AMBITION
LIONS QUEST SKILLS FOR ADOLESCENCE

Case study

About the project

Funding awarded: £999,919
Duration of funding: 4 years
Number of beneficiaries: 1000 young people aged 10 to 14
Areas of delivery: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Devon, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Lancashire, London, Manchester, Somerset, South Yorkshire, Warwickshire and Wiltshire

Ambition is a membership organisation providing training, support and assistance with quality assurance to voluntary youth services within the United Kingdom. In Realising Ambition, the organisation delivered Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence (Skills for Adolescence), an evidence-based programme operating in over 90 countries. Participants take part in workshops and a community project in order to attain good citizenship skills, core character values and social-emotional skills to reduce their likelihood of using drugs, alcohol and violence in the future. Realising Ambition funded the overall set-up and management of the programme by Ambition as well as its delivery by Ambition’s member organisations.

Lessons learnt

Ambition’s experience shows how important it is for an organisation to adapt their business model to account for external funding factors.

The replication of Skills for Adolescence in Realising Ambition was based on a social franchise type model and its future sustainability was initially based on the ability of local delivery partners to attract grant funding to support further replication of the service in their own areas. Significant changes to local funding arrangements, however, have meant local member organisations are struggling to secure the funding from local authorities that they have traditionally relied on. This has led Ambition to focus on developing alternative income streams including sponsorship by local Lions groups, commissioning by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and direct funding from school budgets.

External funding factors have also affected the type of delivery site chosen for Skills for Adolescence. Originally within Realising Ambition, 65% of Skills for Adolescence’s delivery was in schools and 35% in youth services. Over time, the proportion of delivery has shifted more and more towards schools, as non-statutory youth services have increasingly faced cuts. However, this shift has enabled greater targeting of Skills for Adolescence at young people who have been assessed by their schools as most likely to benefit from the programme. Consequently, Ambition has worked closely with delivery partners to build in a team-teach approach whereby youth workers and teachers co-facilitate the programme in schools. This reduces the programme’s direct costs, potentially making it more attractive to future funders.

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: Skills for Adolescence is an evidence-based programme supported by a detailed handbook, developed in the US, which has been adapted to the UK
Questionnaires were administered to 89% of Skills for Adolescence’s beneficiaries at the outset of service provision and to 60% at the end of service provision. Analysis of beneficiaries’ outcomes indicate that 55% of programme participants improved in academic confidence between pre- and post-test with 11% remaining unchanged. 44% improved their aggression and misbehaviour with 28% remaining unchanged, and perception of drug risk improved for 56% of participants with 20% remaining unchanged.

Although improvements were evident across a number of outcomes, programme recipients also typically continued to experience higher levels of need in a number of measures. For example, nearly half (45%) still experienced higher than average conduct difficulties at post-test and over half (56%) of young people reported below average academic confidence. This could suggest that the population served by the programme may require more intensive and sustained engagement.

Overall the results from this outcomes analysis are positive, and particularly positive are the improvements in aggressive behaviour and the perception of drug risk – two of the main areas of focus for the programme. Whilst the lack of a comparison group means that any stability or improvement in outcomes cannot directly be attributable to Skills for Adolescence, the stability and improvements are both desirable and realistic for less intensive prevention programmes.

Ambition retains the sole licence for Skills for Adolescence in the UK. The organisation believes that delivering the programme in schools offers the best prospects for a sustainable programme and is exploring a range of income streams.

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The experience of UK delivery organisations within Realising Ambition suggests that the programme is highly replicable. That is effectively and faithfully delivered to those that need it: Skills for Adolescence is a universal programme, however the UK replication of the programme has shifted towards school-based delivery as opposed to community based youth settings. This has enabled the programme to be targeted more towards young people identified as suitable for it. Evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required: Whilst Skills for Adolescence is a prescribed programme, Ambition has been given scope to adapt it for UK replication. Ambition has consulted delivery partners, the programme developers and young people while developing the programme curriculum and plans to further adapt it to complement the national school curriculum. There is confidence that outcomes have improved: Skills for Adolescence appears to create stability and small improvements in outcomes, which are both desirable and realistic for less intensive prevention programmes. The service is cost-beneficial and sustainable: Ambition is analysing unit costs for the delivery of Skills for Adolescence and is developing its business models for the further replication of the programme. The organisation believes the diminishing prospects for local authority funding mean that developing relationships with local philanthropists and PCCs, and seeking direct funding from school budgets offer a stronger model for sustainability.

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.

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What next

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