



Increasing our uptake of Healthy Start vouchers

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

May 2020

A city-wide campaign

We re-designed our poster and delivered over 1,500 through partners. These were also displayed in all the city buses and libraries as well as food banks, community centres, GP surgeries and pharmacies. A social media campaign ran alongside this.

Partners also embedded Healthy Start awareness deeper within their own organisations, such as adding stickers to children's 'red books' to remind midwives and health visitors to talk about Healthy Start.

We delivered 23 'bite size' training sessions marketed as "Families and food poverty" but focussing on Healthy Start. In this way we reached 278 frontline workers and volunteers in a range of organisations including food banks, domestic violence, poverty and drug and alcohol charities, midwives and hospital dietitians. The average score for usefulness was 9 out of 10, and participants reported an increase in knowledge of 94%.

Many participants committed to embedding Healthy Start awareness into their own processes, practices or checklists, and the sessions were great for building a sense of collective mission around raising uptake in our city.

Toward the end of our campaign, Covid-19 arrived. We quickly spread the word that health professional signatures were no longer required, as was announced in April 2020, and sought to reach those newly eligible for and in need of the vouchers. For example, information on Healthy Start was included in all food parcels for families with young children.

"All of it [was useful] – I was unaware of the details of the scheme and eligibility criteria previously." Frontline worker feedback on bite size training



The newly designed poster promoting Healthy Start in Brighton & Hove

Challenges and learning

Participants in many of the training sessions repeatedly identified issues with the scheme that need to be addressed at a national level, as many administrative challenges with the scheme are beyond local control

The national Healthy Start data on uptake among eligible families was affected by national changes during the time of this campaign so it has been hard to track the difference we have made effectively.

However, detailed uptake data for our three local postcodes showed that one area had 80% uptake, much higher than the city average of 65%, and we couldn't understand why. It turned out that one children's centre receptionist had played a key role in proactively promoting the vouchers via displays and by mentioning it to everyone using the centre. We shared her good practice at a training session specifically for children's centre admin and reception staff, and also wrote a blog [featuring her as a 'food hero'](#) who has been instrumental in driving up uptake in one area of the city.

“Bite sized sessions are a good way to reach frontline workers. The half hour format plus our willingness to go out to organisations, slotting into their normal staff or volunteer meetings, works well.”

Emily O'Brien, Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

Next steps

We have coordinated a city-wide response to the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue to integrate Healthy Start vouchers into the planning for what comes next. We would like to be able to offer our bite size training as an online half hour session to more frontline groups including newly formed groups formed as a response to the crisis.

We will also continue to support national campaigns to increase the amount paid by Healthy Start vouchers and reduce the barriers to sign-up. Many frontline workers stressed the importance of changes to the scheme at national level in feedback from sessions.

Key achievements and impact

By embedding awareness of Healthy Start within local organisations, we hope that voucher uptake will continue to increase over time.

Although they may seem a relatively small amount of money, Healthy Start vouchers can add up to over £900 per child – in a world where there is little other support for healthy eating. Bringing this 'missing money' into our city directly addresses household food insecurity.