

# Nottinghamshire Childhood Obesity Trailblazer

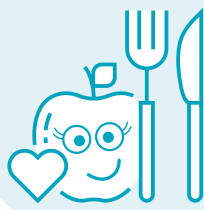
## Healthy Start Evaluation Summary



**...giving children  
the best start**



Nottinghamshire  
County Council



## Vision and Aims

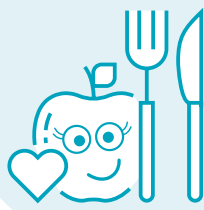
Nottinghamshire is one of five Local Authorities selected to participate in the **Childhood Obesity Programme**.

The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme (COTP) seeks innovative action to tackle childhood obesity at local level. The programme is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and managed by the Local Government Association with support from Public Health England. It is intended to test the limits of existing powers and developing solutions to local obstacles aiming to enable ambitious local action and to achieve change at scale.

Our aim is to make access to affordable healthy food easier, improving the quality of food provision through early years settings and enabling parents/carers to develop good eating habits with their children.

A key element of the programme is aiming to improve awareness and uptake of the national **Healthy Start scheme**. This enables us to support families on low incomes to access free fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins.





## Developments in 2020-21

The Covid pandemic has had a big impact on food insecurity including households with children. Families have found it 'harder to put food on the table, particularly lone parents, large families and low income families' **Food Foundation: The Impact of Covid 19 on Household Food Security**.

Healthy Start has gained a higher national profile throughout the pandemic. The expansion of the scheme is a key recommendation of the **National Food Strategy**. Access to the scheme has also been widely promoted by Marcus Rashford; two examples being his '**Full Time**' campaign with chef Tom Kerridge and his **open letter to health professionals** in July 2021

There have been significant changes to the scheme throughout the pandemic. To simplify and speed up the application process, there is no longer a requirement for health professionals to sign the application form. There are also changes underway to digitise the scheme, moving to an on-line application process and pre paid chip and PIN cards instead of paper vouchers.

We have adapted to the changes throughout the pandemic and grasped opportunities to embed Healthy Start into our overall approach to promoting access to healthy, affordable food, addressing food insecurity and ensuring the 'Best Start' for families, babies and young children.

## Inputs



**Part time project officer** with a focus on Healthy Start funded through the Trailblazer.



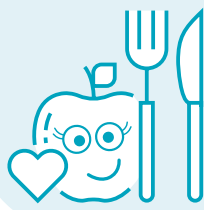
**Additional funding** through Public Health for a part time officer to increase vitamin uptake.



