



HEALTHY LIFESTYLES PATHWAY SERVICE

Outcome, process, and
economic evaluation

Executive summary

November 2024

Introduction

The Children's Public Health 0-19 Service, delivered by Nottingham CityCare and funded by Nottingham City Council Department of Public Health, is a critical provider of the Healthy Child Programme. Through universal contacts, this service promotes healthy lifestyles and supports children's healthy development across Nottingham City. Additionally, the Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) initiative has commissioned the 0-19 Service to implement the Healthy Lifestyles Pathway Programme—a targeted early intervention aimed at supporting families with children at risk of childhood obesity and poor health outcomes. This programme addresses pressing health needs, fostering healthier long-term outcomes for children within the local community.

To assess the effectiveness and impact of this intervention, SSBC commissioned the Royal Society for Public Health to conduct a comprehensive process and impact evaluation of the Healthy Lifestyles Pathway. This evaluation includes the analysis of service data from all service users, alongside interviews with service users, staff from the referral pathway, HLP staff, and other local stakeholders involved in the programme. The primary objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Conduct a process evaluation, identifying factors that contribute to successful implementation and service delivery within Nottingham City and any potential improvements.
- Carry out an impact evaluation to assess the programme's contributions toward improved health outcomes for families.
- Aid service delivery providers in developing a longer-term data and evidence strategy.
- Advise commissioners on cost efficiencies associated with early intervention efforts.

This report outlines the findings of the evaluation, which ran from October 2023 to November 2024.

A mixed-methods approach was employed for this evaluation, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a thorough and balanced analysis. This multi-faceted methodology supports a comprehensive understanding of the Healthy Lifestyles Pathway's processes and impact, laying the groundwork for informed decision-making and sustainable improvements in service delivery.

Furthermore, this report also contains a top level economic evaluation prepared by Centre for Mental Health, our evaluation partner.

Acknowledgements

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Furthermore, special thanks to the parents who participated in this evaluation. Their time and effort are much appreciated.



Executive Summary

The Children's Public Health 0-19 Service, commissioned by Nottingham CityCare and Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC), supports families in four Nottingham wards through the Healthy Lifestyles Pathway (HLP) service. Focusing on early intervention for childhood obesity, it offers tailored one-to-one and group sessions on nutrition, physical activity and parenting.

SSBC commissioned the Royal Society for Public Health to conduct a comprehensive process and impact evaluation of the HLP service. This evaluation includes the analysis of service data from all service users, alongside qualitative data from interviews with service users, staff from the referral pathway, HLP staff, and other local stakeholders involved in the programme. In addition, Centre for Mental Health was commissioned to undertake a high-level economic analysis of the intervention to assess its economic benefits.

The key findings can be summarised as follows:

Service design

- The HLP service meets an important public health need in Nottingham, and its design aligns with good practice explored within the literature reviewed, including local pilots and national guidance.

Service Delivery:

- Tailored one-to-one sessions were highly valued for practical, personalised advice (e.g., reducing sugar intake, reading food labels).
- Parents highlighted that they valued that the service was provided by knowledgeable and non-judgmental staff that focused on their needs.
- Group session options were appreciated, but families preferred the privacy and flexibility of individual sessions.
- Parents found resources to be practical, memorable and interactive. Resources such as BMI calculator wheels and nutritional guidance packs supported family engagement.

Impact on Families:

- Improvements in eating habits, including portion control, increased fruit/vegetable intake, and reduced sugary drinks/snacks.
- Physical activity levels rose significantly, with 72% of children achieving over three hours of activity weekly post-intervention (up from 42%).
- Parental confidence in supporting healthy lifestyles increased from 61% pre-intervention to 93% three months post-intervention.

Challenges for Families:

- Barriers included low income, fuel poverty, limited access to healthy foods or playgrounds, and language/cultural gaps.
- First-time parents faced knowledge gaps around weaning, physical activity, and child development.

Workforce Training and Coordination:

- Training boosted staff confidence in engaging families but highlighted a need for improved communication and clarity about the service's purpose.
- Some referral partners and families mistakenly viewed HLP as a weight management service.
- Collaboration with referral partners was strong but needed reinforcement to increase referral rates.

Sustained Behavioural Changes:

- Families reported ongoing benefits, including healthier cooking practices, reduced screen time, and consistent home-cooked meals.
- A notable rise in children eliminating sugary drinks (54% pre-intervention to 76% post-intervention).
- High parental motivation (90%) to sustain positive changes at follow-up.

System Integration:

- HLP filled a service gap, providing expertise and referrals to additional resources.
- The service operated below referral capacity, highlighting the need for strengthened referral pathways.

Evaluation and Co-Production:

- The design of the service is evidence-based and addresses an important public health in Nottingham. Examples of the evidence-base include evaluations from previous pilots/services, national guidelines, a cultural foods survey.
- Co-production with families shaped the service, with customisation for individual needs praised by participants.

Economic value:

- Service demonstrates strong value for money to the health system, with a return on investment of £6.92 for every £1 spent, based on quantified costs (£236,294.56) and benefits (£1,635,364.66).

Overall Outcomes:

- HLP demonstrated a substantial and sustained positive impact on family health behaviours, fostering healthier lifestyles through a tailored, supportive approach. Furthermore, the service demonstrates strong value for money to the health system.

Conclusions

The Healthy Lifestyles Pathway (HLP) delivers tailored one-to-one sessions for families, complemented by resources and group options. It empowers families to adopt healthier habits through personalised guidance, effective resources, and supportive staff. The programme improved dietary habits, physical activity, and parental confidence, but barriers like poverty and cultural misunderstandings persist. Co-production and holistic support enhanced outcomes, but misconceptions about HLP's role as a weight management service and underutilization highlight areas for improvement. Families valued the programme's flexibility and non-judgmental approach, leading to sustained positive changes in health behaviours.

Recommendations

Acceptability:

- **Cultural Engagement:** Enhance strategies to explore cultural foods and parenting practices using non-judgemental, professional curiosity. Provide training on key cultural practices to support co-production of solutions.
- **Recommendation:** Train staff on cultural sensitivity and effective communication to better engage families and address specific cultural needs.

Accessibility:

- **Digital Resources:** Develop a co-produced digital platform (e.g., app or website) to host resources, videos, and a parent forum.
- **Service Awareness:** Design promotional activities with parents and local services to raise awareness of self-referral routes.
- **Universal Access:** If funding allows, broaden referral criteria to make the service accessible to all families with babies or toddlers.

Quality:

- **Training for Professionals:** Offer additional training for referral partners to improve conversations about weight and increase acceptance of referrals.
- **Expanding Referral Pathways:** Establish additional partnerships with early years and primary care services to improve referral accessibility.

Enhanced Evaluation and Follow-Up Data Collection:

- **Increase Follow-Up Participation:** Expand follow-up efforts to include more participants and gather data on non-attendees to understand barriers and behaviour change over time.
- **Early Evaluation:** Embed evaluation mechanisms at the start of the programme for better outcome measurement and continuous improvement.

Assessment of Non-Participants and Counterfactual Development:

- **Understanding Non-Participants:** Gather insights into barriers faced by families who did not attend. Explore creating a matched comparison group for future iterations.
- **Recommendation:** Allocate resources for counterfactual development and collaboration with partner organisations.

Evaluating Impact:

- **Indirect Benefits:** Assess the programme's impact on parents, siblings, and the family environment to understand broader effects and inform future adaptations.
- **Refining Data Collection:** Review and update tools to enhance data relevance and quality, using insights from international questionnaires to understand family motivations and behaviours better.