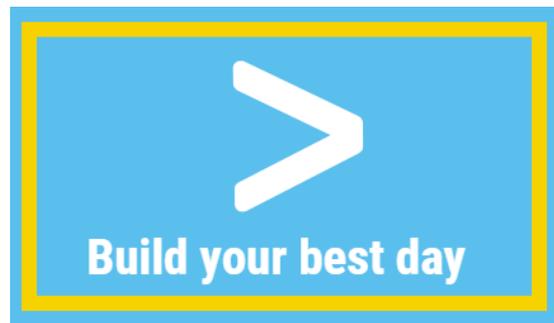
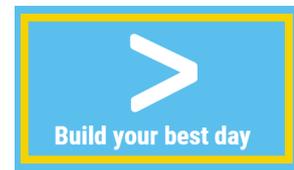


“Building your best day”: co-producing an intervention to reduce the large and rapidly growing inequalities in childhood obesity in Scotland

Stakeholder Report Spring/Summer 2021





Contents

Summary of themes.....	1
Background	3
Methods summary.....	4
Results.....	5
Theme 1) Parents as active collaborators.....	5
Theme 2) Critical evaluation of the language, communication, messaging and branding of 24-hour movement behaviours.....	7
Theme 3) Systems-based approach to intervention development and implementation	8
Theme 4) Need to map to help fill gaps and create connections and links.....	8
Theme 5) Play based approach.....	9
Theme 6) COVID-19 considerations.....	9
Theme 7) Ongoing pressures within the sector.....	11
Research team response to stakeholder themes	13
Project Team	14



Summary of themes

Themes	Sub theme	Quotes
Parents as active collaborators	Use co-creation with parents to develop the intervention	<i>"The, kind of, wider point there is that engaging with parents is going to be super important for us to understand what they think is important to help with their children."</i>
	Communicate specific and/or immediate benefits to create buy-in	<i>"So it's trying to play into what's actually important to the parents at that point in time because they're not going to be swayed by something that seems maybe further off."</i>
	Intervention should seek to educate alongside supporting parents	<i>"It's about encouraging parents to understand the benefits. It's not about making them feel bad about something they're doing wrong. This is about saying, you know, you've got a kid who's struggling to sleep, here's some really handy hints and tips."</i>
Language, communication, messaging and branding		<i>"But I guess what I'm trying to get at is if we could move away from this idea of screen time is bad, let's reduce it as much as possible, 'cause I personally don't think that it is all bad. Let's reduce it as much as possible."</i>
Systems-based approach to intervention development and implementation		<i>"Yeah. I think what they're articulating here is that the way in which we need to work with under-fives is a systems approach. ...the work that we do, we split it in to three very distinct groups. You have education, you have the home and then you have the community."</i>
Need to map to help fill gaps and create connections and links		<i>"If we're thinking 24-hour movement guidelines for under...the under fives and the early years is that, well where does behaviour actually exist, where are the contexts and environments that actually happen? We're also thinking of context and we're thinking about wider environmental constructs that exist within each of these settings or domains."</i>
Play based approach		<i>"I do lots of talks to parents and early years practitioners and people about what children really need in terms of healthy development. And I've got it down now to just two four letter words actually, love and play."</i>
COVID-19 considerations	The isolation of parents and their ability to access services	<i>"Yes, I wholeheartedly agree and I was just thinking as everyone was speaking there how badly this has just been exacerbated by COVID. And we've found with our families that isolation levels have just gone through the roof."</i>
	Changes in provision of services	<i>"I'm worried actually about what's going to happen post-COVID, is we're not allowed across the door... I think that's going to be really detrimental to a lot of families as they're not going to have that contact with those early years practitioners they would have had before."</i>



Ongoing pressures within the sector

<p>Burnout of parents and staff</p>	<p><i>“And I think at this stage families are probably...everybody’s fatigued with everything at the moment. So, it’s trying to find the right time to engage in that for families as well, and it won’t be the right time for every family.”</i></p>
<p>Competing agendas within the educational setting</p>	<p><i>“We (in education) still haven’t got this idea of play being something that is a vital necessity within children’s lives as opposed to a sort of rather trivial thing that they do when they’re not doing something more important, like learning the 3Rs. And I say that, can I say, as a lifelong literacy specialist”</i></p>
<p>Disjointed or short-term approaches</p>	<p><i>“There is a breakdown in communication and my experience in this local authority is there are significant challenges across the board with communication and working together, it’s very disjointed quite a lot of the time. So, yeah, I think it includes everybody.”</i></p>
<p>Pressure on nurseries and nursery staff at all levels</p>	<p><i>“I also think that there’s a lot of pressure put on early years, in the sense that everybody feels that it’s the best people to support everything that’s going on. And we work with closely with health visitors and the schools and the local authority’s psychology team and various things – but we’re the first point of call for every single one of those departments.”</i></p>





