



# Parent, Family and Community Engagement - Learning from A Better Start

Report from the Annual Learning Event 2021

Delivered by



## About A Better Start

A Better Start is a ten-year (2015-2025), £215 million programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

Five A Better Start partnerships based in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham and Southend are supporting families to give their babies and very young children the best possible start in life. Working with local parents, the A Better Start partnerships are developing and testing ways to improve their children's diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication. The work of the programme is grounded in scientific evidence and research.

A Better Start is place-based and enabling systems change. It aims to improve the way that organisations work together and with families to shift attitudes and spending towards preventing problems that can start in early life. A Better Start is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) is designing and delivering an ambitious programme of shared learning and development support for A Better Start, working within, across and beyond the five partnership areas. The programme is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

Our aim is to amplify the impact of these programmes by:

- Embedding a culture of learning within and between the partnerships.
- Harnessing the best available evidence about what works in improving outcomes for children.
- Sharing the partnerships' experiences in creating innovative services far and wide, so that others working in early childhood development or place-based systems change can benefit.

[www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/a-better-start](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/a-better-start)



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# Introduction

Involving and empowering parents and communities is fundamental to all that the 10-year A Better Start (ABS) programme does, and the partnerships have demonstrated the importance of recognising the expertise of families in their own unique lives.

The National Children's Bureau, on behalf of The National Lottery Community Fund and the five A Better Start (ABS) partnerships, was delighted to host this virtual conference on Thursday 25 March 2021. The event showcased how A Better Start partnerships are working with local parents to develop, test and embed ways to improve their children's diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication.

The event was attended by more than 300 stakeholders from across the country (see appendix 3 for full details of organisations represented), including commissioners, policymakers, practitioners, academics and parents; and aimed to help delegates understand the value of delivering services with, not to, service users, ensuring the support provided fully addresses their needs.

Through a mix of interactive workshops and keynote sessions, attendees had the opportunity to hear directly from A Better Start parents, practitioners and directors as experts in coproduction. This focussed on how families are contributing to service development, design and delivery, and impacting systems around them, through:

- Peer engagement and a peer-led workforce
- Peer-to-peer support networks
- Parent and community-led funding initiatives
- Parent and community involvement in leadership, decision-making and governance

The full agenda for the event is included in appendix 1. This report provides a summary of the keynote presentations, the breakout sessions provided by each ABS partnership, and the questions and answers covered during the afternoon panel session.

Recordings from the breakout sessions and from the parents and directors' panel sessions are also linked throughout and available to view on the A Better Start webpage.



## Welcome and purpose of the day

### Anna Feuchtwang, CEO, National Children's Bureau

Anna welcomed delegates to the first A Better Start annual shared learning event, 'Parents and Communities in the Driving Seat - learning from A Better Start'.

She reflected on the breadth of experience in the 'virtual room' in terms of roles, backgrounds, and geographical locations, with over 300 attendees, including policy and decision-makers, practitioners, parents and community members, and those representing ABS core teams, ABS partners and delivery organisations, wider voluntary and statutory services, government departments, academic and independent research organisations, councils, schools... and more.

Anna summarised NCB's role in supporting the dissemination of learning from A Better Start through the shared learning contract and the skills which the NCB team brings, including:

- The multidisciplinary nature of the NCB team.

- NCB's experience in building authentic relationships within the sector.
- NCB's role as convener and independent trusted partner.
- NCB's five-year strategy, 'United for a Better Childhood', and its central focus on making evidence count, involving children and young people & families, and bringing organisations together.

Anna stressed the importance of investment in the first 1001 days, prevention & early intervention, from conception onwards, and the significant contribution ABS is making in this regard.

In closing, Anna provided an overview & aims of the day and encouraged delegates to take the opportunity afforded by the conference to network with colleagues and acquaintances, old and new.





# 'People in the Lead' - the strategic direction of The National Lottery Community Fund

**Sophy Proctor, Senior Head of Funding (Strategic Programmes), The National Lottery Community Fund**

Sophy expressed how pleased she was to highlight the National Lottery Community Fund's (TNLCF) principle of *putting people in the lead* and to reflect on progress, given that seven years ago, this was a quite new concept. Today, it has become part of daily language, and it is timely and useful to think about what 'People in the Lead' means in practice, the lessons learned, and how this learning has been applied to the Fund's wider work.

What does 'People in the Lead' mean? The simple answer is giving people meaningful ownership of activity. However, in practice, this looks different in every situation, with every person, group or organisation. It is important to recognise there is no 'one size fits all' approach, therefore support is needed to put theory into practice, and it will not happen overnight. However, funding can and should act as a catalyst.

ABS is one of five strategic programmes funded by TNLCF, with over £500m invested, and supporting people from birth and throughout life. All five programmes have been codesigned with people with lived experience, and are delivered by partnerships, bringing local organisations together in a 'test & learn' model. These partnerships are testing innovative approaches to tackling many of the issues people face throughout their lifetimes.

There has been much learning on what works to make the 'People in the Lead' principle a reality, as well as what does not work. Sophy reflected on how being generous in sharing the learning is critical, so that when funding ends, the evidence from ABS and other TNLCF-funded programmes, as well as the people who have been put 'in the lead', helps to drive good practice in coproduction.

## **Codesign in practice - examples from The National Lottery Community Fund**

Sophy shared some examples of how the codesign approach has been embraced within the Fund, and what this might look like in the future, as it will continue to evolve as learning grows. Further details of these programmes are available through the links below.

**HeadStart** - a six-year programme, exploring new ways to improve mental health & wellbeing of young people, age 10-16. The programme believes young people with first-hand experience of the issues are best placed to shape the service, so play a key role in design, commissioning, delivery and evaluation.

**Fulfilling Lives Programme** - A National Expert Citizens Group, supporting those who have lived experience of multiple disadvantages to create real systems change through their involvement in the programme.

**Ageing Better Programme** - This programme aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness in older people, by providing micro-funding to empower local people to make local decisions about where money is spent. Small grants have made a big difference, and the issues may not have been identified had it not been for local people having the opportunity e.g. The weekly lunch club established at Bristol Sikh Temple.

**Young People in the Lead Advisory Group**

- TNLCF funding goes to a wide range of activities across the country, so a Young People in the Lead advisory group has been set up to work closely with Head of Youth Voice and to partner with the Fund work. The panel aims to steer significant, positive change by influencing discussions with their experience across all Fund work.

Over the past year, the value of the ‘parents in the lead’ approach has been seen most clearly, with local people mobilised to identify where funding was most needed to address emerging issues in their communities and to reach out to support their local community.



# **Learning from A Better Start - putting children, families and communities in the lead**

**Matthew Riddell, Funding Manager (Contracts) & Gill Hart, Funding Manager, The National Lottery Community Fund**

Matt introduced himself, and his role in supporting A Better Start, as well as the Shared Learning and Development programme, through which the annual event has been delivered.

**Background to A Better Start:**

The ABS programme aims to improve the life chances of babies and very young children by involving parents as equal partners from the beginning. This engagement of parents and communities was a key feature in the selection of the five ABS partnerships.

ABS was informed by research and policy developments relating to inequalities, in particular, the first two policy objectives set out in the Marmot Review (2010):

- Giving every child the best start in life
- Enabling all people to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives

Putting people in the lead is key to how the five ABS partnerships work with children, families and the workforce who support them. ABS is the Fund's biggest investment to date, with £215 million invested over 10 years; this reflects the recognition that bringing about systemic change takes time and is complex. The partnerships were chosen for their strong, shared local vision, and forward-thinking approach to improving outcomes for children. ABS partnerships sit in areas of deprivation and high levels of need, but also where there are local strengths and commitments to change, with parents and carers supporting all aspects of the programme.

All ABS partnerships are committed to an evidence-based approach, and all services have been refined based on feedback from communities, meaning they are tailored to the needs of the individual communities and meet families 'at their starting point'. Test and learn is a key feature, and parents have contributed throughout.

The Fund is flexible and supports changes to improve outcomes, rather than being prescriptive, recognising that ABS partnerships are the experts and have the local knowledge. During the pandemic, this flexibility has helped sustain services and enabled them to continue to support families through changing needs.

ABS also aims to change the way local organisations and agencies work together with parents as equal partners to inform service planning and design. ABS aimed to be sustainable from the start, enhancing and working alongside existing services rather than setting up separately.

The Fund has a role not just in funding, but in facilitating and enabling partnerships, and in disseminating the learning beyond ABS.

## A Better Start's definition of coproduction

Gill provided further information and examples of coproduction within the ABS partnerships, which has been a core component from the beginning. ‘The child at the centre’ was included in assessment criteria during the bid phase of ABS, therefore the five funded partnerships were skilled and ready to embed this approach from the beginning. Across the partnerships, parents and communities are involved in decision making, recruitment, procurement panels, service design & delivery, community forums and many other areas.

Gill highlighted some examples from across the five partnerships that demonstrate the innovation in coproduction taking place.

### Empowering communities through micro-funding

A new area of work to emerge as programmes have developed, all partnerships now run these funding schemes, providing small amounts of funding for communities to manage and use where they see need. Examples include:

**Bradford:** [Dance Motivation](#), and [Little Dots](#) music groups, encouraging physical movement, expression and interaction through music.

