

YOUTHWATCH DARLINGTON

Healthy Eating and Exercise

Reaching young people and families: The impact of working together to promote healthy choices in Darlington.

August 2021



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About us

Who are Youthwatch Darlington?

Youthwatch Darlington is a health and care volunteering group for 14 to 25-year-olds in and around Darlington. They support Healthwatch Darlington in our mission to ensure that young people have a voice when it comes to health and social care in the town. We create opportunities for young people to work with service providers and commissioners to develop and improve services now and in the future. Youthwatch Darlington also work to raise awareness, bringing important topics to life through their creative campaigns.



Executive summary

It's a privilege to be involved with Youthwatch Darlington, a creative and enthusiastic team of young volunteers, and support their aim to help us make a real difference to health and care in the Borough of Darlington.

As a result of attending the Darlington Children & Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee earlier this year, and hearing about the rise in young people consuming unhealthy food and drink and increasing screen time, our young volunteers were inspired to deliver a campaign to raise awareness and promote positive lifestyle choices, in relation to eating and exercising, with families and young people in Darlington.

They created a suite of resources which we shared on our Healthwatch Darlington website, encouraging young people and families to attend innovative activities and provide them with healthy eating ideas. This was a popular page for visitors.

They also ran a competition encouraging young people and families to share their healthy food creations, helping to raise awareness along the way. Well done to all who took part.

They created engaging graphics to inspire their peers to keep fit and engage in active hobbies.

They developed the Fruit & Vegetable Gang - a fantastic idea to encourage young people to eat healthier food. Thank you to Kelly Rose, Public Health Portfolio Lead for Children & Young People for your support and involvement. Thank you also to all of the shops and community venues who helped promote 'The Gang'.

The Rotary Club of Darlington showed their support to this initiative by giving Youthwatch Darlington a grant of £250 which enabled our young volunteers to create Seed & Wellbeing Boxes. The boxes went to over 50 children in Darlington who could grow their own herbs, with recipe cards and wellbeing tips included too. There was a great response from the families involved. Thank you, Rotary Club of Darlington, for your support.

The many strands of the campaign successfully raised the profile of healthy eating and exercise in a fun, appealing and interactive way with young people and their families in Darlington. Feedback and numbers accessing resources were positive and showed there is a desire from young people to make healthy choices where there is encouragement to do so.

We look forward to working on other initiatives with our Youthwatch volunteers and Public Health to ensure the importance of healthy eating and exercise is kept at the forefront of positive messages to our young people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Thompson".

Michelle Thompson BEM
Chief Executive Officer, Healthwatch Darlington

Background

Why healthy eating and exercise?

In January 2021 young volunteers from Youthwatch Darlington were invited along with our Senior Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator to attend the Children & Young People's Overview Scrutiny Committee. The committee were hosting a special session for organisations to highlight the experiences of young people during the pandemic. We highlighted the experiences of young people using mental health services.

Public Health Darlington presented insight from the latest 'Healthy Lifestyle' survey for 2020 which was shared in both primary and secondary schools and captured the views of 1900 pupils within primary schools and 1400 pupils in secondary schools. Both surveys highlighted similarities in the rise of young people snacking and consuming unhealthier foods and drinks more frequently, as well as spending more time on a screen during the pandemic.

The insight concerned our young volunteers who then decided as we approached the warmer months that it would be a great idea to create a campaign that they felt would promote positive lifestyle choices in relation to eating and exercising with their peers whilst raising awareness in Darlington reaching families.

What else do we know?

According to [Darlington's Childhood Healthy Weight Plan for 2019 -2024](#) the most recent measurements back in 2017/18 showed that childhood obesity in the town was above the national average at both reception and year 6 age. It is very slightly below the regional average at reception age but in line with the regional average in year 6.

21.2% of children (year 6) are categorised as obese which is more the double the figure at (reception age) which is 7.8%

The impact of obesity contributes to poor mental wellbeing as well as long term health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease which can occur during childhood into adulthood.

The main cause of obesity is poor diet and low levels of physical activity; however, environment also plays a part. An environment which promotes physical activity through recreation and less contact with high energy dense foods can make a difference.

Information and education are proven to be a solid foundation to improving diets and health outcomes; however, more structural changes are needed to sustain behaviour change.

Purpose

- To improve awareness, promote positive wellbeing and to celebrate healthier lifestyle choices.
- To reach children, young people, families, and organisations across the town.

