

Brighton & Hove Healthy Start campaign (January-March 2017) – Joint learning

About the Brighton & Hove Healthy Start campaign:

Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP), Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, and Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) launched a joint campaign in January 2017 to increase uptake of Healthy Start vouchers. Healthy Start vouchers help low income families on certain benefits who are either pregnant or have children under four, to buy milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables.

The campaign arose after an unsuccessful joint funding application to the [Alexandra Rose](#) Trust. The application process involved looking at healthy start activity and awareness in the city including holding focus groups with low income families at two children's centres, especially those using children centre food banks, and this formed a basis for partnership working.

The children's centre manager subsequently hosted several Food Poverty Group Meetings over a number of months, with the Healthy Start campaign being a key agenda item.

Both BHCC Public Health and the BHCC Children's Centres were closely involved in planning the campaign, alongside BHFP and the Sussex Community NHS Foundation.

Research by BHFP for the city's [Food Poverty Action Plan](#) launched in November 2016 showed high levels of household insecurity, and identified that families in the city - especially families with larger numbers of children, and single parent families - were particularly vulnerable. BHFP worked out that the vouchers plus free vitamins can add up to over £900 per child if someone signs up at ten weeks pregnant, yet three out of every ten eligible households in the city who could be getting these vouchers were not claiming them. Figures from November 2016 reveal that Healthy Start uptake in Brighton and Hove is at 73% roughly in line with national figures.

The campaign was launched in order to increase uptake, and focused on working with intermediaries and on 'embedding' the vouchers into existing systems, rather than direct contact with the public, as this was felt to make best use of limited resources. Partners asked community and voluntary groups, food banks, housing, childcare, social care, health and other professionals who work with children or families to make sure their staff and volunteers understand and promote the vouchers.

A local poster was created which was made available to organisations and individuals who wanted to help promote the scheme, this was sent via email, posted on various social media accounts and a few hard copies were delivered to organisations that requested them. BHFP also used their [Healthy Start blog](#) to promote the campaign.



(The PDF for the Healthy Start poster is available [here](#))

Partners involved in the Campaign:

1. Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) – Research, promotion, employed an intern to help with the campaign
2. Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) (especially Public Health, Children’s Centres, Welfare Reform Team) – wide range of activity (see below)
3. Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust – midwives/health professionals attended food poverty meetings, and shared information within their teams
4. Healthy Start Alliance – Provided expertise

All partners were involved in a joint communications plan, which included cascading emails to relevant individuals/organisations and some social media activity

Who was targeted:

1. Health and other professionals
2. Community and voluntary organisations
3. Retailers
4. The public

Aims of the Campaign:

- Ensure that trusted intermediaries e.g. health visitors, social workers, midwives, childcare providers, staff and volunteers at Community and voluntary groups, food banks, money and fuel poverty advice services, schools, benefits advisors and housing, child care, dietitians, social care and health and other professionals who work with children or families know about and promote the vouchers.
- Ensure that midwives, GPs, dieticians and other health professionals who are able to sign the vouchers are confident to do so (and understand they don't have to check financial eligibility, only confirm that someone is pregnant or has children under four)
- Create an 'easy sign up' route via children's centre receptionists in areas that have them.
- "Build in" awareness of the vouchers into existing systems, prompts and checklists so that midwives, health visitors and benefit advisers - are prompted to flag them up.
- Raise awareness with Retailers - Audit how many retailers are currently signed up to accept voucher in the city, and sign up more, especially the two retailers in the open market. Share and if necessary create 'healthy start welcome here' info for them to display.
- Ensure community and health settings have attractive, friendly locally branded posters promoting the vouchers.
- Follow a joint comms plan, using social media, and a press release targeted at local media and specialist publications/websites that target pregnant women families with young children to boost the campaign.

What has been done:

1. Health and other professionals

A priority with this campaign was to spread awareness about Healthy Start amongst Health Professionals. Often health professionals are the first point of contact for pregnant women or those with young children, and as they are essential for signing off Healthy Start application packs, it is vital that they are discussing the scheme and are confident about how it works.