**Stakeholder support** through the Trailblazer project team.



**Resources for communications** provided through the Trailblazer.

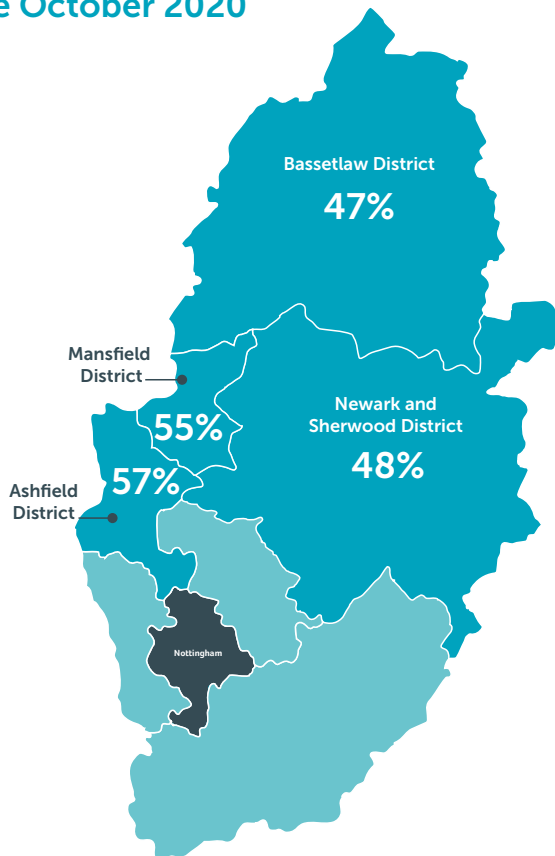


## Qualitative information

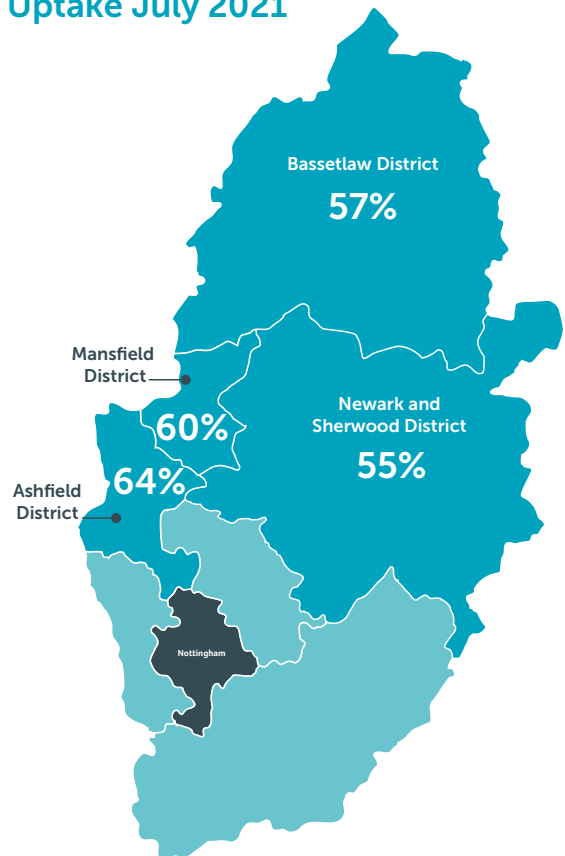
Increased uptake of Healthy Start in all areas where Trailblazer activities are underway.

The maps below show the percentage of eligible people who are accessing the scheme in each of the current Trailblazer Districts.

### Uptake October 2020



### Uptake July 2021



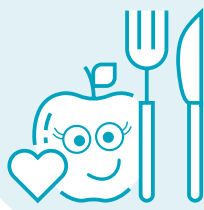
**252 more** families were accessing the Healthy Start scheme in Trailblazer areas in July 2021 than in October 2020 - a **10% increase**



**2,700 vitamin packs** distributed to expectant Mums in Trailblazer areas from October 2020 to June 2021.



**2,363 vitamin packs** distributed to breastfeeding Mums from October 2020 to June 2021.

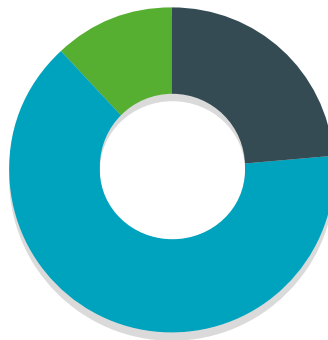


## FOOD Club evaluation

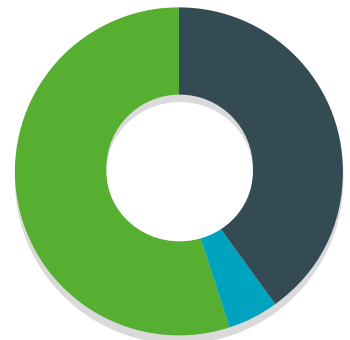
An early snapshot evaluation of the two initial **Food On Our Doorstep (FOOD)** clubs in Harworth (Bassetlaw) and Ravensdale (Mansfield) asked parents whether they had heard about Healthy Start through the club.

**Did you hear about the Healthy Start Scheme through attending a FOOD Club or collecting a Meal Kit?**

Harworth



Ravensdale



■ Yes ■ No ■ Already knew

Across both clubs:

**37**

**evaluation forms were completed**

**13 parents/ carers (35%)**

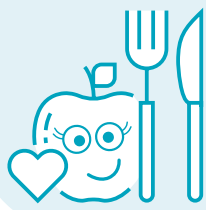
said they had heard about Healthy Start through the FOOD Club.

**100%**

of the 13 people who heard about Healthy Start through the FOOD Clubs **signed up to the scheme**

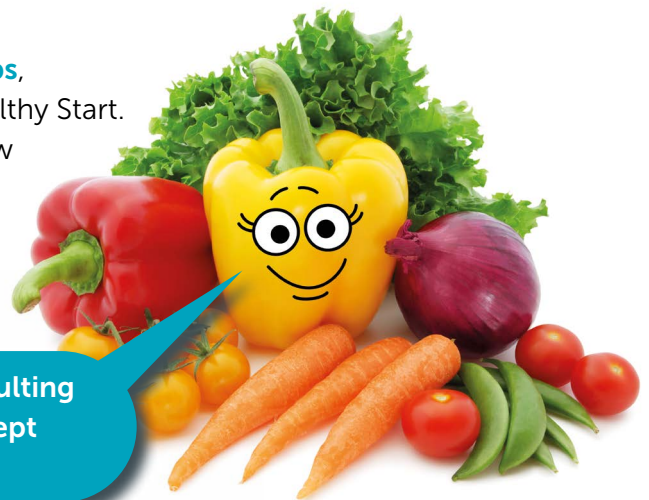
## What we have achieved

- By bringing together public health officers working in different settings and through building strong links with the project team and wider stakeholders we have embedded Healthy Start in a number of different workstreams and priorities. Examples include the **Best Start Strategy**, Improving Life Chances for children, young people and families, the Maternal Health sub group of the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) and the food environment/food insecurity work embedded in the Healthy and Sustainable Places element of the **Health and Well Being Strategy**.
- We have developed and shared a wide range of Healthy Start resources, including paper and digital options, for use by different practitioners in different settings.
- Information about Healthy Start is given to all women within Trailblazer areas at the start of pregnancy, along with a free bottle of vitamins and advice about where to locate their next supply.
- Healthy Family Teams regularly promote Healthy Start and provide a free bottle of vitamins to all breastfeeding Mums at the birth visit (bottle fed babies don't need them at this stage as vitamins are added to formula milk).



