



Increasing Healthy Start uptake

South Gloucestershire Food Poverty Alliance Interim report, November 2019

Exploring mothers understanding and experiences of Healthy Start

Initially we planned to hold face-to-face interviews with families on their overall understanding of the Healthy Start scheme, both the food vouchers and vitamin. However, this was changed to telephone interviews to encourage greater participation and reduce the barriers to engage in the project. It also allowed for greater flexibility for the families and the Project Worker (PW) and supported a greater likelihood that the interview would take place.

Focusing on engagement has been key. This initially involved engaging the health professional working with these families to support them to participate. However we then realised that it was better for the PW to attend the hubs in person to explain about the project and encourage involvement.

Challenges and learning

Overcoming the challenges to engage, arrange and at times repeat the interviews has required persistence. We realised that some families didn't feel able to say that they didn't want to take part despite ample opportunities given to them. This often meant that text and phone calls were not returned. As we didn't want to exclude them they were often called several times and we then had to decide after a certain amount of time to stop trying.

Next steps

Health professionals, particularly Health Visitors and Community Midwives, are key to supporting families to apply for Healthy Start. We are setting up focus groups to get a better understanding of their perceived role in the application process and the barriers they feel get in the way of a conversation regarding Healthy Start.



“Be prepared to be flexible. Be aware that planned activities can take much more time than you think. Be able to adapt and be flexible in your approach when talking to families – this needs to be written into project planning and application for research governance.”

Deborah Crossan, Project Worker, Public Health

Outcomes

Our alliance needs the views of local people to ensure that priorities in our food poverty action plan are based on reality. Food poverty is not a discrete issue to be considered in isolation. Interviews with parents are finding wider issues for families than Healthy Start itself. It's about “You said, we did.”