

# VIOLENCE REDUCTION

## Good Practice Case Studies

LB Waltham Forest  
Botvin Essential  
Lifeskills Programme

*By taking a joined-up public health approach to the prevention of a range of risk-taking behaviours, like smoking, drinking or taking drugs, Waltham Forest's ambitious Lifeskills Programme aims to boost self-belief and resilience at primary age that can significantly reduce the risk of young people engaging in anti-social behaviours in later life.*



### The Challenge

The use of risk-taking behaviours such as smoking, drugs, alcohol and unsafe sex contribute to social problems, morbidity and mortality. If unchecked, these behaviours can develop into habits that impact young people's physical and mental health and well-being.

Preventing poor choices in relation to health behaviours (such as smoking or misusing alcohol) and building children's self-belief and resilience through universal programmes has been shown to be cost-effective.

A public health approach is the key to the prevention of risk-taking behaviours. There is a significant overlap between young people who drink regularly, smoke and/or take illegal drugs, and the amount of young people who are involved in anti-social behaviour and crime. A Department for Education survey (2011) of 16-year-olds in England found that almost half (47 per cent) of those involved in criminal activity either drank alcohol on most days, or smoked at least six cigarettes per week and had tried cannabis, compared to 13 per cent of the law-abiding majority.

A 2016 research collaboration between LB Waltham Forest and Dartington Social Research Unit confirmed Waltham Forest Council's commitment to building skills, relationships and social capital as vital to improving outcomes. As a result of this, a priority of the council was to deliver population-level, evidence-based prevention programmes, such as Botvin LifeSkills.

### Partners involved

LB Waltham Forest

Dartington Social  
Research Unit

Barnardo's NI

30 primary schools  
across the borough

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### Proposed solution

An early intervention and prevention programme delivered in 25 targeted primary schools across the borough for all pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6. The programme is aimed at supporting children's emotional health and wellbeing and developing their resilience skills, ultimately preventing children from engaging in risk-taking behaviour across a number of domains.

### Approach

Barnardo's NI and Waltham Forest entered into a three year partnership in 2018 that involved the roll out of Botvin LifeSkills in primary schools across the borough. More than 270 year 4, year 5 and year 6 teachers will be trained and supported through their delivery of the programme. This aims to reach over 8,000 children completing the programme.

Barnardo's NI holds the UK licence for Botvin LifeSkills and is highly experienced in their implementation of the programme.

Barnardo's are committed to high quality training and support to ensure fidelity to the programme. Following good implementation practice, the programme is introduced in the following ways:

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<b>Exploration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about Botvin LifeSkills shared with Primary School Head teachers across the borough by Early Help team.</li> <li>Sharing of programme information to school leaders.</li> <li>Schools commit to 3 years of the programme.</li> </ul>
<b>Installation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 day of full training for teachers</li> <li>Distribution of materials</li> <li>Programme timetabling</li> </ul>
<b>Initial Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-Questionnaire</li> <li>Teachers begin delivery of programme</li> <li>Post-Questionnaire</li> <li>One hour session per week for 9 weeks</li> </ul>
<b>Full Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LifeSkills embedded within Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6</li> <li>Results and analysis per class and per school</li> <li>Support provided to teachers to maintain programme fidelity</li> </ul>



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### Desired Outcomes

LifeSkills has consistently shown to reduce tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use. Robust evaluations which have been undertaken include multiple Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) as well as other types of evaluation methodologies. More than 40 years of research have provided evidence of LifeSkills effectiveness under different conditions, with different providers and with different populations and age groups. The programme is effective with different groups of children and young people and the reductions in risk taking behaviours are long lasting.

Studies show that LifeSkills cuts tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use by up to 75 per cent and polydrug use by up to 66 per cent; is effective when taught by teachers, youth workers or health professionals; reduces young people's use of psychoactive substances and other unhealthy behaviour; increases the likelihood that children and young people will attend school regularly and increase their attainment; empowers young people and improve core resiliencies that help them to engage in education; and improves young people's health and well-being by reducing substance misuse, risk taking behaviours (including risky sexual behaviour), improved decision making and coping strategies.

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### Current picture

Between January 2019 and July 2019, 1,845 children completed Level one of the programme across 25 schools.

Between September 2019 and July 2020, 2833 children participated in Level one and two of the programme across 25 schools, although not all pupils completed the programme due to the impact of Coronavirus.

All training for teachers has now taken place for the academic year September 2020- July 2021. We anticipate that once schools are back, pupils in Year 4, 5 and 6 across 24 primary schools in the borough will complete the Essential LifeSkills programme.



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### Learning

Although the programme is free to all schools participating (including teacher training, resources, ongoing technical assistance and impact reports), school budgets leave little room for additional costs. Waltham Forest do report that some schools have been unable to participate in the programme due to the cost of covering staff who are out on training. This is a particular problem in larger schools where turnover of staff can be high.

Of 26 schools who initially signed up in 2018, we are still working with 24 schools. One school did not complete the first year, due to a key staff member (responsible for the programme) leaving. The second school did not complete Year 2 of the programme due to Coronavirus and have chosen to not participate in the third year.

As with many programmes, there is patchy parental involvement across the borough. In some schools, parental involvement has been extremely high, but in others schools have had no parents attending the offered sessions.

A key strength of the programme has been the strong relationships between Barnardo's, Waltham Forest Council and the schools. This has resulted in sharing of learning between agencies. The majority of schools who initially signed up in 2018 are still participating in the programme and the council have had requests from other schools who wanted to join mid-way through.

As with many projects and services, delivery of Botvin LifeSkills has been affected by Covid-19 and the schools closing. This impacted on delivery and completion of the programme, although there have been significant innovations in this. Barnardo's provided all participating schools with additional support and resources to share with pupils and parents around emotional health and wellbeing. Teacher training has been adapted to go online, and parent information sessions are now offered via video. This flexibility on all sides has been a strength of the partnership.

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### Next steps

- There will be a full evaluation of the project against the desired outcomes once all pupils have completed the programme this academic year.
- The learning from the Botvin LifeSkills programme will be shared across Children's Services.
- Results from the Botvin LifeSkills programme will be shared with individual schools to allow them to develop and identify children in particular need.
- Disseminating the learning from schools about the importance of developing resilience within their school community.
- The potential for development of a parent programme for parents who are especially worried about their children's mental health and wellbeing.

### Contact

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Safety Team

*This is one of a series of case studies submitted by London boroughs and collated by London Councils to share experience and learning across the capital. Publication date: May 2021*