

## **Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan**

### **PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEFING REPORT**

**September 2021**

#### **Background**

1. The scope and vision of the Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan is to ensure that more children leave primary school aged 10-11 years with a healthy weight. It sets out a whole system approach recognising the complex relationship between the social, economic and physical environment coupled with individual factors that underpin the development of obesity.
2. In Darlington childhood obesity sits above the national average at both reception and year 6 age groups. The percentage of children at year 6 (2019/20) who are categorised as living with obesity in Darlington is 22.5%. This figure is 12% at reception age.
3. Childhood obesity and excess weight carry significant health risks for children. They can have serious implications for the physical and mental health of a child. Children with obesity are more likely to track unhealthy lifestyle behaviours into adulthood, with a higher risk of morbidity and premature mortality. Obesity and overweight are linked to a range of diseases including type 2 diabetes, asthma, hypertension, cancer, heart disease and stroke. Living with obesity at age 7 is a risk factor for emotional distress at age 11, and mental health problems predicting high BMI at age 14.
4. The trends demonstrate the prevalence of excess weight in least deprived Children and Young People (CYP) is decreasing or stabilising, whilst for most deprived CYP levels are increasing.
5. COVID-19 has had a detrimental impact on emotional eating, increased snacking and eating disorders.

#### **Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan 2019**

6. In 2019, the following objectives were collaboratively set by multiple stakeholders across the borough to:
  - a) Transform the environment so that it supports healthy lifestyles by increasing and maintaining use of green space for play and recreation;

- b) Transform the environment so that healthier choices are available in the provision of food consumed out of the home;
- c) Transform the environment by supporting the public sector to lead by example with healthier options;
- d) Make healthier choices easier by providing information and support on active travel
- e) Deliver consistent messages to increase awareness around healthy lifestyles and maximise the use of Making Every Contact Count (MECC)
- f) Support services needed to tackle excess weight by increasing breastfeeding rates

### **Post COVID recovery actions and progress 2021**

- 7. Reconnecting with partners, existing and new stakeholders resulted in the redefining of the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan objectives within the evidence and as relevant to Darlington priorities.
- 8. In January 2021, five separate Action Task Groups (ATGs) were established Healthy Early Years (HEY), Physical activity, Whole school nutrition, Food in care and Out of home food. The purpose was to identify and leverage changes to local environments in which children and young people live play and socialise.
- 9. In order to create opportunities for environmental-behavioural synergy, which promotes increased healthy weight and reduced BMI in children and young people across the borough. Defined collaborative objectives going forward:  
  
The goal is to promote:
  - The best start – the first 1000 days, maternal health and nutrition, community promotion of breastfeeding and nutrition education.
  - Increased food familiarity in children as early as possible – weaning, post weaning, nursery, primary school etc.
  - Improvements in the proportion of children and young people meeting national UK fibre targets.
  - Improvements in the proportion of children and young people consuming a minimum of 5 fruits/vegetables per day.
  - Improvements in the proportion of children and young people meeting the 60 minutes a day of physical activity.
- 10. The childhood healthy weight plan outcomes place the child and young person as the central focus, using 'I am' terminology:

- I am a child who feels emotionally and physically healthy, with lots of opportunities to actively play and enjoy healthy foods.

I am a young person who feels safe and nourished, able to live a positive life, looking forward to the future.

11. The following outlines the progress made within each of the action task groups.

*Food in Care; Implementation stage*

12. A children's home food policy, guidance and workable menus have been coproduced with children's care home staff and Public Health.
13. Childrens care home staff have been developing training on specific dietary requirements, implementing menus and utilising behaviour change techniques to improve dietary outcomes for children and young people.  
In addition to coproducing a 'working with children and young people nutrition toolkit' and undertaking nutrition education sessions/videos with Public Health and Workforce development team.
14. Working with families; nutrition toolkits have been coproduced with the foster care team, eating disorder dietitia and approved by 0-19 service manager.
15. Training was developed and implemented with all DBC staff having access on the Public Health nutrition section of the website. All of the videos and resources produced are replicated on the Living Well page of the DBC website, to include tips for parents on shopping and ideas for healthy eating in addition to tips for fussy eating and importance of nutrition for children and young people.

