

2024 Evaluation of the DAaRT Programme

Teacher Interview Results



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1. Summary

This report provides the findings of interviews conducted with 7 teachers participating in the DAaRT programme. The interviews were conducted in Autumn 2024 and were part of a broader exploration of the programme's impact on schools, teachers, parents, and pupils. The interviews aimed to explore the difference that DAaRT had made to interviewees, both as teachers and to their schools. Teachers reported positive benefits for them as professionals and for their schools:

- DAaRT enables schools to tackle an issue they would otherwise find difficult to address in a teaching context.
- Teachers felt that DAaRT officers had greater experiences and authority than they had and that pupils responded better to this independent role model.
- Teachers felt that the programme offered schools a structure to talk more meaningfully about the issue of substance use.
- DAaRT sessions were seen as a safe space for pupils to explore any issues they were concerned with, and using a DAaRT officer rather than a teacher to deliver the sessions created better pupil engagement with the programme.
- Schools valued the presence of DAaRT to counter the external influences pupils are subject to – both through social media and the influence of older young people in the community.
- DAaRT adds value to teaching elsewhere in the curriculum – especially in science, where teachers felt that DAaRT resources allowed a deeper

(and better) conversation about the issue of substance use and its impact on the body.

- Teachers felt that pupils needed to be exposed to DAaRT early in the school year, both to allow pupils to reflect on the learning throughout the year and to expose them to the issues before they start going through puberty, as this was felt to work against the programme due to changing attitudes to authority.
- The graduation ceremony was felt to be of value as a way of embedding learning – especially for pupils who are less willing to participate in classroom discussions.

2. About the DAaRT Programme

DAaRT (Drug Awareness and Resilience Training) is an 11-week interactive programme delivered to years 5 and 6 in schools through a partnership with Life Skills Education, the programme developer. Through DAaRT, the organisation delivers school-based programmes that build vital social skills and empower young people to make informed and confident choices in response to risky behaviours. Since its inception in 1995, the primary programme has been delivered to over 500,000 young people. DAaRT enhances the PSHE curriculum through school partnerships, ensuring pupils can access an evidence-led, value-for-money product. The programme equips young people with the knowledge and skills they can use as they transition to secondary school and beyond.

DAaRT sessions address a range of legal and illegal substance use, including alcohol and medicines. For the purposes of this report, the general term

‘substance use’ is used to include both legal and proscribed substance use in a neutral way that avoids the terms ‘illegal’ or ‘misuse’.

3. What we did (Methodology)

The DAaRT programme is delivered to pupils with the involvement of teachers and parents. Separate evaluation methodologies were used to capture the programme's impact on each group. A quantitative approach was adopted for pupils and parents, with both offered a pre- and post-programme survey to complete. The teachers' experiences with the programme were explored through qualitative interviews. Each methodology was adopted in order to learn specific things about the difference the programme has for each group. Pupil evaluation was designed to measure the programme's effectiveness against six measures (pupil **confidence**; **relationships**; **wellbeing**; **self-efficacy**; **resilience**; and **knowledge & understanding**). The parent survey was used to collect observational data on the difference the programme might have had away from the school environment over time. The purpose of the teacher interview was to understand how DAaRT makes a difference to the school in the context of each pupil cohort, the area the school is located in, pupils' prior knowledge and understanding of the issues DAaRT explores, and how DAaRT supports schools to talk about the issues it explores across other parts of the curriculum (as well as how it ‘adds’ value). An additional aim was to identify future teacher and school outcomes for further evaluation. Pupil impact is reported against Life Skills outcomes (see Appendix 1 for Life Skills Outcomes Framework). This was developed between October 2023 and March 2024 through co-design with DAaRT Officers and other Life Skills Education staff. Teacher interviews were semi-structured to enable them to express wider

views on how they and the school have benefited from participation and to inform the development of a teacher and school outcomes framework. Pupil outcomes are reported in a separate report.