Background

Health inequalities and childhood obesity have been rising in the UK over the last 15 years. In Scotland specifically, 17% of pre-school children in deprived families have obesity. This compares to 11% in the least deprived families. This obesity gap is widening and can lead to differences in health and employment for children from deprived families. Approaches to tackling obesity in pre-schoolers have often focussed on intervening on one behaviour rather than seeing behaviours such as sleep, physical activity, screen use and sedentary time as inter-linked. The World Health Organization recently said that preventing obesity requires 'better days' in early childhood through improved sleep, increased physical activity and reduced screen time. Intervening early to deliver lifelong changes amongst those that are most vulnerable will help to reduce profound and on-going inequalities. 'Better days' is a novel concept. It is developed because traditional interventions to prevent childhood obesity have not been successful long-term and lack of engagement with existing preventive services from families, particularly more deprived families.

In order to develop a research programme in the area of 'building better days' we must work with stakeholders. We define a research stakeholder as any individual, organisation or community that has a direct interest in the process and outcomes of a research project. Our stakeholder will help us understand more about the problem and its modifiable causes; who would benefit most from an intervention; what intervention is needed; and how it should be delivered. The aim of our research programme is to:

“develop a systems-informed intervention to support pre-schoolers and their families to ‘build a better day’ in order to reduce obesity-related inequalities.”

To achieve this aim we will need to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions, needs and gaps of Scottish families and stakeholders towards an intervention to assist with building a better day and reduce the obesity inequalities in pre-schoolers?
2. What would an acceptable intervention that is co-produced with organisations that work with deprived families look like?
3. What, after further stakeholder input, is the final evidence-based intervention content and structure?

This report will provide evidence from stakeholders to help answer questions 1 and 2.



Methods summary

Four online focus groups with 18 stakeholders

Recorded, professionally transcribed and analysed

Thematic analysis via coding, generation of themes and reviewing

Four online focus groups were run with pre-school education and parenting charity representatives (n=8), senior NHS public health and health promotion staff (n=6), and caregivers (parents and early years practitioners; n=4).

At each focus group a facilitator introduced the research and the topic of health inequalities in general. Two other members of the research team presented background information about pre-schooler obesity in Scotland and the WHO approach to combatting childhood obesity using increased physical activity, reduced sedentary time and improved sleep. Each participant consented to having the Zoom recorded.

The Zoom focus groups were recorded, transcribed by an external company and anonymised. An experienced qualitative researcher led the analysis. The researcher drew on Braun and Clarke's reflexive approach to thematic analysis. He initially read each transcript line-by-line looking to capture meaningful data and coding them according to what each piece of data meant in relation to the overall project.

Themes were then developed and reviewed. This involved bringing together codes, both within and across stakeholders, which have shared meaning, ideas or concepts. Reviewing themes involved collating extracts within a theme to decide if they form a coherent pattern.



Results

The summary table at the beginning of this report summarises the themes that developed as well as example quotes for each. The themes are fully described below along with additional quotes.

Theme 1) Parents as active collaborators

This first theme developed across the focus groups as stakeholders felt strongly that parents should be actively involved in intervention development as well as the implementation. There were many ideas shared as to the specific nature of how the intervention team should involve parents.

Three specific perceptions of parental involvement were more widely viewed across the stakeholders. The following three ideas were most represented:

- Use co-creation activities with parents to develop the intervention;
- Communicate specific and/or immediate benefits of improving 24-hour movement behaviours to the parents to create buy-in;
- Intervention should seek to educate alongside supporting parents.

Use co-creation activities with parents to develop the intervention

In relation to intervention development, the stakeholders felt strongly that parents or carers of children should be involved in the construction of the intervention components through a co-production process or methodology. This would involve talking to and listening to them to understand what they feel is needed to help build their best day. The following quotes illustrate the theme.

“But the most important bit that comes before all of those three slides I think is co-creation. ...what does the community, what do the parents and the people that we want to try and influence want to say to us about how they're in receipt...or indeed their ideas for shaping the intervention.”

“I think, just to keep it short and simple, start with the parents and children, pilot some things and listen before we go down the road of something that may or may not be ideal. So I think that's just the key, listen, listen to what the needs are.”