- The chair of B&H MSLC shared the campaign across their social media platforms and discussed it during their members meeting in March.
- A teenage pregnancy midwife confirmed that they discuss Healthy Start with all of their clients. As they deal with teenage pregnancy, and all mothers under 18 are eligible for the vouchers, this is an important message to be delivering. They order application forms in bulk and regularly hand them out to eligible mothers to be.
- A lead midwife at the Royal Sussex County Hospital distributed the Healthy Start poster amongst their team and has spoken about the campaign in a team meeting.

- Copies of the local campaign poster have been distributed to all GP surgeries and pharmacies across Brighton & Hove.
- Information was put on both Council and NHS intranets.
- Healthy Start information was emailed to local nurseries.
- Children's Centres took an active role, building promotion of the vouchers into a range of existing activity and groups.
- Children's Centres trained receptionists to help people fill in the forms, creating an 'easy sign up' path for anyone wanting to apply, who can simply walk in, and proactively promoting the vouchers to those waiting for midwife appointments.
- The Health Visiting Team Manager gave a presentation on Healthy Start at the Healthy Weight Programme Board at the end of January 2017, and the Public Health improvement specialist followed this up with PHE.
- Public Health B&H sent a copy of the Healthy Start poster to a number of local schools to display, as well as an electronic copy which was sent out in school bulletins.
- The DWP cascaded Healthy Start information and the poster to all Job Centre staff in Brighton and Hove, it was also uploaded to the District Provision Tool and the Brighton and Hove provision toolkit which are the main sources for DWP work coaches to signpost to support. They also shared Healthy Start information with DWP Troubled Families Advisers who are embedded within the council and the Welfare Reform Team.
- Jubilee library distributed the Healthy Start poster to all other city libraries.
- BHCC Welfare Reform Project team built Healthy Start vouchers into existing systems, and circulated information to the officers working directly with BHCC tenants. Initial plans to do a targeted direct mail out to those eligible were cancelled as it emerged that the national Healthy Start Issuing Office already sends letters to everyone eligible, so this was not felt to be a good use of limited funds.
- BHFP's nutritionists and dietitians have included healthy start vouchers in their advice to families and individuals.

2. Community organisations

The partners have contacted a number of community organisations in Brighton & Hove who may come into contact with people who are eligible for the vouchers to ask them if they would promote the campaign and build Healthy Start into their checklist of what they currently discuss with their clients.

- The Community Safety Manager for Refugees and Migrants at BHCC emailed the Refugee and Migrant Forum with information about the Healthy Start campaign for them to pass on to any relevant migrant/refugee families.
- BMCP (Black and Minority Ethnic Community Partnership) displayed the poster in their Hub area.
- Healthy Start information was forwarded to the MEP (Migrant English Project) list.
- Sanctuary Housing displayed the poster at The Foyer in Pelham Street.
- Vandu Language Services passed on the information about the campaign to all of their Bilingual advocates who can then discuss it with their clients.
- IntoUniversity Sussex displayed the poster in their waiting room.

- Voices in Exile displayed the poster.
- BUCFP (Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project) displayed the poster.
- Chomp, the children's holiday lunch club run by One Church displayed the poster.
- Community works included some information about Healthy Start in their Newsletter (March 2017) '**Healthy start vouchers**. These vouchers help low income families on certain benefits who are either pregnant or have children under four, to buy fresh milk, and fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables. Please do let your clients know about these vouchers'. They also linked to the BHFP Healthy Start blog post.
- BHFP have discussed the campaign during both the Advice Services Network meeting, which involves a number of community and voluntary organisations across Brighton and Hove, as well as the Food Banks and Emergency Food Network meeting which includes all of the main food banks in the area.
- BHFP community cookery workers have included healthy start vouchers in their work e.g. cookery sessions in playground and 'baby buffet' weaning sessions.