Five schools participated in the evaluation, with seven teachers interviewed, 128 pupils completing the baseline survey and 120 completing the follow-up survey. Seven parents also completed the parent baseline survey and 17 the follow-up survey (these are reported in a separate briefing). Table 1 below lists the teachers by the school number and teacher number used to preserve anonymity in this report.

Table 1 – Schools and Teachers

| School No. | No. Teachers | Teacher No. |
|------------|--------------|---------------|
| School 1 | 2 | Teachers 1, 2 |
| School 2 | 1 | Teacher 3 |
| School 3 | 1 | Teacher 4 |
| School 4 | 1 | Teacher 5 |
| School 5 | 2 | Teacher 6, 7 |

4. What we found (Results)

An initial analysis of the interview data was undertaken to identify key themes emerging from each data set. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to show how DAaRT sessions are effective in making pupils more aware and resilient to issues surrounding substance use. This report explores one aspect of this by reporting the difference participation in DAaRT makes to the school itself and exploring the benefits for teachers more generally. The teacher interviews identified several common areas where schools saw some difference as a result of delivering DAaRT:

1. **Capacity Building:** This included the ability of DAaRT to support teaching in other areas of the curriculum and support a *whole school approach* to conversations about substance use; the ability of DAaRT to support schools to provide a safe space to challenge pupil views, and the ability of DAaRT to support schools to address the challenges of the local areas they are situated in
2. **School-level competence:** This included the ability of DAaRT to enable schools to discuss the issues the programme addresses more easily
3. **Teacher Effectiveness:** This included the role of DAaRT in helping talk about these issues as a school and across the curriculum

5. *Capacity Building*

Teachers described DAaRT as enabling a school to discuss substance use in ways that it wasn't capable of before the programme's introduction.

During interviews, teachers reported how DAaRT added value to the curriculum by offering additional ways in which issues around substance use and misuse are raised. Teachers saw DAaRT as a way of providing more insight into the issues it covers compared to teaching through the curriculum. They cited examples of using DAaRT to support teaching on the effects of substances on the body in lessons such as science. Teachers could compare the experience of talking about substance misuse before and after introducing the DAaRT programme in their school, noting that "*we do touch upon it in our year six science lessons, but not to the depth that DAaRT can*". Pupils were seen as coming into lessons across subjects with a good understanding of the effects of

substance misuse, and this often helped the teacher to talk about substance misuse in other contexts. Teachers suggested that the DAaRT officer's independence was important to the school because pupils were more likely to listen to a voice of authority with a deeper understanding of the issues based on their experiences than teachers would have. For example, one teacher pointed out that "[it's] *having that person that can come in.... and the children respect, and hear their life experiences... [pupils] can draw on those experiences*".

Teachers also felt that a DAaRT officer delivering the programme was more effective than the school running their own bespoke programme precisely because the strength of the programme (and its ability to embed across a school) is the relationship each officer has with the pupils. During the interviews, teachers, for instance, commented that having the DAaRT officer with the pupils:

"... opens up that conversation. You have somebody who comes in as an outsider, who is using the right language setting, the right sort of level. And the children, regardless of how much they respect you as a teacher, you get somebody who walks in in a uniform... They [the pupils] listen, and they respond well to that. They respond to an individual coming in who is knowledgeable in that field that isn't going to flap at any of the questions".

DAaRT was described as an effective way of enabling schools to have a deeper and more reflective, school-wide conversation than would be possible with just teachers building issues into PSHE. Teachers also commented on how running

the DAaRT programme made these conversations more structured. Some pupils were described in one school, for example, as having had experience with substance use (witnessing parents or siblings use, for instance) and had brought these experiences into the school. Here, DAaRT was seen as especially useful in challenging these, with one teacher reflecting that:

"... some behaviours are obviously just so embedded with certain children, it's hard for them to snap out of it. But I think having that reference point through the DAaRT sessions to go back to allows us to say, "let's reflect back onto our DAaRT session". "Let's think about behaving, communicating effectively"... it gives us that reference point really to help to start to shape behaviours a bit more effectively".

