

BLACKPOOL INCREASES UPTAKE OF HEALTHY START SCHEME FROM 63% to 72%

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. It is worth £4.25 for each week of pregnancy from 10 weeks, then £8.50 a week for babies up to one year old, and £4.25 a week for children up to four years old. As the cost-of-living crisis deepened, 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 Issues

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 UK is 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.



Blackpool Better Start's peer-to-peer service, the Community Connector team, was also instrumental in speaking to local families about barriers to accessing the scheme. Conversations with parents found that there was a general lack of awareness about the scheme with families, as well as confusion over eligibility and criteria. Completing complicated forms was again highlighted as a major barrier to families in Blackpool wanting to access the support.

WHAT WE DID

The strategy to combat the identified problems families faced was to raise awareness of the scheme locally and to support 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. 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.

Digital Awareness Campaign

According to the previous research, the most commonly asked questions by parents about the scheme were:

- Do I qualify?
- How do I apply?
- How much can I receive?

To help answer these questions, a film was created with a Money Saving Connector which gave clear and concise answers and signposted to further information and support. The films were posted on Facebook and received a high level of engagement.

A webpage with the film, a FAQ section, and useful links was also created for families to be directed to. Healthy Start - Blackpool Better Start. Between March 2022 and January 2023 there was a total of 1008 page views, with visitors spending an average time of 2mins 26 seconds on the page. In addition to this, a targeted email campaign to help raise awareness of the scheme was sent out to 1600 Blackpool families who had all previously registered interest with Blackpool Better Start

Cost-of-Living Drop-Ins

To compliment the digital campaign, a more hands on approach was also required to give specific support to families. Weekly Cost-of-Living Drop-Ins were organised in key community venues across the town, to allow families to speak directly to the Money Saving Connector who can advise on benefit entitlement, and support families to complete forms.

Aneliesa Forshaw, Money Saving Connector talks about a recent contact with a family:

"One family I spoke to recently said that they had applied previously for Healthy Start and were not entitled. Their circumstances had changed since with a job loss due to Covid-19, another baby and them claiming universal credit. They also were not claiming child benefit.

I encouraged mum to try and claim for both, but she was unsure about how. I arranged to meet mum at Well Baby Clinic, she could get baby weighed. I put together an engagement pack and whilst there I went through the application forms with the mum over a brew. The claim came back as successful and now the family are receiving £12.75 per week in Healthy start vouchers and £14.45 a week child benefit for the new baby.

An increase of £108.80 a month. Mum said a few weeks later at that she had felt some of the pressure of life lifted. She had been using the local community grocery store meaning the healthy start vouchers can go even further (a £4 shop equates to around £25 of food/ toiletries) meaning herself and her children were eating better and using the remaining towards formula milk which has also increased in price recently."

Samantha (Parent)

"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. It says I am entitled to £12.75 a week. First payment will be £51 then every 4 weeks. Child benefit is also £14.45 each week! That's £108.80 a month! I should get my card in about a week. Thank you so much"

OUTCOME

In January 2023, NHS data revealed that 72% of eligible families in Blackpool have signed up to the Healthy Start scheme. The uplift – nearly 10% in the last 10 months – positions Blackpool as the fourth highest area in England for uptake of the benefit.

The national average for take-up is now at 63%, with almost a third of the half a million households (155,000) eligible for the scheme not claiming the support.

Blackpool Better Start will use this new data to identify the 630 families in the town that are still not claiming the benefits, and work towards reaching them in 2023.