

VITAMIN D

Raising awareness of the importance of Vitamin D in the Outer Hebrides

Background

Although the body can create most of its own vitamin D through exposure to sunlight, those living in Scotland only receive enough sunlight for approximately half of the year. In fact we are such a distance from the equator that at the north of Scotland, for most of the year, it's difficult or impossible to get enough Vitamin D from sunshine.

For the remainder of the year, we are dependent on Vitamin D stores that have been built up within our bodies during the summer months as well as on other sources such as dietary intake and supplements.

Vitamin D is known to be important for good overall health and strong and healthy bones (specifically Vitamin D3 which increases the body's ability to absorb calcium). It is also an important factor in ensuring muscles, heart, lungs and brain work well and helping the body to fight infection. Research also reports that Vitamin D is important in preventing and treating a number of serious long-term health problems.

Low Vitamin D levels are a particular issue for all pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants and children under 5 years, adults aged 65 years and over, black/other darker-skinned minority ethnic or mixed race groups and those with limited exposure to sunlight. Pregnant women must also ensure that not only their own requirement for Vitamin D is met, but that they also build up adequate stores in the developing foetus for early infancy.

To promote the uptake of Vitamin D in the Outer Hebrides, a series of short films were commissioned by the Western Isles Maternal & Infant Nutrition (MIN) Group on behalf of the NHS Western Isles Division of Public Health and Health Strategy.

These films formed part of a localised public engagement campaign to raise awareness of the importance of Vitamin D and were specifically tailored for the Outer Hebrides.

Aim

The aim of the initiative was to raise awareness and promote the uptake of Vitamin D across remote and rural settings in the Outer Hebrides to support the Maternal & Infant Nutrition (MIN) national framework. It did this by:

- commissioning three short films that emphasise the importance of Vitamin D for good health and mental health
- renewing focus of the Healthy Start Scheme, Vitamin D supplements and their local availability and access points
- featuring local professionals, adults and families in everyday situations talking about Vitamin D, dubbed by local children's voices.

Methods

- Partnership working with the local multi-agency Maternal & Infant Nutrition (MIN) group.
- Forging and developing relationship with Dr. Benjamin Jacobs, Consultant Paediatrician at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital around clinical guidance.
- Creation of three separate film story boards emphasising Vitamin D for health, Vitamin D-rich foods, daily supplements for identified at-risk groups, the Healthy Start Scheme (child drops, pregnancy tablets and voucher scheme) and local supplement access points.
- Advertising and recruiting native islanders from each of the islands (adults and children).
- Building relationships, coordinating and undertaking filming.
- Editing and production of three separate humorous short films.
- Simultaneous film launches within the Isles of Lewis and Benbecula.
- Promotion and availability of the films via online, media and social media.
- Free distribution of Healthy Start Scheme, pregnancy tablets and children's vitamin drops throughout the Outer Hebrides.

Results

- Production of three popular and well-viewed films.
- Partnership working increased with range of local MIN developments being undertaken.
- Increased promotion of Healthy Start Scheme by local midwives, health visiting staff, local mums groups and services for vulnerable parents and young people.
- Increased local availability and distribution/uptake of Healthy Start Children's Vitamins and Pregnancy Tablets.
- Recruitment of Robert Gordon University dietetic students to undertake project assessing barriers/solutions to increase Healthy Start local uptake.
- Other local departments looking to replicate film commissioning to promote other health messages e.g. Health Visiting team promoting breastfeeding to school children.
- Development of Vitamin D animation lecture launching winter 2017.
- Excellent feedback received with requests from boards to share/replicate within their regional areas.

Conclusion

Key learning has been acknowledging that involving native islanders in local engagement activities attracts previously difficult-to-reach audiences, especially when promoting a normally 'dry' topic.

The development of the highly popular three short films and their subsequent promotion has meant that the distribution of children's vitamin supplements locally has almost doubled. There has also been increased awareness on the importance of Vitamin D throughout the Outer Hebrides archipelago.

Partnership working has also increased with a range of additional work being undertaken by local MIN, including promotion and support of breastfeeding in local cafes. **Films can be viewed at:**

www.parentingwi.scot.nhs.uk

MEET OUR CHILD STARS



Katie Morag Barker
Isle of Harris



David Macdonald
Isle of Lewis



Ryan Macdonald
Isle of Benbecula



Ruby Duncan
Isle of Lewis



Sam Scott
Isle of Lewis



Scott Campbell
Isle of Barra



Hannah Matheson
Isle of Lewis



Calumn Maciver
Isle of Lewis

Contact Details:

For further information please contact the Western Isles Maternal & Infant Nutrition (MIN) Group, Division of Public Health and Health Strategy
NHS Western Isles, 37 South Beach, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, HS1 2BB. Tel. (01851) 702997. Web: www.parentingwi.scot.nhs.uk