DAaRT's ability to support teachers to hold conversations about substance misuse was, according to one teacher, helpful in building up their school's overall competence: *"... if we were to try and do this ourselves, it would fall into some of our PSHE objectives, but it wouldn't be as in-depth as what our children in this area need"*. Teachers pointed out that it's not always the case that they are best placed to hold challenging conversations in the classroom - and that the DAaRT officer's status as independent and a 'role model' for pupils was an important part of what makes the programme work:

"... pupils need that additional role model... I just think everything that goes with [DAaRT] is what helps pupils really benefit in this area, not just this year group, but every year we've done it.... "

Ultimately, DAaRT was seen to build schools ability to have a whole-school conversation because, according to one teacher: *"I think it's the fact it has a name, DAaRT, and is a structured program where pupils get their own books and a graduation at the end of it, allows us to make a big deal out of it and the issues... and that gives pupils a sense of, "we're year six. and we do DAaRT now!"*".

Changes to the way that pupils discover and learn about alcohol, drugs, and other substances, especially through social media, were cited as a particular benefit of DAaRT for schools, not only in the classroom - but across the culture of the school itself. Teachers described DAaRT as an important programme because of its role in supporting pupil's personal development (*"... as a school, we work very hard on personal development, this is an area which is outstanding, and DAaRT is a good way of making sure that every year our year fives have a great project. Our children need it... "*). As a result, pupils were described as better able to understand and process the messages they get through social media:

"... over the past few years, we've had quite a lot of issues with social media and group chats and all that kind of stuff. DAaRT has really helped there, especially where we have children with problems processing emotions or don't really have that empathy for what they're doing... DAaRT is really important and can feed through throughout the year as well, especially in relation to values and the impact of actions on others... "

6. School Competency

Teachers suggested that one advantage of running DAaRT in their schools was its ability to support better quality conversations about substance misuse that were more meaningful, based on experience, and ultimately more effective in building pupils' resilience. To one teacher, DAaRT's importance to schools was providing pupils with a safe space to discuss issues. Reflecting on this, one teacher said, *"... it's been really beneficial just in terms of providing those opportunities to actually discuss those things"*. The value of DAaRT extends to its ability to help pupils reflect on their relationships and their behaviour towards others and others on themselves. This helped to build pupils' resilience to negative peer pressure by helping them to recognise it:

"... I think for a lot of our kids, it's about peer stuff, and talking about how to manage relationships and what a negative relationship looks like. DAaRT helps to talk about peer pressure and [showing pupils] how to say no constructively and walking away... I think for these kids, the other things will come later for a lot of them... know, they are naive, but [DAaRT] does open their mind a little, and I think that's important..."

Teachers recognised that schools have little direct influence on pupils' exposure to things that might present a risk to them once outside the school environment, and saw DAaRT as a useful way of building pupils ability to make better choices, reflecting that *"... We're not teaching them this stuff to use necessarily within the school environment. It's about how they will use this within their everyday life, outside of school, in the local community, in terms of*

their resilience...". DAaRT was also seen as a good grounding for pupils' transition to secondary school and the inevitable shock they will face in a new school environment and larger social groups than some (from more rural areas) might be used to. In this respect, one teacher commented "... I think when they go into secondary school, the tables will turn... they become more independent and see themselves more as adults, so they think that they're going to sort issues out themselves...". Teachers also felt that DAaRT was important for them to be able to have wider conversations with pupils about topics that fall outside of the curriculum:

"... this is a space where I can have these conversations with children because some of the topics that you go into... they're not traditional conversations that you would have in a school, particularly primary school, I would say, so it allows that freedom, that we can actually explore things in a little bit more depth together, because we might not be, as Teachers, the expert in these areas...".

