



Insight driving innovation and impact

# Healthy Movers

## Key Evaluation Findings

October 2024

**Believing** in every child's future

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
The Challenges .....	2
The Importance of Physical Activity in the Early Years .....	4
The Solution: Healthy Movers .....	5
Engagement in Healthy Movers (2018-2024) .....	6
Benefits of Healthy Movers .....	8
Case Studies .....	19
Views of Healthy Movers .....	26
Success Principles .....	27
References .....	31

# Introduction

This document was prepared by the Youth Sport Trust's (YST) Research and Insight Team in October 2024. It synthesises evidence from our Healthy Movers programme that has been delivered between 2018 and 2024 to capture the scale of Healthy Movers' activities, the benefits achieved, and the success principles.

# The Challenges

## Children's physical activity levels

Children under five years old should aim for an average of at least 3 hours of physical activity per day (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019a). However, a survey of 1,000 parents for children's charity, the Early Intervention Foundation, found that only 19% of children between the ages of one and five get more than three hours of physical activity a day – meaning most children are getting less than the officially recommended amount needed to grow up healthily. In addition, a UK study of nursery and reception children found that young children spend up to two-thirds of their time being stationary (66% for nursery and 70% for reception) (Woodfield et al, 2022). Furthermore, in households earning under £30,000 only 13% of children meet physical activity guidelines, compared with 23% where the household income was over £50,000 (Early Years Foundation, 2022).

Children aged 5 to 18 years old should aim for an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous intensity physical activity a day across the week (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019b). However, in the 2022-23 academic year, almost half (49%) of children in year 1 and 2 (aged 5-7) were not meeting this guideline (Sport England, 2023) and over 1 in 5 children (21%) were overweight or obese by reception age (aged 4-5). Further, physical activity levels were lowest for children in years 3-4 (aged 7-9) than in any other age group; 60% did not meet the guidelines (Sport England, 2023). Therefore, improving physical activity (and physical literacy) in early childhood to encourage a lifelong positive relationship with physical activity for physical health benefits is of clear importance.

## Children's school readiness

What is more, research shows that in the 10 years between 2007 and 2017, the percentage of children starting school with, or at risk of having, a movement difficulty (32%) almost doubled. There has also been a noted decline in motor skills which authors speculate could be due to the increased use of screens and fewer outdoor play opportunities (Duncombe & Preedy, 2021). Certainly, teachers currently report nearly half (46%) of children not being school ready (Kindred Squared and YouGov, 2023) and half (50%) of teachers reported fewer reception children were school ready in September 2023 compared with September 2022 (Kindred Squared and Savanta, 2024).

In the academic year 2021/22, over one third (35%) of children were not reaching a good level of development in the early years foundation stage, which relates to key areas including: communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development; literacy; and mathematics (Government, 2022).

## **Practitioners' competence to support children's physical activity**

Research suggests that staff in early years settings have a lack of understanding of fundamental movement skills (or physical literacy), and how these can benefit learning outcomes (Dobell et al, 2021).

Supporting this, before starting the Healthy Movers programme, only 19% of practitioners felt 'very competent' in delivering physical activity sessions for children at their settings<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, only 17% of practitioners felt 'very confident' in delivering physical activity sessions, leaving significant room for improvement<sup>2</sup>. Building on this, many studies note that staff experience and training is an important mediator of physical activity for young children (Coates et al, 2023).

## **Parents' knowledge and understanding to support children's physical activity**

This limited confidence in physical activity does not only affect educators but parents as well. Indeed, 61% of parents do not understand what is meant by physical literacy (Youth Sport Trust, 2022). However, when the concept of physical literacy was explained to them, 7 in 10 parents (70%) said that they thought that their child's physical literacy was as important as their language literacy and numeracy (Youth Sport Trust, 2022).

Educators report parental education is often required to reinforce infants' learning outcomes, including education on the role of physical literacy (Foulkes et al., 2020). Indeed, there is a positive association between increased parental engagement at 2 years old and greater learning outcomes at 6 years old (Hayes et al., 2018).

A recent systematic review demonstrated that greater parental support for physical activity outside of childcare is associated with greater levels of physical activity per week in early childhood (Carson et al., 2016). This shows that it is crucial to include parents and families as a whole into the conversation around challenges of physical literacy and how to improve this in the future.

However, before starting the Healthy Movers programme, only 16% of practitioners felt 'very competent' in engaging parents and guardians in physical activity sessions with their children at their setting, and a staggering 97% did not feel 'very confident' about this<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sample: 48 responses from Dorset (2020-21), Cornwall (2020-21) and West Somerset (2018-19)

<sup>2</sup> Sample: 48 responses from Dorset (2020-21), Cornwall (2020-21) and West Somerset (2018-19)

<sup>3</sup> Sample: 32 responses from Dorset (2020-21) and Cornwall (2020-21)

# The Importance of Physical Activity in the Early Years

The first 1001 days of a child's life are critical as the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down (HM Government, 2021). Building on this, internationally, a focus on physical development is considered crucial within early childhood education and care as part of a balanced routine and in support of overall developmental milestones (WHO, 2019). In England, since 2008, the inclusion of physical development as a prime area of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) also illustrates the importance placed on such developments (DfE, 2021) and the UK Government has stated that physical literacy is a key focus for physical education.

Research reports that physically literate children do twice as much activity as their peers and states that their enjoyment has the greatest influence on this (Sport England, 2019). The research further states that physical literacy and activity decreases with age (Sport England, 2019), however those who have a positive relationship with movement and physical activity are more likely to be physically active throughout life (Physical literacy consensus statement for England). This highlights the importance of positive active experiences for the youngest children in our communities.

Beyond the clear benefits to physical health, physical activity also has a further range of important benefits for children and young people, as summarised below.

*A young person who is physically active on a regular basis will have better:*



## Mental health

- > Happiness
- > Resilience
- > Equipped to tackle anxiety and stress



## Physical health

- > Cardiovascular fitness
- > Healthy weight
- > Energy levels



## Social wellbeing

- > Less lonely
- > More trusting
- > Improved communication and teamwork skills



Evidence also shows that **being physically active improves brain function**, including learning, memory and concentration.