*Healthy Early Years (HEY); Working towards a published strategy*

16. Firstly feedback from early years services, practitioners, parents/carers informed actions to keep consistent healthy messages to support families.
17. A digital newsletter was coproduced with DBC and early years settings, allowing for a consistent approach and sharing of the Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan objectives.
18. The language used to engage parents has been a significant focus. Healthy packed lunches wer a barrier recognised, and aPDF colourful simple guide has been produced.
19. The group are working together on guidance to improve physical literacy in early years, and also oral health and inclusion of sensory food experiences as included in the overall Darlington HEY strategy.
20. A draft version of a HEY food policy and guidance to ensure consistency in all early years provision across Darlington has been coproduced and three ealry years setting

are currently working with Public Health and Early years teams for applied evaluation purposes.

21. A HEY catering award checklist has been coproduced with settings. Three nursery settings are working through to achieve the award, and the checklist has been adapted to trial with an initial 10 childminders. This will form one of the healthy catering awards as part of a wider plan to improve out of home food options.

*Whole school approach to nutrition; trialling stages*

22. The approach of the school action task group has resulted in the coproduction of a 'whole school approach to health', including a food policy/guidance, the embedding of healthy eating principles (increasing fibre, fruit and vegetables, healthy packed lunches, breakfast and hydration) across the curriculum, including the delivery of a 'gut bug' educational resource developed by 'microbiome and nutrition experts for primary school children. A trial of the approach which also includes a parent/carer course to fit with the children's learning (developed by Learning and skills and Public Health) is being carried out in Autumn/winter term in two primary schools (Harrowgate Hill and St Teresa's)
23. The Darlington School Food Award, is a five module training programme produced by Public Health and Environmental Health, with school catering managers and school catering staff.
24. The evidence shows secondary schools in particular are not adhering fully to national school food standards, and COVID has exacerbated the existing challenges.
25. The purpose of the staff training is to increase awareness and educate school catering staff on the importance of nutrition, and to empower them to follow school food standards.
26. Carmel College trialled a first version of the training. Feedback demonstrated the staff increased knowledge, but were aware that without a whole school approach and support from staff it would be a challenge for them to meet the school food standards.
27. Interest has been established from Polam Hall in a staff group to trial a whole school approach to include the training.
28. Learning and skills are working on adding the content to Equal, an online platform to make it ease of access and to complete. This will then be available to all school catering staff across Darlington, and linked to a healthy school catering award going forward.

*Out of home food; healthy families*

29. Two restaurants in Darlington worked with Public Health and Environmental health to produce menus which meet the government standards and targets for children's calorie, sugar, fat and salt recommendations, in addition to incorporating behaviour change techniques on to their children's menus, such as colourful images and games of fruits and vegetables, promoting water firstly, with low sugar options as secondary.
30. All food businesses across Darlington can now apply for the 'Healthy Families Catering Award' via the DBC website.
31. From July 21 relaxation of COVID rules resulted in a busy time for EH and food outlets, therefore, the progress of promoting the award has been temporarily halted. However, feedback from parents, where children have ordered from the menu in both restaurants has been extremely positive.
32. Evidence of practical ways to improve healthy vending and healthy families catering have been shared with public sector partners.
33. A partnership has been established with Darlington Memorial Hospital catering, and plans have been discussed in improving nutrition content of patient food options, in addition to highlighting healthy options in Hollie's restaurants and increasing the use of behaviour change techniques. This will inform a wider healthy catering award.

*Healthy places; a healthy food strategy in our communities*

34. The work in this group has been based on sharing of consistent healthy and evidenced based messages across services and partners.
35. In the June healthy eating week, resources were shared with all partners, including the library, holiday and food activities and leaders of community groups and The Bread and Butter Thing, in addition to PCN, schools, early years and youth engagement partners.
36. The Cornmill have taken on board the displaying of 'Change4life' weaning and healthy lifestyle messages in the form of posters and vinyls.
37. In addition to taking on some of the evidence for 'Play on the way' ideas and fitting a colourful hopscotch with use of 'affective messaging' sharing simple messages of

why physical activity is good for children. Making stairs more attractive in Council buildings and Cornmill through behaviour change is ongoing.

38. Public Health have supported the 'Move More' team with providing of consistent health messages, links and coproduced educational videos and ideas for food related activities. This was targeted towards families with low income as per Government funded holiday and activities programme requirements.

*Physical activity; developing a map of actions together*

39. A working group has been established with services and partners across Darlington, which include schools, local Physical Activity providers. A map of actions to share consistent messages and encouraging children and young people to be more physically active within daily habits is being developed.
40. A treasure hunt took place over May half term in partnership with town centre team. A route was mapped around local businesses in Darlington using characters competing in sports events. This route was 2.4 miles. Entries were handed in at the Dolphin Centre, who provided a prize of a family swim and a family bowl.