One of the ways DAaRT supports schools is by bringing an independent voice into the classroom, with DAaRT officers having a different relationship with the pupils, both because of their uniform ("*having a DAaRT officer come in who is somebody different... they've got their uniform on, it makes the children take it a little bit differently to just how we're speaking to them...*"), but also because of the authority their outside experience brings. Reflecting on how DAaRT officers were seen as 'experts' by pupils, a teacher pointed out that "[DAaRT officers] *will call pupils out in a lesson if they're not showing respect [and] we're very consistent... I actually find they respond better to [the DAaRT officer]*

than they have done to PCSOs. We've had in people from the police, like we've had police in and I'm almost there, like, you need to be harder. You need to be really laying it on the line...". Teachers described pupils as sometimes having made poor decisions about substance use in the past and were able to describe how DAaRT sessions and the conversations in these were important opportunities for them to reflect and process these as a group of peers:

"... Generally, pupils know all the right answers, even our children that have made ridiculous decisions when they're in year seven... but it's the fact that it's the how they're viewed by their peer group is so important to them. It is everything to them. DAaRT gives them a way of looking at their decisions with the peer group that they are influenced by..."

In this context, DAaRT officers were valued because of their ability to adapt their session to the specific risks pupils are exposed to in their respective communities (*"...what we have found is that with our particular DAaRT officer [is that] he's good at [being flexible about the content] and coming in and discussing what issues need to be addressed given other things happening in the school, such as bringing in vapes, etc..."*).

Teachers described how DAaRT contributes to their ability to counter what was seen as negative influences on pupils' behaviour. One area of concern to teachers was social media's influence on pupils. Schools were described as limiting social media use in school and making pupils aware of the age limits on access. Despite this, teachers were impressed by DAaRT as a means of

supporting broader school efforts to manage how pupils responded to social media messaging. For example, one teacher stated that:

"... a lot of children find out about things from TikTok, Social Media, or YouTube. So DAaRT really helps because it allows us to be more open about the issues... You know when pupils have seen vaping or whatever..."

DAaRT was seen as a good counter to this, particularly as a forum for a considered, interactive conversation. This was especially useful because teachers felt they lacked the credibility that DAaRT officers could bring to the classroom ("*... [DAaRT is important because]... no matter how many times you say to them "You shouldn't be having Snapchat or WhatsApp in year 6", it doesn't matter. ... This is where the DAaRT program comes in... "*").

7. Teacher Effectiveness

DAaRT was described as a programme that supported teachers in other curriculum subjects. Often, the relationship between DAaRT and other subjects was a deliberate one made by the teacher to help them draw on the DAaRT material and to avoid unnecessary duplication in a crowded timetable:

"... sometimes we will link DAaRT to our actual lessons, like, "remember we talked about communication in our DAaRT sessions, when it's not really got a direct link to say, maths, you know, things like that" "[DAaRT] works really well [for us] because it also covers the PSHE objectives that we would

normally cover... which with the timetable constrictions that we've got is very helpful..."

At other times, teachers referred back to DAaRT sessions to address pupils' behaviour. For instance, recollecting a situation where pupil behaviour had become problematic, they described how "*...we were in a situation with children where they weren't treating each other fairly, and we reflected on what we'd learnt in the DAaRT session where we've explored communicating effectively, and how that applies to the current situation...*". Teachers described using DAaRT in a range of other situations. Teachers, for example, used DAaRT to support PSHE sessions on prejudice and discrimination:

"... I taught PSHE this afternoon, and one of the sessions was called 'Am I normal? We looked at the words discrimination and prejudice, which [the DAaRT Officer] had talked about just the day before. I said, 'who can remember what you learnt in DAaRT yesterday?'... So there are strong links, and this makes it easier for us, as teachers..."

Science was one area of the national curriculum where DAaRT was reported to have particular relevance. Teachers independently reported several instances where DAaRT sessions have been raised in science classes to add context to a point or to enable pupils to reinforce the learning by reflecting on their own experience with DAaRT. One advantage of DAaRT sessions over more formal teaching of issues such as the effect of drugs on the body is the ability to bring these to life and contextualise them in light of the pupil's own experiences. For example, one teacher reported that DAaRT was relevant:

"... particularly in science as we don't need to teach the effects of drugs on the body for the first time because the DAaRT session has covered it in more depth than what we would have covered in our science lesson... DAaRT has workbooks as well, so pupils have got a record of it that they can refer back to."

