

# EBPU

## Evidence Based Practice Unit

A partnership of



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

November 2021

# Embedding support across the system: what do we know from HeadStart and beyond?

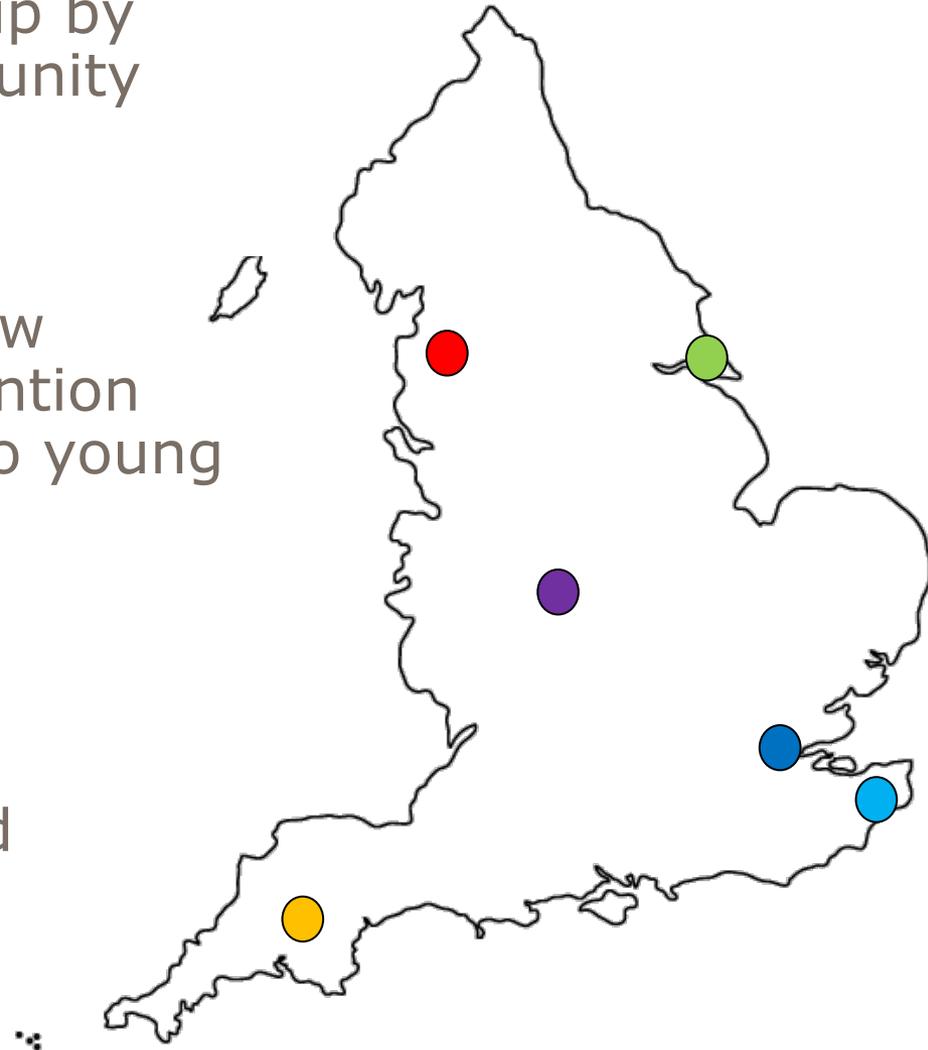
---

Dr Emily Stapley & Dr Mia  
Eisenstadt

# HeadStart



- A six-year programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund
- Aims to explore and test new approaches to early intervention and prevention in relation to young people's mental health and wellbeing
- At six local authority led partnerships across England



# The HeadStart approach

- Specific activities and interventions for young people
- Whole-school and community-based approaches
- School staff training
- Parent support provision



HeadStart Hull



Building resilience  
and mental wellbeing for  
children and young people



HeadStart  
Wolverhampton

## Evaluation of Headstart

- The Learning Team - led by the Evidence Based Practice Unit (UCL & Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families)
- Also local evaluations being conducted at each partnership
- What does and does not work locally to benefit young people now and in the future?



