

# **ACE**

## **Ambassador Programme**

Leadership development  
to support a trauma  
informed system

## The ACE Ambassador leadership programme supports people to learn together, share knowledge and ideas and test out possible solutions to reduce the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).

This approach recognises that reducing the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences is a complex issue that requires leadership across multiple organisations in order to support a system wide shift in thinking and practice.

Recommended ways of working with complexity include increasing the capacity of practitioners and community leaders to change together, by:

- Creating learning environments to explore and make sense of change from a range of perspectives
- Develop tailored interventions, based on understanding of local population health needs and evidence<sup>1,6,9</sup>.

Sharing perspectives and testing change ideas is part of a public health response to ACEs by helping develop a strong professional workforce that is able to meet the needs of children, adults and families struggling with past trauma.



### What are ACEs?

- Specified traumatic events (such as abuse, household violence) occurring before the age of 18 which, given high or frequent exposure, without the support of a trusted adult, can lead to toxic stress and negatively altered brain development<sup>11</sup>.
- Are associated with greater levels of physical health, mental health and social challenges later in life<sup>3,5</sup>.
- Strongly linked to socioeconomic disadvantage as well as being prevalent across the general population<sup>2,3,8</sup>.

### How best to reduce the impact of ACEs?

A building evidence base identifies key themes of stable and trusted relationships particularly in childhood, participation in community activities, financial security and trauma informed service cultures<sup>4,7</sup>. The majority of these activities take place outside of healthcare settings.

## The model

The ACE Ambassador development programme is influenced by Nesta's 100-day challenge programme that places front line staff and citizens as experimenters of change with support such as coaching, diverse place-based teams and sponsorship<sup>10</sup>. The initial programme design was tested and evaluated in two areas of Kent (Ramsgate and Swale). A development platform guide has since been developed to support a diversity of providers deliver the ACE Ambassador programme in a way that can be adapted to local area needs and available resource.

## What ACE ambassadors thought

Evaluation from the first programme included interviews with six programme participants. This identified that the ACE Ambassador programme provides space to:

### Share

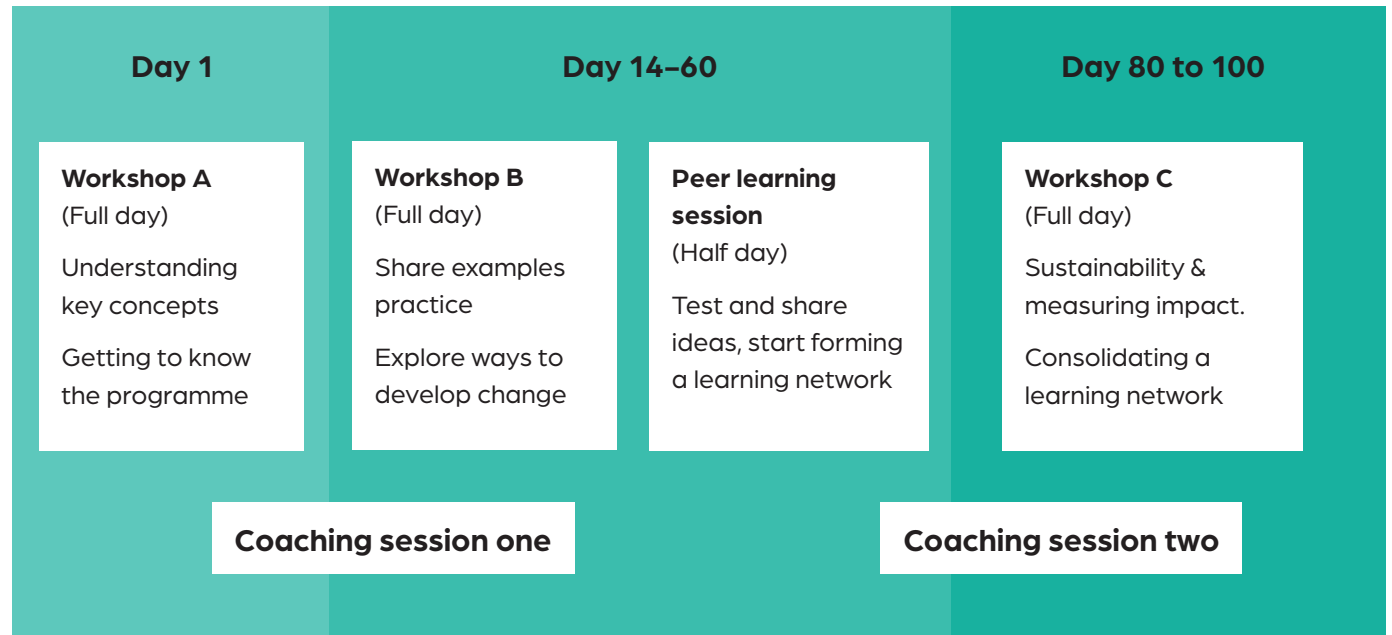
Understanding that we all hold areas of knowledge and that we start to see things differently when connections across services are made

