

# Better Start Bradford Innovation Fund

Our Innovation Fund was set up as a way of enhancing and extending our core programme offer and addressing gaps and priority areas. With funding of up to £100,000 available for each project, it allowed organisations to pilot new, innovative approaches robustly over a period of a year, with potential for it to become a fully-fledged Better Start Bradford project. Due to COVID-19 the projects were only able to part-deliver what they intended and were extended, with the majority running from 2020-2022 (with HIDVA ending March 2025).

## Enhancing the HABIT £109,000 investment

The University of Leeds received funding to improve oral health for 0-3s by delivering their 'Enhancing the HABIT' oral health intervention with the area's Health Visitors.

HABIT (Health visitors delivering Advice in Britain on Infant Toothbrushing) is a Medical Research Council funded research intervention that supports Health Visitors to have effective conversations around baby and young children's oral health with families.

The project set out to adapt and refine the HABIT intervention and resources to improve accessibility for families in Bradford, in preparation for implementation in the Better Start Bradford area. They set up focus groups with Health Visitors, nursery practitioners and parents/carers with limited English from the local community to undertake this work.

HABIT was subsequently embedded within our MECSH (Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting) programme.



### Why this project was developed

In Bradford, around two in every five children have tooth decay by the age of five, and the district's South Asian and Eastern European families with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) face higher risks of childhood tooth decay.

The project had the following objectives:

- To enhance the parent-facing HABIT resources to ensure they are accessible and appropriate for parents living in the Better Start Bradford area.
- To refine the training resources for Health Visiting teams to ensure HABIT is delivered in a consistent, but flexible way.
- To enable the HABIT intervention to be potentially embedded within the MECSH programme.
- To gain insight from early years professionals and parents/carers around supportive oral health conversations and other oral health activities delivered within early years settings.

### Impact and findings

- The HABIT resources have been widely used amongst Health Visiting teams in East Bradford to support their oral health conversations.
- HABIT has been embedded within the MECSH programme, which provides sustained home visits with the same Health Visitor. MECSH has now been incorporated into the Bradford 0-19 contract and become district wide.
- Other districts in the UK are interested in the research which will improve the accessibility to oral health resources for families in more deprived areas.
- The HABIT intervention was successful, but initially only reached English speakers. This study allowed HABIT to be more accessible to non-English-speaking parents/carers.
- During lockdown, the HABIT team had lots of fun coming up with creative ways to demonstrate good oral health care with 0-3s as part of our Better Start Brushing campaign on social media.

"At first, I was a bit nervous... I always thought I was hurting him when I was brushing his teeth. After speaking to my Health Visitor in quite a bit of detail they showed me how to try different ways until you find one that works well. So, what we do is, I brush his teeth then I let him do it and then I go back over them at the end."

Over 58 Health Visitors and nursery practitioners have received HABIT training as part of MECSH

25 parents with limited English engaged in the 'Think Aloud' focus group

(13 Eastern European, 12 South Asian)

## Growing Together £30,200 investment

Horton Community Farm and Grow To School joined forces to create their Growing Together project.

They brought parents/carers and young children together to learn to grow, cook and eat their own produce at Horton Community Farm, SHINE at St Stephen's, CHAS @ St Vincent's and Canterbury Centre for Children and Families.

They ran seasonal sessions with a focus on food growing and play, sharing knowledge with families and practitioners about when and how best to grow specific fruits and vegetables that could be used for cooking and eating.

The idea was that families and practitioners would then be able to use this learning at home and within the community to 'grow their own'.



### Why this project was developed

Growing Together aimed to foster a love and understanding of growing your own produce to encourage healthy lifestyles and change behaviours around food, poor diets, food choices and nutrition. It also aimed to increase skills in gardening and growing as well as engaging communities to access and enjoy outdoor spaces.

As a result, the hoped families would:

- Access fresh food, healthy eating and nutrition
- Develop growing skills for the community and at home
- Connect to outdoor activities and diverse community spaces

They hoped 0-3s would:

- Develop language and communication skills
- Build confidence with their peers and within the family
- Learn about nature, outdoor play and food

### Impact and findings

- The project successfully engaged large numbers of families in outdoor sessions in the Better Start Bradford area.
- The project adapted well to COVID-19 restrictions, delivering growing packs to families and encouraging people to grow at home on their windowsills and in their yards and gardens. They also set up demonstration beds in two growing spaces - one at Horton Community Farm and one at SHINE - in preparation for face-to-face growing activities once restrictions were lifted.
- They hadn't originally factored in sessions over the colder months, but with COVID-19 restricting face-to-face contact, the model was adapted again and sessions ran over the autumn and winter months to maintain the progress and ensure continuity of support and interaction for the children. During the outdoor sessions they had a fire pit to keep warm and delivered 'cook and eat' sessions, prepared hot food and drinks, and ran activities including making food for birds.

