



HARNESSING PEER TO PEER SUPPORT

Increasing the uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme

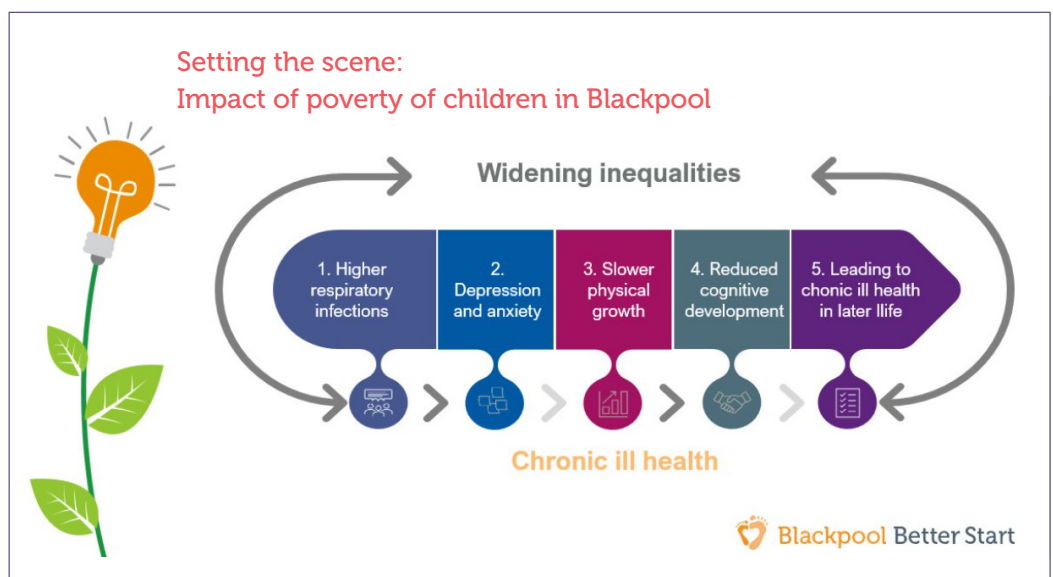
Figures released by NHS in March 2022 showed that only 63% of eligible families in Blackpool had signed up to the Healthy Start scheme. The scheme helps low-income parents and pregnant women pay for fruit, vegetables, milk, and formula, from 10 weeks of pregnancy until their youngest child turns 4.

In 2022, nearly 44% of children in Blackpool were living in poverty, with 32% being under 4. Within high numbers of families eligible for the benefit and a low uptake, it became a priority for Blackpool Better Start to understand why the take-up of this benefit in the town was lower than the national average, and by doing so, ensure that more eligible families received this extra financial support.

Understanding the challenge

To help understand and combat the low uptake, members of the team conducted research into the barriers families faced when trying to access Healthy Start. By visiting the scheme’s Facebook support page, it was clear that the main issue for families across the country was completing the application forms correctly. For instance, applications will only be approved if the claimant enters their details in exactly the same format as they appear on Universal Credit paperwork, and any discrepancies will result in the application being automatically rejected. Another issue that leads to applications being denied is due to parents not adding children to their Universal Credit claims. Healthy Start only approves claims where children under four years old are also named on Universal Credit claims.

The Better Start community connector peer-to-peer service spoke to families about the scheme and understood that locally there was a general lack of awareness about the scheme, as well as confusion over eligibility and criteria. Completing complicated forms online was again highlighted as a major barrier to families in Blackpool wanting to access the support.



What we did

To combat the identified challenges and barriers families faced, two interlinked priorities were developed. One raised awareness of the scheme locally while the other supported eligible families to complete the forms through virtual and face-to-face interactions.

Money Saving Connector

In summer 2022, a new role was created in the community connector team called 'Money Saving Connector' to support local families with basic money saving advice and to give up to date advice on benefit entitlements.

The connector offers practical support such as providing a phone to ring the government premium rate helpline, access to a tablet and assistance to complete online applications, checking eligibility and reducing common misconceptions or concerns over entitlements.

This 'light touch' peer-to-peer approach allows families to feel comfortable when talking about their financial situation so the right support can be given at the right time.

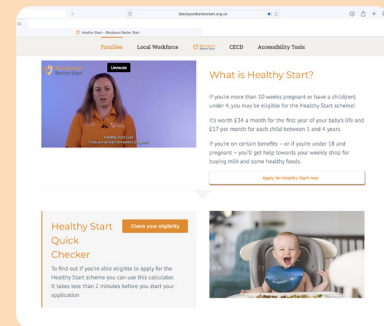
Awareness Raising Campaign

According to the previous research, the most asked questions by parents about the scheme were: "Do I qualify?", "How do I apply?" and "How much can I receive?".

To help answer these questions, a film was created of a community connector who gave clear and concise information on the benefit and highlighted where families could receive individual support. The films were posted on Facebook and received a high level of engagement.

A webpage with the film, an FAQ section, and useful links was also created for families to be directed to. Families who are on the Better Start distribution list were reminded of the benefit and support available.

Additionally, the community connectors will inform and support families to access free vitamin entitlement from their health visitor or family hub, discretionary support, food/hygiene or clothing banks, receive funded childcare and other cost of living support schemes. This ensures that the most vulnerable families are receiving the support and services that they need.



www.blackpoolbetterstart.org.uk/healthy-start/

I spoke to a community connector on the phone a few weeks ago regarding healthy start and child benefit. I have managed to apply and was successful. I will be getting an extra £108.80 a month! Thank you so much.

Parent

I spoke to one family recently and helped them to apply for the scheme. Mum said a few weeks later that she had felt some of the pressure of life lifted."

Connector

Outcomes

The campaign saw an increase in uptake of families accessing the scheme from 63% in March 2022 to 76% in March 2024 - a 13% increase in uptake and the second largest uptake compared to 296 local authorities.

I am really encouraged by the figures released as they show the positive impact peer-to-peer support has.

Health Visitor