### Reflect

Time to think about personal experience alongside professional goals, recognise the uncertainty associated with dealing with complex change and that this is about many rather than one solution.

### Identify the possible

This takes place by coaching, learning from others and thinking through change techniques.



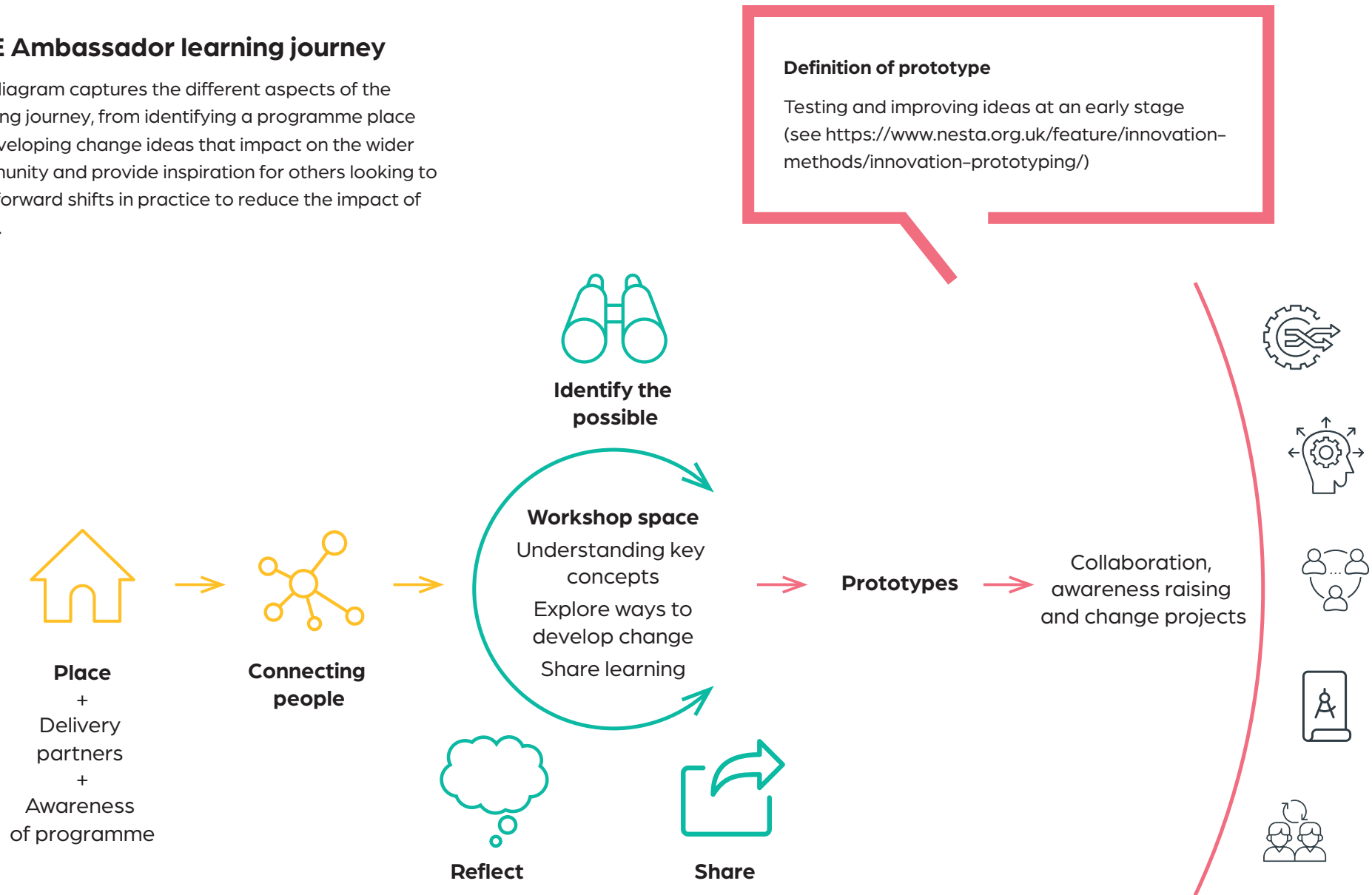
**"Everyone has a little bit of the jigsaw of what is happening in that particular locality."**