Both PSHE and Science teachers generally agreed that DAaRT made a positive difference in their ability to teach by allowing pupils to reflect on the issues being discussed more widely than if they just limited teaching to formal materials. In relation to PSHE, one teacher felt that:

"[DAaRT] certainly filters out into the whole of their curriculum when it comes to PSHE... When we do about healthy bodies, they will draw upon the work that they did on different types of drugs at that point as well as health and fitness and making right choices".

Other teachers, reflecting on how DAaRT supports science teaching, suggested that DAaRT materials were complimentary to those used in the curriculum:

"... some of those things come along in science, they overlap, you know, so obviously, some of those issues come into that, and obviously into PSHE and other bits of the curriculum. But I really like DAaRT as a program in itself because I think it just covers it at a much better level. I think it takes it in clearly marked graduated steps. It's at the right level, I suppose, for these pupils."

And it covers everything. It builds on things, whereas in science, it's sort of random bits..."

Teachers liked the ability to draw on DAaRT often at random and felt that they could do this due to the breadth of issues DAaRT covers and the way that what are quite serious issues for young children are presented. Teachers felt that the programme had utility and was practically easy to apply outside of the session, with one reporting that *"... it's nice, to say 'remember that we did that program, and some of them may then have their books still at school, and we'll say, look, remember we learned in this lesson, we learned about this and a lot of like, the effects of drug and alcohol on the body...."*. DAaRTs 'ease of use' was echoed by other teachers too:

" ... I think it's quite easy for us to kind of fit it in where we can. And I think we're quite spur of the moment, so we'll be teaching something, and it'll be like, " Oh, remember back to when we've done this previously in DAaRT" - especially any like PSHE or anything, or those types of lessons, or, say, like computing when we do internet safety or whatever - DAaRT is quite easy to fit into other subjects. ... it's quite easy to revisit".

8. Conclusion

Teacher interviews show that bringing DAaRT into a school has a number of positive implications for the school as a whole and for the teachers themselves. This report shows that teachers value the programme not only for the impact it has on pupils' ability to process and reflect on the issue of

substance use but also for how it supports them in addressing these often challenging issues in general conversation and other lessons. Teachers were aware of the pressures that pupils were exposed to outside of the school and that DAaRT was a valuable asset to them in countering negative peer influences that their pupils are under and negative messaging from social media – something they were alert to but found difficult to counter effectively. DAaRT's ability to set a school-wide conversation allowed schools to constantly reflect on pupils' experiences in the programme, and to use this as a reference point when thinking about – or challenging – behaviour and attitudes in the school. The cross-over to areas of the national curriculum, and science in particular, was seen as a core benefit of the programme to teachers, as this gave them additional material to draw on when teaching the narrower science-based issue of the biological effect of substances (legal and illicit) on the body. Teachers did comment on the strategic use of DAaRT as a school asset in managing the behaviour and attitudes of young people at a particularly transitional stage in their lives. Several teachers were sensitive to the development of their pupils over the course of the school year, noting that in the Autumn term, most pupils are still receptive to advice on subjects that might be considered 'cool' or at least those that they have a curiosity about if only because they are taboo, or illicit. DAaRT is effective in their view if pupils are exposed early enough to ensure that the messaging isn't competing with biological changes they are going through – and that the Autumn or Spring terms are most likely the best, but earlier, the better is the rule. Teachers saw the real impacts of early exposure in two ways: (1) it enabled the school to draw on the sessions throughout the year, offering a chance for the learning to embed and, through links to other lessons, be reinforced; (2) It allowed behaviour deemed unacceptable (whether the use of substances or poor

behaviour to others) to be challenged ‘independently’ by referring back to the programme. In this light, the graduation at the end of the programme was seen by some teachers as a useful way of both celebrating the achievement of the pupils and embedding the programme into the culture of the school. This ‘whole-school’ aspect of DAaRT’s impact is something that informs the content of much of the teacher's comments and should be the subject of future evaluations.