Communicate specific and/or immediate benefits of improving 24-hour movement behaviours to the parents to create buy-in

Stakeholders also described that, if the intervention targets parents in some way, it must consider parents' motivation for participating in interventions. They felt that often parents of children under five are looking for something that will help improve a problem they are already facing (e.g. sleeping problems, screen time fights or eating issues). For example, in the first quote the stakeholder describes this by suggesting we need to understand the benefit to "them" as parents. The following quotes illustrate this aspect of the theme.

"I suppose...really agree about benefits and so on of co-creation and coproduction... But I think parents are much more likely to be persuaded of the benefits to children... if they're also persuaded that there's a benefit to them, you know, that, like, if your child's more physical active then they're going to sleep better, which...I don't know, is one of the things that we constantly get most traction with."

"And just one small thing that parents, I think, and everybody finds it difficult to focus on, the long-term benefits of behaviours. So you're much more likely to do something if you can see an immediate reward... if you take your kids out to the park for an hour, they'll probably sleep better tonight, and therefore you'll get a better sleep."

"So yeah, I think it's good to link them but maybe not in quite the way that you're trying, you need to make it more of an immediate benefit for parents."

Intervention should seek to educate alongside supporting parents

In relation to intervention implementation, there were strong feelings that parents should be gently educated as well as encouraged to try and maintain motivation for participation in the intervention. The following quotes illustrate this aspect of the theme.

"So I think the education component of it and doing a really good job of thinking about really creative ways... And if you can do this wee bit for that component and this wee bit for that component, the...you know, and that's education based."

"It's about encouraging parents to understand the benefits. It's not about making them feel bad about something they're doing wrong. This is about saying, you know, you've got a kid who's struggling to sleep, here's some really handy hints and tips."



“I just worry that it’s parents saying, what now? So these are all things that probably most parents know about, but I think it feels like just giving them more information but not actually supporting them with the how, how do you do this? And how do you engage your young children in this as well?”

Theme 2) Critical evaluation of the language, communication, messaging and branding of 24-hour movement behaviours

Stakeholders felt strongly that the intervention would need to be developed with significant attention paid to how we communicate our overall aims and objectives with all those involved in the intervention. Specifically, in relation to the terminology of “24-hour movement framework”, there were strong feelings that this needed reframing to be less prescriptive, and more gentle and approachable. For example, one stakeholder suggested that the language felt “military”. There was also a strong message that the language that was used needed to be gentle and understanding, and needed to feel open to departures from the recommendations on screen time to avoid creating feelings of failure and disappointment in the participants. The quotes below represent some of the opinions shared in relation to the theme.

“There’s just something about the language around it. I think military is the word that sprang to mind, I just worry that it’s parents saying, what now?”

“I would agree with [other participant], – when you say 24-hour movement... it didn’t actually jump out at you what 24-hour movement framework was going to represent. So, once you read it, it’s pretty straightforward, but you have to kind of do that wee bit of research to understand what the 24-hour movement framework is.”

“(speaking about breast feeding messaging) But I just kept thinking of, well think about the additional anxiety and guilt that that’s then generating in parents if they can’t or don’t want to or for whatever reason they don’t breastfeed. And I felt like, do we want to add this same risk around screen time that...you know, that alternative message that came out around feeding which is, you know, fed is best. Could we then adapt that somehow in to this...the screen time message around outdoor play is best, or, imaginative play is best, or something that’s a little bit more a positive...softer, it’s less guilt inducing.”



Theme 3) Systems-based approach to intervention development and implementation

This theme developed as stakeholders shared their views about the type of intervention that should be developed and its underpinning theoretical and developmental approach. As the stakeholders' were from a variety of backgrounds, the language used to describe the approach to the intervention was diverse. They all described that the intervention needed to consider the way in which children under five interact with the different societal and organisational structures. Therefore, the intervention should target these structures using multiple components to improve the potential for implementing an effective intervention. This theme was characterised by quotes such as:

"I think what they're articulating here is that the way in which we need to work with under fives is a systems approach.the work that we do, we split it in to three very distinct groups. You have education, you have the home and then you have the community."

"But again if we go down the route of slowing thinking through the individual lens, which I don't think is going to be the case for you guys, I know that won't be the case, I think you'd be destined for seeing little to no effect in whatever we do. And that just harps on to me about thinking about, well do we understand the system to begin with?"

