



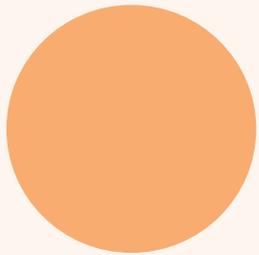
**EBPU**  
Evidence Based  
Practice Unit

A partnership of



# Evaluating a multi-disciplinary children's referral service: HeadStart Kernow's Bloom model

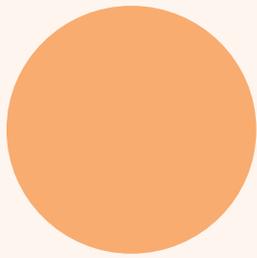
May 2022



**How do you go about evaluating the impact of a multi-disciplinary approach to getting the right support for children and young people, which itself does not intervene in children and young people's lives?**

This was the question staff in HeadStart Kernow faced, to understand whether and how Bloom benefits the lives of children, young people and their families as well as the services and professionals that support families' mental health and wellbeing.

In this case study we do not outline the findings of the evaluation work; these can be found by following the links at the end. Instead, this report outlines the challenges associated with an evaluation of Bloom, the process that HeadStart Kernow developed and implemented, and the key learning gained from undertaking this work.



## About HeadStart

HeadStart is a six-year, £67.4 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10–16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.



Six  
years



£67.4M

Six local authority led HeadStart partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to make young people's mental health and wellbeing everybody's business. HeadStart Kernow is the partnership led by Cornwall Council.

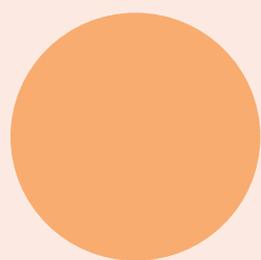


Ages  
10–16

The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) at the Anna Freud Centre and University College London (UCL) is working with The National Lottery Community Fund and the HeadStart partnerships to collect and evaluate evidence about what does and does not work locally to benefit young people now and in the future. Partners working with EBPU on this evaluation include the University of Manchester and the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), a project of the Anna Freud Centre. This collaboration is called the HeadStart Learning Team. Previous partners in the HeadStart Learning Team include the London School of Economics (LSE) and Common Room.



Six local  
authorities



## About Bloom

A multi-disciplinary children's mental health referral service



HeadStart  
Kernow

The Bloom model is a child-centered approach used to determine appropriate needs-based support services for children and young people's emotional, social and mental wellbeing. Bloom is a partnership model led by Headstart Kernow, Cornwall Council, and Cornwall Partnership Foundation Trust Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), supported by the voluntary sector and education support services.



Integrated  
approach

The Bloom model brings together a multi-disciplinary team that meets to consider the emotional, social and mental wellbeing needs of children and young people. This team reviews local referrals that don't fit the eligibility criteria for NHS-provided CAMHS and directs young people and families to appropriate local provision, or facilitates onward referrals through psychological formulation. Bloom multi-disciplinary meetings consist of core professionals from CAMHS, including those from the locality's primary mental health and clinical psychology teams, early help teams and HeadStart coordinators and community facilitators. Professionals from wider services including schools, GPs and other providers (including the voluntary and community sector) join as appropriate. The young person and family is represented in the meeting by their nominated professional.



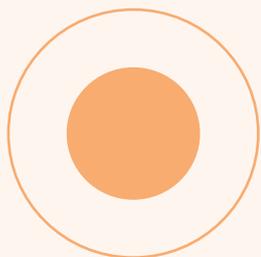
Multi-  
disciplinary



Ages 0-18

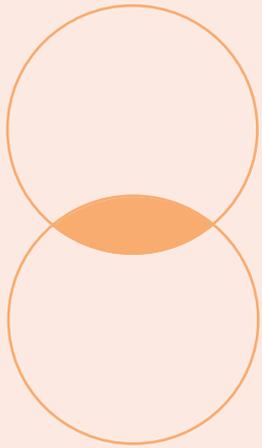
Bloom is available for all children and young people aged 0-18 who live in or who are educated in Cornwall. Anyone can make a referral and there are no referral criteria.

Analysis of Bloom referrals indicates high levels of referrals where there is considerable complexity in a young person's presentation and circumstances.



## Aims of Bloom

- Enable child-centred, holistic discussions about children and young people, leading to timely and appropriate suggestions for support.
- Enable informed recommendations for appropriate pathways of support for children and young people through a multi-agency approach.
- Support prevention and early intervention by enabling support to be provided to children and young people earlier than might otherwise be the case.
- Reduce waiting times for support and relieve system pressure.
- Cultivate collaboration and professional development through the building of positive working relationships and networking among professionals.
- Enable professionals to ask questions and share information and knowledge, and to support each other within a safe space.
- Enhance the resilience and confidence of frontline professionals who are providing support to children and young people.
- Provide access to clinical expertise within Bloom professionals meetings.