**LEAP:** [Happy Drums](#) project is funded through LEAP community awards and provides fun and interactive drumming classes and community events for families in the community. Through LEAP micro-funding, the Happy Drums facilitator has been able to secure further funding to expand his project, therefore contributing to sustainability.

**A Better Start Southend:** [Microgreens](#), funded through the Community, Ideas and Development Fund (CID Fund), is a scheme to improve families’ knowledge on growing and harvesting vegetables in their own homes. Seed kits have been provided, along with

resources and guidance to grow healthy food at home.

### Work with dads

This work supports the recognition of the role and importance of dads in child development and aims to empower dads to engage in projects across the partnerships.

**Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham:** Working to embed a culture of inclusion of dads as the norm across services, through a father inclusive strategy and operational plan, developed in consultation with local fathers and including a fathers’ advisory group. Programmes include Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED), with local innovations leading to virtual sessions during lockdown.

### Blackpool Centre for Early Child

**Development:** Engaged dads in practical activities, then build in more sensitive conversations on the role of dads. As part of this process dads visited libraries and worked with the Illuminations company along with interior and graphic designers to create early years reading spaces encouraging dads to engage in programmes such as Fathers Reading Every Day and Mellow Dad’s . Dads 4 Life help dads to meet peers and build relationships. Dad’s Shed is upskilling dads to build furniture and resources for their community.

Across ABS, the learning from the involvement of parents is also being used to encourage partners to take a similar approach, therefore influencing the wider system, local practice, and policy e.g. commissioning. Partnerships are also moving towards community-led funding models (examples of which will be shared during the session), and again, this will support efforts to ensure that changes are sustainable beyond the lifetime of the project. Going beyond this, parents have also fed into national policy - influencing

others through their lived experiences. Opportunities have included joining discussions and roundtables with national policy makers, health and wellbeing boards, All Party Political Groups, and informing the 1001 days review.

A compilation video showcasing parent and community engagement across the partnerships is available [here](#).

# Parents in the Driving Seat: Parent-led session

**Chair: Pete Fleischmann, Lead Consultant, Co-Production Works**

**Panel members:**

- **Tara Newbold, Parent Champion, Small Steps Big Changes**
- **Dave Bannister, Community Champion, Blackpool Better Start**
- **Lucy Jeffreys, Parent Champion, A Better Start Southend**
- **Elzbieta Skowron, Parent Champion, LEAP**
- **Saiqa Akhtar, Parent Champion, Better Start Bradford**

Pete Fleischmann from [Co-Production Works](#) chaired the session, which was developed and delivered by parents from across the ABS partnerships.

Pete reflected on the evident efforts made within ABS partnerships to genuinely put ‘parents in the driving seat’ and was delighted to be able to work with parents to coproduce this session for the event.

The panel introduced themselves and the partnerships they represent, and each parent champion provided some background to their involvement and experiences with ABS. Pete then asked parents to reflect on questions posed during the earlier part of the conference.

Key points are summarised below:

- Parents are proud of the ways they work together with practitioners to coproduce services and are passionate about what they can contribute.
- Parent Champions are a valued resource across all partnerships and play a vital role in building connections with the community and ensuring services meet needs.
- Parents are involved across all activities within the partnerships at every level, including participating on boards and recruitment panels, supporting the evaluation process, designing, promoting

and delivering programmes, and engaging directly with families, and are contributing to positive outcomes across all development areas.

- Some parents have been involved in their partnerships from day one of the bid phase and have been able to shape and drive the coproduction model.
- The work taking place across partnerships to involve dads has been particularly welcome, bringing opportunities for dads to build relationships with peers, learn new practical skills and importantly, to become more involved in their child’s development from pregnancy, birth and beyond.
- Parents have had many opportunities to develop and take forward their own ideas, activities and groups.
- ABS involvement has given parents an opportunity for their voices to be heard beyond the ABS programme, for example in presenting to All Party Parliamentary Groups or contributing to policy consultation discussions.
- While coproduction with parents has evidently benefitted the ABS programmes, involvement has also been individually rewarding for parents involved, providing a community of support for many at personally difficult times.

*“Sometimes when you have children, you lose your identity- you become just a mother and forget who you are. Better Start gave me this opportunity to recognise my skillset, volunteer and give back to the community.”* (Parent Champion)

## Q&A Session

### Q. Are there any elements of the coproduction process that haven't worked so well, or you would do differently with hindsight?

- It is a way of working that needs to be embedded, with automatic inclusion of the parental voice within everything happening, rather than needing a reminder to bring them in after the process has started.
- Trust between parents and communities is central, however this takes time to develop.
- Everything has been trial and error, without being afraid to challenge and try something. Parents have been quite challenging, asking ‘why’ things can/cannot be done, and moving professionals away from how things have always been done.
- The creche facility provided has been crucial for many parents to engage-without this practical support, many parents would not be able to attend meetings or get involved as they would like.
- In general, parents feel things are working well and it has been a positive experience.
- Lockdown has brought challenges and parents would like to be able to get back to face to face contact and engagement.

### Q. Any top tips on engaging dads?

- Just having a conversation at a bus-stop, in a shop queue, or picking your child up from school has led to deeper conversations.

- Building relationships and opening up to other dads, being vulnerable, allows them to do the same, bringing the realisation of similar issues and concerns.

### Q. How have parents been involved in evaluating the projects?

- There are various examples across the partnerships of how parents have been involved, both in local evaluation and in advising on the national evaluation.
- One partnership evaluation team is developing a codesign group from the early stages so that parents can be involved throughout the local evaluation process.
- Parents have been involved in gathering data as well as in interpreting and reviewing data at board meetings.
- Parents contribute their opinions throughout informal evaluation activities, as well as being engaged in formal evaluation activities.

### Q. How does A Better Start compare with how it was envisioned at the beginning?

- At the first meeting, coproduction was a clear priority, and parents were able to challenge professionals at all levels to take this on board and embed it. Their commitment has been clear.

### Q. What is the impact you want to achieve through ABS that you think hasn't been realised yet?

- When the funding finishes, parents hope the work is passed down to the communities and continues, rather than ending with the funding. There is a hope that the ideas are passed down through the community and can impact future generations too.
- The real impact of the pandemic is yet to

## Q&A Session (continued)

be seen, so programmes like ABS are even more important now.

- Parents would like to see the five partnerships linking up more to bring the principles of ABS forward together, building on what has already been done and bringing more power to parents voices by combining them.
- The ‘test and learn’ approach has been central. Parents hope that organisations will continue to try new things beyond ABS, and that the things that have been shown to work will be able to continue.
- Coproduction doesn’t necessarily need

money, and regardless of funding in the future, there is no excuse to not continue to routinely seek parents’ voices.

In closing, Pete thanked the parents for sharing their stories and experiences and congratulated the ABS partnerships on the strong coproduction practice evident across all their work.

The full recording of this session is available [here](#).



## Coproduction within A Better Start: Breakout Sessions

There were two opportunities within the event agenda for delegates to attend breakout sessions, where they heard directly from the ABS partnerships on how parents and communities have shaped and continue to shape their work. A summary of content, along with links to session recordings, are presented below.

### Better Start Bradford: Making a Better Place



In this session, attendees heard the story of how parents in Better Start Bradford ensured the co-creation of spaces for their children to play, to walk, to breathe and enjoy. The session demonstrated how parents are helping to design a Better Place and make green spaces for 0-3s, how they showed the team where to look, and how Better Start Bradford and parents are jointly building a Better Place.

#### Presenters:

- Gill Thornton, Head of Programme, Better Start Bradford
- Adele Adams, Better Place Manager, Bradford Council
- Ludmila Novosjolova, Parent
- Becky Robertson, Innovation Hub PhD student
- Shahid Islam, Senior Research Fellow, ActEarly

#### Introduction

From the beginning of the bid process, parents have been at the heart of what the Better Start Bradford programme should look like. They helped write the bid, design & set up projects, and make up half of the partnership board. The Better Place Project was a late addition to the bid, based on feedback from parents who stressed the need for a healthy environment for children to grow up in.

Parents helped to develop the programme and how it would work, identifying what was needed as well as what was already happening. They wanted improved access to play that would work for very small children, as well as safe walking routes & reduced exposure to harmful emissions.

The process has been an opportunity to try out new ideas and do new things to include very young children in new ways. Coproduction has been running throughout

right from the start and has embedded joint accountability and parent engagement.

The Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted plans. Capital works had to stop, however are now back on track, while play areas & early years provision was closed. However new activities and approaches have been codesigned with parents, including remote activities and resource packs (e.g. distributing seed packs to grow at home).