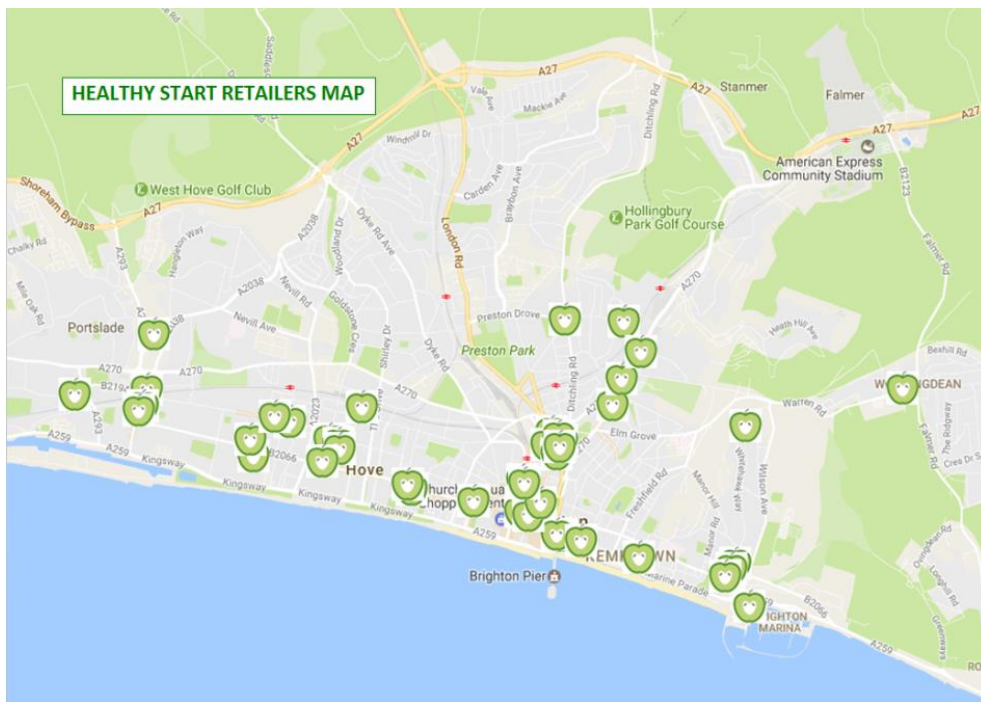
3. Retailers and the public

There was also a limited amount of work directly targeting the public. It was also seen as important that as many retailers in Brighton and Hove as possible are signed up to accept Healthy Start posters, and that those who are already signed up are aware of how the scheme works. There was some light touch promotional work with several retailers in the area in order to boost the campaign.

- A week long display was put up outside the Foodshed at the Open Market, Healthy Start application packs and posters were available to take from the stall.



- BHFP have been in talks with the Open Market about them becoming a Healthy Start retailer, and it has been agreed that they will sign up as a collective unit. Fruit and Veg retailers (Mears/The fruit shop/Foodshed) will collect their vouchers together and then be reimbursed by Open Market management who will send the vouchers off on their behalf.
- BHFP hosted a till talks at Sainsbury's, which involved targeting families with young children to discuss Healthy Start and offer guidance on the application process.
- Mulberry's in Whitehawk is in the process of signing up as a Healthy Start retailer.
- BHFP's intern visited Roundabout Children's Centre during a 'Jump for Joy' session in order to promote Healthy Start and offer families support with the application process.
- BHFP created an interactive retailers map, which displays all of the current retailers that accept Healthy Start vouchers. This map is available via the BHFP [Healthy Start blog](#), and has also been shared across social media, and it currently is on 271 views (16/03/17). The map can be edited via the Harvest 'Google My Maps' account. The shareable link is: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1XWrOCp-Y0IsYYT_3A0Ec-yVaNI&usp=sharing



The impact:

This campaign has caught the interest of a number of organisations and individuals who have helped to share the message about Healthy Start in an attempt to increase the uptake figures. Through social media engagement, a press release and the BHFP Healthy Start blog, more people have been made aware of the Healthy Start scheme.

