

YoungMinds / boingboing Resilience Forum

“The Blackpool Model of Resilience”

Pauline Wigglesworth and Marc Chevreau, Blackpool City Council

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Summary

There was a capacity crowd at the 11th August meeting of the YoungMinds/boingboing Resilience Forum in London with representatives from across the spectrum of children and young people’s mental health in attendance.

The topic for discussion was a model of resilience therapy currently being developed and implemented across Blackpool for 11-16 year olds as part of the Big Lottery Headstart programme. On hand to deliver a presentation on the model were Pauline Wigglesworth, the lead executive with Blackpool City Council with responsibility for the Headstart Programme, and Marc Chevreau, a Specialist Educational Psychologist with the Council. Both Pauline and Marc have been working vigorously on developing the model over the last 18 months.

Pauline began by discussing the Headstart programme and the concept of resilience that is at its core. In order to develop a better understanding of the concept and how it can be applied, a working group was set up which included educational psychologists, the manager of the CAMHS service, a leader in the voluntary sector and others who were passionate about resilient practice in Blackpool. The aim of the working group was to develop a vehicle or model for the desired achievement in building resilience in young people in Blackpool. The working group knew that they wanted an inspiring model that would help to guide their thinking on the delivery of the Headstart programme. The model would also assist the team in their planning and evaluation of the interventions implemented as part of the programme. In tandem with all of that, the council were aware that Big Lottery were keen to have an element of sustained whole system change as part of the programme which led the working group to think of how services were provided in their current form and how to change this for the better.

Marc presented the genesis of the model and how the first step was to look at resilience research and its development through the four/five waves of resilience – from asking questions about what makes some young people better able to cope than others, varying ability to function in different contexts, consideration of interventions, neurological profiles and the impact of the environment on brain development and working to reduce adversity. Key ideas that influenced the thinking of the working group included that resilience relates to how an individual manages adversity but resilience is not seen as an ‘inherent’ property. Another key idea is that resilience is a demand-specific dynamic interaction between the person and their environment – young people resilient at home but not at school for example. Another area of particular interest was the idea that social and emotional learning could be regarded as a special set of protective factors particularly in programmes of work in particular schools.

Blackpool met with representatives from the Frameworks group from the USA who work to develop embodied analogies of academic ideas. They discussed with members of the public in Blackpool the problems facing young people which people found difficult to identify straight off. However, when they discussed this using the ideas of

risk factors and protective factors in a resilience model, this enabled people to think about how to balance things out to lead to positive/negative outcomes. They use a centre point (fulcrum) as the innate qualities an individual brings to a situation. In Social and Emotional programmes, the extent in which they change brain biology can push this fulcrum to a more positive point.

In terms of the kinds of things that need to happen to make children and young people resilient, the group saw that the child was influenced by various layers of social influences from their parents, siblings and family right out to influences at a national level. Initially the model started out as a bipolar construct between 'resolving difficulty' on one side and 'enhancing wellbeing' on the other. However, this became a circular dynamic model – enhancing wellbeing was viewed as forestalling the likelihood of difficulties arising and resolving difficulties is likely to enhance wellbeing. The centre of the diagram reflected what had been learned from the work of Bronfenbrenner around ecological systems in that it contained layers of social influence (i.e. individual, family, school and community), doubled up for the fact that these have an input to both resolving difficulty and enhancing wellbeing. This prompts the questions of 'what are we doing at family level to resolve difficulty' / 'what are we doing at community level to enhance wellbeing' etc. This can then become a planning tool for universal, targeted and individual interventions, though it is unlikely that all of these populations will be worked on in applying the model. However, it provides a good basis for looking at how to apply interventions (either universal, targeted or individual) in individual child, family, school or community contexts.

Pauline followed up by showing how the ideas in the model could be embodied within one system using the example of how all this could occur in a school environment or a community environment. Marc showed that the approach could also be used to enhance wellbeing – not solely for individuals/families/schools/communities with difficulties but interventions that further enhance wellbeing for children and young people within those groups. The matrix model is intended to be used by all kinds of people right up to the level of commissioners and planners.