Source: Youth Sport Trust (2024)

## The Solution: Healthy Movers

Healthy Movers has been created in response to these challenges and is a multi-component approach by the Youth Sport Trust to support 2-5 year olds' physical literacy, development and wellbeing, and gain a better start in life – working with practitioners and parents. As a result, we get young people who are Healthy Movers in their early years setting or school, and families becoming Healthy Movers together at home

Healthy Movers is made up of the elements below. As a minimum the training and toolkit are provided, and the other elements are available to enhance the offer.

<h3>Physical literacy training</h3> <p>Training session for practitioners aims to develop the whole child through engaging in purposeful physical activities supporting the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum as well as providing theory and practical ideas using the YST Healthy Movers Toolkit.</p> 	<h3>Networking opportunities</h3>  <p>Networking opportunities aim to provide ongoing support to enable practitioners to share good practice, discuss any challenges/barriers and potential solutions to delivery.</p>	<h3>Stay and Play training</h3> <p>Training session for practitioners aims to support settings to engage parents in supporting their child's physical literacy at home.</p> 	<h3>Power hour training</h3>  <p>Healthy Movers Tutors visit settings to provide a short and focussed Healthy Movers training to all staff at these settings.</p>	
<h3>Toolkit and developmental tree</h3> <p>The toolkit complements the EYFS Framework and includes 1 printed bag, 1 handbook, 16 activity cards, 1 poster, 1 certificate, 30 sticker sheets, 1 USB with music to accompany activities, and 1 visual display of a developmental tree that shows the key stages of physical development.</p>			<h3>Home packs</h3> <p>Designed to help parents support children aged 2-5 years to develop balance, movement and object control. The home pack includes a children's backpack, parent resource cards, bean bag, soft touch ball, 2 scarves, water bottle, sticker pack, pot of bubbles and chunky chalk.</p>	<h3>Support visits</h3>  <p>Healthy Movers Tutors provide regular support to the settings, through a mixture of face-to-face and virtual delivery.</p>

# Engagement in Healthy Movers (2018-2024)

## Targeted interventions

### Settings engaged

Between 2018 and 2024, Healthy Movers has been introduced in **468 settings** across **14 local communities** as part of a targeted intervention:

- Bedfordshire
- Cornwall
- Cumbria
- Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
- Hartlepool
- Hull
- Ipswich
- Leicester
- Liverpool
- London (4 Boroughs)
- Plymouth
- Suffolk
- West Somerset
- Wiltshire

In addition, Healthy Movers has also been introduced in a sample of family hubs in some local communities.

### Practitioners trained

**1,361 practitioners** have so far been trained through Healthy Movers targeted interventions<sup>4</sup>.

### Children participating

An average of 35 children per setting have participated in Healthy Movers, which equates to an **estimated 16,380 children** in total across all targeted interventions<sup>5</sup>. Government data demonstrates that the average number of children per group-based provider is 50 and per school-based provider is 37 (Department for

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<sup>4</sup> For 2023/24, practitioners trained has been inferred from data collected from 148 out of 197 settings. All previous years have used actual data.

<sup>5</sup> Based on data provided by 283 settings across 8 local communities and 13 targeted interventions, we have engaged 9,882 children as part of Healthy Movers. This works out as an average of 35 children per setting. This data has been extrapolated across all 468 settings to give an estimated total.



Education, 2023<sup>6</sup>). This suggests that Healthy Movers has engaged a notable proportion of children per childcare setting.

#### Families supported

**8,063 home packs** have so far been distributed as part of Healthy Movers targeted interventions<sup>7</sup>.

#### Wider engagement in Healthy Movers

Up to 2022, 243 settings had also accessed Healthy Movers resources through their YST membership. It is estimated that an additional 8,505 children could have engaged in Healthy Movers through this so far.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/childcare-and-early-years-provider-survey/2023?subjectId=20ce72c1-104b-4171-b848-08dbda05c888>

## Benefits of Healthy Movers

The below insight is based on data collected from Healthy Movers interventions across all local communities so far. Survey data has been drawn from the following key sources of evidence:

- End of Programme Survey for Practitioners (n=102-213) from 7 – 13 local communities. This survey asked practitioners about the number of children who took part in Healthy Movers, the benefits to them and the children taking part, and their views of Healthy Movers.
- Training Feedback Survey for Practitioners (n=463-464) from 12 local communities. This survey asked practitioners about the benefits of the Healthy Movers training and their views of the training.
- Parent Survey (n=70-75) from 3 local communities. This survey asked parents about the benefits of Healthy Movers to them, their family and their child, plus their views of the programme.

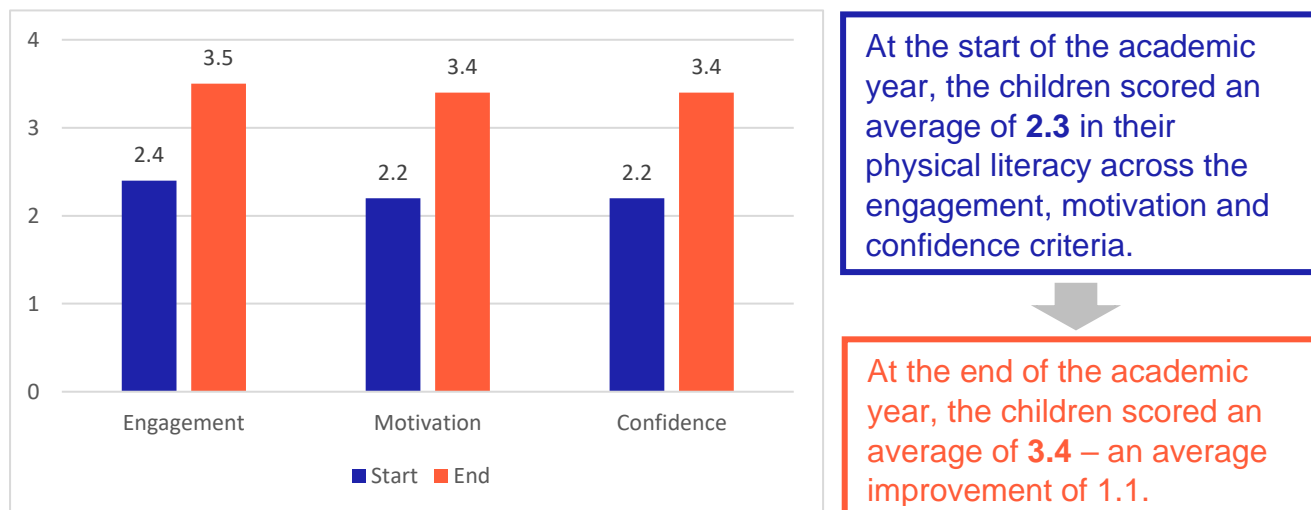
### Improved physical activity and physical literacy

