



# CHANGEMAKERS

Embedding evidence in  
local children's services

# ABOUT CHANGEMAKERS

Can embedding local evidence leadership nurture a culture of evidence-based commissioning, design, and delivery of support for children & families?

## 4 LOCAL EVIDENCE LEADERS



### LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- City of York Council
- Merton Council
- Stockport Borough Council
- Wirral Council

## 3 EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- Family Foundations (York & Stockport)
- Triple P Resilience (York & Merton)
- Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) (Wirral)

## OVER 2 YEARS

**Year 1**  
Set-up

**Year 2**  
Roll-out & evaluation

## IMPLEMENTATION & PROCESS EVALUATION (IPE)

Mixed-methods (using quantitative & qualitative data and methods) study informed by Proctor et al.'s (2011) Implementation Outcomes Framework

**Cordis** Bright

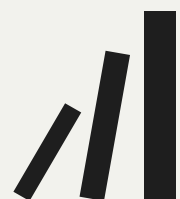
# NAVIGATING THIS REPORT

This summary report starts by outlining the broader conclusions from the evaluation of Changemakers:

- Foreword by Donna Molloy OBE – Foundations Deputy Chief Executive
- Summary of the main findings.

Explore the summary evaluation findings in more detail across four themes:

1. Is Changemakers feasible to implement? (Findings on **programme implementation**)
2. What did local stakeholders think about the impacts of Changemakers? (Findings on **perceived impacts**)
3. What did the implementation of Changemakers look like across the four different partner local authorities? (Findings on **programme differentiation**)
4. Does Changemakers work as intended? (Findings on **programme theory validation**).



# FOREWORD

**Donna Molloy OBE, Deputy Chief Executive**

Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families

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We are excited to be publishing the findings of our Changemakers evaluation concluding two years of delivery. This briefing provides senior local authority leaders and national policy makers with an insight into the findings and what these mean for using evidence in children's services to secure lasting change for children and families.

It is well established that evidence does not move into practice or commissioning automatically. Active support for the use and application of evidence within local systems is crucial. Launched in April 2024, Changemakers had the ambitious aim of finding out whether funding and supporting dedicated 'evidence leadership' can help local areas overcome some of the common and well-known barriers to implementation and embedding evidence-informed approaches within complex systems.

More than two years later, these evaluation findings show that the Local Evidence Leader (LEL) role we invested in as part of the Changemakers programme can provide the coordination, relationship-building, and problem-solving capacity needed to translate evidence into practice across different local authorities. We have also found that the model can improve confidence in using evidence and help local authorities navigate the challenges of implementation. This learning feels timely as local leaders – who are best placed to design integrated public services to respond to the needs of their local populations – are being given more powers to shape services and allocate resources locally.

However, we know that to use evidence to inform decision-making, local systems need dedicated capacity, skills, and support to translate evidence into action and improve local outcomes. The Changemakers evaluation shows us that investing in dedicated capacity, leadership, and infrastructure is crucial to the successful

implementation of effective local services for children and families. This learning is a vital part of the conversation on what is needed for effective local devolution.

The findings also reinforce the importance of viewing implementation holistically as a systems process, highlighting the value of the Changemakers programme model, which combines implementation leadership, evidence mobilisation, and practical implementation support.

As local authorities grapple with shifts and changes to delivery and decision-making, Changemakers provides an evaluated-on-the-ground model that can help enhance factors that are key to delivering local services that work for children and families. The evaluation of Changemakers indicates that investing in dedicated evidence leadership capacity and support in local areas can facilitate greater confidence to implement evidence-based interventions (EBIs), strengthen evidence-informed practice, and improve local implementation capability.

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Changemakers was jointly funded by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and the Department for Education (DfE), as part of the National Family Hubs programme.

Read the full evaluation report on the Foundations website: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/changemakers-implementation-and-process-evaluation-full-report.pdf>

# SUMMARY OF THE MAIN EVALUATION FINDINGS

Changemakers was delivered largely as intended, and local authority stakeholders saw the programme as the key driver of evidence-informed implementation activities. Overall, the findings provide broad support for the Changemakers model and theory of change.

