Better Start
Real Change for Childhoods

BLACKPOOL

REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

The whole of Blackpool and now being commissioned in other geographies across England.

- Between 2015 and 2018 the service was targeted in seven of the most deprived wards in Blackpool.
- From 2018 services started to scale up across Blackpool, the first of these being the Baby Steps Antenatal Services.

CHILDREN AND FAMILILES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

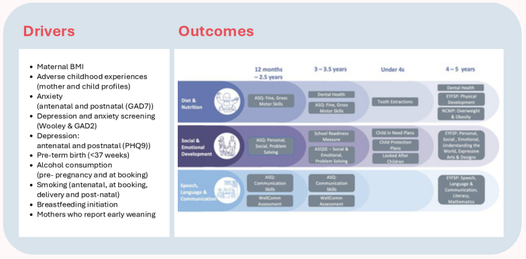
13,010 (2,394 Pregnant Women & 10,615 0-5 years) average per annum between 2015-2025

Support has been designed according to the principle of progressive universalism, ensuring a tiered portfolio of services. It is weighted towards universal services to enable prevention and early identification of need for early help or specialist support. The portfolio of work is then targeted to those living in the most challenging circumstances and co-designed to optimise progress towards the three outcome domains of physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development.

KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

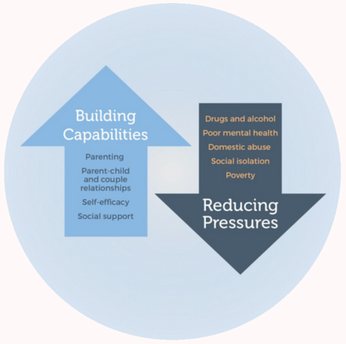
Better Start's ambition is to bring together senior leaders, commissioners and service providers alongside local communities to transform and build early years systems that give all children the best possible start to life, from conception to Reception.

- Better Start established a 'data warehouse' hosted by the local Hospital Trust to track outcomes and other data across multiple sectors. It uses NHS Numbers to link NHS, LA social care, education, Better Start and community data for anyone participating in Better Start services and events. Over time this will provide population level metrics at cohort and programme levels.



THEORY OF CHANGE

Blackpool Better Start is based on a simple Model of Change which focusses all energies relentlessly on 1) building parents' own capabilities; and 2) reducing the pressures families face. It breaks down the barriers between public services and communities through more effective and meaningful community involvement and more accessible delivery.
While the focus of work is systems change, Better Start also provide targeted delivery to fill gaps in the system, including Family Connectors and EY quality assurance.



POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Family involvement underpins Better Start at three levels:

1. empowering parents to build resilience
2. co-designing services to improve uptake and reduce inequalities
3. shaping strategy to ensure legitimacy and sustainability

Trust-building is key, especially for families with less confidence in services. Programmes like Community Connectors help remove barriers and embed inclusive, relational ways of working. Parents trust Community Connectors because they understand first-hand the challenges local families face and they are not represented by statutory services. Connectors ensure the right people are getting the right help, in the right way, at the right time for them, and in turn help local services better understand family challenges and contexts.

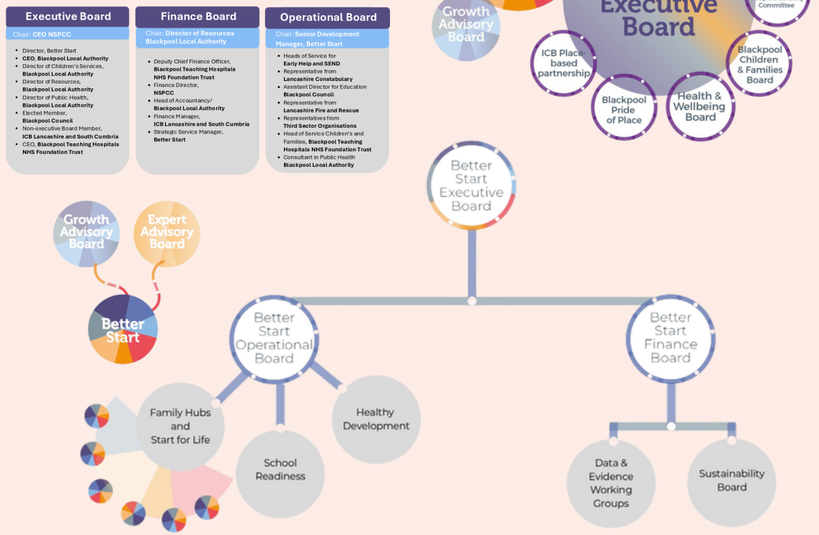
GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

Collaborative governance and systems change have always been a fundamental and a core part of Better Start's ambition. They've established formal multi-agency governance structures which provides a dedicated forum for collective leadership and decision-making. It keeps early childhood high on the agenda of senior leaders and enables collective accountability for delivery of the shared strategy. This breaks down silos, creates opportunities for more integrated working such as data sharing, joint commissioning, pooling of skills and resources, integrated models of delivery, and embedding innovation into routine service pathways

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance is underpinned by the values of meaningful and true co-production with families and the workforce. Integration of lived experience is an essential part of thinking and decision making at all levels.



BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

CORE TEAM STAFF:

- Strategic Staff: 21
- Delivery Arm: 10

ANNUAL BUDGET

- Management and Core Team Costs £1.5 Million
- Direct Delivery through Better Start and Partners £2 Million

SOURCES OF INCOME

The £3.5 Million is currently 70% funded through the National Lottery Community Fund.

The additional operational costs are met through NSPCC core funding and commissioned activity from other local authorities.

Over 10 years fewer children living in the most deprived wards under 5 have been taken into Local Authority Care, compared to those over 5. Continued rates of placements would have seen £6 Million additional cost.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Better Start operates both as a backbone and focused delivery organisation. It is the engine room of the cross-sector partnership, actively driving innovation, delivery, and system change. It brings together insight, evidence, and lived experience to fuel strategic direction, mobilise resources, and maintain momentum. This dual coordination and delivery role ensures that the vision for early years is not only held, but continually advanced through collaborative action and adaptive leadership.

The delivery work focuses on connectivity and quality gaps that are not being provided elsewhere, through:

1. Community Connectors to improve family access to services
2. EY Team focusing on quality improvement in EY settings



AMBITIONS TO SCALE

AMBITION

- To share the strategic model of systems building developed in Blackpool with other authorities in the UK.
- Develop a sustainable model which ensures continued work in Blackpool to test & learn whilst scaling up & sharing insight nationally.
- To generate more learning & insight through research.

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring Better Start continue to balance local innovation alongside national scale up work
- Scaling up impact in other local areas when funding is known to be limited
- Obtaining long term strategic investment from funders

MITIGATION

- Developing an associate model of consultants to support new areas of work.
- Undertaking policy influencing work with national government to increase funding allocation to strategic early years innovation & prevention.
- Work with academic partners to support applications for grants.

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

Better Start's work with Family Hubs in Blackpool is multi-layered and multifaceted. Better Start worked hand in hand with the local authority to bid for Family Hub investment for Blackpool in 2022 and co-wrote the initial delivery plan. This ensured it was built upon the foundations laid by Better Start, complemented any existing work and prioritised the voices of the community and the workforce.

Better Start and Family Hubs continue to lead work together; with joint commissioning arrangements, practice improvement work, shared delivery and joint design making. Representatives from both teams play a key part in each other's governance resulting in a protected space and strategy within the Early Years system.

place matters
Document produced by Place Matters November 2025