Children have shown improvements in their object control, locomotion and stability, along with their confidence, engagement and motivation to take part in physical activity. As examples reported from settings/schools, these improvements have helped children to become more confident using outside play equipment, to sit with better posture, to put their coats on, and to hold a pencil. Healthy Movers has also helped to identify areas of physical literacy that children need to improve, and the activities have enabled settings to focus on specific skills.

For a sample of children, aged between two and four years old, that were taking part in Healthy Movers, their physical literacy was assessed by practitioners at their setting. The assessment was conducted at the start of the academic year, which was the start of their engagement in Healthy Movers, and then again at the end of the academic year.

Children were assessed against engagement, motivation and confidence in physical activity on a scale of one to four, with one being the lowest score and four being the highest score.

Figure 1: *Physical literacy assessment (1)*



Source: *Physical literacy assessment in Cornwall and Dorset (N=396)*

The physical literacy assessment was reviewed by a number of key demographics, as highlighted below.

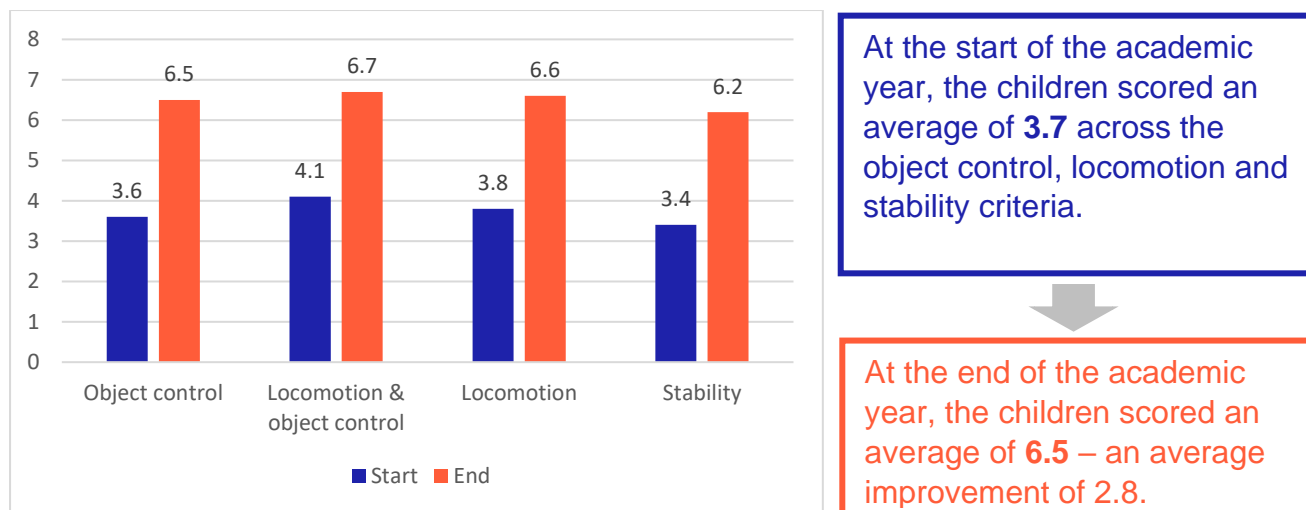
Table 1: **Demographic differences across the physical literacy assessment (1)<sup>8</sup>**

Gender	There were no real differences between girls and boys.
Age	At the start of Healthy Movers, on average, two-year-old children had lower scores than three-year-old children across engagement, motivation and confidence. However, two-year-old children showed bigger improvements between the start and end of the academic year, across engagement and confidence when compared to three-year-old children.
Deprivation	On average, at the start, children eligible for 'Disadvantaged two-year-old entitlement / Early Years Pupil Premium funding' had lower scores than those who were not eligible for funding, especially in relation to their confidence to participate in physical activity. By the end of the academic year children eligible for 'Disadvantaged two-year-old entitlement / Early Years Pupil Premium funding' showed greater improvements than those who were not eligible for funding in their confidence to participate in physical activity. However, they showed smaller improvements in their motivation.
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	Children with SEND had lower scores than children without SEND at the start and end of the academic year, across engagement, motivation and confidence. The scale of improvement over the academic year was similar for children with and without SEND.

<sup>8</sup> Note of caution: some sample sizes for the demographic groups are small; they range from 25 to 217.

Children were also assessed against object control, locomotion and stability on a scale of one to eight, with one being the lowest ability and eight being the highest ability.

Figure 2: *Physical literacy assessment (2)*



Source: *Physical literacy assessment in Cornwall and Dorset (N=396)*

The physical literacy assessment was reviewed by a number of key demographics, as highlighted below.

Table 2: **Demographic differences across the physical literacy assessment (1)<sup>9</sup>**

Gender	There were no real differences between girls and boys.
Age	The scale of improvement increased with age across object control, locomotion and stability - three-year-old children showed greater improvements than two-year-old children and four-year-old children showed greater improvements than three year old children.
Deprivation	On average, at the start, children eligible for 'Disadvantaged two-year-old entitlement / Early Years Pupil Premium funding' had lower scores than those who were not eligible for funding, especially in relation to their object control and locomotion. By the end of the academic year children eligible for 'Disadvantaged two-year-old entitlement / Early Years Pupil Premium funding' showed greater improvements than those who were not eligible for funding in these areas.
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Children with SEND had lower scores than children without SEND at the start and end of the academic year, across object control, locomotion and stability. The scale of improvement over the academic year for children with SEND was greater than children without SEND for object control and locomotion but lower for stability.

