



# Recommendations: Increasing the uptake of the NHS Healthy Start Scheme

**10**GM



A joint venture to  
support the local  
VCSE sector in  
Greater Manchester



**10GM was commissioned by the then GM Health and Social Care Partnership to gather targeted insight with local communities to understand reasons for low uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme, as well as to gain a better understanding of what, where and how it had been working well.**

We received additional funding in March 2022 to explore the additional challenges posed by the digitalisation of the scheme and in particular to:

1. Distribute information on Healthy Start to health, education and welfare frontline practitioners - including a commission for Citizens Advice local welfare officers to prep and deliver Education / Awareness training for the VCSE sector (train the trainer offer);
2. Provide tailored support - including conducting 'deep dives' and fact finds into local networks including: food, economic, women's networks, utilising local community leaders' knowledge and skills and aligning to local initiatives;
3. Generate a robust system across GM to enable good support and communication mechanisms regarding new announcements and changes;
4. Campaign and lobby - Joining up work with existing Food Poverty networks, Greater Manchester Poverty Action and other partners to gain insight and learning to subsequently influence and improve policy.

Work has subsequently been focused around these 4 areas with a range of outputs being achieved, as well as learning and identification of good practice. This paper is focused on providing an update on work completed since February 2023, along with suggested recommendations.

## Distributing information on Healthy Start

### Healthy Start awareness raising course – commissioned with Citizens Advice

The development and delivery of a Healthy Start awareness raising online training course was commissioned with GM Citizens Advice. The plan was to deliver this once in all 10 localities for a mainly VCSE audience, and would focus on awareness raising of the Healthy Start scheme as well as providing information to participants on how to refer the more complex applications to Citizens Advice and other financial advice services.

What was achieved and what was learned -

- Citizens Advice have highlighted that although there were high levels of interest from VCSE sector in the training, in practice it was difficult to translate this into registrations and then attendance, with 48 attendees across 10 sessions. The assumption made is that the high volume of work experienced by many VCSE organisations stopped colleagues from being able to attend.
- Attendance levels increased when training dates were circulated via the Healthy Start Taskforce network – as this is predominately a statutory sector network, it is likely that attendees recruited via this route were not based in the VCSE sector.
- The feedback from evaluations highlighted that the people who did attend got some good outcomes including making local connections, networking and feeling in a better place to cascade information in their locality.





### Distributing information via frontline VCSE organisations – Salford Baby Bank

Salford Baby Bank used a small grant to print and distribute Healthy Start information, dovetailing this with their core business of providing baby focused resources such as nappies. Information was placed in parcels along with details of how to access support with an application from the Baby Bank team.

What was achieved and what was learned -

- Salford Baby Bank did not receive any enquiries on the basis of the Healthy Start information distributed, although people may have applied independently. The observations of the team were that some of the main reasons are likely to be language and cultural barriers to accessing the scheme as many of the families they support speak English as an Additional Language.
- Salford Baby Bank team did have a small amount of face to face conversations with people who have already claimed Healthy Start, with the main issues being that due to being in temporary accommodation the address on the application needs changing or the Healthy Start card has been lost. Potentially there could be targeted information developed around this, and connections made across the Healthy Start taskforce with other colleagues working with temporary housing provision – however additional resources would need to be found to cover this work.
- Salford Baby Bank have contact with communities that are likely to be eligible for Healthy Start due to low incomes and having young children – however the timescales of the project and small amount of resource meant that impact was curtailed and work could not continue.
- There are resources that have been developed by other Healthy Start Taskforce members that would be freely available and useful – such as translated leaflets – however even seemingly ‘quick wins’ such as swapping resources and expertise are challenging in the face of workload pressure and need resourcing.

## Provide tailored support

### Front line support to raise awareness and make an application – Visit from the Stork

Visit from the Stork (VFTS), a frontline organisation providing support to families in Salford and Manchester, used a small grant to offer 1-1 support in making applications to the Healthy Start Scheme. Team members paired up with mobile food pantry, The Bread and Butter Thing, joining existing sessions when community members picked up their grocery packages.

What was achieved and what was learned -

- Through attending drop in sessions the VFTS team recognised that due to the very low income threshold that necessitates eligibility for Healthy Start, resources need to be targeted at families likely to be eligible – e.g. food banks and food pantries where a basket of shopping is £1 - £3 rather than £8 - £10 as was the case with the sessions attended.
- From completing a small amount of applications with family members, VFTS were able to identify the frequent issues with applications – e.g. names and addresses input slightly differently than on Universal Credit claim – and so could provide efficient support in a short space of time.
- The complexity of the system, especially for younger families and families with No Recourse to Public Funds means that 1-1 support will often be needed. In line with Salford Baby Bank, VFTS team felt that language and cultural barriers presented particular barriers to successful applications.