## Involving parents in the planning and design

Better Start Bradford has worked with the local council and communities to identify the best areas to redevelop the outdoor space & create new spaces. The following steps have been critical:

- 1. Learn about the community from the community:** parents and communities identified & prioritised areas. The Better Place team sought views on what was needed, often piggy backing on other organised activities in order to engage a wider range of people.
- 2. Build the capacity of community members:** a central aim has been to empower communities to make the changes themselves. Once the spaces have been created, work will continue with families to show them how they can best use the spaces & run their own activities.
- 3. Codesigning Better Place with the community:** Each project is different, and the Better Place team has been able to work with communities to create bespoke projects for each area. For larger projects, they have developed steering groups to support the process.
- 4. Build a legacy for the community to be proud of.**

Some examples of projects include:

- Kettlewell Snicket: an internationally recognised sculptor has worked with the community to co-create sculptures for the area.
- Newby Primary school: an early years sand play area has been created, and the school is now opening out of school hours to allow the play area to be used.
- Bowling Park: a story trail (to support families with literacy), accessible walking route & wheelie park.

## Being a Better Place Parent

One parent, a huge advocate for the Better Place project, shared her experience of supporting the development of the story trail at Bowling Park. She has been delighted to see an increase in local families using parks & greenspaces during lockdown, and it has been great to show off the hard work.

The Forest School has also been a fantastic resource during lockdown, with children learning practical skills such as how to cook on an open fire and plant bulbs. Sessions have also provided good examples for parents in developing their own gardens and outdoor spaces.

The Better Place Project gives parents an opportunity to be part of something, to bring families & communities together & empower them to do something life-changing for them & their community.

## Parent & community involvement in research & evaluation

Parents have also been involved in the evaluation of the Better Place Project.

[ActEarly](#), UK Prevention Research Partnership, aims to look ahead to support healthy lifestyles and communities by creating healthy neighbourhoods, and Act Early is using a coproduction approach to do this. This aligns to the ABS commitment to early intervention.

The [SOPARC tool](#) was used to identify how many people were using the various greenspaces and how they are using them. The [Our Voice 'Discovery tool'](#), an app-based research tool, was also used to gather information from parents and community members. Participants were able to go for a walk, take pictures of things they saw, describe how they are feeling in the space they are in and what they like/dislike.

Feedback from parents confirmed:

- Playgrounds are important and an enabler to using greenspace, however, are very busy at certain times of the day.
- Parents like woodland/natural areas but these aren't necessarily used for various reasons (e.g. fear anti-social behaviour). Feedback allowed an exploration of why parents don't currently use the available natural areas and how they can be improved.

- Parents are keen for very young children to have a connection with nature.

## Q&A session

**Q. Do you think community ownership of Better Place has helped eradicate some of the anti-social behaviour that may have been a barrier to young children accessing the space?**

Yes, neglected areas perhaps feel ok to drop litter or allow dog-fouling, whereas a well kept area discourages this. The designs of areas are also considered carefully, for example using materials which are not easily vandalised (such as timber which can be burned).

**Q. Were there any major obstacles when developing these spaces for example local councils, asking permission etc?**

Local councils are under pressure with limited staff and resources, so the team has been working closely to build relationships and trust, with an aim to build spaces that in the future will minimise the need for maintenance and actually save time/money in the long term. Embedded in development is training and supporting communities to look after these spaces themselves where appropriate.

Click [here](#) to watch a full recording of this breakout session.

For more information on this project, please contact Gill Thornton, Head of Programme  
[gill.thornton@betterstartbradford.org.uk](mailto:gill.thornton@betterstartbradford.org.uk)

# A Better Start Southend: YourFamily - A Live Case Study



YourFamily exists to create the conditions where relationships can thrive between families, the community, and organisations in Southend. It will strengthen families' and community members' abilities and opportunities to support and learn from each other, and for families to access the right help and information they need, when they need it. It will reduce the number of families reaching crisis-point, working with them to develop their strengths and resilience from before their children are born, and walking with them throughout their parenting journey.

It is a codesigned project between statutory service providers, volunteer groups and parents of Southend, with the support of Dartington Service Design Lab.

## Presenters:

- Stephanie Farr, Deputy Director, A Better Start Southend
- Julie Lannon, YourFamily Programme Manager, A Better Start Southend
- India Roche, Senior Designer, Dartington Service Design Lab
- Keira Lowther, Service Improvement Specialist, Dartington Service Design Lab
- Joanne Webb, Parent Champion, A Better Start Southend

## Introduction

The vision for YourFamily is a 'golden thread', running through services across Southend for 0-4 years olds, and ensuring they are integrated. It has been developed alongside parents, however, plans for delivery had to be put on hold due to the pandemic. Since then, a refresh was needed to bring it up to date with current issues, and Dartington Service Design Lab was brought on board to support the process and ensure it meets the needs of parents and is grounded in the community. YourFamily will also play a key role in ensuring the sustainability of the work of ABS.

*"YourFamily walks with families on their parenting journeys from conception to school. We bring families, the community, statutory and voluntary organisations together to create a village around Southend's children; because it takes a village to raise a child".*

## This is done by:

- Supporting relationships and connections
- Creating the conditions for members to support and learn from one another
- Ensuring parents can reach out for support before crisis hits.

## The Codesign Process

Dartington undertook research to inform the service design, including interviews with stakeholders. Following that, a codesign team was established, including parents and community members, and a series of workshops were held to co-create the 'who, what, where, and how' of the YourFamily journey.

Based on the findings of this preliminary research and work by the codesign team, a 'blueprint' was developed.

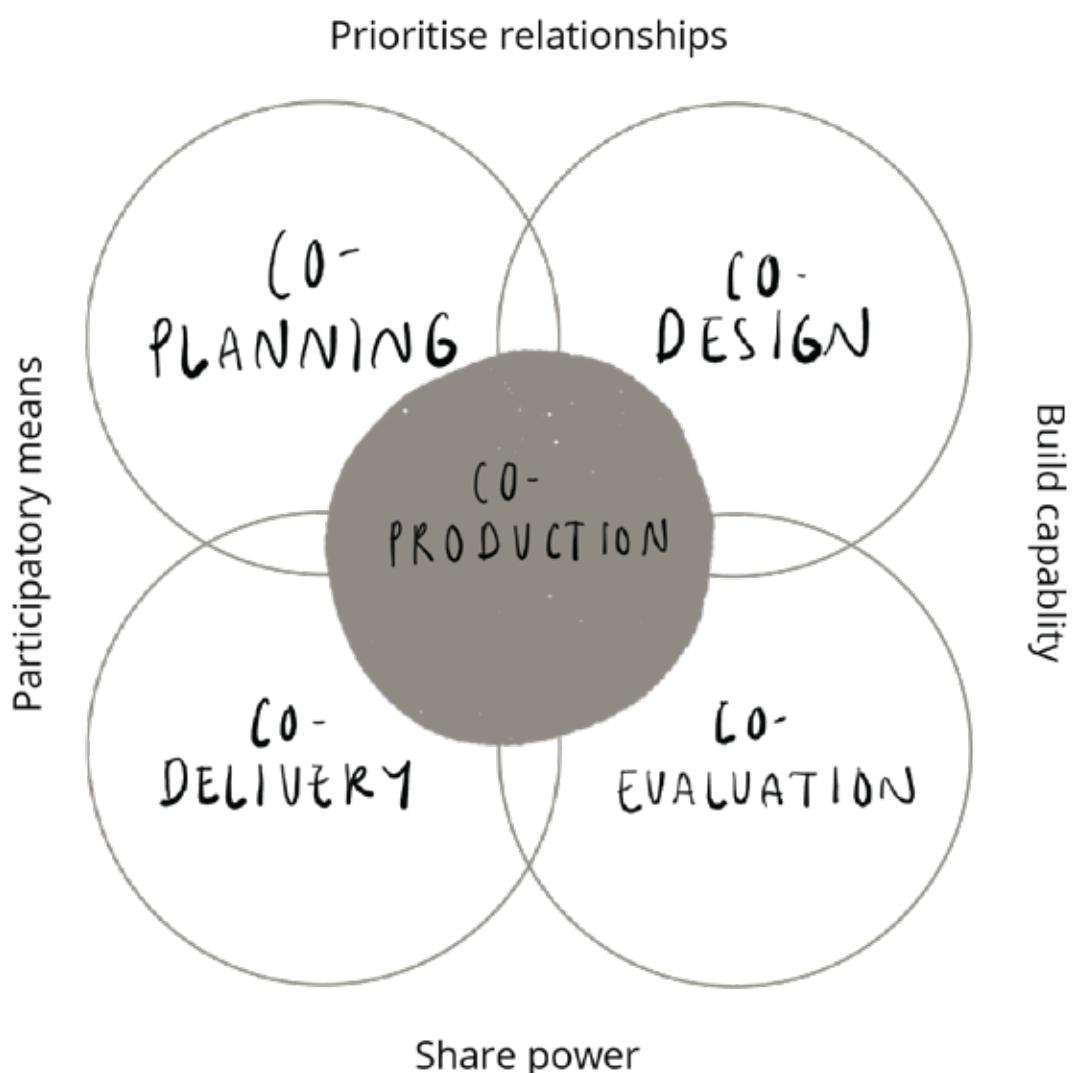
Work was informed by the following mindset and model for codesign:

- Elevating lived experience
- Curiosity
- Hospitality - creating a soft place for hard conversations
- Being in the grey - uncertainty is uncomfortable but essential

- Learning through doing

- Valuing many perspectives

Additionally, sharing power, prioritising relationships, building capacity and participatory means, guided the work.