**1** The Changemakers model was feasible to implement across diverse local areas. All four local areas implemented the core components of the programme, including the Local Evidence Leader (LEL) role, selected evidence-based interventions (EBIs), Practice Development Adviser (PDA) support and shared learning activities.

**2** The LEL role was the primary mechanism through which the programme generated value. Stakeholders consistently described the role as providing dedicated implementation leadership, coordination, relationship building, and problem-solving capacity that would not otherwise have been available

## MORE ABOUT THE MAIN EVALUATION FINDINGS

Across all four Changemakers local areas, the programme was implemented largely as intended and stakeholders consistently identified the LEL role as the central mechanism for:

- implementation support
- stakeholder engagement
- relationship building
- evidence translation.

The programme addressed a common need within local systems for dedicated capacity to support implementation of EBIs, navigate implementation challenges, and bridge the gap between evidence, strategic decision-making, and operational delivery.

**Changemakers strengthened local authorities' implementation processes and capability to deliver the selected evidence-based interventions.**

The strongest evidence relates to the programme's contribution to implementation processes and local implementation capability for the selected EBIs

3

The programme strengthened implementation capability and evidence-informed practice. The strongest evidence of impact relates to improved implementation processes, stakeholder engagement and partnership development for the EBIs included in the programme

4

Implementation support was critical to successful delivery. Support from Foundations, PDAs and EBI providers played a more important role in supporting implementation than originally reflected within the programme theory of change

5

Local context strongly influenced implementation experiences and outcomes. Leadership support, workforce capacity, organisational readiness, partnership infrastructure and intervention fit all shaped how the programme was implemented and the extent to which wider ambitions were realised

included in the programme. Stakeholders consistently perceived the LEL role as improving the acceptability, feasibility, and quality of EBI implementation by providing dedicated implementation leadership, coordination, and problem-solving capacity. The programme appears to have strengthened local stakeholders' ability to critically assess, adapt, and implement the EBIs and supported more reflective and evidence-informed approaches to implementation and decision-making.

### **Changemakers shows promise in creating the conditions that support improved evidence use beyond the selected evidence-based interventions.**

There was also evidence of the programme's promise in contributing to shifts in conditions that support improved evidence use activities beyond implementing the EBIs included in the Changemakers programme. These shifts took two main forms. First, the activities undertaken by the LEL role increased stakeholders' confidence and capability to engage critically with evidence and their interest in using evidence, implementation tools, and critical appraisal approaches in other areas of service development and reform activity. Second, the LEL strengthened infrastructure for evidence-informed decision-making by supporting the development of stronger relationships, networks and structures.

Such shifts were mainly contained to stakeholders and partnerships closely involved with the selected EBI implementation and governance, rather than stakeholders across the wider system. As yet, there is limited evidence that these shifts have contributed to the adoption or increased efficacy of evidence-based practice outside of the selected EBIs. However, in supporting these shifts Changemakers has strengthened the foundations for future evidence-informed decision-making and practice amongst stakeholders involved with the programme.

### **Equality, diversity, inclusion and equity (EDIE) may work best at intervention level, rather than as a responsibility of local area implementation.**

While EDIE considerations were incorporated into implementation activity across local areas, there was

**6** Flexibility and local adaptation were strengths of the programme model and should be further emphasised in any future theory of change. There was little evidence that a more standardised implementation approach would have produced better outcomes across all local areas

**7** The programme generated stronger evidence of impact on EBI implementation capability than on wider systems change. There was evidence of the programme's promise in contributing to shifts in conditions to support broader improvements in evidence-based decision-making. At this stage, there is limited evidence that this has contributed to the adoption or increased efficacy of evidence-based practice outside of the selected EBIs

limited evidence that the programme substantially increased reach among underserved populations during the evaluation period. This appears to reflect both the relatively short implementation period and wider challenges relating to EBI fit, recruitment pathways, and engagement with target populations. These findings indicate that EDIE considerations need to be embedded within EBI selection, design and provider support from the outset rather than being treated primarily as a local implementation responsibility.