# Research project 1

## Factors that protect young people's wellbeing in the context of risk

Eisenstadt, M., Stapley, E., & Deighton, J. (2020). *Learning From Young People in HeadStart: A Study of Young People's Reported Protective Factors in Relation to Risk Factors and Wellbeing*. London: EBPU.

## Setting for this research project: **The HeadStart Learning Team's qualitative longitudinal study**

- Annual research interviews with young people over the five-year period of HeadStart
- Either had already received HeadStart support at the start of the study or were eligible to receive it in future – targeted or universal
- Experiences of coping and receiving support in relation to problems/difficult situations and feelings in life

## Methodology

- Focused on the interviews conducted with young people in the first year of HeadStart programme delivery (2017)
- 63 young people (aged 9-12) were interviewed across the HeadStart partnerships
- Our aim was to explore young people's lived experiences of risk and protective factors

## Findings

There is clear variety at the outset of HeadStart in the types and extent of support drawn on or available to young people from various sources:

- 24 young people who were interviewed had **multiple forms of support**
- 29 young people had **uncertain sources of support**
- 10 young people described having **self-initiated forms of support**

## Findings

Young people with **multiple sources of support** talked about robust support from parents, friends, and engaging at school.

*“My parents are extremely supportive... even though they're really supportive, they obviously have boundaries and I'm very loved in my home. I have no problems at home at all.” (Female, 11)*

Young people with **uncertain sources of support** talked about severe stressors and not having support in place.

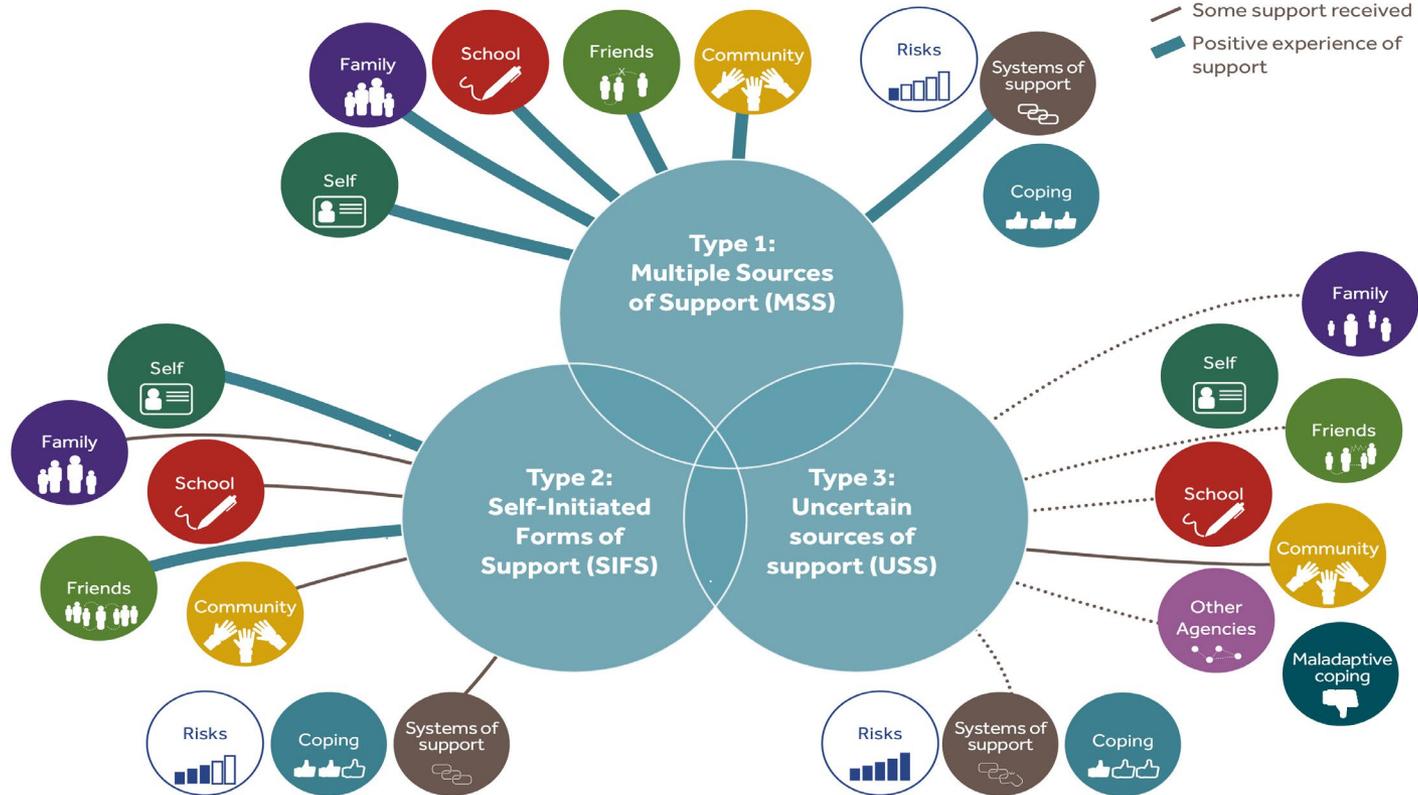
For example, a young person talked about his parents' financial hardship and his mum's illness, he reported that he would not approach another adult for support: *“'cause they wouldn't listen.” (Male, 11)*

