REACH INSIGHTS – Supervised Toothbrushing Evaluation

1 - WHAT WE EVALUATED

We evaluated the Supervised Toothbrushing Programme in County Durham, which is delivered to children aged 2-5 years in early years settings. As the programme had not previously been evaluated, this work aimed to better understand its impact and delivery.

Two evaluations were carried out: one with staff working in early years settings and another with parents and carers of participating children. The evaluation focused on their views and experiences of supervised toothbrushing and explored how these contribute to the programme's success.

2 - WHY IT MATTERS

The supervised toothbrushing scheme had not been previously evaluated and the public health team wanted to ensure the programme was running as efficiently as possible, and that it had the support of the people involved in the programme.

As oral health is an important part of overall health and wellbeing, the Supervised Toothbrushing Programme aims to reduce tooth decay and the number of missing or filled teeth in children. Poor oral health can affect sleep, speech, eating, confidence and quality of life. The programme also seeks to reduce the need for hospital tooth extractions in children. Ensuring the programme is delivered effectively is essential to achieving these outcomes.

3 - METHODS

Electronic questionnaires were distributed to staff by email and promoted by the *Early Years Team* through the *Early Years Forum*. A total of 48 responses were received - 47 from participating settings and one from a setting that had previously withdrawn and was rejoining the programme.

Electronic questionnaires were also distributed to parents and carers through early years settings via email, parent apps and letters. A total of **246 responses** were received, and a voucher incentive was offered to encourage participation.

4 - KEY FINDINGS

Staff - respondents felt confident delivering the programme and staff felt that supervised toothbrushing helps to prevent poor oral health outcomes in children. The majority of settings found the programme easy to implement. The programme became easier to deliver as staff gained experience over time. Training was viewed positively, and feedback from both children and parents was overwhelmingly positive.

Parent / Carer - 91% of parents and carers supported the programme. Of the remaining respondents, 5% did not answer, 2% were unsure, and 2% did not support the scheme. Most parents and carers reported receiving sufficient information about the programme, and children generally shared positive experiences of toothbrushing at their early years setting. Findings also suggested that participation in the programme helped make toothbrushing at home easier.

5 – RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue delivery of the oral health programme.
- Engage with staff and parents to monitor implementation and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Celebrate and promote the achievements of the programme and participating early years settings.
- Strengthen programme communications and stakeholder engagement.
- Conduct an evaluation with non-participating early years settings to understand barriers to engagement and opportunities for future uptake.

Date of Evaluation – September 2025

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