Objectives

With Youthwatch Darlington leading the way with their creative ideas, Healthwatch Darlington staff supported and provided the resources they needed to reach young people and families across a variety of platforms. We targeted the following groups of people and sectors:

- Young people aged 3 to 25
- Families/parent carers/grandparents
- Voluntary organisations
- Local authority departments
- Nurseries, schools, and colleges

Method

We developed an engagement strategy to reach families, young peoples and organisations across multiple platforms using a variety of methods. These included:

- Social media
- Email marketing
- Website
- Newsletter
- Video content
- Posters

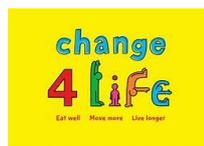
Information and education

Healthwatch Darlington has a statutory duty to share information and to signpost service users to health and social care services. Youthwatch Darlington’s campaigns were created with this in mind, and they decided that sharing information about where young people and families can go for advice and inspiration would form part of their ‘Healthy Eating and Exercise’ project.

They gathered information and spoke to Kelly Rose, Public Health Darlington’s Portfolio Lead for Children & Young People, to create an information page which would share reliable sources of information on Healthwatch Darlington’s website. This was launched at the end of March 2021 in preparation for the two-week Easter break: <https://www.healthwatchdarlington.co.uk/advice-and-information/2021-03-22/healthy-eating-exercise>

Information includes the following:

- NHS Change 4 Life
- Bike back 2030
- British Nutrition Foundation
- Healthy Start NHS
- The Body Coach (aka Joe Wicks)
- NHS Couch to 5K



- Let's Go Tees Valley

To date, the information website page and anything related to this project has been visited **350 times** according to Google analytics.

Competition

Youthwatch Darlington's volunteers wanted to create fun videos creating healthy snack/meals from home which they could then share on social media with their peers. This then developed into a competition using the campaign tag **#MakeAHealthyStartDarlo** encouraging young people and families to share their photos or videos of healthy food creations they made at home in an effort to raise awareness along the way.

We had support from a range of organisations and sectors some examples of this include:

- Longfield Academy
- Darlington Borough Council's (Housing Team)
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service

The creative videos which helped to promote the competition were designed by Jessica Mather one of our volunteers and recipe ideas included:

- Speedy Pizza Wraps
- Chicken and salad wraps
- Mexican Taco's
- Healthy cake recipe using oats and banana
- Frosted grapes

The competition and awareness raising content reached individuals on our Facebook social media page alone almost **21,000 times** during March to May 2021.

The competition winner was a young person aged 7 who took part with their parent. They created a breakfast of healthy yoghurt and fruit.



Social media posts

Throughout the campaign our young volunteers raised awareness further by creating graphics which they hoped would inspire young people to think about keeping fit through a variety of recreational activities whilst also enjoying some hobbies they might already have. For example, playing games on consoles and photography.

There's lots of things you can do while outside!

From taking a walk through your local park, taking some photos of animals and scenery, and even exercise like jogging. There are benefits for being outside.

It is healthy as the smell and the fresh air can clear your mind and keep you focused and keeping yourself busy is a good way to accomplish going outdoors.



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Created by Youthwatch Darlington, a volunteering group, for 14-25 year olds.

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Fitness games on the Nintendo Switch

- Ring Fit Adventure
- Fitness Boxing (1 & 2)
- Zumba: Burn It Up
- Just Dance
- Arms
- Jump Rope Challenge



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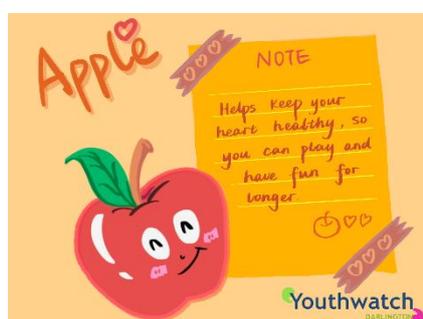
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Fruit & Vegetable Gang

Creating colourful messages which could help to inspire young people to eat healthier food such as fruit and vegetables was also another fantastic idea from our volunteers.

Two of our international volunteers used their skills to design the 'Fruit & Vegetable' gang which appeal to young people using fun characters.

The messages were developed over a period of time in collaboration with Public Health's Portfolio Lead for Children & Young People, Kelly Rose who shared her expertise in nutrition to help our young volunteers create messages that would encourage and positively influence young people and families.



“It’s exciting to see young people working together on projects that will make a difference and making fruits and vegetables colourful supported by fun affective messages is such a positive approach - well done everyone!” - **Kelly Rose, Public Health Portfolio Lead, Children & Young People**

We were thrilled to hear that local shopping venues and schools loved the graphics and wanted to share them within their venues. They can be seen on display at the Cornmill Shopping Centre, a local nursery, St Bede, St Augustines, Holy Family and St Theresa’s Primary School.