**Flexibility and local adaptation are strengths of Changemakers' programme model. A more standardised approach would have been unlikely to produce better outcomes across all local areas.**

Implementation experiences and perceived outcomes were strongly influenced by local context. Leadership support, workforce capacity, organisational readiness, partnership infrastructure and EBI fit all shaped how the programme was implemented and the extent to which wider ambitions relating to evidence use and systems change were realised. Different EBIs generated different implementation challenges and required different implementation strategies, while the credibility, relationships and influence of individual LELs emerged as important factors shaping implementation success. These findings suggest that flexibility and local adaptation were strengths of the programme model and that a more standardised approach would have been unlikely to produce better outcomes across all local areas.

**There were mechanisms that proved more critical to the successful implementation of Changemakers than originally thought.**

The evaluation also identified several mechanisms that appear to have been more important than originally reflected within the programme theory of change. In particular, implementation support provided by Foundations, PDAs and EBI providers emerged as a critical enabling mechanism.

**8** Evidence that the programme increased reach among underserved populations was limited. Although EDIE considerations informed implementation activity across local areas, structural barriers relating to intervention fit, recruitment pathways and engagement with target populations constrained progress

**9** The programme's long-term legacy is likely to depend on embedding implementation capability within local systems. Sustainability appears more likely to be achieved through strengthened relationships, networks, governance structures and evidence-informed ways of working than through continuation of dedicated LEL posts alone

**10** The programme theory of change was broadly validated but would benefit from refinement. Future iterations should place greater emphasis on external and internal implementation support, relationship-building, local area readiness and system capacity as factors influencing implementation success.

Relationship-building, trust, local credibility, organisational readiness and workforce capacity also played a more significant role in shaping implementation experiences and outcomes than originally anticipated. These findings suggest that future iterations of the theory of change should place greater emphasis on these mechanisms and implementation conditions.

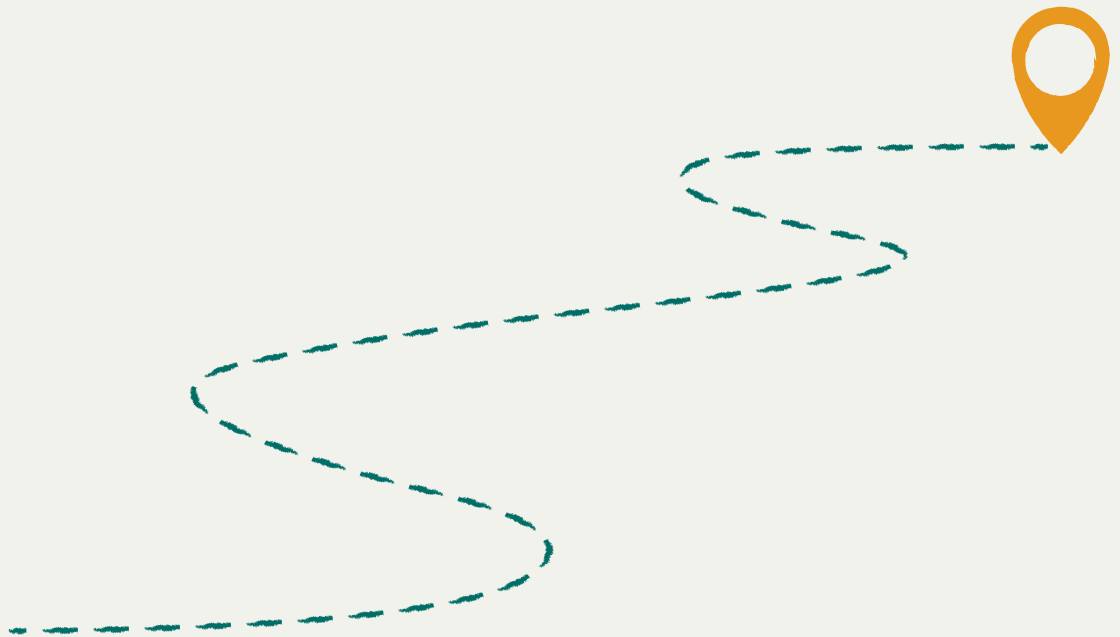
**Embedding implementation knowledge, relationships, networks, and evidence-informed ways of working within local systems is crucial for sustaining the benefits of Changemakers.**

Finally, the findings suggest that sustainability is likely to depend less on continuation of dedicated LEL posts and more on the extent to which implementation knowledge, relationships, networks and evidence-informed ways of working become embedded within local systems. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire to sustain the benefits generated through Changemakers, but there was uncertainty regarding how implementation leadership and evidence-use functions would be maintained once dedicated funding ended.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Changemakers generated its greatest value through strengthening the conditions required for successful EBI implementation and also demonstrated the potential to catalyse longer-term shifts in system conditions to support evidence-informed decision-making and practice. Future programmes' longer-term impact in this catalysing role would likely be greater if local areas can sustain dedicated roles and resource for evidence leadership and implementation beyond the programme funding period, or if the programme can maximise capability transfer and embedded shifts in wider system conditions during its lifetime.