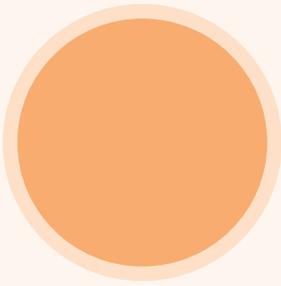
## The challenge

The evaluation of Bloom was undertaken by the Bloom Evaluation Project Team (hereafter referred to as the 'evaluation team') comprising of professionals from HeadStart, CAMHS and other services. The evaluation aimed to understand, demonstrate and celebrate the impact that the model has had. Evidence of positive impact would provide justification for sustaining the approach beyond the HeadStart programme. The evaluation team had delegated authority from the Bloom Cornwall-wide Evaluation Working Group (EWG) to agree the evaluation strategies and approaches.

Since Bloom provides no direct support for children, young people and their families, the evaluation team at HeadStart Kernow faced the challenge of determining the key outcomes of the model and how these outcomes could be measured and evidenced. The impact of any mental health and wellbeing intervention received as a result of Bloom recommendations cannot be attributed to Bloom itself, even though Bloom facilitates the support. Indeed, there is no obligation for families to pursue any of the suggestions made through a Bloom meeting (a point of contact discusses the suggestions with the family, and the family decides which, if any, to pursue).

The evaluation team also faced the challenge of differentiating Bloom from other referral mechanisms that exist locally, to evidence what Bloom provides that these other processes may not.

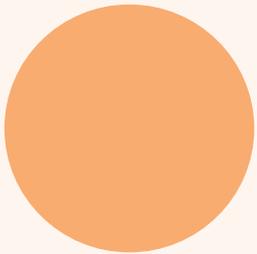
The task facing the evaluation team was to identify precisely where in the child and youth mental health system the impact of Bloom was felt and how to capture this impact. It became apparent to the team that a useful question to keep in mind was 'what would happen if Bloom didn't exist?'



## Key benefits

Working through a simple theory of change model, the evaluation team anticipated the benefits to Bloom to be:

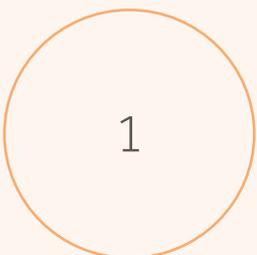
- improved and more rapid access to help for children and young people with multiple or complex needs
- enhanced collaborative and integrated working
- more appropriate and informed referrals to support services
- improved access to community-based support for children and young people and their families
- increased capability and confidence of education providers to support children and young people with their mental health and wellbeing
- monetary savings across the system.



## The evaluative approach

The evaluation team took the anticipated benefits or outcomes of Bloom listed above and determined their appropriate measures. The group decided to split the evaluation into **10 key strands of evaluative work**:

### Senior stakeholders



The aim of this strand was to collate senior leadership perspectives about Bloom. To capture evidence from a range of senior leads at stakeholder services including CAMHS, Cornwall Council and schools, the evaluation team asked the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to undertake one-to-one interviews.

2

## **Children and young people and parents and carers**

Since Bloom had no resource or remit to follow an individual child or young person beyond a Bloom meeting, there was no way to ascertain whether suggested interventions were followed through and how helpful they were to the child or young person and their family. Furthermore, General Data Protection Regulation and wider data protection considerations inhibited the use of surveys or interviews retrospectively with children, young people and families whose referrals had been discussed in Bloom meetings. As a result, the evaluation team developed a case study approach to gain some understanding of children and young people's experience of Bloom. This approach explored a number of individual cases via their anonymised referral forms and consultation plans.

3

## **Professionals**

The evaluation team collected evaluation surveys and routine feedback from all professionals who attended Bloom meetings (except core Bloom professionals – see below), to capture the experiences of the wide range of professionals engaging in Bloom.

4

## **Core Bloom professionals**

The evaluation team held focus groups with the professionals who are central to Bloom meetings, including CAMHS clinical psychologists, primary mental health workers, members of the locality early help team and HeadStart coordinators and community facilitators. Through these focus groups, the evaluation team aimed to capture core Bloom professionals' experiences of the strengths, challenges and impact of Bloom.

5

**Bloom service providers**

The evaluation team conducted a survey of Bloom service providers – the organisations and services signposted to within Bloom meetings, judged as being the most appropriate to support the young person whose referral was being considered. This survey explored the perspectives of these organisations and services about their awareness of Bloom, the appropriateness of resulting recommendations, and associated benefits and challenges.

6

**Steering group attendees**

The evaluation team sent a survey to all locality-based and Cornwall-wide Bloom steering groups (which are central to Bloom's governance and consistency across Cornwall) to assess the effectiveness of the meetings and to determine the views and needs of attendees.

