



Improving awareness of Healthy Start

Southwark Food Poverty Alliance

May 2020

Increasing awareness of the vouchers among professionals

This winter we held a focus group with eligible families to understand any barriers they may face in applying and using the vouchers. We then also held focus groups with healthcare and non-healthcare professionals to understand their experience of supporting families to access the vouchers.

Everyone who took part in the focus groups was very positive of the vouchers and the impact they can have, but amongst families and professionals there was still confusion as to what they could be used for and where.

As a result of these findings, Southwark's Healthy Start steering group have been involved in promoting the vouchers in a number of ways, for example ensuring all children's centres have display boards on the vouchers and introducing the vouchers at stalls in East Street market.

"I visited a young mother at home that was getting Healthy Start vouchers and the amount of different types of fruit that she bought! She said she had never tasted them before. She bought papaya and strawberries because she had choice to buy so many different types of vegetables and fruits. This is the purpose of Healthy Start vouchers. These vouchers help families buy and try fruits and vegetables."

Health Visitor, Focus group, January 2020



This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.
www.foodpower.org.uk



Challenges and learning

Understanding the experiences of healthcare professionals in using the vouchers was crucial to understanding how we could then improve access to the vouchers locally. However, it was challenging to hold a focus group with healthcare professionals due to workloads and scheduled clinics. The most successful focus group was when we attended a Health Visitors team meeting, rather than setting up something new. This meant we were able to discuss the vouchers with eighteen healthcare professionals in one session.

We had planned to deliver face-to-face training in March, but due to COVID-19 this was cancelled. Instead, we have rescheduled these to run online in June, which has resulted in having more professionals signed up than previously planned for the original face-to-face sessions.

“The vouchers are a bit of a mystery.” Health professional, Focus group, October 2019

Next steps

From early June onwards we will be delivering online information sessions to a range of client-facing professionals and volunteers from across the borough. The information sessions will cover who can apply for Healthy Start vouchers and how, where they can be used and what for. Over fifty professionals in the borough have already signed up to attend the sessions.

Later in the year, we will be delivering more detailed Healthy Start Champions training. This will include further information on the vouchers and digitalisation plans, as well as role-plays on how best to raise the vouchers and discussions of income when working with families.

Key achievements and impact

- Established a good understanding of knowledge and use of Healthy Start vouchers in the borough
- Developed a number of ways to promote and continue to promote the vouchers locally
- We hope this will lead to an increase in the take up rate of Healthy Start vouchers amongst Southwark residents in the coming months