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# IS CHANGEMAKERS FEASIBLE TO IMPLEMENT?



## This section covers the evaluation findings on programme implementation.

The Changemakers model proved feasible to implement across all four participating local areas and the core components of the programme were delivered, including appointment of Local Evidence Leaders (LELs), development of local theories of change, implementation of selected evidence-based interventions (EBIs), support from Foundations' Practice Development Advisers (PDAs) and participation in programme-wide learning activities. Stakeholders consistently described the LEL role as the central mechanism through which implementation was coordinated and supported.

The implementation of Changemakers by the four partner local authorities was characterised by a balance between fidelity and flexibility. Core programme functions and intended mechanisms were delivered consistently across the local authorities, while allowing adaptation of implementation approaches to reflect local needs, priorities and challenges. Fidelity was achieved primarily through consistency in purpose and function rather than through standardisation of delivery approaches. This was evident in the implementation of the LEL role, PDA support, and the selected EBIs. Across all four of the local authorities, implementation of the selected EBIs was the primary focus of the LEL role. While some local areas – particularly Merton and York – also pursued broader evidence leadership and capacity-building activities, these were less consistently evident across the programme and were more dependent on the extent to which this was a priority for both the local LEL and decisionmakers, as well as EBI implementation demands. EDIE ambitions were similarly less consistently operationalised than EBI implementation support activities.

Stakeholders consistently viewed the programme as acceptable and valuable. The LEL role was widely perceived as addressing a gap in implementation leadership and coordination capacity.

Overall, the evidence suggests that effective implementation of the role and programme depended on several factors. These included senior leadership support, organisational readiness and an LEL with sufficient credibility, relationships and system knowledge to bridge evidence, strategic priorities and frontline delivery. Alongside organisational readiness, other factors which constrained effective implementation included workforce pressures and perceptions of the selected EBIs.

Across all four local areas, stakeholders generally described the LEL role becoming increasingly integrated within local implementation systems over time. Integration was generally strongest within systems directly involved in implementation of the selected EBIs and less evident in relation to wider ambitions relating to organisational culture change and evidence use.

Relationship-building was the most important mechanism for promoting integration, which was strongest where Changemakers aligned with existing local priorities, governance arrangements and ambitions relating to evidence-informed practice.

Implementation of the Changemakers programme required a substantial but relatively consistent investment in local workforce capacity. Differences in overall expenditure in local areas were driven primarily by non-staffing costs rather than variation in staffing investment. Stakeholders considering implementation of a comparable model in future would need to account for both local implementation costs and any additional centrally funded infrastructure, training or programme support.

While the dedicated LEL role is largely not being sustained beyond Changemakers, its expertise and ways of working are influencing subsequent implementation activity within local systems. However, stakeholders questioned whether momentum on increasing evidence-based decision-making and practice can be maintained without dedicated implementation capacity.

Stakeholders generally supported the LEL model and suggested refinements rather than fundamental changes. Future similar programmes may benefit from greater clarity regarding: the purpose and expectations of the LEL role; anticipating more intensive external and local implementation support; clearer guidance regarding fidelity and adaptation; and greater attention to sustainability and capability transfer may help embed learning beyond the programme period.