<sup>9</sup> Note of caution: some sample sizes for the demographic groups are small; they range from 25 to 217.

Practitioners and parents also observed positive changes to children's physical activity and physical literacy:

- **91%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on the **amount of time children spent being physically active at their setting**.
- **96%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **enjoyment of physical activity**
- **95%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **confidence to be active**
- **95%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **physical skills**, e.g. balance, locomotion and object control
- **88%** of parents also said that Healthy Movers had helped their child to be **more active**<sup>10</sup>.

“One child that I feel has benefitted from Healthy Movers is a child whose physical skills were poor. By taking part, this has allowed the child to develop gross motor skills, balance and coordination. And become more confident.”

**Practitioner from Hull, 2021-22**

## **Improved communication and language**

Healthy Movers has a positive impact on children's communication and language skills. As examples reported from settings/schools, Healthy Movers activities encourage children to talk about the activities they are doing, help them to learn new words that they can use every-day and encourage greater communication with their peers.

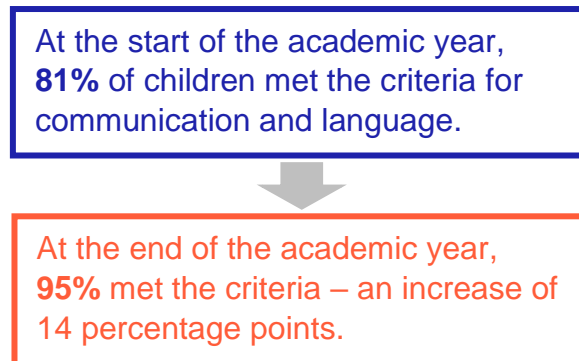
For a sample of children, aged between two and four years old, that were taking part in Healthy Movers, their communication and language was assessed by practitioners at their setting. The assessment was conducted at the start of the academic year, which was the start of their engagement in Healthy Movers, and then again at the end

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<sup>10</sup> Sample: 75 responses from Cornwall (2021-22), Dorset (2021-22), Wiltshire (2022-23). Scale used: Yes, No, Don't know  
Healthy Movers

of the academic year. Children were assessed using a simple statement to ascertain whether they met or did not meet the expected standard for their age for communication and language. The results are shown in the figure below<sup>11</sup>.

Figure 3: *Communication and language assessment*



Source: *Communication and language assessment in Cornwall and Dorset (N=308)*

Practitioners also observed positive changes in children’s communication and language:

- **93%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children’s **ability to follow instructions**
- **89%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children’s **listening skills**
- **80%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children’s **speaking skills**.
- **81%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children’s **communication and language**

“As I watch the children, I am constantly reminded that Healthy Movers is not just about the physical, it has really improved the children's communication and speaking as they talk about the card, story and the activities.”

**Practitioner from Dorset, 2021-22**

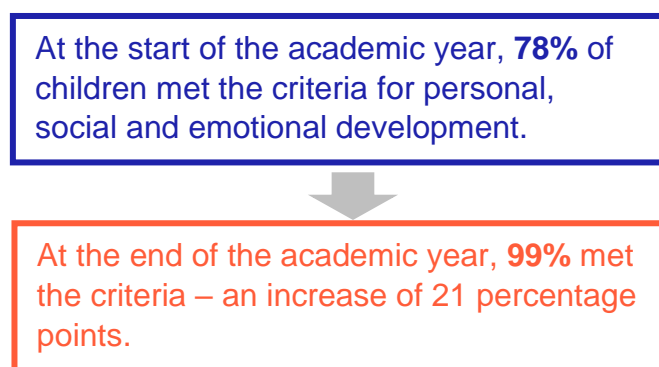
<sup>11</sup> Note: Any improvements observed cannot be solely attributed to Healthy Movers.  
Healthy Movers

## Improved personal, social, and emotional development

Healthy Movers has a positive impact on children's personal, social and emotional development. As examples reported by settings/schools, Healthy Movers has supported children's resilience, their focus, their ability to share, and their relationships with other children. Practitioners often emphasised that Healthy Movers supports children's engagement at nursery (in Healthy Movers activities and other activities), including children who are normally shy or quieter, with special education needs or disabilities (SEND), or with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Taking part in the same activities together, copying each other's actions, and being able to take part at their own level, supports this engagement.

For a sample of 396 children, aged between two and four years old, in Cornwall and Dorset, their personal, social and emotional development was assessed by practitioners at their setting. The assessment was conducted at the start of the academic year, which was the start of their engagement in Healthy Movers, and then again at the end of the academic year. Children were assessed using a simple statement as to whether they met or did not meet the expected standard for their age for personal, social and emotional development. The results are shown in the figure below<sup>12</sup>.

Figure 4: *Personal, social and emotional development assessment*



Source: *Communication and language assessment in Cornwall and Dorset (N=396)*

Practitioners also observed positive changes in children's personal, social and emotional development:

- **90%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **relationships with other children**
- **94%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **happiness**

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<sup>12</sup> Note: Any improvements observed cannot be solely attributed to Healthy Movers.  
Healthy Movers

- **87%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **resilience**
- **79%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **engagement with the setting**
- **67%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **behaviour at the setting**

"This [Healthy Movers] has allowed children to come together, making new friendships."