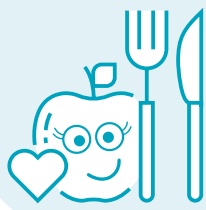
# Nottinghamshire Childhood Obesity Trailblazer

- We have embedded Children's Centre Services as key distribution points for families to access vitamins in exchange for vouchers. Families that are not eligible for Healthy Start can buy vitamins at a low price, supporting those on low incomes but just above the benefit threshold. Vitamins are routinely available at 17 Children's Centres across the county and can be collected by arrangement at others.
- Healthy Start information is provided on the Notts Help Yourself website ([Parent/Carer zone](#)) and regularly promoted through Family Information Service and Children's Centre Service Facebook posts.
- Healthy Start is promoted through all Trailblazer activities and wider activities related to healthy and affordable food, for example inclusion in recipe books developed for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.
- At the height of the Covid pandemic we set up a system to ensure that pregnant women and families with children under five needing food assistance from the Local Authority received Healthy Start vitamins in their food packages. We achieved this by setting up a screening process with the Customer Service Team to identify pregnant women and children with young families requesting assistance. Healthy Start vitamins were redistributed from Children's Centres to district and borough council workers to include in food packages.
- 'Your Health Your Way' promotes Healthy Start in all interventions with expectant Mums and families with young children.
- Leamington is a priority area within Ashfield with a small working group of local partners. A presentation was delivered on Healthy Start to understand what action could be taken by local partners working with the retail sector. This conversation has initiated discussion about which retailers are on the Healthy Start scheme and how Healthy Start can be promoted to improve take up with local families.
- We have worked with our existing links in District and Borough Councils to promote Healthy Start widely across each location within the County.
- Family Action, the organisation delivering **FOOD clubs**, have worked with us to register as a retailer with Healthy Start. They have had recent confirmation that they can now accept Healthy Start vouchers to pay for the bag/box of food people receive through the club, enabling people to receive £15 worth of food in exchange for their Healthy Start voucher.



**Family Action plan to roll this out nationally, resulting in currently 78 FOOD clubs being able to accept Healthy Start vouchers for payment.**

- We worked with **Venner Nutrition** to raise awareness of Healthy Start, resulting in them including information in their recipe booklet. They also added question to their follow up survey, to see if they helped raise awareness of the scheme.



## Case study 1

### Gathering feedback from people using the Healthy Start Scheme.

We wanted to find out more about Healthy Start from people signed up to the scheme. We asked some families living in the Ashfield District of Nottinghamshire who attend the Children's Centre at Butler's Hill. The questions were asked over four weeks by a member of the Children's Centre team and a volunteer helping to facilitate the 'Healthier@Home' meal kit initiative. This was a ten week initiative where families received the ingredients and instructions for a main meal and pudding every week. Although only a small amount of parents were engaged in the discussion, their answers mirrored findings following consultation in other parts of the country.

### What people told us

Most families found out about Healthy Start through a health professional such as a midwife or Healthy Family Team practitioner.

Most families used their vouchers in supermarkets but would also like to be able to use them in more corner shops. Some families felt it was not always obvious which shops you could use them in, often **"trial and error"** and felt that local shops could benefit from signing up to the scheme and having a sign. **"the smaller shops could benefit from a sign"**

All families spent their vouchers on fruit, vegetables, milk and formula milk. The main comments were about the milk element.

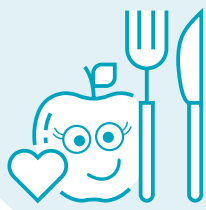
**"2 tubs of formula for vouchers don't cover all formula used for a baby"**

**"Should be extended to all milk as some families use alternatives"**

(currently only cow's milk can be purchased with Healthy Start vouchers).

Most families are happy with the forthcoming digital changes to a card scheme

**"it will be so much easier as the card will be in my purse"**



However there were concerns about any charges to replace lost cards, or the need to spend a minimum amount. It was generally felt that online applications were **“quicker”**, **“more people may enrol online”** and it would be **“more manageable”**. One person said they would prefer paper.