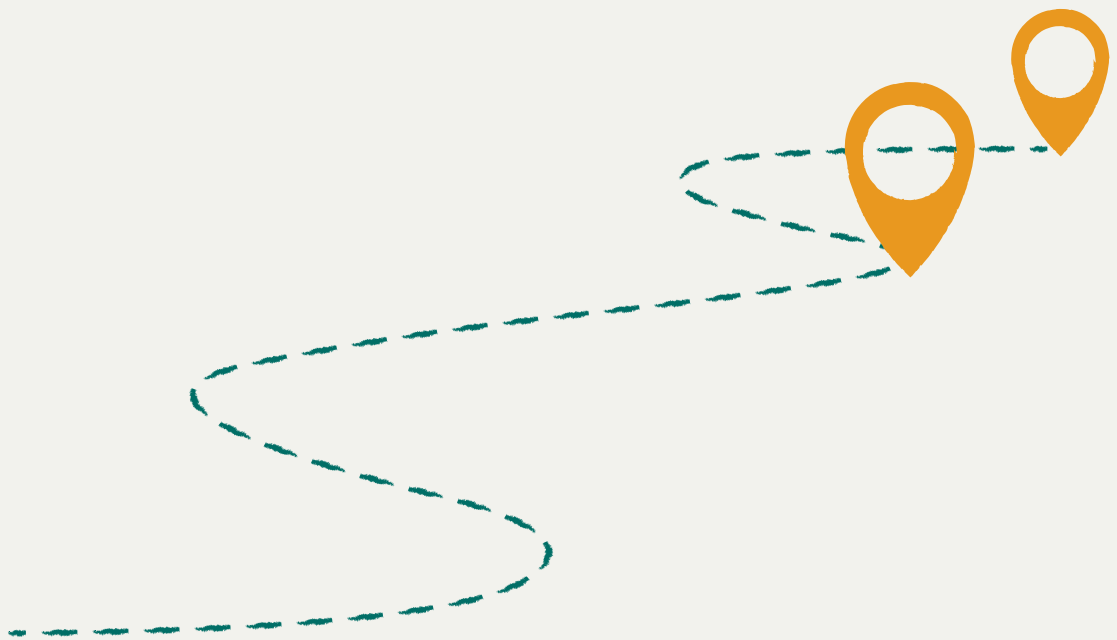


Through Changemakers, one of the participating local authorities reinstated its Parenting Steering Group to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of evidence-based tools and interventions to enhance parenting support across their wider partnership. This governance group meets twice a month to oversee the delivery of parenting interventions, monitors referrals, uptake and outcomes, and drives progress forward through translating these into key actions. Alongside this, the local authority also has regular communication with all intervention providers for the programmes which they deliver. This is further complemented by strong mechanisms for monitoring fidelity and a data collection system which allows them to track delivery and child outcomes.

This infrastructure is now also being used to deliver evidence-based commissioning, design, and delivery linked to service transformation as part of Best Start in Life and the Families First Partnership.

For more detail, read the full evaluation report on the Foundations website: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/changemakers-implementation-and-process-evaluation-full-report.pdf>

# WHAT DID LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS THINK ABOUT THE IMPACT OF CHANGEMAKERS?



## This section summarises the evaluation findings on perceived impacts.

The findings on perceived impact suggest that Changemakers generated value in local areas primarily through improving the conditions for successful implementation of the evidence-based interventions (EBIs) delivered within the programme. The main mechanism for doing so was the dedicated implementation leadership and coordination capacity provided by the Local Evidence Leader (LEL) role. This helped to increase the acceptability of the selected EBI(s) to local stakeholders. It also made EBI implementation more feasible, resulting in quicker and more effective implementation due to dedicated LEL capacity focusing on activities required to support implementation – such as stakeholder engagement, coordination across different services and layers of the system, and problem-solving around implementation challenges.

The strengthened implementation capability generated by the LEL role promoted the adoption and appropriate use of the selected EBIs beyond what would have been likely to happen without the LEL role in place. LELs also sought to increase the reach of the selected EBIs among underserved populations. However, these efforts did not consistently translate into substantial or sustained participation among underserved groups during the programme period, suggesting that the Changemakers model or implementation might need to be revised to maximise the reach of the EBI to the most underserved populations.

There was also evidence of the programme's promise in contributing to shifts in conditions to support improved evidence use beyond the EBIs included in the Changemakers programme. These shifts took two main forms. First, the activities



One of the Changemakers local authorities overcame challenges to recruiting parents to the selected evidence-based intervention by developing a parent champion model and using community voices to help recruit Parent Group Leads (PGLs) who deliver the intervention.