**Practitioner from Dorset, 2021-22**

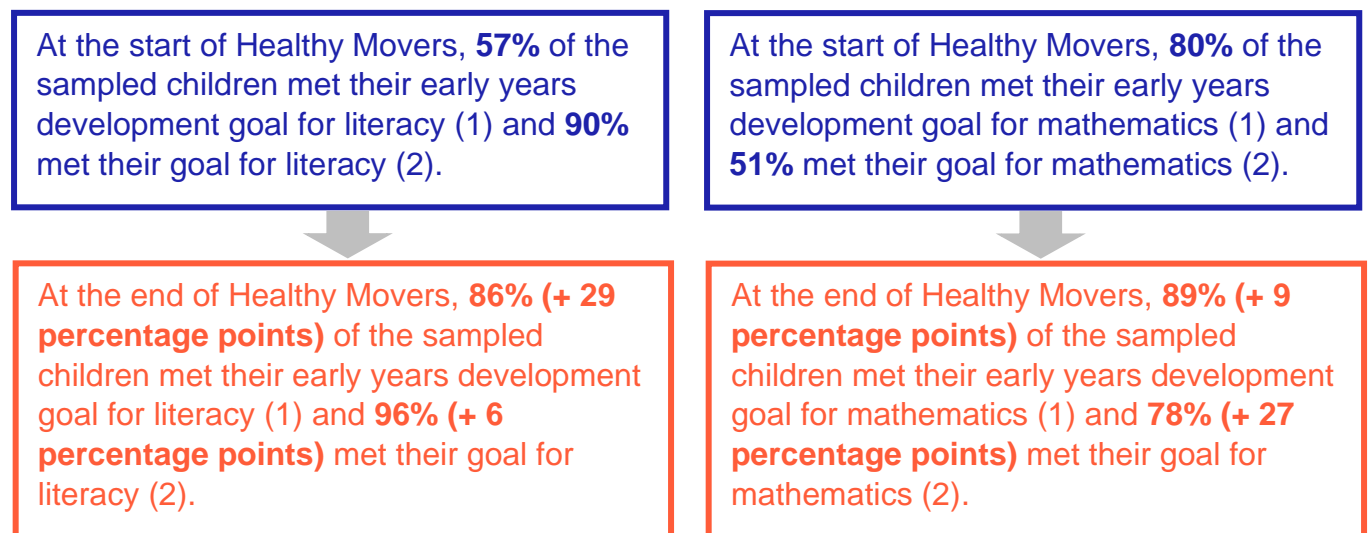


## Improved literacy and mathematics

Healthy Movers has supported children's literacy skills, for example (as reported by schools/settings) by supporting children's imagination, helping with letter formation, and linking Healthy Movers activities to stories. The Healthy Movers activities are also reported to have supported children's mathematical language skills.

For a sample of 148 children, aged between two and four years old, in Dorset, their literacy and mathematics was assessed by practitioners at their setting. The assessment was conducted at the start of the academic year, which was the start of their engagement in Healthy Movers, and then again at the end of the academic year. Children were assessed using four simple statements as to whether they met or did not meet the expected standard for their age for literacy and mathematics. The results are shown in the figure below<sup>13</sup>.

Figure 5: *Literacy and mathematics assessment*



Source: *Literacy and mathematics assessment in Dorset (N=138-148)*

"It has been a relatively short time, and we are already seeing a big improvement in the mathematical language of the children. All children know in front of, behind, and under, since doing the Hide and Seek Healthy Movers card."

**Practitioner from Dorset, 2021-22**

<sup>13</sup> Note: Any improvements observed cannot be solely attributed to Healthy Movers.  
Healthy Movers

## Enhanced school readiness

As demonstrated, Healthy Movers has been reported to support children's school readiness in many ways, including improvements to their listening skills, ability to follow instructions, behaviour and relationships with others. In addition, improvements in their physical literacy have supported better posture to sit at a table, improved ability to hold a pencil or put on their coats, and increased preparation for PE lessons at school.

- **74%** of practitioners said that Healthy Movers had a very positive or positive impact on children's **school readiness**

"Last year's nursery children, who were the first to do the [Healthy Movers] programme were far more school-ready than previous year groups. I think it really has made a difference to their ability to sit and concentrate, and their listening skills as well."

**Practitioner from West Somerset,  
2018-19**

## Improved physical activity delivery at settings

Practitioners frequently highlighted that Healthy Movers had given them new ideas for activities. Through the training and ongoing support visits, the tutors also played a key role in building the confidence of the practitioners to deliver Healthy Movers activities. The programme has also developed practitioners' skills and knowledge of physical activity, including its benefits and how to effectively improve children's physical literacy.

There is also a range of evidence to demonstrate how settings are using Healthy Movers activities to complement other areas of delivery, including the EYFS. Settings are typically embedding Healthy Movers activities by integrating the Healthy Movers activities throughout the whole day, for example when the children transition through the building, before naptime, at story-time, or during outside play.

- **99%** of practitioners said that the Healthy Movers training helped to make them feel more **competent** in their role by either 'a lot' (91%) or 'a little' (8%)
- **99%** of practitioners said that the Healthy Movers training helped to make them feel more **confident** in their role by either 'a lot' (92%) or 'a little' (6%)
- **99%** of practitioners said that the Healthy Movers training helped to make them feel more **motivated** in their role by either 'a lot' (91%) or 'a little' (8%)
- As a result of Healthy Movers, **96%** of practitioners had made **improvements to how they deliver physical activity** in their setting by either 'a lot' (58%) or 'a little' (38%).

"It has upskilled the team in how to teach physical skills in a way I had not considered before. It has been flexible to embed into our daily teaching."

**Practitioner from Cornwall 2021-22**

## Benefits to families

Parents and carers said that Healthy Movers had helped them in a variety of ways.

- **93%** - given them ideas to help their child be active.
- **88%** - increased their understanding of the benefits of being active.
- **78%** - helped them to be more active as a family.
- **76%** - helped them to have a better relationship with their child's setting.

"We spend more time together practicing catching and throwing for hand eye co-ordination and he [child] enjoys all activities associated to Healthy Movers and loves to show me his new skills from the class lessons."

**Parent from Dorset 2021-22**

**Parent from Cornwall 2021-22**

"He [child] loves the bag and showed his granny how to wave the scarves around."

