

## Project Summary

### Impact and Implementation Evaluation of *My Baby's Brain*, *Phase Two*

Commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council Childhood Support Services (2012-2014),  
with the University of Warwick Medical School

#### Policy and practice background

Since 2011, Hertfordshire County Council Childhood Support Services, working with Kate Cairns Associates (KCA), have been developing an innovative evidence-informed project aimed at local health and social care practitioners working with parents in the community. *My Baby's Brain* is a low intensity parenting support approach that provides one days' training and supporting materials for practitioners to use when working with parents, in order to assist them to talk with parents about principles of strong infant-carer attachment and about everyday strategies for encouraging a healthy environment for brain development in very young babies. Based on KCA's *Five to Thrive* model, which in turn draws on emerging evidence from neuroscience showing that how carers behave with babies in the very first years of life sets the foundations for healthy future growth and development, *My Baby's Brain* sets out a simple 'five a day' message that encourages parents to talk, respond, cuddle, play and relax with their baby in ways likely to lead to stronger attachment and healthy stimulation for the baby's developing brain. After a successful pilot phase, Hertfordshire County Council scaled up the project in Phase Two, with the aim of training over 400 local health visitors, Children's Centre workers and other health, social care and education staff in multi-agency groups, from October 2012 to March 2013.

#### Background to the project

The Colebrooke Centre was commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council to evaluate Phase Two of the project in October 2012, working in collaboration with Warwick Medical School at the University of Warwick. The evaluation focused on the impact the training has had on the trained practitioners, as well as on the implementation of the project. In respect of impact, we tested whether there were improvements in practitioners'

knowledge of the importance of secure attachment between infants and carers, underpinned by understanding of how baby's brains develop during the first few months and years of life. We measured whether, at time points immediately before, after, and two to three months after the training, practitioners reported increased confidence in knowing how to convey this information and the 'five to thrive' messages to parents. We also explored whether and how they have used the 'five to thrive' concept in their daily practice when working with parents and babies, and if and how they shared the learning with colleagues. The implementation element of the evaluation focused on the key 'drivers' of implementation for practitioners from different agencies, using implementation science theory and frameworks, and provided recommendations for future strategic and operational planning.

## **Project design**

The research project was designed around four key modules. These included a survey of trained practitioners, completed immediately before and immediately after the day's training, and a follow-up of the same practitioners two to three months later to establish if any changes were sustained over the medium term. A simple counterfactual (comparative) element was provided by a sample of wait-listed practitioners. Qualitative depth interviews with trained practitioners allowed us to unpack how staff responded to the training and how they implemented the learning in practice, and qualitative interviews or group discussions with parents in the community contributed insights into how the messages may be passed on in contacts between staff and parents. Implementation factors, both in terms of the *fit* with local agencies' strategic priorities and the *readiness* of the operational contexts in which they work, were explored in depth interviews with staff in different roles across a range of agencies, and an analysis of costs to the council and to participating agencies was prepared.

## **Publications and outputs**

The main output was a report and a detailed executive summary to Hertfordshire County Council published in February 2014. Recommendations for further or future development formed an important part of these outputs. Download the executive summary [here](#) and the final report [here](#) or at <https://www.hertsdirect.org/mybabysbrainevaluation>

## **Contact**

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See also: <http://www.hertsdirect.org/services/edlearn/css/mbb/> and <http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk/>

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