**"Coaching sessions gave you the confidence to think about ideas and take them forward"**

**"Liked being pushed and explored, made me look and reflect."**

## ACE Ambassador learning journey

This diagram captures the different aspects of the learning journey, from identifying a programme place to developing change ideas that impact on the wider community and provide inspiration for others looking to take forward shifts in practice to reduce the impact of ACEs.



## These are some of the project ideas developed by Ambassadors participating in the programme, which are being taken forward at different stages

- Developing ACE Aware workshops for young people between 19 and 24 years old, with plans to run these in educational and other relevant settings such as prisons.
- Running a faith based ACE Overcomers course in partnership with The Salvation Army for adults severely impacted by ACEs to enable them to understand and process their trauma in a safe, supportive environment and learn practical strategies to enable them to achieve a greater quality of life.
- Developing opportunities to make non-teaching staff in schools more ACE aware, for example creating a library of resources for school Family Support Workers and planning roll out of ACE Aware training.
- Co-designing and co-delivering an ACE Awareness course within the Kent Recovery and Wellbeing College provision, which offers educational courses to support mental, physical and emotional wellbeing in shared learning environments in the community and via virtual online learning.
- Adapting early help assessments and plans to become more focused around the effects of trauma on children and families, including supporting staff supervision to be trauma informed and assessing the impact of this change through service user feedback.
- Developing *Thriving through connection*, a holistic parenting programme addressing generational ACEs, designed specifically to empower parents affected by ACEs by teaching effective parenting strategies to strengthen their connection with their children and build their children's resilience.

## Ambitions going forward

We are keen that this model continues to be used to create space for ACE Ambassadors to come together, learn and innovate across Kent and Medway, with the hope of a network of Ambassadors helping reduce the impact of ACEs through many action across the system.



Email:

Visit [www.kent.gov.uk/spacematters](http://www.kent.gov.uk/spacematters)

## References

1. Abercrombie, R. Harries, E. Wharton, R. (2015) Systems Change: A guide to what it is and how to do it. Lankelly Chase/ NPC. Available from: <https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Systems-Change-How-to-Do-It.pdf> [Accessed 24 June 2019]
2. Asmussen, K. Fischer, F. Drayton, E. McBride, T. (2020) *Adverse childhood experiences: What we know, what we don't know, and what should happen next*. Early Intervention Foundation, London.
3. Bellis, M. A., Ashton, K., Hughes, K., Ford, K. Bishop, J., & Paranjothy, S. (2015). *Adverse childhood experiences and their impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population: Alcohol use, drug use, violence, sexual behaviour, incarceration, smoking and poor diet*. Public Health Wales.
4. Di Lemma, L.C.G., Davies, A.R., Ford, K., Hughes K., Homolova L., Gray, B., Richardson, G. (2019). Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences: An evidence review of interventions to prevent and address adversity across the life course. Wrexham: Public Health Wales, Cardiff and Bangor University
5. Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M.P., Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 56(6), 774–786.
6. Gordon, P., Plampling, D., Pratt, J. (2010) *Working in Systems: The Landscapes Framework*. Centre for Innovation in Health Management, University of Leeds.
7. Lester S, Lorenc T, Sutcliffe K, Khatwa M, Stansfield C, Sowden A, Thomas J (2019) *What helps to support people affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences? A Review of Evidence*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London.
8. Lewer, D., King, E., Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., Treanor, M., Maguire, N., Bullock, M., Hayward, A., Story, A. (2019). The ACE Index: mapping childhood adversity in England. *Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdz158>
9. Lowe, T. and French, M. (2018) 'Public Management' in *A recipe for action: using wider evidence for a healthier UK*. London: The Health Foundation.
10. Nesta (2019) *Sparking change in public systems: The 100 Day Challenge*. Available from: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/sparking-change-public/> [Accessed at 26 April 2020]
11. Sweeney, A., Filson, B., Kennedy, A., Collinson, L., & Gillard, S. (2018). A paradigm shift: relationships in trauma-informed mental health services. *BJPsych advances*, 24(5), 319–333.