From '[Beyond Sticky Notes](#)' by Kelly Ann McKercher

## Reflections From a Parent Champion

Coproduction is difficult and has been a lot more complicated during the pandemic when things must be done online. The process has had to adapt, with surveys and zoom conversations replacing a relaxed face to face conversation. It is also about learning, therefore will never be perfect.

Existing relationships with community representatives have supported the inclusion of more diverse voices. The design group has been privileged in getting to know one another and the reality of their role and life and has shown how people and services are intertwined.

The group has codesigned YourFamily principles to shape ongoing practice:

- YourFamily is owned and shaped by the community, and has trusting relationships at its heart.
- The door is always open to anyone, and accessibility for all is a priority.
- Children's voices are heard as loudly as parents/carers.
- YourFamily never works alone - working with the voluntary and statutory sectors as well as the community.

## Challenges

There have been several challenges along the way, and when things become difficult, it can be tempting to return to what is comfortable. However, the work has continued.

One challenge has been ensuring asset-based language rather than deficit-based language, with a focus on seeing opportunity rather than risk.

Another has been working within the wider context, with the deadlines and constraints that brings. Building capacity and relationships, and sharing power, takes time to do properly and authentically.

## Key learning

- If you are finding coproduction easy, you're probably not doing it right.
- Trust is the opposite of control. It is important to step back from controlling and trust that others can and will play their parts. Trust must also be earned from the community.
- Change isn't hard! We don't resist change, but we resist the perceived loss. Therefore, changes require us to anticipate potential loss and mitigate against it.



## **Q&A session**

### **Q. How can we pace the stress that service providers and planners feel as they look forward to budget restrictions and rising need?**

Budgets are only one element of the process, but there are so many other community resources to be considered. YourFamily is ready to move from design to delivery. There are pressures in terms of timescales to get things up and running and start to demonstrate impact, but it is important to keep the codesign group engaged and ensure all views are respected, remembering that it is a journey.

### **Q. What benefits has working directly with parents, practitioners and budget holders in a codesign process had on the success of YourFamily?**

Essentially, why would you not do this! When creating a service for a community, you need to truly understand that community's wants and needs, which is only possible by designing it with them. Parents have learned so much from being involved and can communicate the project and aims in a different light when explaining it to others too.

### **Q. How do we identify the community? And how do you ensure communities aren't excluded?**

'The community' isn't a homogenous group, rather, it's all the variety of people who can benefit from the service. That means getting to know the 'community', including all the subgroups, and trying to understand their position and needs. A benefit of the diverse design team is that each is part of a different community and can bring different perspectives and make connections. The codesign team has used a range of approaches to gather information to be as inclusive as possible and access a variety of views.

This is only the beginning of a journey, and the codesign team will continue to reach out and include the voices of those who have not had a chance to contribute. The next step will be to employ the right people for the 'village', and to test and learn at each stage.

Click [here](#) to watch a full recording of this breakout session.

For more information on this project, contact Stephanie Farr, Deputy Director  
[stephanie.farr@eyalliance.org.uk](mailto:stephanie.farr@eyalliance.org.uk)



# Lambeth Early Action Partnership: The LEAP Cake of Co-production! Exploring the key ingredients for effective coproductive working



Coproduction is the backbone of the Better Start work; stakeholders and parents are working together to develop and test effective approaches to delivery and learning which sees families thrive, and babies and children having the best start in life.

LEAP used examples of their coproduction work to highlight the ‘key ingredients’ of coproduction, and the ways in which LEAP has used these ingredients in their work with parents, children and carers.

## Presenters:

- Tanya Spence, People in the Lead Manager
- Catherine Walsh, Parent Champions Manager
- Kira Montague, Parent Champions Coordinator
- Marta Sordyl, Family Engagement Worker
- Kimberlin Dunkley, Parent Champion Befriender

## Parent Champion Befrienders

This is a peer-support befriending role, delivered by passionate volunteers to parents of children aged 0-18 months, aiming to increase parents' feelings of being supported, reduce feelings of isolation, and increase attendance at early years services.

The befriender role grew from feedback from existing Parent Champions, who felt there was a group of parents they weren't able to reach, who may need the services the most.

The befriender meets with a parent once a fortnight in order to build a trusting relationship and supports them to engage more in services and activities. Befrienders have provided emergency support during the pandemic, have registered parents with children's centres for the first time, and provided language and/or interpreting support. Referrals come from wide ranging services.

## Designing the service through coproduction

Within the parent champion role, there are existing mechanisms and spaces to support parent feedback, so the concerns from champions around gaps in engagement were heard. A focus group was held to explore and better understand the need, then the proposed offered was mapped out and trialled. Parents have been involved at every stage.

From the focus groups, parents said the most important time to focus on was the peri-natal period, the time when they had felt most isolated themselves. They felt peer support would work best, and that these peers should be the first point of contact when a new parent is referred into the service; this has been particularly challenging, but parents felt strongly this would be key to engagement.

Focus groups also identified several challenges to parental engagement with services, such as a mistrust of professionals, fear of being judged, cultural or language barriers, or meetings in unrelated spaces. Parent champions are ideally placed to break down these barriers by building trusted relationships with new parents.

## Parent Champion reflections on the service

In breaking down barriers, it is important that parents see someone who represents them and their life/experiences, rather than representing a service. Building trust has been key throughout the befriender journey, and interactions have built from casual conversations through to opening up about issues where professional help must be sought. Hosting events (e.g. celebrating local cultural activities) have also proven to work well in supporting parents to engage where they might not have previously.

As a volunteer, the role is second nature, as the volunteer has gone through the same experiences. Having conversations in the park, sharing stories about your own children, all help to build the relationships.

## Race and inequalities work (find out more [here](#))

LEAP is based in Lambeth, an area with a very diverse community. In the early days of the pandemic, there were reports of disproportionate deaths within BAME groups, alongside a collective frustration and shock at the death of George Floyd and surrounding events. LEAP wanted to create a platform to listen to the community and understand the issues and concerns of parents for their young children. Listening spaces and frameworks were created about how to engage, however in the end, there was a recognition that the goal was simply to be open and ensure parents could speak freely and trust the space.

A blueprint with four key areas was developed to guide LEAP's further engagement in this space, including a focus on:

- Educational and play settings
- Rounded and increased BAME projections
- Health interactions
- Listening and continued learning

## Positive outcomes

LEAP celebrated [Black History Month](#) by sharing positive stories of significant contributions of black people past and present, and by bringing the community together to learn about and appreciate diverse cultures. LEAP has worked closely with parents to create and develop these opportunities and activities to ensure they are meaningful.

Through this work, LEAP has enabled the voice of local parents, supporting them to have their stories heard e.g. through webinars and events co-delivered by parents.

This is a broad piece of work that will continue.

## Employment pathways

This work was developed in response to feedback from parent champions, who felt there was a need to support parents back into employment after having children. A working group was established with parent champions and others to begin to identify the multiple barriers to employment for parents. From this, four areas were identified in which to develop support, including helping parents to be 'prepared for work', and addressing barriers to work (e.g. resources, childcare, working with employers to identify 'family friendly' roles).

## Parent rep: my top ingredients for coproduction

One of LEAP's parent champions shared her thoughts on what is important to effective coproduction:

- Working alongside parents to develop and deliver community engagement sessions.
- Speaking and listening to parents through different mediums to encourage diverse engagement.
- Including SEN in community events.
- Building sustainability into parent engagement - giving power back to parents and carers within the community.
- Asking parents what they want and need.

## In summary, the key ingredients of coproduction for LEAP are:

- Actively listen
- Respect & trust
- Be open to learning
- Creating an environment that supports coproduction
- Speaking/listening to families through different mediums
- Inclusive delivery
- Giving power back to parents and carers to ensure sustainability
- Create spaces to listen
- Support and empower

## What ingredients are missing? (Breakout discussions)

To close, delegates were split into breakout groups to discuss anything else they felt was a key ingredient of coproduction that hadn't yet been mentioned.

- Language is so important. What do terms like 'coproduction' or 'systems change' actually mean to parents, and how can language be changed to open opportunities for engagement to everyone and ensure mutual understanding?
- It is critical that parents have the space to really focus on what they need, within an environment where they can safely challenge what is being said and push back on ideas or current ways of working.
- The reliance on volunteers to deliver services must be recognised, and consideration given to ways in which this engagement can be encouraged, and a long-term momentum sustained.
- The importance of 'really listening' and then being responsive to requests.
- The role of technology in engagement and ensuring access inequalities do not impact engagement opportunities.
- Training and scaffolding will be essential to support parents to fully engage.

Click [here](#) to watch a full recording of this breakout session.