Young people with **self-initiated sources of support** talked about their independence and own problem-solving skills.

*“[In difficult situations] I can control, I think, how I feel, so I can always feel happy.” (Male, 12)*

**Types of support reported by adolescents in relation to risk and well-being**

A qualitative study of adolescents eligible for targeted and universal interventions in HeadStart (N=63) in six sites in England



## Conclusions and next steps

- The findings bring attention to the kinds of support systems that a young person may have contact with and the strength of their links with those systems
- Young people with multiple sources of support had strong links with many systems, whereas young people with uncertain or self-initiated sources of support had less reliable links with systems
- How do young people's lived experiences of risk and protective factors *change over time*?

## Research project 2

# Change over time in young people's experiences of difficulties and support

Stapley, E. Eisenstadt, M., Demkowicz, O., Stock, S., & Deighton, J. (2020). *Learning From Young People in HeadStart: A Study of Change Over Time in Young People's Experiences of Difficulties and Support*. London: EBPU.

## Methodology

- Also situated within the HeadStart qualitative longitudinal study
- Interviews were conducted at Time 1 (2017/2018) and 2 (2018/2019) with 78 young people across the HeadStart partnerships:
  - Approx. 12-16 participants per partnership
  - Aged 9-12 at Time 1 and aged 10-13 at Time 2
- Our aim was to examine change over time, from Time 1 to 2, in young people's experiences of difficult situations and feelings, and support or services received

## Findings

There is clear variability in young people's experiences of life and support over the first two years of HeadStart:

- Group 1: When young people's feelings, experiences or relationships had been **going well** ( $N=29$ )
- Group 2: When young people's feelings, experiences or relationships had been **up and down** ( $N=36$ )
- Group 3: When young people's feelings, experiences or relationships had been **difficult** ( $N=13$ )