Existing strong relationships across voluntary and community partners also enabled them to extend this parenting support to groups of parents they were unable to reach before. A large proportion of the PGLs are parents of children with neurodiversity, which has been positive in recruiting and supporting families with children who have similar needs.

The local authority also saw an increase in the number of dads and male caregivers, meaning that they have PGLs who can support both parents when needed. This also enriches gender diversity in upcoming PGL cohorts.

undertaken by the LEL role increased stakeholders' confidence and capability to engage critically with evidence and their interest in using evidence, implementation tools and critical appraisal approaches in other areas of service development and reform activity. Second, the LEL strengthened infrastructure for evidence-informed decision-making by supporting the development of stronger relationships, networks and structures.

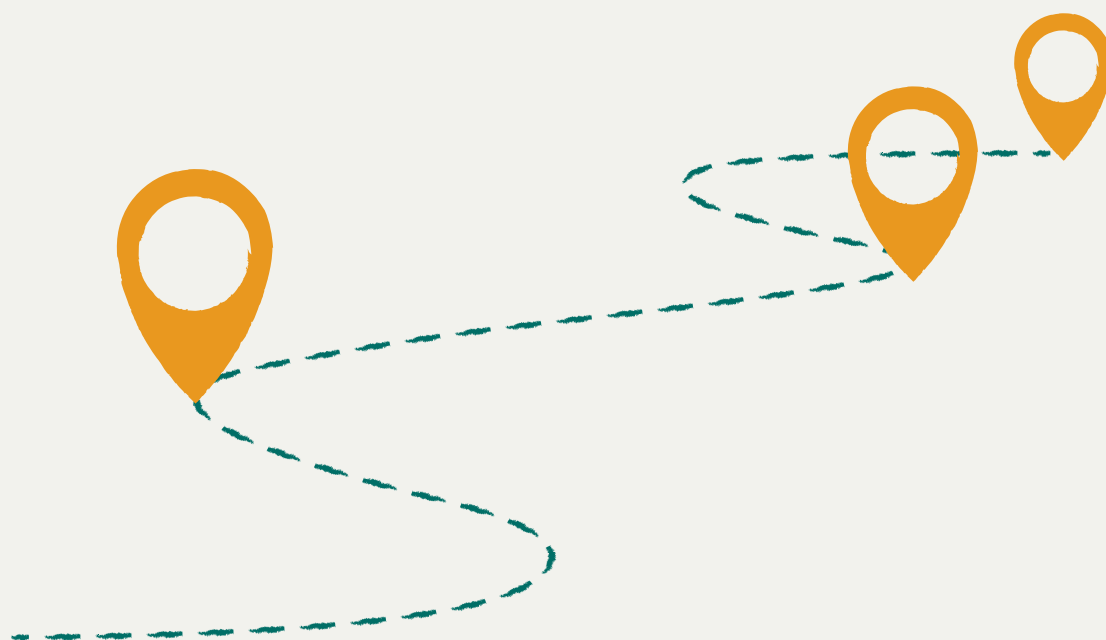
Such shifts were most evident among stakeholders and partnerships closely involved in implementation and governance of the selected EBIs, although some local areas also demonstrated specific instances of broader evidence leadership activity relating to organisational learning, research partnerships and evidence-informed decision-making. While these wider shifts were not consistently evident across all four local areas, Changemakers has strengthened the foundations for future evidence-informed decision-making and practice among stakeholders involved with the programme.

The EBIs introduced under Changemakers will continue to be delivered in some local areas, suggesting that the programme can successfully catalyse the sustained adoption of specific evidence-based approaches.

Local stakeholders wish to maintain the perceived impacts of the Changemakers programme on local stakeholders and system conditions. They have sought out ways to support sustainment where possible. However, the perceived impact and progress made during Changemakers was heavily linked to the capacity provided by the LEL role. Therefore, there is a risk that progress in engagement and use of evidence is not sustained without further dedicated resource, leadership and coordination capacity.

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# WHAT DID THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGEMAKERS LOOK LIKE ACROSS THE FOUR DIFFERENT PARTNER LOCAL AUTHORITIES?



