HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young)

A Better Start case study
HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young) is a childhood obesity prevention programme that supports families with young children to develop healthy lifestyles. The programme is a universal service for families with children aged 0-5.

A Better Start is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and is a ten-year programme focused on developing and testing new approaches to promoting good early childhood development (ECD). The A Better Start partnerships have developed locally tailored strategies to promote ECD, focusing on three key child development outcomes: diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication.

A Better Start child outcome(s) the service aims to improve:

- Speech, language and communication
- Social and emotional development
- Diet and nutrition
What are the key aims of the service?

The HENRY programme aims to:

- increase parents’ knowledge and skills in healthy eating and understanding of the benefits of physical exercise
- improve parenting efficacy (their belief in their capabilities as a parent), healthy family eating behaviours, and increased consumption of fruit and vegetables
- promote emotional wellbeing to support families to develop healthy lifestyle habits, including in relation to food, activity and daily routines

Who is the service for?

HENRY can be accessed through group sessions or in specific cases on a one-to-one basis. The HENRY group programme is offered to families living in selected areas of England. Referral routes are determined locally, but there is usually a mix of self-referral by parents and referrals by professionals. The one-to-one programme is for families who face barriers to attending a group sessions because of factors such as disability, English as an additional language, or a lack of confidence.

What is the evidence base for the service?

Evidence from research using a pre- and post course evaluation design has shown that:

- following attending the HENRY group programme, parents reported greater confidence and self-efficacy in preparing nutritious meals for their families, and this was demonstrated through significant changes in family dietary intake and eating behaviours
HENRY training has a sustained impact on practitioners’ professional and personal lives, and has led to improvements in nutritional policy and practice at children’s centres.

A Randomised Controlled Trial began in 2015.


How is the service run?

The programme is delivered by professionals working in the early years who have been trained by a HENRY coordinator. HENRY is frequently run in partnership with children’s centres and voluntary and community organisations in the local area.

For the group programme, parents and children attend weekly sessions over an eight week period at a community venue. The one-to-one programme runs over 5-8 weeks in the family home.

Core content of the service

Group programme: Each session lasts for 2.5 hours, consisting of ‘family time’ where parents and children enjoy a healthy snack and play an active game; and ‘parent time’ where group members explore the programme topics together while the children attend a crèche. Participants explore a new topic each week (e.g. parenting skills, portion sizes, physical activity and play) through activities that lead to shared understanding and ideas for strategies to support changes. At the end of each session, group members are encouraged to set individual goals for the week ahead.

One-to-one programme: Each session is about an hour long and covers similar content to the group programme. Everyone who takes part receives a toolkit with information and resources to support their family to develop a healthier lifestyle (books, growing charts, ball games).
**Innovations in A Better Start partnerships**

**Better Start Bradford**

Better Start Bradford is working in partnership with children's centres and voluntary and community organisations to deliver the HENRY family programmes to all families with children aged 0-4 living in the local area.

The Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub is working with the HENRY co-ordinator and team to undertake qualitative evaluation, including observing sessions and undertaking focus groups with parents who have completed the HENRY programme. Parents are also invited to a ‘catch up’ session after 8 weeks where they complete the final evaluation questionnaire. Outcomes that are being measured following completion of the HENRY programme include parental reporting on self-efficacy; the consumption of fruit and vegetables, and high fat and sugary foods; confidence in preparing healthy meals and family eating behaviours.

Longer-term outcomes will be individually tracked for parents and children who are part of the Born in Bradford Better Start cohort, including Body Mass Index (BMI) at ages 2, 4-5 and 10-11 to review the impact of the programme on reducing childhood obesity.

Parents who have completed the HENRY programme can become Parent Champions (volunteers). Their role is to arrange community activities that promote healthy eating, support programme delivery, and to encourage parents to attend HENRY sessions.
“The great thing is that they don’t tell you what to do, they simply present you with ideas and you do what you want with them. Thanks to the HENRY course, I feel a lot more confident as a parent, Logan’s eating has improved and I have learned a lot of things that we can do together as a family to be healthier.”

- Parent, participant of one-to-one programme

“HENRY is usually delivered in a group setting and is an opportunity for parents to come together and share tips. I have seen bedtime routines improve; parents share new healthy recipes, cut down on sugary snacks, and begin to walk to nursery or visit the local park together.”

- Heather Fawcett-Jones, HENRY programme facilitator

For more information, please go to www.betterstartbradford.org.uk/families-get-involved/our-projects/henry-health-exercise-nutrition-really-young
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