For more information on this project, contact Tanya Spence, People in the Lead Manager: [tspence@ncb.org.uk](mailto:tspence@ncb.org.uk)

# **Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development: A Community Development Approach to Supporting Early Child Development**



This session demonstrated how the Blackpool Better Start (BBS) partnership has taken a broad and diverse approach to engaging with and involving parents and communities. The workshop outlined the overarching approach and underpinning values and covered the following key areas:

- Ensuring parents' voices are central to decision making across the partnership
- Joint commissioning and enhancing the way services are delivered
- Embedding a sustainable community structure
- Growing a workforce through volunteering, training and apprenticeships
- The Community Connector role (a Harvard Frontier of Innovation)
- Embedding a 'Common language'
- Campaigns - using community consultation and research to change the narrative
- Promoting the role of Dads
- Our investment in community parks
- Participatory Budgeting

## **Presenters:**

- Clare Law, Deputy Director, Centre for Early Child Development
- Lauren Wolfenden, Development Manager, Centre for Early Child Development
- Vicki Walker, Development Manager, Centre for Early Child Development
- Melanie Farman, Development Manager, Centre for Early Child Development
- Colin Smy, Community Engagement Officer, Centre for Early Child Development

## **Introduction**

The team shared some detail on how they are working to improve outcomes for children & families through innovative and meaningful community development approaches, and the context within which they work.

The CECD theory of change stresses the need to increase capacity & capability of parents, which will lead to improved community outcomes, and provide children with a firm foundation from which to grow. Individual programmes all have theories of change

linking back to the overarching theory of change.

CECD has identified four cornerstones which enable the partnership to achieve its aims & break the intergenerational cycle of poor outcomes:

- Grounded in a Public health approach
- Evidence-based intervention/programmes, including a suite of interventions reframing discussion on child development
- A shared language and narrative, and system transformation

- The Centre for Early Child Development - the engine room of the Blackpool Better Start partnership

During the bid writing phase, there was a desire to grow a feeling of pride in the community and develop a centre of excellence, recognised internationally, which would attract academic institutions to the town.

Work started long before the funding was awarded, and community members were working hard to demonstrate what they wanted and what would make a real difference. They wanted to:

- Feel proud of the town and their role
- Do more for themselves, and shift the power back to the community,
- Have services that are accessible
- Give a higher profile to dads
- Be involved in service planning.

There are five areas through which CECD ensures parent and community voices stay central to the work.

## **1. Community structure, including support for volunteering, & approach to participatory budgeting**

**Volunteers** were central to the work, and CECD knew that ‘growing an army’ of volunteers would be key. The structure has changed over time, however the model in place now that has been coproduced by the community & enables community governance through BBS work. Volunteers support consultations, disseminate messaging and act as a local advocate. Contributions range from a few hours a week in a specific project to much wider engagement, however, all engagement is flexible & valued.

The community said from the beginning that they wanted to drive the work, but also have an opportunity to deliver by ‘growing our own’ workforce. The Volunteer Academy

offers courses for volunteers on the work of BBS, and facilitates opportunities in the town e.g. sling libraries and children’s centres.

The Community Connector role (CCx) was developed to provide a local peer to be a trusted advocate for services, and to provide local people with local jobs. CCx help connect parents to services within the local community, & have increased access within the area. The CCx role has extended to include health-specific connectors to help parents access health services. Impact of the model has been demonstrated including increased uptake, and BBS was offered the Harvard ‘Frontier in Innovation’ award due to the success.

**Participatory budgeting:** A large number of community members have been engaged in coproduction, including spending participatory budgets on small scale local projects e.g. Street to Scale. This approach puts community members in the driving seat & lets them plan, deliver & evaluate their own work without the restrictions of grant-style funding awards.

## **2. Coproduction & codesign, locally & nationally**

True coproduction includes principles on how services are designed, developed & delivered, with equal partnerships between service users, carers & professionals. There are clear benefits for wellbeing when this is done well, & a platform is provided for people who would not have a chance to be heard.

Empowering the community is essential, and within Blackpool Better Start, over 8000 local residents have been involved. Examples include:

- **Alcohol use in pregnancy campaign:** parents and community members worked alongside a professional agency to develop the campaign in a way that would speak to all, and marketed it in places that hard to reach communities were likely to access. The impact was clearly seen in how many people could recall the campaign.

- **Enhanced health visiting service offer:** parents told CECD what was missing & what the service should look like. Changes were made accordingly, & this put parents at the centre of the service. Local authorities have now agreed that all consultations will be done in partnership with the community going forward, which is a positive impact.
- **Designing Trauma Informed Care guidance:** CECD has been able to link with experts in the field but also with the community & those who have lived experience. Principles of equality, diversity, accessibility & reciprocity have been integral to meaningful & successful coproduction.

### 3. Parks & open spaces

This element of CECD's work has been driven by research on the value of parks & green space, but all work has been involved community consultations at each stage to ensure community ownership. Communities have been involved in all discussions, including which spaces to redevelop, what they should look like & how they should be used. CECD's role has been to facilitate discussions/input between professionals & communities to ensure views being considered. Redeveloped parks have become areas of pride & primary assets, and this has created a real community movement to continue to redevelop.

### 4. Dads engagement

Evidence shows that children have better outcomes when there's a positive male role model in their lives. Previous consultations showed lack of resources for dads in the Blackpool area, as well as a number of barriers to their engagement, yet there is a high percentage of single parent households in the area which are headed by dads.

CECD has built a dads support team to increase their engagement with services. A central part of this work is increasing the recognition of the role of dads by services & practitioners.

A Dads Strategy will underpin all work with dads over the next few years, & will ensure ambition & equality. The aim is that every community member has an awareness of the importance of dads in child development. Dads Community Connectors will support this work. CECD will work with parents & the community to prioritise workforce, peer support, engagement & volunteering, and will work with partners to make their services accessible & dad-friendly.

Through lockdown, Dads Connectors have continued work - Talking Dads live broadcasts with guest speakers, & have built up a large share of male followers. Popular messages have included mental health, and the role of play.



## **5. Development of a common language across community & services**

**The Brain Story:** CECD has worked to embed a common language around child development so that everyone, in particular parents/care givers & multi-disciplinary practitioners, know what is being talked about & can understand and claim the language. This has created a level playing field, using metaphors to explain the scientific knowledge around child development, resilience and brain development. Evaluation has shown the Brain Story has prompted parents to make changes and to reflect on how their own experiences might impact their child.

Overall, CECD has aimed to demonstrate how community engagement has been prioritized throughout their work, and how the BBS partnership has been able to break down barriers between services & communities, while also helping parents and communities to find self-confidence & purpose. Parents now see themselves as having a crucial role in their community and their voices are heard.

Click [here](#) to watch a full recording of this breakout session.

For more information on this project contact Clare Law, Deputy Director [clare.cecld@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:clare.cecld@nspcc.org.uk)



# **Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) Nottingham: From the community, for the community: How SSBC developed a paid peer workforce**



In this session, SSBC and their commissioned delivery partners gave an overview on how conversations with parents, communities and professionals led to the development of a coproduced Family Mentor Service in Nottingham. They also shared key learning around recruitment to this new paid peer workforce, and how it is influenced by lived experience and community knowledge, how the service has become established in the four SSBC wards of Nottingham in the past five years and the impact it is having on the system, families and communities it works within and with.

## **Presenters:**

- Steven Parkinson, Manager, The Toy Library
- Joanne Hallam, Scheme Manager, Home-Start Nottingham
- Stacey Lochhead, Assistant Manager, Family Mentor Team, Framework HA
- Donna Sherratt, Head of Programme, Small Steps Big Changes
- Sue Wood, Service Manager, Family Mentor Team, Framework HA

## **The Family Mentor Service: How it all began:**

Initially, a wide-ranging consultation took place with more than 1500 parents across Nottingham to gather a cross-section of views on what was needed to improve child development outcomes. Community partnerships were set up to meet regularly and share ideas, while travelling playgrounds attracted parents with children allowing conversations to happen organically while the children played. Consultation days with parents, professionals and senior leaders were then held to develop the strategy.

The findings clearly showed that to improve outcomes for children parents and the wider community needed to be involved. Parents made it clear that they listened to people they trusted and didn't feel judged by, such as their own community, family or friends.

This was the starting point of the Family Mentor service - to build the capacity of the community to meet the needs of its children.

## **The recruitment process**

The Family Mentor service recruits local people to paid roles (a paid peer workforce); this local workforce are trusted within the community, which enables them to build relationships with the families and support them in their parenting journey. While there is a person and job specification for the role, the recruitment process focuses more on personal experience and attitude, rather than skills and qualifications. The role is advertised in the local community, on social media, via other community organisations, and via city council and job hubs. Applications are encouraged from across the whole community.

Applicants are initially invited to a unique 3-day assessment process, including both group and individual activities. Skills assessed include communication and listening, equality and diversity, teamwork and resilience, and awareness of family needs and challenges. Successful candidates are then called for a formal interview.

Candidate feedback on the recruitment process has indicated that this different approach helped put them at ease, was informative and thought-provoking, and increased their confidence and knowledge.

## Training

From day one of employment, all new Family Mentors receive comprehensive training across the core ABS outcome areas (including child development, nutrition, and speech & language) as well as on other key topics such as play, safe sleep, and gaining confidence in delivering community groups.

## The transition of the service, and the journey of volunteers

The impact of the service is clear. Learning has shaped services, the community voice has been heard, and the service has successfully integrated with other services, for example in delivering Triple P with early help providers.

The service also draws on the community through recruiting to volunteer posts., Volunteers support general group activity, but also get the opportunity to take on different roles to build their skills, for example in administration. This is part of the Volunteer Pathway, which supports them with training and experience to support their future employment or life plans.