“The Cornmill is proud to be displaying this fantastic artwork, which is vibrant and fun, as well promoting an important message to young children. The introduction of the hopscotch provides a fun activity, while at the same time encouraging young children to be active. We hope that this initiative helps young children starting their journey through life to celebrate healthy food choices and encourage exercise.” **Susan Young, Cornmill Centre Manager**

Seed & Wellbeing Boxes

Our young volunteers were fortunate enough to be approached by Darlington Rotary Club who awarded a grant amount of £250 for a project of their choice which would make a difference to young people in the town.

Our young volunteers decided to spend this grant on creating ‘Little Box of Herb’s’ a free seed and wellbeing kit for up to 50 children in Darlington aged 4 to 11 years of age.

Each box was designed by Youthwatch Darlington and contained a healthy recipe card, herb seeds, bag of soil, planting pots, wellbeing checklist, stickers, and character pencil.



The boxes were delivered by Healthwatch Darlington to families and organisations in Darlington reaching more than 50 children.



The boxes were designed to inspire children to think about healthy ways to create food using ingredients such as fresh herbs which can easily be grown from home. Whilst also offering them ideas on how to improve overall wellbeing by taking simple steps from the checklist such as drinking more water, reducing screen time and spending time outdoors.

We got back in touch with some parents using a short survey after the children had used their box to find out if they enjoyed using the contents and if they learnt anything. This is what we found out and what nine parents told us:

- All 9 parents told us that their child’s favourite part about the wellbeing kit was planting the herb seeds.
- 6 out of 9 parents felt their child learnt something by taking part in using the wellbeing kits whilst 3 out of 9 parents were unsure. Some parents shared additional comments which included:

“It reinforced how to grow food”

“My child learnt about the importance of new growth in plants”

“As an activity it got us talking about why we were planting the seeds and what we thought would happen”

“We grow things on a regular basis, the recipe was a great idea”

“After my child planted the seed, they was no longer interested.”

- 6 out of 9 parents felt they also learnt something by their child taking part in using the wellbeing kit. Whilst 2 out of 9 felt they didn’t learn anything and 1 parent was unsure. Some parents shared additional comments:

“I now know how to take care of herbs”

“I learnt my child now knows how herbs are grown and will use them in cooking”

“Another hobby to share with the kids”

“I’m not the one taking care of the herbs”

- 7 out of 9 parents think similar wellbeing kits for families would be a good idea in the future whilst 2 parents were unsure. Two parents shared additional comments:

“I think its important for children to learn how to look after their own wellbeing in a fun & engaging way.”

“Kids always want to learn something new”

- 5 out of 9 parents shared additional comments about the wellbeing kits which are as follows:

“Thank you for providing my child with this wellbeing kit it really is appreciated and kept my child engaged and active.”

“I thought it was a lovely idea, maybe if you do it again it would be great to encourage tree growth to support the environment better.”

“Such a great idea, I know the nursery I work at ‘Play Hut Ltd’ would love more of these boxes for different departments. The children at kids club loved doing them.”

“The box was a great for all ages and worked if you had a big garden or just a windowsill.”

“As a child my father taught me how to grow vegetable seeds”

“Youthwatch Darlington deliver a vital role in promoting opportunities for young people in Darlington. The volunteers involved in this project were a credit not only to Youthwatch but the wider community and their peers. Too often the youth of today are given poor press, yet here is an example of young people delivering a hugely worthwhile project that connected with their communities and promoted healthier lives in a simple but effective manner. They are a credit to society and the Rotary Club of Darlington are extremely proud of our association with them.”
Rotarian Kevin Robinson, Chair Rotary Youth Services Committee

What impact did this project have on our young volunteers?

We spoke to one of our volunteers to find out what they enjoyed about the project, if they learnt anything new and if they feel the project made a difference.

“I enjoyed working with others to design this project and I liked that the project helped the community. I think it did make a difference because it encouraged families to work together to think about eating healthier choices and could have possibly influenced children to think about what they eat. During the project I also learnt that making small changes in your life could help you to become healthier. If I was to share one final message with young people, it would be to try to keep up with the healthy eating! It's good for you. Also, thanks for making the project such a success.” Ellie, Youthwatch Darlington volunteer



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all Youthwatch Darlington's volunteers for sharing their time to create this project. Their ideas and sense of enthusiasm to make a difference shine through.

We would like to thank the Rotary Club of Darlington for their kind donation which contributed to the creation of the seed and wellbeing kits.

We would also like to thank all organisations and departments from across the voluntary, community, health and public sector for supporting this project and helping us reach families in Darlington.

Finally, a huge thank you to all families and children who took part in our competition and boxes.



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