- The BHFP [Healthy Start blog post](#) has reached 504 views and 1876 hits on Joomla (updated on the 12/03/2017)

- There has been social media activity surrounding the campaign. BHFP have had 35 retweets on their posts regarding Healthy Start (13/03/17), and a number of organisations have posted about the campaign on their own accounts including Possibility People, Family Information Services and Chomp.
- BHFP have had a total of 32 shares on all Facebook posts relating to the Healthy Start campaign (14/03/17). Healthy Start information has been posted via a number of Facebook sights, including all of the B&H Children Centre pages, Brighton & Hove Resident Involvement and the Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust Breastfeeding page.
- A press release was sent out. The Argus published a short piece of information about the Healthy Start campaign on the 2nd March 2017. The Brighton and Hove news published an [article](#) about the campaign on the 16 March 2017.
- Local MP Caroline Lucas wrote to the Department of Health on whether or not Healthy Start vouchers should be sent out in blank envelopes in order to avoid theft, as this was an issue which was raised during the local focus groups (update in May 2017- Dept of Health declined to answer due to restrictions around general election)
- BHCC will check Healthy Start figures in 6 months' time (September 2017) to see if there has been any increase in uptake.

Unclaimed food support
FAMILIES might be missing out on hundreds of pounds of healthy eating support.
 The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership has warned low income families are missing out on Healthy Start vouchers to buy milk, fruit and vegetables.
 The group, working with Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust and Brighton and Hove City Council's children's centres, said vouchers plus free vitamins can add up to £900 per child for pregnant mothers or families with children under four.
 To check eligibility visit healthystart.nhs.uk or call 0345 607 6823.

The Argus (02/03/2017)

Further reading:

In order to know what would be effective for the Healthy Start campaign, BHFP conducted some research into what has already been done in other areas as well as some reading on the Healthy Start scheme in general.

Healthy Start: Understanding the use of vouchers and vitamins. Summary for practitioners, March 2014

<https://nursingmidwifery.dundee.ac.uk/sites/nursingmidwifery.dundee.ac.uk/files/page-files/Healthy%20Start%20Evaluation%20summary%20for%20health%20professionals.pdf>

- Food Matters worked with the University of York to produce a DoH funded evaluation of Healthy Start.
- They concluded that Healthy Start needs to reframe the debate between breastfeeding and formula feeding so that the inclusion of infant formula reflects Healthy Start's aim to provide a nutritional safety net and is not interpreted as a healthy food
- Many families in nutritional need are not eligible (for example, those on low incomes but above the income threshold, and those seeking asylum) Eligibility criteria should be broader
- The Healthy Start scheme should continue to be developed, this could include linking the application process to other benefits, speeding up the authorisation of claims; providing application forms in different languages and formats; index-linking the vouchers to the rising prices of Healthy Start goods; simplifying eligibility criteria in-line with proposed changes to

the benefit system.

Healthy Start in England: Messages for professionals from interviews with parents, professionals and small retailers

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/migrated/documents/healthystartbooklet.pdf>

- Messages for professionals from interviews with parents, professionals and small retailers
- In the areas visited no one currently had the capacity to undertake any work to increase the availability of fruit and vegetables or promote Healthy Start through local retailers, though many could see the benefit of doing so
- To help the local organisation, some Healthy Start coordinators identified a 'champion' for the scheme in each team who could make things happen (including midwifery, health visiting, public health, nutrition, Children's Centre managers etc.)