To date, there have been 86 volunteers, giving 11,407 volunteer hours. 11 have gone on to further education, 15 have gained employment as Family Mentors, and 20 have moved on to other employment.

## The service

Family Mentors deliver ‘Small Steps at Home’ to families using an evidence based, service designed toolkit (this includes a handbook, activity and tip sheets) to support parents to become the best they can be. They also deliver community groups some of which are service designed to meet the ABS outcomes of nutrition, communication and language and social and emotional development. The programme has grown based on feedback, for example with the development of the ‘Small

Steps for your Future’ programme, which works in collaboration with local community and government funded schemes to provide practical skills and confidence building activities for parents to support them in their next steps, perhaps into employment or volunteering.

Family Mentors have also established additional support for local families, for example the ‘Around Again’ baby bank, run by volunteers to supply pre-loved baby clothes and equipment for those who need it.

The pandemic has required a rethink of services, with many now delivered online, and check-in calls rather than face to face visits. Family Mentors have provided over 1000 craft and activity packs to families, as well as food packs.



## **Q&A session**

### **Q. How have health visitors interacted with the Family Mentor service?**

This has gone really well, although has required some effort to identify ways to work best with one another. There have been opportunities to meet one another to put faces to names, and family mentors and health visitors continue to have regular contact and safeguarding meetings to share information or any concerns.

### **Q. Have you ever had any confidentiality concerns from parents about sharing information with someone from their community?**

There were some initial concerns from the ABS panel, and this has been carefully considered throughout the service development. In practice, there have been no concerns. Training, and the trust established, are central to the success. Family Mentors provide a professional service in the same way as other services, and any conflicts of interest can be carefully managed.

Click [here](#) to watch a full recording of this breakout session.

For more information on this work, please contact Donna Sherratt, Head of Programme [donna.sherratt@nhs.net](mailto:donna.sherratt@nhs.net)



# Insights from the NHS and panel session with the five A Better Start Directors

## Chair: Dr Neil Churchill, Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities, NHS England

### Panel members:

- Merle Davies, Director, Centre for Early Child Development
- Alex Spragg, Programme Director, Better Start Bradford
- Laura McFarlane, Director, Lambeth Early Action Partnership
- Karla Capstick, Programme Director, Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham
- Jeff Banks, Director, A Better Start Southend
- Tom McCulloch, Head of Funding, A Better Start, the National Lottery Community Fund

The Chair, Dr Neil Churchill, welcomed the panel for the last session of the event, and began with a brief introduction to his role as Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities at the NHS. Specifically, he noted:

- Patient involvement within the NHS has been a gradually increasing process that began with particular services responding to their users, slowly influencing other services and now becoming the default way of working, although there is still a distance to go.
- Previously, Neil worked with Barnardo's, where working with people was the culture. He reflected that local government and the voluntary sector have a history of coproduction, and the aim is to align these approaches with the different ways of working within the NHS.
- There are different types of and approaches to involvement within the NHS, including the consumerist approach (based on choice), the democratic approach (based on rights), and person-centered approaches (building services around the needs of people and families).
- There is a slow rise of coproduction as a way of working within the NHS, driven by certain sectors challenged by their service

users to work differently (for example within mental health or community services) and there are good practice examples within these.

- There have been training and capacity building initiatives introduced to support the embedding of coproduction.
- The [Coalition for Collaborative Care](#) was established to support the partnership between people and organisations to deliver personalized care for all.
- There have been areas where the approach has been more difficult/challenging to embed, for example patient safety.
- A range of methods have been engaged, such as experience-based codesign, and paid 'lived experience' ambassadors.
- Neil reflected on the example set by ABS in terms of shifting the balance of power towards parents, and the impact this has made towards improving outcomes for children and families. NHS is experimenting with more systematic approaches to hand over power to service users and communities.

- The challenge is to do this in an inclusive way, involving those who traditionally have not been involved.

Areas for discussion at the panel session were generated through the ‘chat’ function of the conference platform throughout the day. A summary of Directors’ commentary on the themes and questions raised is included below.

**An overwhelming number of comments were raised throughout the event on how inspired people are by the contribution parents have made to A Better Start - and in sharing their stories today.**

- Parents are truly inspiring, having given so much time, energy & passion. It’s been a ‘golden thread’ across all five partnerships. ABS nationally has demonstrated parents want to be actively involved in shaping services, at all levels, and more organisations should harness the power of this commitment.
- The journey takes time to build relationships, and there are difficult conversations to be had, but the engagement has been positive from the beginning. An openness and willingness to be challenged by parents’ suggestions is crucial.

**Systemic change is complex and takes time - this sounds so obvious, but that acceptance fundamentally changes everything for communities.**

- The sustainability of all programmes was a key consideration from the beginning, and discussions have been held throughout with local funders and commissioners to ensure that where programmes are demonstrated to work, there is a mechanism to sustain them.
- It is enormously challenging to create a momentum for system-wide change, and a key commonality across partnerships is a role as a catalyst for change.

- Seeing the parent journey has also inspired further change.
- There are lots of developments within the health and care system currently which recognise the value of people and community’s contribution and it is the ideal time to further empower parents and to share the learning generated within ABS.
- Embedded within ABS funding has been the need to change ways of working and influence a wider cultural change, rather than just to implement programmes. This is the added value which will bring about systems change and make a long-term difference for parents and families.

**There may need to be changes in national policy to support the direction of travel above.**

- There are some great policy recommendations but there needs to be money and backing behind these for implementation.
- Services at a national level need to draw on ‘experts by experience’ through every stage of the commissioning and delivery process.
- Parents engaged in ABS work have gone over and above their role in influencing their local communities and have had a chance to shape wider policy developments.
- Parents are empowered, and holding programmes and decision makers to account, which is critical.

**Discussions have highlighted the importance of relationships, trust and responsive language to ensure meaningful coproduction.**

- Trust is based on transparency about why decisions have been made, which is why parents as part of ABS Partnership boards is crucial.

- Within ABS, the community are equal, and no decisions are made without equal sign-off from all. There are things that communities have asked for that have not happened, but the decision-making discussions have been open and transparent so that the reasons for those decisions are understood by all.
- Real community engagement is not about engaging with the same one or two people, but reaching out to the wider community, actively engaging them, and giving them the skills to engage and challenge. Building these skills is a central role of ABS and other organisations.
- Trust is two-way; handing over a service to the community to take forward requires trust on behalf of the service too.
- Strong relationships and trust between professionals are also critical; ABS has had the opportunity to bring the local partners together around the table to have the conversations and build trust.

**People were very moved by the video showcasing the extraordinary parents talking about all they've done. How have these wonderful face to face and social interactions migrated to our socially distanced world now?**

- Everyone has had to embrace digital technology, and this has been a priority throughout lockdown. Local families are facing increased challenges, and the existing relationships built have allowed practitioners to continue to engage in any way possible, to better understand the challenges to engagement families are facing and ensuring that the ABS offer is accessible to the families being served.
- Where possible, outdoor engagement has been embraced, which also aligns to key messaging across the programme around the benefits and uses of outdoor space.
- Services have tried to be reactionary to the emerging needs of families, e.g.

through the provision of resource packs.

- There has been a lot of real innovation evidenced, and the learning from this will be used in looking ahead at opportunities for blended delivery in the future.

**A central theme in coproduction is the importance of reflecting the diversity of voices across communities, ensuring they are representative of the whole community, and providing a safe space for them to express their views.**

- ABS has given teams the opportunity to really get to know local communities, but there is a need to take time to better get to know who the community is, who may be 'hidden' and what their needs may be.
- It is important to take time to celebrate and value diversity in everything, and to be open and explicit about values.
- The methods for engagement must also be considered within a multicultural lens, making sure there are a range of opportunities available, and that barriers to engagement have been explored and addressed (e.g. language barriers).
- It is important to respond to world events and provide spaces and opportunities for parents and communities to express themselves.
- In facilitating engagement, a good question to ask is: What does a good conversation look like? And what places, spaces, support and care are needed to encourage a good conversation?

## **A common theme has emerged on the importance of investment in healthy outdoor spaces to support young children's play and development.**

- The past year has highlighted how important good quality outdoor space is.
- ABS commitment to developing safe and healthy outdoor spaces also includes a commitment to supporting parents and communities to make best use of those spaces.
- Sustainable change has been prioritised, particularly in urban areas where poor air quality has been identified by parents as an issue.

**Coproduction can be messy & chaotic, and a real departure from how things may have previously been done, and services will need to embrace moving outside of their comfort zones.**

- Developing a common purpose and set of values, and collective commitment and priorities for the area, and taking the time to build the trust needed between agencies, professional and parents. ABS partnerships have invested in their workforce and volunteers, and created opportunities for people to learn together.
- A genuine understanding for all of a common goal and commitment to the value of parent and community contribution.

**The full recording of the session is available [here](#).**

## Closing remarks

### Tom McCulloch, Head of Funding, A Better Start, The National Lottery Community Fund

Tom closed the event with his reflections on the day, and on all the evidence of good practice demonstrated through the presentations and sessions.