All families know about Healthy Start Vitamins but **“chose not to use them”** and some would like to be able to give their vitamin vouchers to families they felt were more in need.

Thoughts on improving awareness of the Healthy Start Scheme ranged from adverts on TV to banners and posters in shops. Families also felt that health professionals or benefits staff could help to sign people up to the scheme. It was also generally felt that automatic sign up would be a good thing.

## What we learned

Through engagement with the Children’s Centre team and volunteers that had a known and trusted relationship with families, people seemed willing to talk about their experience of the scheme. Previously they had expressed some concern about saying whether or not they were signed up to Healthy Start, which seemed to be due to the stigma they associated with it.

Our work with the team also increased their knowledge and understanding of it, which increased their confidence in making families aware.

The team also learned the importance of continuing to remind people about Healthy Start and to re-apply when their circumstances change, giving an example of a family where redundancy changed their financial circumstances and potential eligibility.

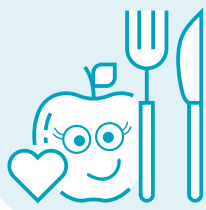
“ I’ve loved finding out about Healthy Start myself and having chats to parents ”

(Community development worker, Butler’s Hill and Broomhill Children’s Centre -Ashfield)

## What we will do next

- Our learning from this consultation will support us in our continued efforts to raise awareness of Healthy Start across Children’s Centres and within other settings accessed by families with young children.
- We will share what has worked well in terms of starting conversations with parents/carers and increasing their awareness of Healthy Start.
- We will reflect on comments about smaller shops and how to increase the visibility of Healthy Start. There is an opportunity to work with the ‘Love Leamington’ Group to improve awareness and signage within local shops.
- We will reflect on comments about vitamins and how we develop key messages at key times about their importance.
- We will work with health professionals to continue to embed Healthy Start.





## Case Study 2

### Ashfield Community of Practice

As part of the **Childhood Obesity Trailblazer**, an Early Years Community of Practice (COP) was set up for Ashfield. The COP comprises of a range of Early Years providers and other practitioners who, through these initial facilitated sessions, aim to develop a sustainable peer support group.

The group identified Healthy Start as an initial area to improve knowledge and awareness. We delivered a session to the COP to raise awareness of Healthy Start and support practitioners in promoting the scheme with families. We will be taking forward actions based on the points identified below

#### You said

Regular updated information is needed about Healthy Start for practitioners

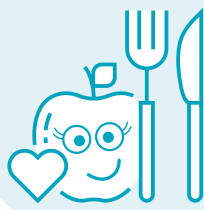
Regular updated information is needed about Healthy Start for parents

#### We will

- ✓ Provide regular updates to Early Years provider forums
- ✓ Provide information for induction packs for new starters
- ✓ Improve communication about access to vitamins
- ✓ Provide training on 'talking about Healthy Start'
- ✓ Provide posters and flyers for parents that can be displayed in settings
- ✓ Provide social media resources and links to resources such as the **Healthy Start Eligibility Calculator** These can then be promoted through Early Years channels.

### Reflections

Many people find it difficult to talk about Healthy Start due to the stigma associated with the scheme, as eligibility is related to income. When people have an established relationship with a health professional or practitioner they trust, this enables a more open conversation.



Even when people know about Healthy Start, there are complexities in accessing the scheme such as printing off and sending in a paper form. Most people appear to welcome the digitisation of the scheme to address these issues.

In the early evaluation of FOOD Clubs, 100% of people signed up to Healthy Start when they heard about it through the club. This emphasises the importance of promoting Healthy Start in particular settings.

By having officers based in different Public Health teams but working closely together through the Trailblazer we have linked up key agendas within the Health and Well Being Strategy, primarily 'giving everyone a good start in life' and 'having healthy and sustainable places'. This has enabled Healthy Start to be embedded in key strategies and developments.

## What we are going to do next

We want to ensure that Healthy Start is embedded as 'everyone's business'.

### We will:

- ✓ Develop a rolling communications programme to provide regular updates and information to the public and a wide range of partners.
- ✓ Work with 'Shared Intelligence' to deliver a Healthy Start webinar to key stakeholders in the early years.
- ✓ Develop an online Healthy Start training tool for health professionals and a wide range of practitioners working with children and young families, with links to a resource page.
- ✓ Continue to promote Healthy Start through FOOD Clubs and other Trailblazer activities.
- ✓ Reflect on how we can promote Healthy Start more widely in Primary Care.
- ✓ Work with local retailers to increase the visibility of Healthy Start. There is an opportunity to work with the 'Love Leamington' Group to improve awareness and signage within local shops.
- ✓ Reflect on comments about vitamins and how we develop key messages at key times about their importance. We are also looking to offer vitamin starter packs during the winter months to children at their one year review (Healthy Family Teams).

