identified through Early Help.

Next steps for the Knowledge Seminars – Alex and Mark will distribute a feedback/ideas for going forward survey to attendees of the Seminars.

AH/MK