"Apparently there's going to be a multicomponent intervention here that is not going to think through just one particular setting. Whether or not...it's not going to be an education based or school based or nursery based intervention, it's going to be thinking wider than that, think about, how do we incorporate parents, grandparents, further childcare, wider environmental factors involved in this particular thing,"

Theme 4) Need to map to help fill gaps and create connections and links

This theme developed as there was already a wide variety of programs, policy and initiatives in Scotland targeting the zero to five-year-old age group that may be important to connect or link to. Participants indicated that, before an intervention was developed and implemented, an understanding of what programs already exist which may potentially interact with an intervention targeting 24-hour movement behaviours is needed. The quotes below help exemplify the theme.

"Has anyone mapped it? Has anyone thought about doing that? I don't know the answer, it probably has happened, it might not have happened, I'm not sure. Is it something you're



interesting in doing as part of this work to think through where are going to be the most feasible points for us to intervene.”

“If we’re thinking 24-hour movement guidelines for the under fives and the early years is that, well where does behaviour actually exist, where are the contexts and environments that actually happen?”

“I don’t know if I can come up with where it’s worked really well, but I think what a lot of policy areas are trying to do is through the health visitors’ pathway, the Early Years Framework, the Children and Young People’s Improvement Collaborative. It’s looking at the introduction to parenthood and what supports are available locally and how accessible are they?”

Theme 5) Play based approach

This theme developed as the stakeholders suggested that, regardless of the target setting or age group within the 0-5 category, the intervention should be based around active play. It was suggested that there is a real opportunity in Scotland as many of the existing programs are play based therefore there is potential to add value to existing programs and attach to policy current policies and practice. The following quotes highlight this.

“But I think there needs to be much more of a focus on play in pre-schoolers because that’s where pre-schoolers learn all their life skills and communication and problem-solving and leadership.”

“It’s just the word resilience cropped up and then reminded me that... I do lots of talks to parents and early years practitioners and people about what children really need in terms of healthy development. And I’ve got it down now to just two four letter words actually, love and play.”

“Here is what good movement looks like and then we always have to connect it to an education outcome. We very rarely can work in an education setting...So maybe there’s an opportunity in Scotland that doesn’t exist south of the border.”

Theme 6) COVID-19 considerations

Many of the stakeholders had concerns related to how the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions have affected various aspects of children’s lives. Although these varied, the common thread was that they felt we needed to be acutely aware of these effects and the intervention would need to be adaptable and flexible (ability to add intervention components) to improve the



chances of being effective. The stakeholders strongly suggested that it would be important to understand how COVID-19 has affected the following:

- the isolation of parents and their ability to access services;
- changes in provision of services;
- burnout of parents and staff.

The isolation of parents and their ability to access services

This theme was in the background of all conversations, almost like an assumption that things are worse because of recurring lockdowns and persistent restrictions.

“This has just been exacerbated by COVID. And we’ve found with our families that isolation levels have just gone through the roof...we’ve definitely lost that community networking support.”

“We’re nearly at the end of June and we’ve hardly had any time to engage with families on the level that we would like to engage with them...all because of COVID, quarantine, children social distancing, there’s many barriers”

“But, also the impact of really high quality early years staff and how they can make a difference in family lives. Which has sadly been destructed because they’re not allowed over the door... all of that has a huge impact on our young children.”

Changes in provision of services

This sub-theme related to the uncertainty about what services would look like in the post COVID-19 world. Would there be less face-to-face and in-home support given to families? Providing services over Zoom or the phone does not work for every family.

“I’m worried actually about what’s going to happen post-COVID, is we’re not allowed across the door....they’re saying more and more we’re not allowed to have those home visits. It’s too much time, it’s too much time travelling, blah, blah, blah. So actually, we’re possibly not going to get that back, and I think that’s going to be really detrimental to a lot of families.”



Burnout of parents and staff

This sub-theme highlighted a concern that families and staff from agencies working with them are tired.

“And I think at this stage families are probably...everybody’s fatigued with everything at the moment. So, it’s trying to find the right time to engage in that for families as well, and it won’t be the right time for every family.”

Theme 7) Ongoing pressures within the sector

There was a consistent message from the stakeholders that some long-standing pressures or tensions within the sector could be a barrier to implementation. As research is in the pre-development phase it is difficult to really identify the barriers to implementation just yet. However, three broad and significant barriers came out strongly represented that could and would apply no matter what the pre-schooler intervention looked like. These barriers to implementation included:

- the competing agendas in the educational setting priorities and policies;
- consistency of provision and quality of services - disjointed approaches and varied implementation of policies;
- pressure on nurseries and nursery staff at all levels.