7

**Leadership group**

The evaluation team asked NCB to conduct interviews with lead CAMHS and HeadStart Kernow staff, and other colleagues who were key to Bloom's day to-day operations.

8

**Pilot business cases**

A comprehensive review of the original 'business case' documents that underpinned the Bloom pilot was undertaken. This enabled reflection on the key objectives to see if the focus had shifted and an opportunity to check whether the original objectives remained pertinent and if so, were still being met.

9

### **2019/2020 data comparison**

This strand provided an opportunity to explore data from the 2019 annual Bloom report and compare it with more recent referral data from Bloom and from other datasets within each locality and across Cornwall. It aimed to consider any significant differences or changes in referral population and reasons for referral.

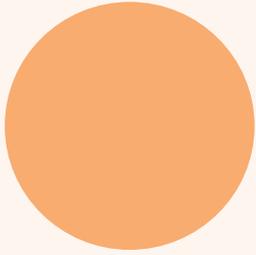
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### **Cost-benefit analysis**

The evaluation team attempted to determine the costs of the Bloom model as delivered through face-to-face or online 'virtual' Bloom meetings, and to understand the costs to society and the individual if Bloom had not been available. Discover more about the [cost-benefit analysis approach](#) taken by NCB for Bloom.

The evaluation team conducted each strand separately and produced distinct reports detailing key findings and learning, perceived benefits of Bloom and emerging recommendations to improve it. All of the [evaluation strand reports](#) are available online. The findings from each strand were synthesised into overarching findings, contained in an executive report.

The [executive report](#) makes clear the limitations of the evaluation, particularly in capturing child, young person and family perspectives of Bloom and limitations of the cost-benefit modelling. It does, however, provide a strong and well-informed case for the positive impact of Bloom, as well as a series of important recommendations for its future development.



## Learning from the evaluation process

There were several key learning points gained from this evaluative work:

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### Time and resource

The project team was committed to carrying out a thorough appraisal of Bloom to provide a robust case for its sustainability. This work takes time and requires appropriate resourcing. Ideally, the evaluation would have been informed by a wider range of interviews and focus groups with professionals, children and young people and parents and carers. These activities were constrained by resources available within the timeframe.

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### Knowing your audience

Bloom has two senior partner organisations, each with their own priorities. Reflections from this work indicate the importance of being clear about the audience for the findings of the evaluation. Having a focus on the people that you want to inform, influence and engage with the findings makes it easier to decide which data are necessary.

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### Multi-agency involvement

A major strength of the evaluation process was the involvement of multi-agency professionals in its oversight, as part of the EWG. The involvement of health, education and local authority colleagues ensured that the evaluation was wide ranging and met the needs of multiple organisations.

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## **Capturing the voices of children, young people and their families**

It was important to the EWG that the experiences of children, young people and their families were captured in the evaluation, but the lack of a consent field within the referral forms for future contact for research purposes meant that it wasn't possible to contact young people and their families for the evaluation. This has now been rectified and young people and parents and carers are able to opt in for future research and evaluations.

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## **Managing expectations**

As Bloom is a partnership model, there was no single 'client' for the evaluation work who could define the scope of the full evaluation. The work of the evaluation team and the EWG were key to providing an external, multi-service review of the development of the evaluation. It became clear that the size and complexity of the reports meant that some people on the EWG were not able to commit the time outside of their core roles to review and feedback on many of the reports. Managing expectations at the outset would be beneficial for future evaluations of this kind.

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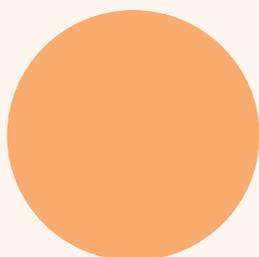
## **Knowledge gaps and misunderstandings**

The Bloom evaluation process surfaced important insight that some professionals held misapprehensions about Bloom. This provided the Bloom management team with an opportunity to understand these misapprehensions and this will inform future communication plans to better clarify the role of Bloom.

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## Shaping the future of Bloom

The evaluation process highlighted not only the range of perspectives held about Bloom, but also the diversity of visions for Bloom's future. The evaluation process provided a better understanding of the conversations that need to be had – and who needs to be involved in these conversations – to ensure that Bloom remains child-centered, needs-based, sustainable, and continues to meet the objectives of Bloom's many contributors.



## Contributors

The evaluation work and the associated learning outlined in this document highlights the efforts and commitment of Deborah Clarke and Derek Thompson at HeadStart Kernow.

Thanks to NCB who conducted a range of focus groups and interviews as part of the Bloom evaluation.

To discover more about HeadStart Kernow activities and the Bloom project, [visit their webpage](#).

You can also read more about Bloom in a [report by NCB](#).

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