## Conclusions and next steps

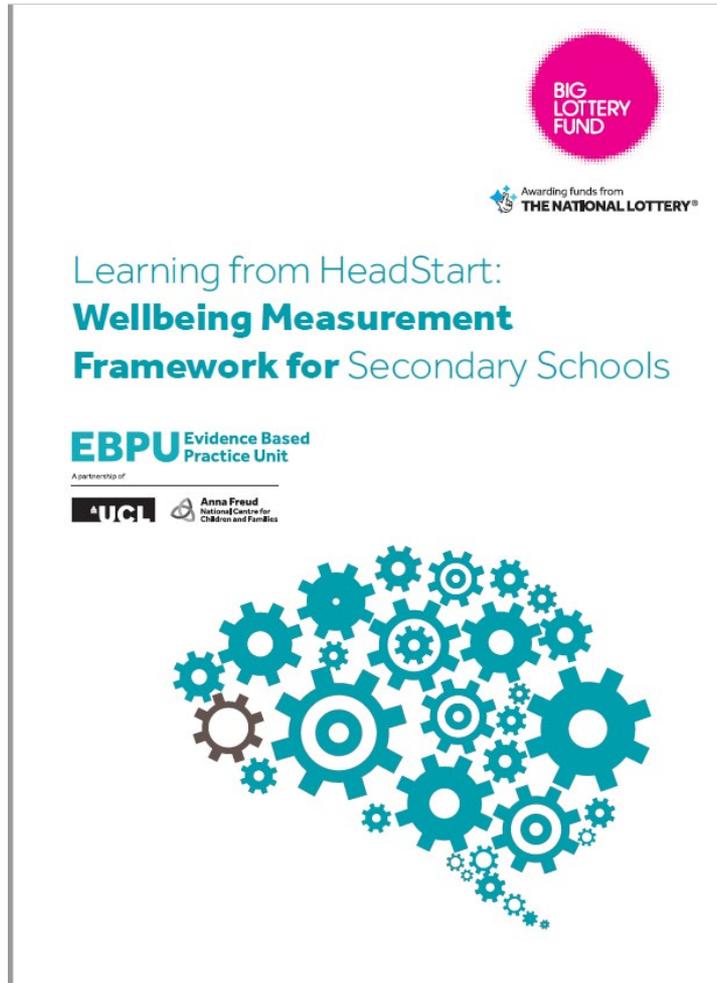
- The findings invite reflection on the extent to which young people in need are being identified for support, are receiving or engaging with support, and are getting what they need from support
- This includes both formal sources of support, like HeadStart, and informal sources of support, like family and friends

## Research project 3

# Learning from HeadStart: changes in perceived social support during early adolescence

Bear, H., Yoon, Y., Stock, S., Garland, L., & Deighton, J. (2021). *Learning from HeadStart: changes in perceived social support during early adolescence*. London: Evidence Based Practice Unit.

# Methodology



- 10,888 young people who completed the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF) yearly, starting in 2017 when they were in Year 7 (aged 11-12) and finishing in 2019 when they were in Year 9 (aged 13-14)
- The WMF is a year-on-year school-based online survey that HeadStart uses to measure wellbeing and resilience in children and young people

# (1) Does perceived social support change during early adolescence, from Year 7 to Year 9?

When looking at the whole sample, yes and no...

Home support	Stable
Community support	↓
School support	↓
Peer support	Stable

## (2) Are there differences in perceived social support between adolescent boys and girls?

Yes...

- **In Y7**, girls report more of every type of support than boys
- **By Y9**:
  - Peer support: Girls still reporting more than boys
  - School support: Boys now reporting more than girls
  - Home support: Boys and girls now reporting similar levels
  - Community support: Boys and girls now reporting similar levels



### (3) Is perceived social support linked to wellbeing?

Yes...

- All sources of perceived social support positively linked to wellbeing at both Year 7 and Year 9
- BUT this doesn't mean that one causes the other (based on this type of analysis)



## Conclusions and next steps

- Boosting young people's access to supportive relationships could help to support and improve wellbeing
- Interventions should aim to establish and reinforce connections for adolescents across contexts, in multiple areas of their lives

# HeadStart National Young People's Group

- We asked the Young People's Group to think about their own experiences of social support and how this has changed over time
- They talked about support:
  - At school
  - Over the transition from primary to secondary school
  - For specific experiences relating to your identity
- We also asked them for ideas about how to present the findings from this research to other young people



# Thank you!

The HeadStart Learning Team website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/headstart-learning-team>

The National Lottery Community Fund HeadStart website: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/headstart>

Research projects 1 and 2: [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/evidence\\_briefing\\_6\\_january\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/evidence_briefing_6_january_2020.pdf)

Research project 3: [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence\\_based\\_practice\\_unit/files/headstart\\_evidence\\_briefing\\_perceived\\_social\\_support.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence_based_practice_unit/files/headstart_evidence_briefing_perceived_social_support.pdf)

WMF: <https://www.annafreud.org/mental-health-professionals/improving-help/resources/wellbeing-measurement-framework-for-schools/>

**EBPU** Evidence Based  
Practice Unit

A partnership of