Competing agendas within the educational setting

This sub-theme spoke of the tension between educational attainment and health and wellbeing within the early years sector. School readiness may continue to be the dominant priority especially now as children will have missed out on key development opportunities during the lockdowns. Our participants are concerned about what the pre-school landscape will look in a year down the line.

“I think in a years time I don't know how much change is going to be done in terms of educational targets and attainment if we're talking at local levels... What we find at local level is it's very much driven by educational attainment and, do you know, local authorities are looking for all the stuff to be done in terms of a child's development for them to be school ready.”

“If they continue to focus on educational targets I think we're going to have missed a lot of wellbeing and health issues, mental health issues of parents and families.”



“(speaking about health and wellbeing) Education is the worst of all the sectors for forgetting it, or thinking it’s unimportant.”

Disjointed or short-term approaches

This sub-theme related to the lack of continuity within the sector in relation to a particular approach, funding or policy. This sub-theme is not one unique to the COVID-19 recovery era but is something that is on-going and needs to be considered when any intervention is being developed.

“It’s looking at the introduction to parenthood and what supports are available locally...and I think that’s quite often quite different depending on where you live and it’s quite often not particularly comprehensive or coherent support available.”

“Instability of services has had such a massive impact. So the support network of some really great organisations providing timely local support, but with really unstable funding. So just 12 months/24 months funding, staff coming and going.”

“There is a breakdown in communication and my experience in this local authority is there are significant challenges across the board with communication and working together, it’s very disjointed quite a lot of the time.”

Pressure on nurseries and nursery staff at all levels

This sub-theme reflects the frustrations of those in the early years sector have on being the first point of contact for any new approach or problem to be solved without, often, the adequate and sustained resource.

“And we’re being taken away from that kind of focus because the focus needs to be on whether they’re updating their systems...all sorts of things that come into the local authority that we have to adhere to in terms of policy. So it’s really difficult... it’s so hard. “

“I also think that there’s a lot of pressure put on early years, in the sense that everybody feels that it’s the best people to support everything that’s going on. And we work with closely with health visitors and the schools and the local authority’s psychology team and various things – but we’re the first point of call for every single one of those departments and when there is something that they need to intervene with it comes straight to us.”



Research team response to stakeholder themes

The themes and sub-themes included in this report will set the direction of intervention development and evaluation in our research programme into the future. In Table 2 we outline how and where the themes can be addressed within the intervention development process.

Theme	Sub theme	Response
Parents as active collaborators	Implement co-creation with parents in to develop the intervention	This theme really is over-arching all work to be done. Co-production methods need to be identified and adopted to guide development, with components identified and tailored by parents' suggestions. There was a tone from across the focus groups that participants felt it should be "done right", which we interpreted as robust and careful development and testing phases are needed.
	Communicate specific and/or immediate benefits to create buy-in	Core consideration in the development of the intervention content and messaging.
	Intervention should seek to educate alongside supporting parents	Core consideration in the development of the intervention content and underpinning philosophy.
Critical evaluation of the language, communication, messaging and branding		Engagement with literature related to communication and messaging. Language and terminology will be tested with parents and early years staff in the development phase.
Systems based approach to intervention development and implementation		Develop a theory of change/logic model to map the wider context of social ecological determinants, and potential avenues for implementation of the intervention within the wider system.
Need to map; behaviour, existing programs, initiative and policy to help fill gaps and create connections and links		As part of the development of a theory of change/logic model for the intervention, potential interacting initiatives, programs and policies will be identified and considered for integration into intervention.
Play based approach		Core considerations in the development Investigate and identify potential strategies for play based intervention components.
COVID-19 Considerations	The isolation of parents and their ability to access services	Core consideration when developing intervention setting and delivery mode.
	Changes in provision of services	Core consideration when developing intervention setting and delivery mode.
	Burnout of parents and staff	Core consideration when developing intervention setting, delivery mode and underpinning philosophy.



Ongoing pressures within the sector

Competing agendas within the educational setting	Rapid scoping review can identify current priorities and policies. Practicing early years specialist added to the investigatory team.
Disjointed or short-term approaches	These will be accounted for through the development of theory of change/logic model. Additionally, through the intervention development phase, formative evaluation, including further interviews with identified collaborators and/or stakeholders of the intervention, will identify barriers and find solutions.
Pressure on nurseries and nursery staff at all levels	Core consideration when developing intervention setting and delivery mode.

Project Team

The research team at the University of Strathclyde were involved in the data collection and analysis. For more information about our work please contact the PI Deirdre Harrington via email.

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