2024 Evaluation of the DAaRT Programme

Evaluation Summary



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Introduction – about this report

This report summarises the results of a 2024 evaluation of the DAaRT programme. In the 2024 Summer and Autumn terms, a sample of 128 pupils in four schools was asked to complete a pre-and post-programme survey, and 7 teachers participated in group or individual interviews. Pupil surveys explored the impact of the programme against six measures (pupil **confidence**; **Relationships**; **Wellbeing**; **Self-Efficacy**; **Resilience**; and **Knowledge & Understanding**). Teacher interviews were less structured and focused on exploring the programme's impact at the school level, particularly how the DAaRT programme had supported a whole-school conversation about substance use and what this meant for teaching in other areas of the curriculum. Pupil and Teacher impact is reported in two separate reports.

1. *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, Life Skills has delivered DAaRT to 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 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 prescribed substance use in a neutral way that avoids the terms ‘illegal’ or ‘misuse’.

2. What we found (Results)

Four schools participated in the evaluation, with 128 pupils completing the baseline survey and 120 completing the follow-up survey. Seventeen parents completed the parent baseline, and 7 the follow-up survey (these are reported in a separate briefing). Interviews were held with 7 teachers in 4 schools.

Overall, both teachers and pupils reported a positive impact from participating in the programme. Teachers were able to easily identify areas where their school’s participation has produced benefits, both in relation to their own competency and in relation to each school's ability to manage what was often described as difficult conversations.

2.1. Teacher Interviews

The teacher interviews identified several common areas where schools saw some difference as a result of delivering DAaRT:

1. **Capacity Building:** This included DAaRT's ability to support teaching in other areas of the curriculum and a whole-school approach to conversations about substance use, DAaRT's ability to support schools in providing a safe space to challenge pupil views, and DAaRT's ability to

support schools in addressing the challenges of the local areas they are situated in.

2. **School-level competence:** This included DAaRT's ability to facilitate school discussions of the issues the programme addresses.
3. **Teacher Effectiveness:** This included the role of DAaRT in helping talk about these issues as a school and across the curriculum.

Results were positive, with teachers able to describe what benefits their participation in the programme has meant for themselves and their school:

- DAaRT enables schools to tackle an issue they otherwise would 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; it was noted that using a DAaRT Officer rather than a teacher 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 issues of substances and their 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 their learning throughout the year and to expose them to the issues before they get older. This was felt to work against the programme due to changing attitudes to authority.
- The graduation ceremony was valued as a way of embedding learning – especially for pupils less willing to participate in classroom discussions.

2.2. Pupil Survey

Overall, 128 pupils across four schools completed the baseline survey, and 120 completed the follow-up survey by the end of the programme. Results were broadly positive, with an **increase** in pupils' confidence, knowledge, and ability to understand and use the skills the programme teaches. In relation to pupils' confidence and knowledge, the evaluation found:

- Pupils reporting the ability (and willingness) to talk to adults about substance use **increased** by 22% at the end of the programme compared to the baseline.
- Pupil's reporting resilience to peer pressure and bullying **increased**, both through their ability to recognise these in practice (for bullying, this rose from 73% to 87% of pupils recognising bullying) and through a corresponding increase for peer pressure (rising from 86% to 94% at follow-up).

- The number of pupils reporting the ability to cope with the stress of engaging with peers on issues surrounding substance use **increased** from 47% to 64% by the close of the programme.
- Pupils reported a greater ability to understand the consequences of their actions on others (and vice versa) when issues about substance use were concerned, **increased** from 69% at baseline to 83% at the end of the programme.
- Pupils reporting higher confidence to apply DAaRT learning in practice **increased** by 15% (rising from 76% at baseline to 92% at follow-up).
- The number of pupils demonstrating a greater knowledge and awareness of the issues surrounding substance use increased - with a 20% **increase** in the number of pupils reporting a greater understanding of the law around the issues DAaRT addresses compared to baseline.

2.3. Parents Survey

Parents were given a short survey at the programme's start and end. Response rates were fairly low, with 17 responses for the pre-programme survey and seven at the programme's end. Each survey was designed to understand what experience families had talking about the issues DAaRT addresses, whether children were open about their own experiences with substances (whether they spoke about the issue in their peer group), and whether the parent was concerned about the risks to their child given the local environment they live in. Positive results were seen in relation to parental concern about the risks to their child in relation to substance use and parents' confidence in their child's ability (skill) to avoid negative peer pressure:

- Level of concern: The proportion of parents **were not** concerned rose from 65% (*n*=11), to 71% (*n*=5). Although the samples are uneven, proportionately more parents were unconcerned once children had passed through the DAaRT programme.
- Ability to avoid negative peer pressure: The proportion of parents being confident (scoring 5,6 or 7 on the scale offered) rose from 71% (n=12) to 100% (*n*=7).

Taken together, this might suggest that parents are confident that their participation in the DAaRT programme is, to some extent, understood as a protective factor (through skills acquisition) that builds resilience to some of the environmental factors that can lead young people to explore and use substances (legal and illegal).

3. Conclusion

The 2024 evaluation shows how bringing DAaRT into a school produces a number of benefits for the teachers, pupils and their schools. Teachers value the programme not only for its impact 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. As a result of this, pupils were better able to recognise the types of situations that may increase the risk of involvement with substance use (through bullying or negative peer pressure) and were well able to articulate what each of these looks like in practice – as well as what types of strategy are available to them in addressing each of these. Teachers were aware of the pressures pupils were exposed to outside school. They described how DAaRT was a valuable asset to

them in countering negative peer influences that their pupils are under and negative messaging from social media – something that they were alert to but found difficult to counter effectively. Taken together, teacher responses and pupil data show that DAaRT participation produces longer-term or sustainable results. For example, pupils were specifically asked to rate their ability to apply DAaRT learning in the future. This is a self-efficacy question offering a way of assessing pupil confidence once away from the safety of the classroom (e.g. in 'real life') alongside other questions asking them to reflect on their level of awareness of substances (their use and role, for example); their ability to deal with the stress brought in by negative peer influence; and the knowledge of where to look for support. Both teacher and pupil data indicate that DAaRT offers a practical set of tools and resources that pupils can continue to reflect on and *employ* as they transition through the education system and within their communities.

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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