## This summarises the evaluation findings on **programme differentiation**.

Changemakers addressed a common gap between evidence, strategy and implementation in all four local areas. All areas benefitted from having dedicated capacity in the form of the Local Evidence Leader (LEL) role and directed this towards evidence leadership and implementation support to create the conditions for the successful implementation of the evidence-based interventions (EBIs). Some local areas also focused capacity on shifting system conditions to promote increased valuing and use of evidence outside of the selected EBI(s).

Local context and priorities influenced the extent to which LELs acted as evidence leaders beyond supporting selected EBI implementation, and the degree to which local areas were able to benefit from the programme. Local factors which increased programme implementation efficacy and perceived impact included leadership support, workforce capacity, organisational culture, and existing evidence-use infrastructure.

As well as local contextual factors, the implementation and perceived impact of the LEL role was affected by the post-holder's position in the system and their level of influence with core stakeholders whose engagement was important to the EBI and/or wider shifts in system conditions.

This suggests that decisions about the appropriateness and design of future similar programmes should consider local need, local readiness for implementation and evidence-informed change, and ways to maximise the influence of the LEL role within the local system.

LELs adapted their implementation strategies to different EBIs and local contexts. Since different EBIs were delivered in different local areas, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about specific strategies that might be needed for different EBIs or local characteristics.



In this local authority, the Local Evidence Leader delivered a cross-team workshop for team leaders from Midwifery, Family Hubs, and strategic leads from Best Start in Life partner agencies. This session aimed to enhance and sustain a climate of evidence use and evidence leadership after the end of the Changemakers programme by bringing colleagues together to reflect on their skills and surface their strengths. Participants found the session provided a solid starting point for change management related to the national plan to transform children's services. This work to strengthen and maintain the culture of evidence use continued across levels and teams in the local area, with the Local Evidence Leader being invited to hold the session with senior leaders, and to develop a session for practitioner teams.

However, future similar programmes should anticipate tailoring of the implementation approach to account for the intersection of EBI implementation requirements and the strengths and challenges within the implementation conditions in local areas.

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# DOES CHANGEMAKERS WORK AS INTENDED?



## This section summarises the evaluation findings on programme theory validation.

The evaluation findings provide broad support for Changemakers' theory of change. Across all four local areas, evidence suggests that the core programme logic operated largely as intended. Stakeholders consistently described the Local Evidence Leader (LEL) role as acting as a bridge between evidence, implementation and strategic decision-making, supporting implementation of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) while also helping local systems engage more critically with evidence and evidence-informed practice.

The strongest evidence supports the theory that dedicated implementation leadership can improve the acceptability, feasibility, and quality of EBI implementation by providing protected capacity for relationship-building, stakeholder engagement, problem-solving, and coordination. There is also evidence that Changemakers contributed to stronger partnerships, increased engagement with evidence, and more reflective approaches to implementation and decision-making, chiefly amongst those stakeholders closest to EBI governance and implementation.

The programme theory would benefit from refinement to better reflect the implementation conditions, contextual factors and mechanisms that shaped delivery in practice. Implementation support provided by Foundations' Practice Development Advisers (PDAs), support from EBI providers and relationship-building by LELs were more important mechanisms than anticipated. Local area readiness and system capacity also heavily influenced implementation approaches and success.



In working to understand the enablers and barriers to evidence use with local decision making, this Changemakers local authority identified the need to develop a framework to support senior leaders in decision-making through building leadership capacity and capability around evidence use. They collaborated with Foundations and the other Changemakers local authorities to adapt and test existing implementation guidance originally developed for educational settings. The implementation tool was designed to support local leaders to consider how different types of evidence can be integrated when commissioning, designing and delivering services and interventions in children's services. This work has resulted in a beta version of an Implementation Framework on evidence use in children's services, which is now being further tested and refined by Foundations and the Local Evidence Leader under the [Foundations' Evidence into Practice initiative](#).



Some longer-term ambitions within the theory of change remain emergent. Although dedicated evidence leadership increased the visibility and salience of evidence within local systems, there was less evidence that this had yet translated into widespread shifts in system conditions to support evidence-based decision-making or evidence into practice. Similarly, while equality, diversity, inclusion and equity (EDIE) considerations informed implementation activity in several local areas, there was limited evidence that the programme substantially increased reach among underserved populations.

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