It has been fantastic to see such a high level of interest here today for putting parents and communities in the driving seat. The number of people registered for and attending the event has shown the level of commitment to community and parent involvement. Involving parents and carers as equal partners is critical to the success of A Better Start and is at the heart of everything we do; that is why they are involved in every aspect of A Better Start as we have seen today.

Tom reflected on how inspiring it has been to see the variety of ways in which parents and communities have got involved in their ABS partnership, and it is clear they go over and above expectations to make a much wider impact. Further examples of this work in practice are available on each of the partnership websites and in the publications shared on the Fund website (links below).

ABS is the largest of five strategic investments across TNLCF. As a funder, Tom noted that it is important to recognise and support partnerships to test and learn, and to facilitate the dissemination of learning beyond the programme; this is something the Fund has committed to for the lifetime of the programme.

The latest in the ABS Programme Insight series: [A Better Start- responding to COVID-19](#) produced by NCB focuses on how Covid-19 is affecting young children and their families, and how A Better Start partnerships are adapting to meet the

challenge, and critically, the innovative and rapid ways in which services have adapted their practices in response.

Parents have continued to play their role supporting others in a safe way over the last year and I want to say thank you to them at this time - that spirit of community and supporting others has probably never been more evident. Thank you also to all the parents who have been involved over the years, and who generously share their insights and experience, which makes ABS the fantastic programme it is to be part of. The ongoing commitment and passion of parents and communities, and of the practitioners who support them, to change things for the better, is very much welcomed and appreciated.

**Find out more on the A Better Start websites:**

[The National Lottery Community Fund: A Better Start Programme](#)

[A Better Start Southend](#)

[Small Steps, Big Changes, Nottingham](#)

[Lambeth Early Action Partnership](#)

[Better Start Bradford](#)

[Blackpool Better Start](#)

## And finally... a selection of reflections from attendees

*“Thank you for such a very interesting and thought-provoking day. Really enjoyed all the speakers and the continued efforts to improve outcomes for young children and their families.”*

*“I will leave today feeling inspired, hopeful, enthused and committed to change - thankyou.”*

*“Thank you for a brilliant day. It has been a very inspiring day and makes me feel proud of being part of ABS.”*

*“Thank you all - transformation leaders that support transformational community change.”*

*“This has been a really valuable day. Inspiring, thought-provoking and a wealth of information to digest and follow up, a big thank you to everyone!”*

*“Thank you for an absolutely brilliant informative and inspiring day - thank you to everyone involved, the panels, and all the people we networked with :)"*

*“Thank you all (parents) for everything you do and for sharing so powerfully your thoughts and insights today, fantastic to hear from you all.”*

*“It’s great to hear parents being so passionate! Truly inspiring stories, well done to all for being a voice in the community and continuing to push boundaries to make a difference.”*

*“Thank you everyone for your individual experiences, you are passionate and committed to making a positive difference to your communities, inspirational.”*

## Appendix 1: Agenda

09:30	<b>Sign in and networking</b>
10:00	<b>Welcome and purpose of the day</b>  <b>Anna Feuchtwang</b>  <b>Chief Executive, National Children's Bureau</b>
10:10	<b>'People in the Lead' - strategic direction of The National Lottery Community Fund</b>  <b>Sophy Proctor</b>  <b>Senior Head of Funding (Strategic Programmes), The National Lottery Community Fund</b>
10:35	<b>Learning from A Better Start - putting children, families and communities in the lead</b>  <b>Matthew Riddell</b>  <b>Funding Manager (Contracts), The National Lottery Community Fund</b>  <b>Gill Hart</b>  <b>Funding Manager, The National Lottery Community Fund</b>
11:00	<b>Break time</b>
11:15	<b>Breakout session: Learning from each of the five A Better Start partnerships</b>  <b>An opportunity to hear directly from ABS partnerships on how they are involving parents and communities, including:</b>  <b>Peer engagement and peer led workforce</b>  <b>Parent &amp; community led funding initiatives</b>  <b>Parent &amp; community involvement in leadership, decision-making and governance</b>
12:15	<b>Lunchtime &amp; networking opportunity</b>

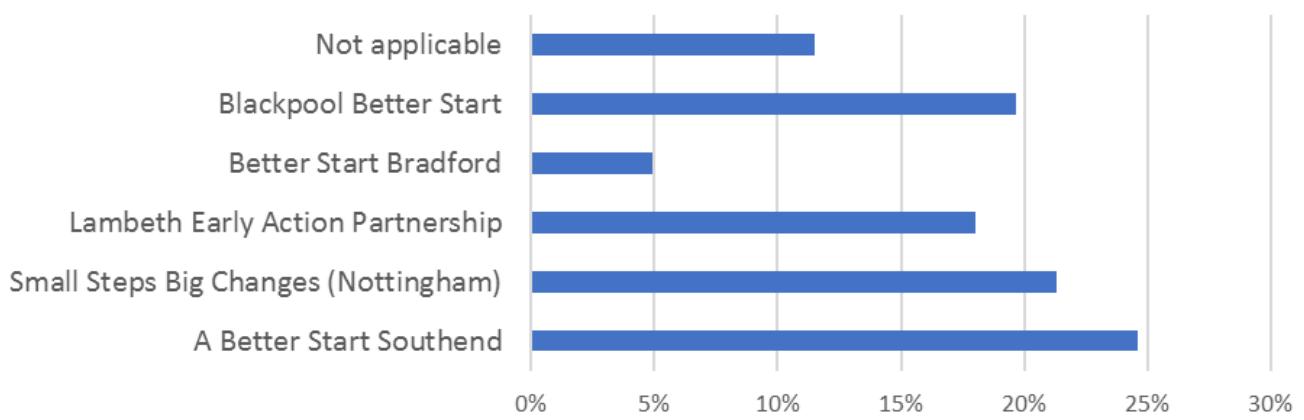
13:00	<p><b>A Better Start parent-led session</b></p> <p>Pete Fleischmann, Lead Consultant, Co-Production Works (Chair)</p> <p>Tara Newbold, Parent Champion, Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham</p> <p>Dave Bannister, Community Champion, Blackpool Better Start</p> <p>Lucy Jeffreys, Parent Champion, A Better Start, Southend</p> <p>Elzbieta Skowron, Parent Champion, Lambeth Early Action Partnership</p> <p>Saiqa Akhtar, Parent Champion, Bradford Better Start</p>
13:45	<p><b>Breakout session 2: Learning from each of the five A Better Start partnerships</b></p> <p>(As above)</p>
14:45	<p><b>Break time</b></p>
15:00	<p><b>Insights from the NHS and panel session with the five A Better Start Directors</b></p> <p>Chair: Dr Neil Churchill</p> <p>Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities, NHS England</p> <p>Panel members:</p> <p>Merle Davies, Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development</p> <p>Alex Spragg, Better Start Bradford</p> <p>Laura McFarlane, Lambeth Early Action Partnership</p> <p>Karla Capstick, Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham</p> <p>Jeff Banks, A Better Start Southend</p> <p>Tom McCulloch, The National Lottery Community Fund</p>
15:45	<p><b>Closing remarks</b></p> <p>Tom McCulloch</p> <p>Head of Funding, A Better Start, The National Lottery Community Fund</p>

## Appendix 2: Summary of evaluation findings

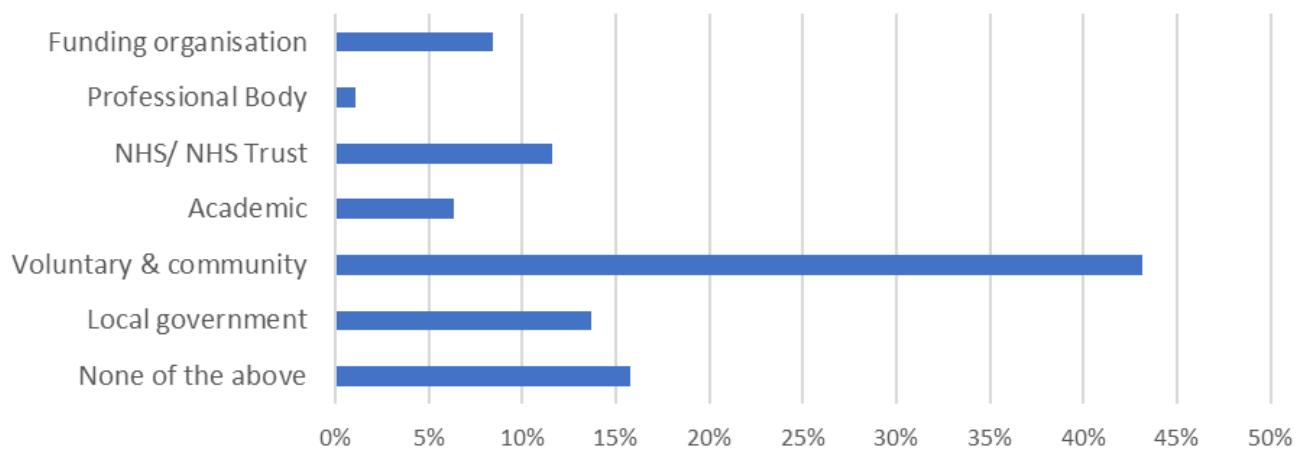
### Q1 Which of these best describes your role? (95 responses)



