BARNARDO’S LIFESKILLS TRAINING

Case study

About the project

Funding awarded: £1.35 million
Duration of funding: 3 years 7 months
Number of beneficiaries: 4224 children aged 8 to 14 years old
Areas of delivery: Liverpool, Swansea, Dundee and Northern Ireland

Barnardo’s transforms the lives of the most vulnerable children across the UK through services, campaigning and research expertise. In Realising Ambition, it delivered LifeSkills Training (LST), a highly effective, evidence-based early intervention and prevention programme that reduces risk taking behaviour. LST has three core components: self-management skills which helps children with problem solving, decision making and how to regulate emotions; social competence where students learn how to communicate clearly, make friends and develop healthy relationships; and drug resistance training to help children develop strategies for resisting peer pressure.

Lessons learnt

The organisation’s experience highlights the many factors involved in replicating across different geographical areas.

Barnardo’s has overcome a number of challenges related to replicating a service across different geographical areas. The organisation managed its delivery of LST from Northern Ireland while delivering across all four UK countries. Barnardo’s undertook significant work to ensure staff felt connected both to Barnardo’s Northern Ireland and also integrated at a local level.

Barnardo’s originally intended to deliver LST solely in youth and community settings, however it quickly became apparent that there was a clear need for the programme in schools as a universal intervention. Barnardo’s changed its approach to targeting schools, as well as youth and community settings, and with this change significantly and positively impacted on programme reach – not only were young people more available to participate in LST, but their engagement was more sustained than those in community settings. Whilst delivering LST, Barnardo’s also recognised that the programme’s resources needed to be made more relevant to the UK. The organisation worked closely with both young people and staff in the replication areas to do this, and also with the programme developers to ensure the resources remained faithful to the LST model.

The delivery of LST highlights the many different factors that impact on successful replication and whether these factors relate to differences between countries in the UK or between the UK and other countries. Successful replication therefore requires not only a strong service but a strong organisation operating in the right environment, as demonstrated by the delivery of LST by Barnardo’s.

Five key ingredients of successful replication

The Realising Ambition consortium has mapped each project’s journey against our five key ingredients of successful replication. The key points from this follow below. Find out more about these ingredients.

- **A tightly defined and replicable service:** LST is a well-defined evidence-based programme.
- **That is effectively and faithfully delivered to those that need it:** LST is a universal intervention. Barnardo’s used local demographic information to target its delivery to geographical areas that would benefit most from the service.
Over the last four years, Barnardo’s has delivered LST to over 4,000 children, routinely monitoring outcomes. It has produced a report documenting its outcome and fidelity monitoring efforts. The analysis of 1160 children completing the primary school Essentials component of LST between September 2013 and July 2015 shows statistically significant improvements in knowledge, attitudes and life skills. It also found that the 502 young people that took part in a following ‘booster’ set of sessions showed further improvements, indicating that a greater ‘dosage’ of the service can bring a greater change in outcomes.

Our preliminary analysis of the indicators from the Realising Ambition framework, focused on 245 young people aged 11 and 12 receiving the ‘Advanced’ component of LST in secondary schools, provides a cautious indication that changes in knowledge, attitudes and life skills may also be accompanied by modest improvement in behaviour. 71% of young people showed stability or improvements in behaviour (45% improving), and the proportion of young people meeting the ‘high need’ threshold on the SDQ fell from 17% before delivery of LST to 13% after.

The next steps for Barnardo’s are to explore whether changes in knowledge, attitudes and life skills, as well as behaviour, are also accompanied by reductions in substance misuse, and what, if any, of these changes may be attributable to LST itself. Barnardo’s is seeking funding for a randomised controlled trial.

What next

Barnardo’s is committed to sustaining and growing the number of evidence-based programmes it offers, of which LST is one. The organisation is continuing to subsidise the replication of LST in a number of schools in Liverpool, with schools covering some of the costs. Barnardo’s states that while there has been considerable interest from schools in the intervention, many have been unable to find the budget to fund LST’s delivery.

Barnardo’s is therefore also exploring a non-direct model of delivery as a method for sustaining future replications and taking the programme to scale. The organisation is currently training youth workers in the Republic of Ireland for instance, to whom they provide ongoing technical support to roll the service out on a licensed basis.

Outcomes for beneficiaries

Each organisation has sought to monitor the outcomes of children and young people prior to and after service delivery. Find out more about outcome measurement in Realising Ambition.

Evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required: Barnardo’s undertook a significant consultation process with staff and young people on the programme’s resources. It used the evidence gathered from this process to successfully redevelop some of the programme’s materials to ensure their relevance for children and young people in the UK.

There is confidence that outcomes have improved: Outcomes data collected during the Realising Ambition funded replication shows that 71% of 11 to 12-year-olds who received the ‘Advanced’ component of LST showed stability or improvements in behaviour. Barnardo’s completed their own independent evaluation which illustrated impressive results with regards to improvements in children’s knowledge, attitudes and lifeskills.

The service is cost-beneficial and sustainable: There is good evidence from overseas that LST is cost-beneficial and can bring a return on investment, however as yet, little has been done on this in the UK.

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