

# Summative evaluation of the LEAP programme:

## To what extent did LEAP improve the lives of children and families in the LEAP area?

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### Introduction

The summative evaluation of the LEAP programme, led by Dartington Service Design Lab (Dartington), aimed to understand the extent to which LEAP contributed to improving the lives of children and families in the LEAP area.

The evaluation focused on three research questions. These were selected because they were practical and of most interest to local and national policymakers. LEAP wanted these questions answered, and they have not been fully explored in existing research, which often reduces them to more manageable areas of focus (Skivington et al., 2021).

- 1 To what extent did LEAP's principles-led strategy help them to **build LEAP's foundations** in children's physical and social environments, for whom, under what circumstances and why?
- 2 To what extent have these foundations helped to **strengthen children's environments**, for whom, under what circumstances and why?
- 3 To what extent have these strengthened environments contributed to **improved outcomes** and reduced inequalities for children and families, for whom, under what circumstances and why?

### Methods

Between March 2023 and June 2024, the evaluation team at Dartington led a theory-driven evaluation that combined theory of change, contribution analysis, and realist evaluation. Using a theory-driven evaluation design allowed Dartington to develop and test assumptions about how the LEAP programme contributed to change and how the context LEAP operated in affected this change.

The evaluation is based on LEAP's programme Theory of Change which states that LEAP contributes to improved

outcomes for children by building the foundations necessary to strengthen the environments surrounding children.

Data sources used for the summative evaluation:

- + Qualitative data from 23 focus groups and 58 interviews (n = 121 participants).
- + Quantitative analysis of pre-post questionnaires and local datasets.
- + Review and synthesis of existing LEAP research.

### Findings

#### 1. LEAP improved outcomes for children

At 2.5-years-old, babies and children whose families engaged with relevant LEAP services were:

- + 40% more likely than those who did not engage to have reached expected levels of overall development;
- + 70% more likely to reach expected levels of communication development; and
- + 50% more likely to reach expected levels of personal-social development.

LEAP contributed by supporting children directly and contributed to improving parents and carers' lives, which

helped to build responsive relationships around children, nurture children's capabilities, and reduce their exposure to stress.

#### 2. LEAP helped to improve outcomes for parents and carers

Following engagement with LEAP services, parents' and carers':

- + mental health and wellbeing improved by 12%
- + parenting knowledge, skills, and behaviour improved by 5%.

Those living in the most economically deprived areas in the LEAP area experienced the greatest and most consistent improvement.

LEAP contributed by nurturing trust between parents and practitioners and community workers and strengthening connections in parents' networks.

### 3. LEAP influenced wider systems change, nationally and locally

LEAP contributed to change outside of the LEAP area and beyond the lifetime of the programme.

#### National systems change

The learning from LEAP, the National Children's Bureau (NCB) (which facilitated the LEAP programme), influenced initiatives such as the £301.75 million Family Hubs and Start for Life programme.

#### Local systems change

In Lambeth, LEAP:

- 1 Directly informed borough-wide approaches to parent and community participation;
- 2 Secured ongoing support for its parenting programmes and other services and initiatives;
- 3 Embedded evidence-based, family-centred practice among early years practitioners; and
- 4 Completed improvements on 11 Children's Centres, one o'clock clubs and early years hubs.



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## Conclusion

**LEAP's impact was shaped by wider influences.**

**These need to be considered when recommendations are taken forward.**

- 1 Support through LEAP could mitigate the impact of, but not eradicate, poverty.
- 2 Some parents and carers faced barriers accessing and interacting with LEAP. Specifically, racially minoritised groups, refugees, immigrant communities, children with special educational needs and disabilities and those experiencing poor quality or overcrowded housing.

- 3 Rising needs, fewer resources, and disruptions from COVID-19 limited collaborative, family-centred working for some practitioners, which partially limited the support they could offer parents and carers. However, these landscape shifts also created opportunities for other practitioners and community workers to connect in new and innovative ways.
- 4 LEAP's influence was amplified by the emerging consensus on the value of community participation. However, rising needs and public sector cuts limited the scope of LEAP's wider local and national partners to put some of their learning into practice. This meant that some of LEAP's services and initiatives drew to a close when the funding for LEAP ended.

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**References:** Skivington, K., Matthews, L., Simpson, S.A., Craig, P., Baird, J., Blazeby, J.M., Boyd, K.A., Craig, N., French, D.P., McIntosh, E., Petticrew, M., Rycroft-Malone, J., White, M. and Moore, L. (2021). A New Framework for Developing and Evaluating Complex Interventions: Update of Medical Research Council Guidance. *BMJ* [online] 374(1), n2061. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n2061>.

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