

# Evaluation of the Ask Teddi app in Thurrock

*We're all much healthier now and feel happier too. We do more exercise as a family and eat better. We take care of our emotional life much better. I think that helps with our child too*

*I like how it is giving information in a gentle way without being judgmental*

## Summary Report

Supporting the health, wellbeing and development of families with a child aged 0 – 5 is a strategic priority. There is a need for innovative, evidence-based interventions to support parent knowledge, confidence and healthy behaviour.

### Solutions4Health

- Solutions4Health commissioned to design an app aimed at parents with a child aged 0 – 5 in the region.
- Co-produced with families and local professionals
- Interactive app utilizing artificial intelligence
- Toolkit of expert and evidence-based advice, reliable resources and information
- Available 24hrs a day

Ask Teddi was launched in March 2021 and is a free app for parents and carers of children under 5 in Thurrock. It provides information on:



- Infant feeding (breast, formula and mixed feeding).
- Healthy eating including starting solids and fussy eating.
- Oral health.
- Sleep.
- Play and socialisation/being with others.
- Exercise and active families.
- Parental mental health and wellbeing.



Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe



University of Essex

- Swansea and Essex Universities commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation
- User survey was led by Swansea University
- Focus groups/interviews with health visitors, children's centre staff and parents was led by the University of Essex

## Methodology

**A mixed-methods study design was used to evaluate Ask Teddi**

### Part 1: Quantitative

Online questionnaire exploring parents' use and perceptions of the app

- impacts upon knowledge and behaviours
- infant feeding
- dental health
- healthy eating
- physical activity

### Part 2: Qualitative



- Focus groups with professionals to understand early and continuing experiences with the app



- Online survey for professionals



- Phone interviews with parents

*We've been eating healthier as a family because of the support and advice from Teddi.*

## Key Impacts



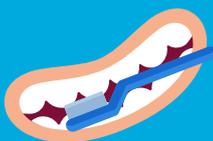
### Infant Feeding

A positive impact upon infant feeding was seen with parents attributing the app to helping them feel more knowledgeable and confident about breastfeeding and how to bottle feed safely and responsively.



### Diet

Increased knowledge of what foods to offer their children, in what portion sizes and how to prepare them. As a result of the app many parents reduced sugar, saturated fat and salt in their child's diet and increased fruits, vegetables, and fibre.



### Oral Health

Improved oral health knowledge particularly around how frequently and how long to brush baby and children's teeth and how to avoid sugary drinks. Half of parents booked a dental appointment because of information in the app.



### Physical Activity

Increased confidence about getting more active play into their baby or child's day. Parents reported that their baby was having more tummy time each day with walking children spending more time being active and outdoors.

## User Feedback

*It's been so helpful and supportive, I've never had so much help and advice either online or in person*



Separate section for toilet training



Add a way for parents to connect



Information on how to choose a language



Be able to ask a healthcare professional



Opt out of daily "How are you?"



Information about older children



Ability to search FAQs



Introduce activities promoting healthy lifestyles that children can do on the app



Additional chapters on:

- Early communication
- Infant mental health
- Children with additional needs



= feedback has been acted on

*There's loads of information and I don't think I've ever seen such information, help, advice altogether on one app before.*

## Professional Feedback

Possibly provide a way for parents to contact the health duty line with a message via the app (there were mixed views about this suggestion).

★ Consider signposting parents to local services (including contact details), support groups and 'Ask Thurrock' from the app

★ Include on the app a link to the children's centre timetables in the local area

★ = already included as pop-up links within the app

Signpost from Teddi to the further and more detailed information available on some of the more specialist apps

Introduce some form of glossary or section on the app with all of the links in one place that parents could then click on to access, or a search bar

Include more videos

Connect with the digital red book

Including the information provided in handouts from professionals, such as the Baby Friendly initiative (in the new birth packs) and advice about screen time (from the speech and language team).

Explain what different services and roles actually do (particularly helpful for parents from other countries) and provide a link to the range of services that parents can access in Thurrock

## Limitations

Overall, parents and professionals feel Teddi is a good resource and the evaluation has found it to have a positive impact, particularly for parents. As with any evaluation there are a number of limitations to this analysis including potentially accessing more motivated parents and professionals and social desirability responses. However, although evaluation responses were typically very positive, participants did feel that they could discuss limitations and areas for improvement. Although the app was available for download by all parents in the region, few fathers took part in our evaluation. The launch, implementation and analysis of the app took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, in part during local lockdowns and social distancing restrictions. This may have affected use and perceptions of the app and a longer-term study exploring its continued impact would be useful. However, it should be highlighted that the positive outcomes of the app may be even more commendable due to the recognised challenges that parents have been facing through the pandemic. Given the evidence that many families have struggled with breastfeeding, child obesity rates across the country have risen, and many families are struggling to access dental care, the app may have been released at a pertinent time.