

BASCD 2024 Abstract #22**Blackpool Together: integrated working and community engagement for improving children's oral health**

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Background:

Inequalities in socioeconomic position and deprivation impact on poor oral health and service use. In 2021, only 29% of Blackpool's children attended an NHS dentist in the previous year, 34% of 5-year-olds had dental caries, with families facing social and systemic barriers to accessing and engaging with dental care. The Blackpool Together programme aimed to employ a collaborative partnership approach, with focus on piloting new methods of engagement, to reduce inequalities and facilitate an improvement in oral health promotion and dental access for families with young children.

Objectives:

To report the development, delivery, and evaluation of a multi-agency programme to reduce inequalities and barriers which prevent families engaging with oral health promotion and dental services.

Methods:

Programme co-development and delivery involved partnership working between local authority health promotion teams, integrated care board commissioners, charities, dental public health, Healthwatch, and dental practices. New models of engagement were piloted including a simple caregiver-referral pathway (Text Teeth), embedding community staff within wider social/healthcare services, and promoting skill-mix. Project evaluation comprised quantitative data collection, cost analysis, and qualitative feedback.

Results:

The programme has distributed 3179 resource packs and 6320 co-developed oral health promotion books to children through community partners, and facilitates supervised toothbrushing sessions across 33 early-years settings. Between January 2023-24, 622 referrals for dental access were received. Following introduction of the self-referral initiative, referrals increased six-fold, from an average of 8.2 to 51.8 per-month. One hundred and fifty-nine appointments were attended, with a 15.8% was-not-brought rate. Feedback from families/stakeholders was positive, with themes including accessibility, engagement, inclusion, and workforce retention.

Conclusion:

Oral health promotional activities and dental access were widened for young children and families in Blackpool, with recommendations for future upscaling. This collaborative programme highlights the benefits of integration across organisational boundaries, with multi-agency partnership working and community engagement key to reducing inequalities and barriers to access.

Funding source:

None

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https://doi.org/10.1922/CDH_BASCD24_Abstract22