

# Supporting Vulnerable Families with Healthy Weight and Oral Health Issues - Findings from a Children & Families Staff Consultation

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### Introduction

- In 2021-22 Early Help and Social Care Managers from North
  Yorkshire Council contacted the Public Health team to raise concerns
  about the large numbers of children and young people struggling with
  healthy weight and oral health issues.
- To explore this issue, we undertook a qualitative consultation with staff to identify the key issues and resources needed to support staff and the families they work with.

# Methodology

- The Public Health Team facilitated 7 semi-structured focus groups on MS Teams with Social Workers, Early Help Practitioners and Foster Carers (n= 51; 43 women and 8 men).
- Focus groups were recorded and transcribed.
- Data were analysed in a two-stage thematic framework.



"I think for parents, it's a battle (teeth brushing). It's one of the battles that they just think .... before bed or like, I can't do this. And so they will let that one go."

# **Key Findings**

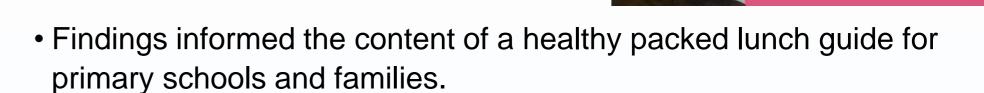
- Barriers to good oral health included problems accessing dentists, oral health not being seen as a priority, parents' capacity to support children to develop good habits, and financial constraints in getting treatment.
- Practitioners are supporting families with a range of complex and often safeguarding-related issues. They recognised that sharing public health messages can help but often don't have the time, knowledge, resources or referral pathways to support families with these wider issues.
- Lack of child healthy weight services and support to refer / signpost families to.

"I know it's money and all that sort of stuff, but it was working before .... You could see people's weights coming down .... and then obviously everything is stripped back and we're back to the beginning again."

- Families need support with cooking, budgeting, meal planning, access to food.
- Practitioners need resources and information for staff and families in a range of formats to meet the needs of the diverse range of families they support e.g. hard copy, digital, video, translated materials.
- Issues around food and eating are often related to past trauma and experiences e.g. sensory, ASD, eating disorders, selective and emotional eating, and being underweight/overweight.
- Mental health was identified as an underpinning priority for children and young people and their parents/carers.
- Practitioners reflected on the impact of Covid families need support
  with getting children off screens and getting active again and reducing
  the social isolation many children experience.
- Practitioners felt there was a lack of communication and joined-up working across the system.

### **Outcomes**

- Findings were disseminated to the Children & Family service through a summary report and a series of webinars.
- A healthy weight and oral health resource bank was developed for professionals and families. This is a word document containing links to various resources, videos, services etc.
- Funding has since been secured for a new family healthy weight service for North Yorkshire children and families, which commenced in March 2023.





- Established local dental referral pathways into flexibly commissioned NHS Dental Practices to help children who are particularly vulnerable to poor oral health to easier access local dental practices and their Oral Health Champions.
- Commissioned oral health training for the 0-19 service workforce.
- Commissioned a Supervised Toothbrushing Programme for Early Years settings located in our most deprived areas and where there are high numbers of funded 2 year-old childcare places





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### **Next Steps**

- Development of bite-sized learning around oral health and healthy weight to be available on North Yorkshire's Learning Zone for Children and Families staff.
- Children and Families Cost of Living group taking a partnership approach to addressing food insecurity.
- Create a child healthy weight pathway with links to mental health and eating disorder services and food clinics.
- Implement a programme of work around poverty proofing schools to support them to listen to the voices and experiences of their pupils and identify steps they can take to mitigate the impact of poverty within the school day.
- Implement a multi-agency action plan to increase the uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme and Vitamins, to improve families' access to healthy foods and boost nutritional intake.

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