## Generate a robust system across GM

Building a collective, pan sector GM voice around the importance of Healthy Start in boosting household income, enabling healthy food choices and highlighting the systemic issues in increasing uptake has been an effective part of our work.

What was achieved and what was learned -

- Building a Healthy Start taskforce has provided an opportunity for focused and informed discussions. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) have seized the opportunity of talking to a large range of stakeholders by running Let's Talk about the Healthy Start Scheme – Collaborative Event on Tuesday 2nd May. The opportunity for a focused conversation to raise concerns and issues was welcomed by the network as a key influencing opportunity that would not have been available to a more limited, less joined up audience.
- Raising collective concerns at a national level with NHS Business Services Authority has contributed to a shift in the data available at a GM level, with some uptake data now released on a monthly basis. The recognition that data is not at a granular level (first 3 digits of postcodes only), and therefore of limited use, promoted a conversation with the GMCA data team who will now assist in seeking and processing additional raw data to inform the data picture – the taskforce was able to collectively raise their concerns and then shape this ask to GMCA and work is now underway on receiving an improved data set to improve the effectiveness of ongoing work.

## Campaigning and lobbying

Building on the successful work with the GM Food Security Action Network and the Healthy Start Taskforce, there have been further useful conversations and sharing opportunities to support collective, efficient action and to learn from other activity within the region.

- Links made across GM boroughs has led to replication of existing good practice. An example of effective work has been the agreement with registrar services in a number of boroughs to include Healthy Start information in the packs that are given to parents who register a new birth – with the Salford registrar team recently agreeing to this approach being piloted in Wigan and Stockport. Resources still need to be secured for ongoing printing costs to make this a sustainable model.
- A fruitful link was made with Blackpool Better Start, a VCSE organisation working with families that has been instrumental in increasing Healthy Start uptake. Blackpool Better Start colleagues shared their learning at both a Healthy Start Taskforce meeting and wider GM Food Security Action Network meeting this spring to detail their learning – including the difference that confirmed funding for 3 years had made in planning and delivery of this great result, and their observation that frontline resources to support applications being made ('hand-holding') were crucial to increasing uptake.





## Our recommendations

The points detailed above are from activity and learning over the last 4 months – and this in turn is built on previous activity and learning over the last couple of years that has already been reported back.

The following options detail effective ways that future funding could further increase uptake of Healthy Start across GM, ensuring that families who are eligible are:

- Aware of Healthy Start and what is available, including the vitamin offer to young children and pregnant women.
- Are able to make successful applications, regardless of their personal circumstances.
- Are able to access support to make an application when needed.

Potential for impact at frontline level and tailored support is needed – it needs sufficient, long term funding to make a difference.

Making connections and sharing learning is important – it will require resource to continue having an influencing and strategic role.

### Option 1

Funding to deliver the Citizens Advice Healthy Start training package to increased numbers of VCSE sector colleagues to continue awareness raising, using 10GM's traction for promotion. The package of training has been developed and no additional funding is needed for developing resources other than ad-hoc updates. Funding could be focused on:

- Staff costs to deliver and evaluate training.
- Providing bursaries to VCSE organisations so they can release team members for training.
- Supporting targeted communications about the training opportunities and using networks such as the 10GM VCSE Workforce Development network, and Local Infrastructure Organisations for wide coverage.

### Option 2

Funding for front line, family focused organisations to support people making applications to Healthy Start. Due to the systemic complexity of making an application and then receiving, activating, and using the digital card 1-1 will be needed to increase uptake and also address the inequity of additional barriers for parts of the community – for example those with language barriers or lacking the digital resources and knowledge to apply and activate the card.

- Staff costs need to be met, and commissioned ideally for at least 2 years to allow for work to be embedded, evaluations and lessons learned applied and to embed lived experience to make approaches effective.
- Aspects such as printing costs for paper based materials.
- Time for meetings and sharing resources need to be costed in as essential opportunities for improvements GM-wide and for localities not to be silo working and constantly 'reinventing the wheel'.

### Option 3

Opportunities to network, and to have a Strategic Lead at 10GM focused on Healthy Start has increased the ability of the Healthy Start Taskforce to make an impact – via sharing good practice and campaigning. Maintaining a presence in the food poverty space allows anti-poverty work to be joined up, forges partnership with other organisation and works against silo mentality.

- Having a 10GM presence at the GM Food Security Action Network and within the Healthy Start Taskforce would maintain opportunities for collaboration in the food poverty space as well as feeding back developments to locality leads.
- Food poverty is a key focus for Andy Burnham and GMCA, and there are many strategic areas that this could be usefully developed further and linked into other areas of 10GM work – for example Population Health and developing Climate Emergency work.



**If you'd like to discuss how we can work together, please do get in touch - we'd love to hear from you.**



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