## Case Studies

### Enhancing children's physical development St Meriadoc Nursery, Cornwall

#### Before Healthy Movers

The staff at the Nursery observed that children's physical development was behind where they expected it to be. For example, they found that children struggled to walk up and down steps, found it hard to keep their balance when walking up a slope in the adventure playground, or were unable to use the climbing frame at the Nursery. Many children also lacked the core stability to be able to sit up at a table; instead, children would slump or lie over the table.

#### What did they do?

One practitioner at the Nursery attended the Healthy Movers training and then the Healthy Movers tutor delivered a power hour (a short and focused Healthy Movers training) to all staff at the Nursery.

The Nursery now delivers Healthy Movers activities throughout the whole day, inside and outside, and at times that suit the children. An advantage of the programme was that it can be short and quick activities that slot alongside, or in between, other activities.

The Nursery also emphasised that the activities can be adapted to suit children's different abilities, for example they can easily be extended for children who have mastered the basic skills, or children can spend more time working on key skills. In one instance, the children were taking part in the 'Deep Blue Sea' Healthy Movers activities and were pretending to be seahorses. Some children balanced on one leg, but those that struggled to balance, lay down on the floor to make the shape of a seahorse. The children were able to work at their level and be suitably challenged whilst all participating together.

#### After Healthy Movers

The staff at the Nursery have noticed that since taking part in Healthy Movers, the children's physical ability, both in terms of gross and fine motor skills, has improved. Healthy Movers has helped the staff to identify areas that the children need to improve and then provided steps to help develop these skills. Children are now more confident at playing in the adventure playground at the Nursery and the children can now sit at the table, or on the carpet with their legs crossed, and hold themselves upright. In addition, it has allowed all children to participate in activities together so children with special education needs have been actively involved in all the group activities.

***"That level of confidence that they've now got is something I could never have pictured ever. It's been amazing."***

*(Cara Meyers, Nursery Teacher at St Meriadoc CE Nursery & Infant Academy Nursery)*

#### Top tips

- ✓ Get all staff on board as soon as possible to encourage Healthy Movers activities to be embedded in all aspects of Nursery.
- ✓ Build Healthy Movers activities into the whole day; "that's when it's best, when it happens all the time throughout the day as and when it suits the children."

## **Increasing children's confidence**

### **Muddy Boots Nurseries, Dorset**

#### **Before Healthy Movers**

Following the Covid-19 lockdowns, the Muddy Boots Nursery Managers noticed a decline in confidence in children – their personal, social, and emotional development had suffered.

#### **What did they do?**

Healthy Movers was easily incorporated into the settings' daily routines. As they are outdoor-based settings, they could take the resources, such as the ribbons for the 'Wiggle Weave Watch' activity, with them to the park or to the beach and do the activities there. The Hamworthy setting incorporated a tick chart on the door where they tracked who was doing Healthy Movers and what they did, to ensure that no activities were repeated.

***"In the everyday running of Muddy Boots, Healthy Movers will always be there running alongside it."***

*(Stacey, Nursery Manager, Muddy Boots Hamworth)*

#### **After Healthy Movers**

Since taking part in Healthy Movers, children who were not active before are now becoming more active as a result. Healthy Movers helped to improve their core mobility and stability, and they are now happy to engage with the resources and going outside.

The children are also becoming more confident. The Managers emphasised the simplicity of the activities and when the children were able to complete an activity successfully, they felt a sense of achievement. This in turn made them feel more confident to move onto other activities. The children now actively seek out Healthy Movers activities.

The managers emphasised that this increase in physical activity and self confidence was particularly rewarding to see after the negative impact of the pandemic and lockdowns.

#### **Top tips**

- ✓ Be ready to engage in the Healthy Movers activities yourself to model it to the children, and do not be afraid to be "silly" with it.
- ✓ Incorporate Healthy Movers into your daily routine by linking it to other activities that you are already doing as a setting.

## Supporting children's engagement

### Tintangels Pre School, Cornwall

#### Before Healthy Movers

Some of the children that had recently started at Tintangels Pre School were very subdued and quiet, often choosing to isolate themselves from other children and group activities.

#### What did they do?

All children at Tintangels Pre-School take part in the Healthy Movers activities. The Pre-School tends to focus on one Healthy Movers activity each half term; this allows the children to get used to the activity and gives them the confidence to do it at the setting, as well as at home. The setting encourages the children to take a lead during the activities, for example when they take part in 'Birds in Trees', the children take it in turns to decide what bird they will be and then they demonstrate the movement and noise that they make. The other children then follow them.

#### After Healthy Movers

The Healthy Movers activities have helped to build children's confidence and encouraged them to join in and take part in activities. Giving the children the opportunity to take a lead during activities also supported their creativity and independence, and encouraged some of the quieter children to join in.

Healthy Movers has also supported greater interaction between the children. The staff encourage the children to talk to the other children, rather than just the staff, about the activities they are doing, for example when they are doing the 'Jungle Journeys' Healthy Movers activities, the children talk to each other about the different animals they are being and the movements they are doing.

***"Healthy Movers activities encourage the children to strike up a conversation with others."***  
(Rosie, Assistant Manager, Tintangels Pre-School)

#### Top tips

- ✓ Give children the opportunity to take the lead in Healthy Movers activities.
- ✓ Encourage the children to talk to each other about the activities they are doing to support their communication and language.

## Improving children's school readiness

### Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery, Dorset

#### Before Healthy Movers

The staff at Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery observed that the children heading off to school in September were anxious about the transition and as a result, were feeling quite emotional.

#### What did they do?

Healthy Movers has helped the Nursery to develop their curiosity approach, which is a new approach for many of the practitioners, as they have taken the children's interests and used the Healthy Movers activities to support these.

In particular, Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery has used Healthy Movers to support children that are starting school later this year. The children have taken the lead, but they have used Healthy Movers activities as a way of discussing school, including their worries and what to expect when they go. Importantly, Healthy Movers has helped to make it easier for the children to talk about school and has helped to make the transition fun.

***"The children are the ones that have turned it [Healthy Movers] into school readiness activities."***

(Charlie Biss, Practitioner at Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery)

#### After Healthy Movers

The children are less anxious about starting school and are feeling much happier about the transition. The children also talk about how they will teach their new friends some of the Healthy Movers activities when they're at school.

