



USING EVIDENCE AND DATA

Data Informed Decision Making in Early Years Systems

Data informed decision-making underpins strong governance within systems.

Understanding what data is available, routinely reviewing and reporting on changes and maximising opportunities to share data between partners will ensure resources are more efficiently allocated and improve service provision for children and families.

Through the collective development of a strong theory or model of change, linked to child and parental outcome metrics, ensures collective accountability toward monitoring change.

Understanding the challenge

In 2020, the UK Government's National Data Strategy was launched to support the use of evidence in policy-making and public service delivery and was designed to enable localities and organisations to share data for decision making purposes. The use of evidence and data informs best practice and has been embraced by Better Start as the mechanism to design, implement, and review all services delivered in Blackpool.

With the reduction in public spending on early intervention and prevention services, this is more critical than ever to ensure that limited financial reserves are spent on the interventions which will have the greatest impact.

What we did

Before any decisions are taken on new services or approaches, data is used to understand the needs of children and families on agreed outcomes aligned to the Blackpool Model of Change. This enables the identification of gaps or unmet needs in certain groups or highlights where services are not achieving the intended outcomes.

Insight from communities supports this data and the two together inform the design of the intervention and implementation, ensuring that services will be both acceptable and feasible. This same quantitative and qualitative data is then used to monitor and evaluate impact, supporting conversations on scale up and sustainability.

The partnership uses data in a continuous reporting cycle to understand the effectiveness of interventions, consider which services are working well and those which may need adapting if they are not a good fit or delivering the outcomes intended.

To enable this, the partnership established a data warehouse, housed by Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, of administrative health data metrics and linked service attendance data to support decision making and monitoring of outcomes across the population and within specific groups.

Women give consent via their midwife and key administrative data metrics about themselves, and their babies are included in the data set. This provides population level, pseudonymised data on agreed outcomes which are linked to the Better Start Model of Change. This data is then used within research and data informed decision making.

When individuals access Better Start-funded services, they are then additionally asked if their attendance at services can be added to the held data. This linkage in secure NHS systems enables aggregate sub samples of the population to be analysed for impact, supporting decision making on need, scale up, sustainability or ending of interventions.

Case Study: Oral Health

Initial data in 2015 showed one in five three-year-olds were affected by tooth decay, this being almost double the national level. The population level data was enhanced by local research to better understand parent's experiences, attitudes and behaviours, as well as exploring the strengths and limitations of current local services. Published research and guidance about what works in other contexts of learning were used to inform and shape the ultimate strategy, which has resulted in an 11.3% decrease in children aged five experiencing tooth decay in Blackpool.

Case Study: Baby Steps

The Baby Steps antenatal programme was initially delivered at targeted level, to vulnerable families in Blackpool. Through the partnership the programme was tested in a few of the most deprived wards in Blackpool for universal delivery. Using the same measures as the national evaluation undertaken by the NSPCC at targeted level the outcomes for families were comparable, and families reported that they were satisfied with the intervention. This supported conversations with the local health commissioner and provider about the potential to deliver the programme universally to all pregnant women and their partners across the town. In 2021 the programme was scaled up across Blackpool and is now delivered by the health provider. The outcomes for those attending showing positive impacts for both babies and mothers, including higher rates of breastfeeding, healthier weights of babies, and improved maternal mental health.

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Data-informed Decision Making