Pauline used the example of a school as a motivator and facilitator of whole system change, the question then is 'how does the school open its doors to the local community to support young people', or 'how do schools support families not only with the child's education but with their wellbeing also.' Blackpool also recognise that local policy has an effect on how services are commissioned. Currently, there is delivery of services to a deficit model but if this was switched to actively reducing the adversity that young people may experience as well as providing support to develop these local environments to be resilient what would it look like – this is the type of discussion taking place within the Council currently. National policy also affects the local community e.g. in Blackpool there is a very high level of deprivation and three times the national average of looked-after children and while schools can be positive around the intentions of some of these interventions, because they are under pressure to prioritise academic attainment because of OFSTED, then resilience is not afforded the resource or focus from schools to be impactful.

Trying to maintain and sustain this system change, which is part of the Big Lottery's criteria for Headstart, is going to be difficult but in Blackpool the approach will be that a lot will have to be done at the beginning of the long term project to begin to coach and embed resilience and resilient practice in services. This will then have to be linked to core funding after the five years of the Headstart programme so that it doesn't drop off.

Marc continued the presentation by discussing the idea of 'golden threads' that link within and across the contexts. An example of this was the development of 'resilience conversations' with schools, enabling discussion about where we're going to work, what we're going to work on, how we're going to do this, how to work as a team – what common values we have and who's going to carry out the work. The model enables these types of questions to be answered so that an intervention that targets the need is identified.

Pauline outlined some of the future challenges of the model. These included: Promoting wellbeing as well as resolving difficulty, actively reducing adversity, continue working in a strengths and solutions focused way and very importantly, to co-produce the change with young people.

Pauline finished by providing a positive example of good practice that was developed in reaction to a very chronic problem of self-harm in young people in Blackpool. Nurses on the adolescent ward of the local hospital were trained to be able to provide emotional support to young people who were admitted on the ward because of self-harm, in particular during weekends. The hospital, in partnership with Blackpool Council, employed youth workers who were already working as part of the Headstart project to go onto the ward on Saturdays and Sundays to do some activity based work around emotional wellbeing. This then branched out into services in the community and school and now the structure of the adolescent ward has now changed to ensure that young people are engaged and stimulated when on the ward.

The Forum opened up for discussion and the first question posed was about where the Headstart interventions sat in relation to the development of the local transformation plans for CAMHS. Pauline informed the Forum that in Blackpool, the Headstart programme was in the minds of Commissioners in developing the transformation plan for Blackpool but also cautioned that Headstart programme should not be viewed as a Tier 2 solution as it is much more than that.

The question of impact measurement was raised and Pauline responded that several sources of data will be used to measure impact including SDQ data tracked along the survey period (which measures impact but also identifies children in need), population data from the SHEU survey and KPI's for commissioned projects. The programme in Blackpool also has young people trained up as evaluators to give some qualitative feedback about the interventions. Examples of KPI's would include – attendances at A&E for self-harm, referrals to Tier 3 CAMHS, school attendance and progress, referrals to PRU (the largest PRU in Europe!).

There was some discussion around targeting around the social gradient and proportionate universalism. Marc identified that given the work is most likely to be through schools, everyone in the school will benefit, even if the most vulnerable children will need targeted or individual interventions secondary to that. Pauline further noted that the usage of the SDQ has helped to highlight a cohort of young people that may slip through the radar because they are quiet or well behaved but may be in emotional distress.

On the issue of school engagement, Pauline did acknowledge that it has been a learning curve to engage some schools, particularly secondary schools but that there has been progress on this through consultative working. Prof. Angie Hart noted that the Ofsted Framework that was published in July did acknowledge that resilience is important to Ofsted and this should be referred to as much as possible so that this message is clear to Inspectors also.

Angie also queried how realistic in practice the resolving difficulties and enhancing wellbeing dynamic works as the whole point of a resilient intervention is to focus less on the difficulty and more on the positive actions one can take. Pauline acknowledged the quandary but did note that the resolving difficulty aspect does recognise that something has happened or is present which motivates the intervention, but the actual intervention is the asset based approach to build on strengths.

In closing, Sarah Brennan thanked all for attending the Forum especially Pauline and Marc from Blackpool City Council who had travelled a long distance to present their resilience model and congratulated them on their diligent work in developing and implementing it.