
RE-ACH PROJECT - EVALUATION SUPPORT

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Background

Re-Ach was a two-year pilot project funded by DCSF and delivered by two registered charities - Hanover Foundations and Youth at Risk (YaR). It aimed to raise aspiration, engagement and achievement in learning amongst young people who were least likely to succeed, including those not on target to achieve qualifications at Level 2, those at risk of teenage pregnancy, and those not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The pilot was based on a combination of workshops (for the young people and supporting professionals) and personal development coaching. Three Local Authorities were engaged to deliver the pilot: Barking & Dagenham, Hillingdon, and Leicester. In each, a mix of schools, colleges and other agencies were involved.

Key findings

- The pilot did not achieve the spread of participants originally intended and, on the whole, did not involve young people identified as the hardest to reach. Delivery agencies tended to refer young people who were borderline Level 2 to the project rather than those who were more disengaged.
- The programme's value for helping more disengaged and disaffected groups was thus not tested, nor was its potential for reducing the number of 16-19 year olds who were NEET and teenage pregnancies.
- Re-Ach was positive and engaging for most of the young people who completed the programme. For some, it helped to prevent a decline in engagement and improved attitudes towards learning, underpinned by improved cognitive skills and understanding of responsibility and choice.
- The programme also helped some of those involved to attain at Level 2, though data were not available to support this finding quantitatively.
- 700 young people completed the programme over the two years, against a target of 1000 and this increased unit costs which were relatively high for a programme of this nature.
- Learning points from the pilot include the potential for improved engagement, communication and management strategies which may have resulted in more effective targeting of agencies and young people who were more disengaged.
- The pilot also provided lessons that could help to improve overall impact and cost-effectiveness, including a need for greater ownership at local level; increased coherence with wider pupil engagement strategies; more flexible and responsive delivery; and better measurement of success through access to high quality outcomes data.

Introduction

York Consulting LLP were commissioned by DCSF to evaluate the Re-Ach project. Re-Ach was a two-year pilot programme funded by DCSF and delivered by two registered charities - Hanover Foundations and Youth at Risk (YaR). The programme aimed “to raise aspiration, engagement and achievement among young people who are least likely to succeed and achieve; and most likely to indulge in behaviour which is not productive for them”.

The business case for the project identified three target groups:

- young people not on target to receive Level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C);
- those most likely to fall into the NEET group;
- those at risk of teenage pregnancy.

The Re-Ach pilot was based on synthesising two established models developed by Hanover Foundations at YaR - personal development coaching and workshops for young people and the professionals who support them. Three Local Authorities (Barking & Dagenham, Hillingdon, Leicester) were engaged to deliver the pilot in a number of schools, colleges and other agencies.

The evaluation aimed to assess whether Re-Ach worked in raising young people’s engagement and attainment in education and, if so, how the project added value.

The approach included:

- baseline and completion attitude surveys with pupil participants;
- consultations with stakeholders (Hanover Foundations, YaR, Local Authorities, coaches and trainers);
- ten agency case studies (including 35 pupil consultations);
- analysis of MI (though, in practice, this was constrained by the quality and quantity of the information that could be obtained).

Delivery Effectiveness

Around 700 young people completed the programme over two years, against a target of 1000. Dropout rates were fairly low amongst young people who had committed to the programme, except amongst those from

agencies other than schools and colleges (e.g. work-based providers, youth offending services).

Schools generally recruited young people at risk of not achieving Level 2 and colleges and other agencies had more mixed cohorts. However, disaffected and disengaged young people were a minority of the Re-Ach cohort since few “other agencies” were engaged and mainstream agencies did not select their most disengaged young people for reasons of protectiveness or uncertainty about their reaction to an outside programme.

Most of the data showed high levels of satisfaction with the programme and participants and agencies found it useful, with high quality delivery and support offered. Attendance at coaching sessions was generally good (especially where there were processes in place to remind and chase participants).

In general, the workshops contributed towards positive experiences, learning about yourself, confidence and empathy with others, while coaching sessions helped to increase responsibility and motivation.

Outcomes and value

The evidence suggests that the programme had a positive influence on most participants. It most commonly supported those considered to be on the borderline of achieving Level 2 qualifications and, may therefore have contributed to one of its objectives in improving Level 2 attainment. This influence was through helping to prevent deterioration in engagement and improving attitudes towards learning. Underpinning this was an improvement in cognitive skills and an understanding of responsibility and choice. There was also some anecdotal evidence of impact on attendance, achievement and destinations (but issues with data quantity and quality prevented further analysis).

Participants were not generally the hardest to reach young people and showed minimal evidence of disaffection and disengagement. As a consequence, the pilot was unable to make much contribution to its objectives of reducing the number of 16-19 year olds who were NEET and reducing the number of teenage pregnancies.

The under-performance against target numbers meant that unit costs for the pilot were higher than expected. Costs were also felt to be relatively high for a programme of this nature, given that only a minority of participants were from the more disaffected target group.

Factors influencing effectiveness

There was potential for the pilot to have had improved engagement, management and communication strategies at national level. This may have resulted in better targeting of agencies and, in turn, of young people demonstrating more disengaged characteristics.

Greater understanding of the challenges associated with engaging Local Authorities was also needed, together with improved communication, need for flexibility of content and timing within agencies, and responsiveness to different agency and cohort cultures and contexts.

Only one Local Authority appeared to provide consistent levels of co-ordination and administrative support for Re-Ach. This impacted on the extent to which agencies felt engaged with the pilot programme. Good practice by Local Authorities included locating Re-Ach within an appropriate team/strategy, feedback meetings with agencies, developing consistent data/ communication/marketing processes, and providing funding for venues, transport etc.

Local Authorities found it hard to engage agencies who work specifically with disengaged young people and those at risk of becoming NEET. Reported reasons were variable level of awareness of what the pilot was about, concerns over the rigid structure of the programme, and level of challenge of the workshop. More upfront planning and customisation with agencies may have helped to engage older and more disaffected clients.

Conclusions

The Re-Ach programme was a valuable experience for many of those involved and, for some, there were observable changes in attitude and skill development. However, the value of the programme for the intended more disengaged target group was not tested. Whilst involvement in similar workshops and coaching

programmes may be valuable tools for this group, it is likely that they would need to be used alongside more effective and flexible approaches to engagement of agencies, staff and young people themselves.

Local Authorities or agencies facing particular issues with low Level 2 attainment may find it valuable to consider the introduction of Re-Ach type activities alongside other tools and programmes.

Additional Information

The full report (DCFS-RR079) can also be accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Julie Toher, W4d, DCSF, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ

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