### Q2 If you work with or for an A Better Start partnership, please indicate which below. (61 responses)



### Q3 Please select the option that best describes the sector you work in. (95 responses)



**Q4 Please rate how satisfied you were with the following aspects of the event**

	Very satisfied/ satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied/ very dissatisfied	TOTAL number of responses
The registration process via Eventbrite	90.53% (86)	3.16% (3)	6.31% (6)	95
Facilitation of the event	89.47% (85)	9.5% (9)	1.05% (1)	95
The conference platform (Remo)	74.73% (71)	16.8% (16)	15.77% (15)	95
Content of individual sessions	94.74% (90)	3.16% (3)	2.11% (2)	95
The overall agenda	92.63% (88)	6.32% (6)	1.05% (1)	95

**Q5 The event aims are listed below. Please indicate how satisfied you are that these aims were met.**

	Very satisfied/ satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied/ very dissatisfied	TOTAL number of responses
To raise awareness of the work of ABS in involving parents and communities	100% (95)	0% (0)	0% (0)	95
To improve knowledge on approaches to involving parents and communities	96.84% (92)	3.16% (3)	0% (0)	95
To improve understanding of the benefits to involving parents and communities	97.89% (93)	2.11% (2)	0% (0)	95
To support and develop thinking on practice in involving parents and communities	95.79% (91)	3.16% (3)	1.05% (1)	95
To provide an opportunity to network	66.32% (63)	26.32% (25)	7.37% (7)	95

## **Appendix 3: Organisations represented**

<b>50 Things To Do Before You're Five</b>	<b>Blackpool Volunteer Academy</b>
<b>A Better Start Southend</b>	<b>Blackpool Council</b>
<b>Action for Children</b>	<b>Blackpool FC Community Trust</b>
<b>Alison Featherbe Learning and Development</b>	<b>Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust</b>
<b>Ann Rowe Consulting</b>	<b>Bradford Metropolitan District Council</b>
<b>Artworks Creative Communities</b>	<b>Bradford Trident</b>
<b>Ballymena and Little Steps Sure Start</b>	<b>Brent Council</b>
<b>Barnardo's</b>	<b>Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust</b>
<b>Barnardo's NI</b>	<b>Brighton and Hove City Council</b>
<b>Basildon Hospital</b>	<b>Caerphilly County Borough Council</b>
<b>BBC Children in Need</b>	<b>Calderdale Council</b>
<b>BD4 Community Trust</b>	<b>Cardiff University</b>
<b>Berridge Primary and Nursery School</b>	<b>Cattanach</b>
<b>Best Beginnings</b>	<b>Centre for Early Child Development (CECD)</b>
<b>Better Start Bradford</b>	<b>Centre for Evidence and Implementation</b>
<b>Bradford Innovation Hub</b>	<b>Centre for Research in Early Childhood</b>
<b>Belfast Health &amp; Social Care Trust</b>	<b>Ceredigion County Council</b>
<b>Birmingham City Council</b>	<b>Cheshire East Council</b>
<b>Business in the Community</b>	<b>Child Poverty Action Group</b>
<b>Blackpool &amp; the Fylde College</b>	
<b>Blackpool Better Start</b>	

ChildsSide CIC	East Sussex County Council
Cognus	EasyPeasy
Community Voice	Education Endowment Foundation
Co-production Works	Education Psychology Service
Coram family and childcare	Enfield Local Authority
Cornwall Council	Essex Partnership University Trust
Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change	Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service.
Croydon Council	Essex County Council
Cyngor Sir Ceredigion	Family Action
Daniel's Den	Family Hubs Network
Dartmouth Films	Family Mentor Service
Department for Education	Family Nurse Partnership National Unit
Devon County Council	Family Support Charity
Dingley's Promise	Flying Start Luton
Diversify Education	Framework Housing Association
Department of Health	Future Men
Dollywood Foundation UK	Fylde Coast CCGs
Dorset Council	Fylde Coast Slings
Department of Work & Pensions	Gateshead Council
Education Authority NI	Gloucestershire County Council
Early years Alliance	Government of Jersey
East London NHS Foundation Trust	Groundwork Yorkshire
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	

Guy's & St. Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust	Leicester City Council
Haringey Council	Lilycroft Nursery School and St Edmund's Nursery School
Health & Social Care Board	Lime Tree Primary School
HENRY	Literacy Volunteers
Herefordshire Council	Little Hearts Nursery
Hi55 Ventures	Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland CCGs
Hillingdon Local Authority	London Borough of Camden
His provision	London Borough of Croydon
Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale CCG	London Borough of Hackney
Homerton NHS Trust	London Borough of Havering
Home-Start UK	London Borough of Merton
Hope for Children & their Families	London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	London Boroughs of Camden and Islington
Institute of Health Visiting	Lovelace Primary School
Islington Council	London School of Economics
Ivana La Valle Research Ltd	Maritime Academy Trust
Kent County Council	Money and Pensions Service
Kings College Hospital/LEAP	NatCen Social Research
Labour Party	National Children's Bureau
Lambeth Council	National Literacy Trust
Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP)	Nesta
Lancashire County Council	New Ground Consultancy Ltd.

NHS England	Parents 1st UK
NHS Lewisham and Greenwich	Plant Dewi
NHS SouthEast London CCG	Public Health Agency
NHS Southend CCG	Public Health England
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
National Institute of Economic & Social Research	Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health
North Halifax Partnership	Richmond and Wandsworth Council
North Lincolnshire Council	Rosedene Nurseries Ltd
Northumberland County Council	RSM UK
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	Ruby's Fund
Nottingham City Council	Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland
Nottingham City Libraries	Save the Children UK
Nottingham CityCare Partnership	Southern Health & Social Care Trust
Nottingham Trent University	Small Steps Big Changes, Nottingham
Nottinghamshire Community Foundation	Social Business Trust
Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust	Somerset CCG
Nottinghamshire YMCA	Somerset County Council
NSPCC	South Tyneside CCG & Local Authority
Nuffield Foundation	Southend Borough Council
Nunthorpe Children's Day Nursery	Southend CCG
OECD	St Giles Nursery School
Oldham Council	Surbiton Children's Centre Nursery School
Pacey	

Sure Start	University of Oxford
Tavistock & Portman NHS	University of Sheffield
Teesdale Day Nursery	University of Sussex
Tesco	University of York
The AIM Foundation	Volunteer Centre Blackpool
The Dollywood Foundation	Wakefield council
The For Baby's Sake Trust	Warrington Borough Council
The Mercer's Company	Whittington Health Trust
The Milk Hub	Western Health & Social Care Trust
The National Deaf Children's Society	Wigan Council
The National Lottery Community Fund	Wirral Council
The Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists	
The Stockwell Partnership Limited	
The Sutton Trust	
The Toy Library	
Together for Children	
Triple P UK	
Triskele Solutions	
UCEC-Education	
University of Derby	
University of Essex	
University of Greenwich	
University of Leeds	

## Appendix 4: Glossary of key terms

**Active listening:** Listening with all the senses. Focusing on what the speaker is saying, through their words and body language; making effort to acknowledge/reinforce what they are saying and to understand their meaning; and ensuring feedback is given and action taken.

**Asset-based:** identifying, acknowledging, valuing and using the skills, knowledge, relationships and capacity already existing within a community.

**Capacity building:** Enable all members of the community to actively engage by providing formal or informal training and development opportunities to build the skills needed.

**Codesign:** active involvement of all parents and community members as equal partners in a service design process to ensure it meets the needs of its users.

**Coproduction:** moving a step further than codesign, where parents and community members are equal partners from design through to delivery/implementation and evaluation of the service.

**Empowerment:** building parent and community confidence to enable them to take control of the factors and decisions that shape their own lives.

**Legacy:** The lasting impact that A Better Start programmes will leave on the parents and communities they work in, with and for.

**Lived experience:** personal knowledge gained through first-hand involvement in a situation, event or service.

**Micro-funding:** small amounts of money given to community members or groups which they can use to run events or develop initiatives based on their own local needs.

**Participatory Budgeting:** Parents or community members are involved in the decision-making process around how money is spent, and/or in the monitoring/scrutiny of grants once they have been awarded.

**Peer-support:** a model of service delivery where people use their own experience to help others- this may be paid or voluntary.

**Sustainability:** A priority within A Better Start to ensure that programmes and services implemented can continue to thrive once ABS funding has ended. Empowering parents and communities to take responsibility for projects is one way this may happen.

**Systems/systemic change:** an intentional process to alter the wider way things have been/are being done by influencing other organisations/services. ABS services aim to do this through a shift of resources towards prevention, upskilling the workforce, encouraging integrated working, parent and community lead services, with the parent at the heart of the community.

**Theory of Change:** An illustration of the desired outcomes from a particular programme, service or situation, including an understanding of how those outcomes might be achieved and the specific actions that would be required to make this happen.

## A Better Start

A Better Start is a ten-year programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund. Five A Better Start partnerships based in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham and Southend are supporting families to give their babies and very young children the best possible start in life.

For more information visit:

[www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/a-better-start](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/a-better-start)

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