#### Top tips

- ✓ Be guided by the children and choose Healthy Movers activities that support their interests.
- ✓ Embed Healthy Movers activities into daily routines and use the activities to support session planning.



## **Increasing practitioners' confidence and knowledge**

### **St John's Pre-School, Dorset**

#### **Before Healthy Movers**

The Manager at St John's Pre-School highlighted that they are based in a deprived area so she was motivated to provide children with the additional support and ideas that Healthy Movers can provide in terms of getting active.

#### **What did they do?**

The Manager of St John's Pre School attended the Healthy Movers training and then cascaded the knowledge to other practitioners at the setting. The team at St John's has weekly meetings where they give each other ideas for Healthy Movers and keep each other up to date. There are now four practitioners at the Pre-School who can deliver Healthy Movers.

St John's Pre-School is a pack-away setting so they are not able to have a dedicated space for Healthy Movers. They have created bags containing: a Healthy Movers card, a book that matches the card, a song, the resources such as bean bags, and then on a tag it says the outcome.

#### **After Healthy Movers**

The staff members appeared a bit apprehensive at first but by emphasizing the simplicity of the activities, the staff were reassured and increased in confidence and competence to lead Healthy Movers activities. The Healthy Movers bags they have created allow practitioners to quickly pick up a bag and have all the necessary information and resources in one location, ready for delivery.

Healthy Movers has also increased their knowledge of how physical literacy links with other areas of development, such as literacy, reading and writing. This made the practitioners feel more confident in explaining the benefits of being active and healthy with other staff members, children and parents.

#### **Top tips**

- ✓ Be confident to adapt activities to make it fit for your setting.
- ✓ Collaborate and network with other settings in the area to give and receive support, in particular to discuss good practice when the set-up is similar, e.g. pack-away settings.
- ✓ Try and catch up regularly with other practitioners in your setting who deliver Healthy Movers to keep each other up-to-date and share ideas.

## Engaging families

### Little Berries Pre-School, West Somerset

#### Before Healthy Movers

The children that attend Little Berries Pre-School were generally very active, but they had mixed abilities in terms of their physical development and communication skills. The Pre-School Manager believes these differences were largely influenced by the extent to which children interacted with their families and the community, such as through toddler groups, prior to starting at Pre-School. This is particularly pronounced as the area is very rural, with a very dispersed population and no toddler groups within the immediate community. The Manager also felt that some parents in the community did not know what to do or how to help their children to be active as they have never had access to relevant support or information. Prior to Healthy Movers, the staff at the Pre-School also found it hard to explain the benefits of physical activity to parents.

#### What did they do?

Little Berries Pre-School delivered three Healthy Movers Stay and Play Sessions. During the sessions they delivered Healthy Movers activities with the children and invited parents to join them. The Stay and Play sessions were extended to include children in the reception years at the school, which is located on the same site. The Pre-School Manager felt that some of these children would benefit greatly from Healthy Movers, and many were siblings of those in Pre-School so she felt it would help to engage the whole family. One of the Stay and Play Sessions was delivered in the village hall and the opportunity was opened up to the rest of the community. The Pre-School children have also taken Healthy Movers rucksacks home, which contain resource cards to support activities at home, along with some simple equipment, such as balls.

#### After Healthy Movers

Healthy Movers has given the staff at the Little Berries Pre-School ideas for ways to engage parents and the community. The Manager believes that one of the biggest benefits of Healthy Movers was engaging the parents through the home packs and the Stay and Play Sessions. The Manager believes that the Healthy Movers Stay and Play Sessions have been particularly instrumental in engaging parents and encouraging them to support their children with activities at home; the staff now have the confidence to be able to explain the benefits to parents, and the parents have been able to actively take part and experience the activities, which has helped to give them ideas of activities they can do at home with their children.

Healthy Movers has also helped to bring parents and families together, which was particularly important in such a rural area.

***“We’re in a society where parents feel the pressure that they are doing their children a disservice if they haven’t done things with them. Giving them information and the chance to come and do fun things with their children through Healthy Movers will help them so by the time their children come to school and need help with their homework, parents will be able to engage better.”***

(Vikki, Pre-School Manager at Little Berries Pre-School)

#### Top tips

- ✓ Encourage parents to actively take part and experience the Healthy Movers activities.
- ✓ Build the confidence of practitioners so they can explain the benefits of Healthy Movers to parents.

## **Building Max's confidence**

### **Little Acorns Pre-School, Cornwall**

#### **Before Healthy Movers**

Max was a very nervous child. Before starting Healthy Movers, he would not join in with music and dancing sessions. He would watch the other children but not engage directly. He showed real anxiety towards doing anything he hadn't done before. Once he became upset it could take him a long time to calm down again until he was regulated to engage again.

#### **What did they do?**

The setting slowly started introducing Healthy Movers twice a day, during the morning and afternoon sessions. They followed the cards and the first one they chose was 'Birds in Trees'. As we had a 'Superheroes' topic at the same time, we chose to do 'Superheroes on Buildings'. They followed this for two weeks, as the children enjoyed running it alongside our topic so much.

#### **After Healthy Movers**

Initially, Max was very hesitant to join in as it was something new and different for him. He would stand to the side becoming very upset if the practitioners tried to get him to join in. As they started the second week, they noticed Max practising his balancing along the lines outside - walking one foot in front of the other then playing with his close friend asking them "can you do this?" and balancing on one leg. When he noticed an adult watching though, he would stop. This continued for the next day, and we started praising his friends near him when they started copying playing out the actions of the card. This got Max's attention and he said to: "look i can balance on a building I'm a Superhero!"

***"It was amazing to see the first steps of his confidence building."***

(Practitioner at Little Acorn's Pre-School)

*Pseudonym used.*

## Views of Healthy Movers

When asked how likely practitioners were to recommend Healthy Movers to other settings, on a scale of 0 (very unlikely) to 10 (very likely), practitioners gave a high average score of **8.9**.

“Healthy Movers has attracted attention and made people think differently... the outcomes go much further than we ever expected.”