"To share the passion for growing and to learn how it can build resilience in the community, we have to listen to our communities and adapt to their circumstances. That is what we've done, and we have built a project we hope will continue to support communities in their growing journeys into the future. You are never too young to start growing!"

2000+ seed packets and plants were given out to families with instructions for growing at home

Over 900 attendees at sessions, reaching 240 children with 75%+ families returning

624 growing packs, 900 litres of compost and 419 plant pots were distributed over 14 weeks during lockdown

## Older Yet Wiser £75,700 investment

Older Yet Wiser, run by ChildsSide, received funding to deliver a series of workshops for grandparents with child-caring responsibilities.

The group-based workshops and mini-series enabled grandparents to contribute to their grandchildren's social and emotional wellbeing.

Session participants were able to enhance their relationship with their grandchildren, whilst receiving up-to-date information on raising children in the 21st century.

New information, key tools and skills can emphasise positive relationships, help understanding, and enhance interaction with the child's world. Weekly home activities are set to help embed positive communication and language skills.



### Why this project was developed

Research recognises the importance of securely attached relationships during the early years of a child's development. It also suggests that grandparents are increasingly responsible for childcare with over 1.9 million grandparents having childcaring responsibilities for their grandchildren. This project gave grandparents the opportunity to broaden their understanding of the value of childhood social and emotional wellbeing and how pivotal those first 1001 days are for their grandchildren's brain development.

The project aimed to:

- Build grandparents' skills to foster a deeper relationship with grandchildren, leading to a secure foundation of support for the child
- Increase grandparents' awareness, learning, and confidence through workshop attendance and participation, increased language and communication with grandchildren
- Benefit grandchildren long-term from sustained care, from understanding, safe and supportive grandparents

### Impact and findings

- Grandparents felt that they had developed new skills and knowledge during the workshops and were keen to use these new techniques at home. They found the changes easy to implement. They also reported being able to use some of their skills outside of their grandparenting duties, for example in family conflicts or helping friends.
- At the end of the project, the BBC contacted ChildsSide to help recruit grandparents to take part in a forum to influence their web-based information for BBC Tiny Happy People. Nine of their grandparents attended.
- The project met the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge when they visited Bradford in January 2020.

"The way I play with my grandchildren has changed. We play games that help in their development. I also use real language and repeat rather than babble with the babies."

Thank you so much for this opportunity - it's been an eye opener and these skills I will share with family and friends.

70% of participants recruited went on to complete the course, with 100% satisfaction rate

## The main criteria were that projects:

- Addressed one of our core outcome areas:
  - Social and emotional development
  - Language and communication
  - Health and nutrition
  - Systems change
- Were aimed at our core audiences of expectant families and/or families with children aged 0-3
- Addressed a gap in terms of the local community/families (e.g. dads/male carers, families from Central and Eastern Europe)
- Allowed for innovation and creativity when addressing key public health themes such as oral health and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

## WomenZone Play Gym and Cafe £99,600 investment

WomenZone received funding to develop The Play Gym and Hubert St Kitchen to provide a fun, free, creative play space for young children, and provide parents/carers the opportunity to access support, practical training and advice.

The Play Gym provides valuable play opportunities for families, with play workers employed to encourage parents/carers to learn practical play techniques to support their child's development, demonstrating how much can be achieved with simple interactions which are easily intertwined with the family routine.

Hubert St Kitchen provides healthy low-cost meal options and sessions around cooking healthy meals.



### Expected outcomes:

- Parents/carers will have improved relationships and bonds with their children
- Parents/carers will have improved understanding and ability to encourage their child's language and communication development
- Dads/male carers will have increased opportunities to spend 1-1 time with their children
- Dads/male carers will have an increased knowledge of how to promote their child's development
- Parents/carers will learn how to provide healthy meals for their children and ensure their families are active
- Children aged 0-3 will benefit developmentally in all areas thanks to parents improved understanding of Better Start Bradford's aims and outcomes

### Impact and findings

- WomenZone has successfully established the Play Gym as a reputable community play space.
- Many more parents accessed the Play Gym play sessions than originally anticipated - they anticipated 50 and the actual figure was 304.
- The project successfully worked with other Better Start Bradford projects, including Better Start Imagine, HENRY, the Perinatal Support Service and Better Place. They anticipated 20 referrals into projects and the actual figure was 91.
- The project originally anticipated that 100 parents would register at the Play Gym. They received 232 registrations.
- Further innovations such as 'DadsZone' allowed dads/male carers to use the Play Gym exclusively on a Sunday morning and participate in fun and interactive activities with their children. This work was particularly successful.
- In response to the impact of COVID-19 on mums/female carers, staff provided emotional support to families that were affected through loss or mental strain. They started a 'Time to Think' group to support families affected by the pandemic.
- By attending the Play Gym and cafe, families have been able to access wider services including food banks and ESOL provision, as well as accessing the additional groups and activities provided by the team.