9. About the evaluators

Community Impact is an independent evaluation organisation specialising in the evaluation of services and programmes delivered to vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. Jason Pollard, the principal evaluator on this report, has 15 years of experience delivering high-quality evaluation projects for organisations such as Age UK, YMCA, the National Citizenship Service, and the Foyer Federation, as well as smaller charities across the UK. Jason holds an M.Sc. in Evidence-Based Social Intervention from the University of Oxford. He started his career in the children’s sector, working with The Children’s Society, Action for Children, and the World Association of Girl Guides.

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Appendix 1 – Pupil Outcomes

| A. Communication | B. Relationships | C. Well-Being | D. Self-Efficacy | E. Resilience | F. Knowledge and Understanding |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| ... Improved Communication and listening skills | ... Effectively dealing with bullying and peer pressure on themselves and others | ... Managing personal feelings | ... Sustainability of the programme effect over time through improved risk management and increased awareness of risk | ... Making safe and responsible choices for themselves and others | ... Knowledge about drugs, alcohol and substance abuse |
| <i>A1. The young person can tell others what they think, and how they feel.</i> | <i>B1. The young person understands what peer pressure, and bullying, look like in practice.</i> | <i>C1. The young person understands the situations that they will find stressful and influence their feelings.</i> | <i>D1. The young person can assess how their choices have positive and negative consequences</i> | <i>E1. Young people are able to recognise and demonstrate resistance strategies to help them make safe and responsible choices.</i> | <i>F1. The young person is empowered through accurate and relevant data about drug, alcohol and substance use.</i> |
| <i>A2. The young can recognise and demonstrate nonverbal communication.</i> | <i>B2. The Young person can react positively to peer pressure and bullying.</i> | <i>C2. The young person is able to recognise the signs of stress in themselves and act on them</i> | <i>D2. The young person has the tools to assess risk in context [as well as work through outcomes and consequences].</i> | <i>E2. Young people are able to recognise the benefit of giving and receiving help to others.</i> | <i>F2. The young person understands the facts and health effects of drugs and Alcohol.</i> |
| <i>A3. The young person can express and discuss ideas with others.</i> | <i>B3. The young person can avoid negative peer influences.</i> | <i>C3. Young people understand how small incidents [situations] can escalate if [they don't take action], allowed to continue.</i> | <i>D3. The young person has knowledge of the law and the legal consequences of their decisions</i> | <i>E3. The young person has a strong support network, and who to go to for help and support.</i> | <i>F3. The young person is able to make balanced decisions about the use of drugs, alcohol and other substances</i> |
| <i>A5. The young person can discuss how to deal effectively with feelings</i> | <i>B4. (empathy) The young person is sensitive to situations where others might feel stressed or be under pressure to do things.</i> | <i>C4. (empathy) Young people can reflect on the positive and negative emotions and feelings people have (for example, happiness or anxiety)</i> | <i>D4. The young person is confident they can apply the tools needed to make good decisions. (The SKILL Decision Making Model).</i> | <i>E4. The young person can consider ways to respond to and report incidents.</i> | |
| <i>A6. The young person can talk about the choices they make, and why.</i> | <i>B5. (empathy) Young people understand the impact they can have on others and the personal consequences of bullying.</i> | | | | |

Appendix 2 – Teacher Interview Topic Guide

1. Tell me about your initial thoughts on the DAaRT programme. For instance, have you had experience talking to pupils about these issues in a structured way before?
2. Are the pupils familiar with these issues? Are they ready for these types of conversations?
3. Is the school in a particularly at-risk area?
4. As teachers, has DAaRT made it easier to talk about the issues it covers?
5. What about the whole school? Does the content feed into other aspects of school life? 7
6. Overall, are there things DAaRT could have done differently?