**West Somerset Opportunity Area Lead  
2018-19**

“The tutor was absolutely amazing, she constantly had us engaged, made the training enjoyable and had answers to most of our questions....She went above and beyond, thank you.”

**Practitioner from Suffolk, 2021-22**

## Success Principles

The Youth Sport Trust commissioned a systematic review of literature around promoting physical activity in early years settings. Though authors noted a limited availability of evidence for children in the early years compared with school-aged children and adolescents, seven 'promising principles' for promoting physical activity in early years settings (such as nurseries and pre-schools) were identified (Coates et al., 2023).

In summary, the review found the below principles:

1. Ensure practitioners receive appropriate training and support which improves their knowledge and understanding about physical activity and sedentary behaviour and increases their confidence to support physical activity.
2. Create an ethos and environment that supports physical activity, including a formal physical activity policy, the provision of play equipment and adequate play spaces, and providing frequent opportunities for outdoor play.
3. Include a balance of child initiated and adult led physical activities.
4. Provide structured physical activity which supports the development of fundamental movement skills.
5. Integrate physical activity into daily routines and use it to support other areas of learning and development.
6. Involve parents and carers, raising their knowledge and awareness of physical activity, sharing activity ideas with them and encouraging them to build on the physical activities introduced in settings.
7. Deliver multi-component interventions

In addition, the review found a lack of evidence for promoting physical activity in settings such as the home, as well as childminders settings. Gaps in literature were also found in relation to: effective training mechanisms to improve childcare provider knowledge and understanding; sex differences in physical activity across different childcare settings; activities, curricula and policy guidelines to support the development of fundamental movement skills and increase physical activity, as well as physical activity and development in infancy (below age 2), specifically in relation to parental understanding and effective practice in childcare settings.

With the above insight in mind, the following success principles have been identified for Healthy Movers. There are strong similarities between those identified specifically for the Healthy Movers programme and by Coates et al. (2023) in the wider literature, suggesting that Healthy Movers aligns with best practice and can target similar limitations to further improve effectiveness.

Table 3: **Success Principles**

	<b>Healthy Movers Success Principles<sup>14</sup></b>	<b>Benefits of Success Principles</b>	<b>Examples of implementation in Healthy Movers</b>
1	Encourage child-led activities as well as adult-led activities.	To support children's interest and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage children to choose the activities or actions.</li> <li>• Provide Healthy Movers equipment during free play.</li> <li>• Adapt activities to suit children's interests, e.g. diggers, trains, favourite stories.</li> </ul>
2	Be flexible.	To ensure inclusion for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt activities to suit ability, e.g. making shapes by standing up or lying down.</li> <li>• Deliver indoors or outdoors.</li> </ul>
3	Create an ethos and environment that supports physical activity.	To support physical activity delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a written physical activity policy in place.</li> <li>• Promote positive staff behaviour including prompting children to be active, playing with children, encouraging and acknowledging children's physical activity.</li> <li>• Where possible, decrease playground density (the number of children per square metre).</li> <li>• Portable play equipment.</li> <li>• Limit sedentary opportunities (e.g. reduce screentime) and modify the environment to support activity.</li> <li>• Appropriate space for physical activity that maximises the potential of the available area (both indoors and outdoors).</li> <li>• Frequent periods of outdoor play.</li> </ul>
4	Maximise synergy with other activities.	To support wider learning and development.	<p>As examples, Healthy Movers activities can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complement story-time and songs through actions.</li> <li>• support counting and shape recognition (e.g. making different shapes or counting actions).</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> These principles have been developed based on evidence from Healthy Movers, along with an evidence review conducted by Coates et al at in 2023, which identified seven promising principles to facilitate physical activity in children under 5 in early years settings.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>align to the natural world (e.g. actions for different weather or pretending to move like animals).</li> </ul>
5	Provide structured physical activity.	To support the development of fundamental movement skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy Movers resources provide simple structured activities, with progression to support the development of fundamental movement skills.</li> </ul>
6	Build physical activity into daily routines and other parts of the curriculum.	To embed and sustain activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do Healthy Movers activities when moving around the setting.</li> <li>Take resources to the park, beach or garden.</li> <li>Use play and movement to deliver other aspects of the curriculum e.g. storytelling and literacy, knowledge of the world.</li> </ul>
7	Have a Healthy Movers Champion in each setting.	To support practitioners and drive continual improvement in physical activity provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lead member of staff at each setting that champions Healthy Movers.</li> </ul>
8	Ensure practitioners receive appropriate training and ongoing support, including the provision of high-quality resources.	To empower trained practitioners to confidently deliver physical activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy Movers training sessions.</li> <li>Healthy Movers resources.</li> <li>Networking sessions between settings.</li> <li>Ongoing support from Healthy Movers tutors.</li> </ul>
9	Encourage trained practitioners to cascade	To empower <u>all</u> practitioners to confidently deliver physical activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy Movers resources.</li> <li>Observing other staff.</li> <li>Information sharing at staff meetings.</li> <li>Training sessions to cascade knowledge to other practitioners.</li> </ul>

	knowledge to others.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posters and information on the walls.</li> <li>• Resource boxes with all necessary equipment readily available.</li> </ul>
10	Involve parents, carers and showcase activities.	To raise parents' / carers' knowledge and awareness of physical activity and encourage them to build on the physical activities introduced in the settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay and play sessions.</li> <li>• Updates via videos, pictures and information on digital platforms or verbal updates.</li> <li>• Videos to demonstrate activities.</li> <li>• Healthy Movers rucksacks (resource cards and equipment) sent home.</li> <li>• Have a 'Bear' that children take turns to take home and record Healthy Movers activities at home.</li> </ul>
11	Include children's equipment packs, or home packs.	To support engagement and a sense of belonging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy Movers rucksacks which contain resource cards and simple equipment, such as scarves, balls, bean bags, bubbles and chalk, plus stickers and water bottle.</li> </ul>
12	Deliver multi-component interventions.	To maximise the benefits, as outlined above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a range of interventions, as outlined above.</li> </ul>



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