“As the weekly sessions progressed, the dads became more confident in their abilities but also became more open in sharing their experiences and worries around parenting.”

304 play sessions delivered

The project reached 364% more parents with 0-3s than originally anticipated

The project achieved 355% more referrals into other Better Start Bradford projects than originally anticipated

## HIDVA £94,900 investment

Staying Put's HIDVA (Health Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) project identifies victims at early stages of domestic abuse and intervenes to provide multiagency support, while upskilling practitioners on how to recognise and respond to domestic abuse.

This project employed an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) to work within the maternity team at the Bradford Royal Infirmary as well as community midwifery teams.

It enabled additional staffing (1FTE) to Staying Put's existing HIDVA project to focus on expectant/new parents/carers in the Better Start Bradford area.



### Why this project was developed

The project was developed to pilot a multiagency approach that supported community midwifery teams to identify and refer families to appropriate support.

### Expected outcomes:

- Increased referrals to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC)/reduced repeat offences
- Earlier identification and support offered in pregnancy. Repeat presentation to the acute trust within 6 months reduced
- Staff report having an increased awareness of impact of domestic abuse and confidence to refer
- Reduction of the number of infants and children removed from parental care
- Parents report that they have improved coping mechanisms and positive outlook on the future
- Systematic approach to responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) via district strategy
- Parents/carers report a raised awareness of the impact of the emotional and physical impact of domestic abuse on their children and are more inclined to accept help

### Impact and findings

- The Maternity HIDVA has shown that it is possible to initiate conversations with pregnant women at risk and assist them in accessing support – something maternity services found challenging.
- Midwives report having greater confidence in initiating conversation due to the training and support offered by the HIDVA and the direct link into domestic violence and abuse services through her.
- The team has been asked to contribute to Shipley College's new Midwifery Access to Higher Education course.
- A local support group has been set up for survivors to build confidence and friendships.
- The Maternity HIDVA is embedded within the wider HIDVA team across the NHS.

“I don't think I would be alive without your support.”

I am so grateful for everything you have helped me with, thank you so much. My family also thanks you for caring for me when they can't as they are not in the UK.”

42 clients supported on a long-term basis

206 clients supported with short-term interactions providing guidance, advice and signposting

## Resilient Dads £100,000 investment

Resilient Dads is a holistic personal development and parenting skills programme developed by Sharing Voices which aims to develop the skills and competence of dads/male carers to support the social, emotional, and cognitive development of their 0-3s.

It was developed to support dads/male carers, who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which may impact on their own parenting.

The project organised engagement activities for dads/male carers of 0-3s and initiated discussions about the challenges of being a parent of a young child. These led to opportunities to take part in groups to talk about their experiences, strengths and challenges. Support was tailored to each individual's level of comfort and uses a flexible approach to learning. It uses methods such as sport and team building to help participants engage with the programme.

For those dads/male carers (self-selected) who were seeking greater support, therapeutic 1-1s were provided with trained practitioners to help them address difficulties in their relationship with their child, often arising from challenges in their own upbringing and early relationships.



### Why this project was developed

Very few dads/male carers were engaging with existing interventions in the Better Start Bradford area for a variety of reasons. Using existing community networks, Sharing Voices targeted dads/male carers in hard-to-reach communities, including those coming out of the prison system. This project aimed to work with dads/male carers who themselves have experienced ACEs which has been further exacerbated by poverty and deprivation and may impact their parenting.

### The project aimed to:

- Develop the skills and competence of dads/male carers to support their toddlers social, emotional, and cognitive development from ages 0-3, build secure attachment and prevent ACEs
- Educate dads/male carers about the importance of child's development from birth to age 3 and the impact of ACEs and resulting trauma
- Use sport and leisure activities to engage, empower and recruit to other parts of the personal development programme
- Empower dads/male carers with a range of skills to ensure they develop greater levels of emotional intelligence/resilience, personal effectiveness, interpersonal and relationship skills, life planning

### Impact and findings

- This project demonstrated that the need existed for the service and that there was willingness from dads/male carers to seek support. Sharing Voices has continued to invest in the project.
- Participants reported higher levels of personal resilience and improved emotional wellbeing, and an increase in personal effectiveness and aspirations.
- Participants reported increased competence and capability in parenting their toddlers and enhancing emotional and cognitive development. There was an observed higher level of parenting by dads/male carers
- One participant was so inspired by the programme that he has successfully been employed as an Engagement Worker and is now working with young people, helping them improve their life chances and social mobility.

“I have been recommending Resilient Dads to friends and cousins. I say to them you can trust the learning mentor and it will change your life - it's just realising that making small changes can have a massive impact and ease stresses in life.”

The project successfully engaged with and supported 73 vulnerable dads/male carers