Healthy Start Vouchers Study: The Views and Experiences of Parents, Professionals and Small Businesses in England (March 2013 – University of Bristol)

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/migrated/documents/finalreport2.pdf>

- The Views and Experiences of Parents, Professionals and Small Retailers in England
- Training on eligibility criteria and fit with other benefits, recommended vitamin intakes, vitamin distribution points and wider benefits of the voucher scheme and its contribution to health promotion would support frontline professionals to better promote the scheme and crucially, link it to wider health promotion information for families in order to maximise the potential benefits
- Accepting HS vouchers did not bring notable benefits to small retailers, either through increased footfall of profit, but retailers in disadvantaged neighbourhoods often felt that they had a role in serving their community and supporting vulnerable families
- It may be the case that early introduction via health professionals would get mums in the vitamins 'habit', so a focus on pregnant and new mums may be justified in this regard

Healthy Start discovery - what we learned

<https://digitalhealth.blog.gov.uk/2016/10/14/healthy-start-learned/>

- A blog about the progress being made on digitising Healthy Start, also gives some feedback about the pros and cons of the scheme from interviews held with beneficiaries/ health professionals
- Within the Healthy Start demographic there are people with disabilities, low literacy levels, English as an additional language and people leading chaotic lifestyles; these factors can often be barriers to internet access and use (must take into account the effect of digital exclusion)
- The need for a health professional signature has been widely cited by users and health professionals as a barrier to applying, and a key reason why users are delayed in receiving the benefits.

Early Years Collaborative: a positive impact on low income families in Leith by Graham MacKenzie

<https://taysidehealth.wordpress.com/2015/05/26/early-years-collaborative-a-positive-impact-on-low-income-families-in-leith/>

- An overview of the positive impact Healthy Start campaigning has had in Leith
- Midwives followed up women at the 16 week antenatal visit and identified that some were struggling to complete their part of the application form, so they linked in literacy and parent support workers
- This EYC (The Early Years Collaborative) work demonstrated the value of connecting with front line workers and testing ideas at a human scale
- The most successful advert highlighted that the Facebook page is maintained by NHS professionals, used an image of a Healthy Start voucher, and mentioned money worries

Increasing Healthy Start food and vitamin voucher uptake for low income pregnant women (Early Years Collaborative Leith Pioneer Site)

<http://qir.bmj.com/content/5/1/u210506.w4243.full>

- A report on Healthy Start campaigning in Leith
- It was established that the midwife has misconceptions about whether or not they needed to assess the woman's financial circumstances (i.e. eligibility) but it was confirmed through training with midwives that they simply needed to confirm that the woman that they had consulted was pregnant
- Text reminders appeared to boost attendance, while a letter reminder did not

Beyond the Food Bank: London Food Poverty Profile 2016

http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/beyond_the_food_bank_2016/

- Beyond the Food Bank 2016 is the second edition of London's comprehensive food poverty profile. The report looks at what local authorities are doing to reduce food poverty across a range of measures
- Covers what London boroughs are doing in terms of Healthy Start, using Kingston as a good practice example
- They appointed a Healthy Start lead
- Found it was important to keep reinforcing the message and not rely on one boost campaign to increase uptake over a longer period of time

Making the most of Healthy Start: A practical guide

http://www.firststepsnutrition.org/pdfs/making_the_most_of_HealthyStart.pdf

- Helpful recipes which all use ingredients you can buy with Healthy Start vouchers and are all affordable within the £3.10/£6.20 weekly budget

Assessment of the Healthy Start Voucher scheme: a qualitative study of the perspectives of low income mothers

[http://thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)32248-6/fulltext](http://thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)32248-6/fulltext)

- Assessment of the Healthy Start Voucher scheme: a qualitative study of the perspectives of low income mothers
- This study highlights poor awareness of the existence of the Healthy Start Voucher scheme, the importance that low-income mothers place on providing children with nutritional diets, and the value of the scheme in this endeavour
- It demonstrates scope to improve uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers and for health professionals to engage mothers in discussions around nutrition

Healthy Start Alliance website

<http://www.healthystartalliance.org/>

Report by Alice Canning, intern at the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, March 2017