

## VANGUARD: Better Care Together

**Case study:** A tour of the NHS 'SICK' play!



**Purpose:**

The purpose of the NHS 'SICK' play is to teach school children how to use NHS services appropriately.

The performance also delivers important health and wellbeing messages to children in a way that they can relate to.

Children are encouraged to go home and pass on their learning to their parents/ carers and families.

The case study for the earlier NHS 'SICK' plays can be found here:  
<http://ow.ly/NnqV30bdKzA>

**Context  
(processes  
and  
conversations)**

In line with the NHS Five Year Forward View, the Better Care Together programme aims to help patients 'get the right care, at the right time, in the right place' by making more appropriate use of primary care, community teams, ambulance services and community pharmacies.

The NHS Five Year Forward View highlights that although staff are working with great skill and dedication to provide care for the public when they most need it, some services are struggling to cope with rising demand. According to the Kings Fund, between 2003/ 4 and 2015/16 the overall number of attendances to A and E has increased by nearly 40%. The Five Year Forward View suggests that a large number of visits to Emergency Departments could have been better dealt with elsewhere.

Due to the increasing demand on NHS services, Better Care Together are looking at initiatives to give communities the knowledge and confidence to use health services appropriately. Consequently, in 2016 Better Care Together teamed up with the Beggars Theatre and the Headzuptheatre group to put on a comedy production called

'SICK' to teach school children across the Bay how to use NHS services appropriately.

The NHS 'SICK' play was first developed and performed to primary school children in Millom before it was rolled out to Morecambe and Barrow areas.

Following the success of the NHS 'SICK' play, the GP lead for the Askam, Dalton and Ulverston Integrated Care Community (ICC); Dr Alison Johnston and the Project Manager for the ICC; Georgina Livingstone contacted Better Care Together to enquire whether it could be rolled out to this ICC area.

Subsequently, the Better Care Together team approached Jakki Moore from the Beggars Theatre and Gary Bridgens from the Headzuptheatre group and the decision was made to roll out the NHS 'SICK' play to Askam, Dalton and Ulverston areas.

A series of conversations took place between Better Care Together, Dr Alison Johnston and Georgina Livingstone regarding whether the show should be performed within schools or at external venues. Due to the high numbers of schools in Ulverston and Dalton it was agreed that hosting the play at external venues would be the fairest option. As only one of the two schools in Askam confirmed their interest in attending the NHS 'SICK' play it was agreed that it could be performed on site, in the school hall for convenience.

The chosen venues for each area were:

- The Coronation Hall in Ulverston
- The Community Centre in Dalton
- Ireleth St Peters C of E Primary School in Askam

**How it works,  
setting out the  
steps:**

Once it was acknowledged that the NHS 'SICK' play could be rolled out to Askam, Dalton and Ulverston and each of the venues had been booked, primary schools in each area were identified.

The Better Care Together team contacted all schools in each of the three areas by phone to explain the purpose of the NHS 'SICK' play and invite pupils from years four and five to attend the show at the venue most convenient to them.

During each performance the actors used stories, songs and interactive games to engage with the audiences, made up of school children. The show involves inviting the pupils onto the stage and asking them to decide if an illness is a 'Big Sick' (when an ambulance is needed) or a 'Little Sick' (something that can be treated at home such as a cold). The play also concentrates on how to maintain good health through physical activity, healthy eating and preventing the spread of viruses and bacteria.

Following each performance, the school children were encouraged to answer questions relating to the key health messages within the show. For example the children were asked to name the different ways they can help themselves to stay healthy. Answers included exercising regularly, washing their hands and eating fruit and vegetables.

**Change elements**

**1) Collaborative working**

The NHS 'SICK' play was written and performed by Jakki Moore from the Beggars Theatre and Gary Bridgens from the Headzuptheatre group.

The play was commissioned by Better Care Together who worked in conjunction with Jakki and Gary to encourage as many primary school children within the Askam, Dalton and Ulverston ICC to attend the show in order to learn how to use NHS services appropriately.

**2) Implementation of the changes (patient and public communication)**

The Better Care Together team contacted all primary schools in Askam, Dalton and Ulverston by phone to promote the NHS 'SICK' play and invite them to attend a performance in their area.

Following the initial phone call, the Better Care Together team sent each school an email containing a written invitation, further details about the NHS 'SICK' play, and a press release from when it was performed in Morecambe and Barrow. Emails were tailored each school, containing the details of the show closest to them. Schools were asked to confirm their attendance via email.

Attendees included:

- Children and staff from six primary schools attended the performance at the Coronation Hall in Ulverston
- Children and staff from two primary schools attended the performance at the community centre in Dalton
- The final performance took place in the hall at Ireleth St Peters C of E Primary School in Askam and all pupils attended

**3) Developments**

The NHS 'SICK' play has developed as it has been rolled out across the different areas. Changes to the show include:

- The localisation of key messages, for example referring to the A and E department at Furness General Hospital when performing the show within South Lakes and the referring to the A and E Department at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary when performing the show in north Lancashire.
- Acting on feedback that schools prefer to watch the show at external venues opposed to on school premises. Teachers reported that this makes the show more memorable.
- Due to the small size of Ireleth St Peters C of E Primary School in Askam, all pupils within the school were invited to watch the show. This meant the performance had to be tailored to meet the needs of younger pupils whilst also

maintaining the interest of pupils within Key stage two.

- When inviting schools to attend the NHS 'SICK' play it proved more effective to speak to School Head Teachers directly as opposed to admin staff/ class teachers. This direct contact resulted in speedier support which encourages larger attendances and facilitates forward planning.

The 'SICK' play, which has now been performed in Millom, Morecambe, Barrow, Askam, Dalton and Ulverston has been seen by over 1,500 children. Overall, the cost to Better Care Together has been approximately £4.50 for each child who has seen the NHS 'SICK' play. We believe that this is a cost effective use of NHS resources and a sound investment in behaviour change to maximise the appropriate use of NHS services.

**Teachers have shared positive feedback on the NHS 'SICK' play:**

Mrs Rachael E McFarlane, Headteacher at Ireleth St Peter's C of E Primary School said: "We enjoyed the NHS 'SICK' performance which educated the children about how to use the NHS appropriately. It was creative and really engaged all of our children who came away with important key messages."

Miss Spence, year four teacher at Penny Bridge C of E primary school said: "The children really enjoyed the show and learnt new information; the most meaningful being the difference between big sick and little sick."

**Health professionals have shared positive feedback on the NHS 'SICK' play:**

Dr Alison Johnston said: "I was delighted to attend the NHS SICK play. It was very engaging and the children were all enthralled. It was a fantastic way of teaching children how to use services appropriately and about healthy eating, exercise, rest and relaxation."

Arabella Onslow, GP from Dalton said: "I thought the play was fabulous; funny, thought-provoking and the children were so engaged. I could see a different relationship being born between the NHS and our future generations."

**The feedback from some of the children showed how using comedy really helped to capture their attention in order to understand important messages about their health.**

Abi, Year five pupil from Lindal and Marton Primary School said: "The show taught us about the NHS in a funny way!"

Harry, Year four pupil from Lindal and Marton Primary School said: "The show was really good and funny- we learnt new things about the NHS!"

Ella, Year five pupil from Dalton St Marys C of E Primary School said: "The play was good because it taught us how to look after ourselves in a funny way rather than just telling us."

**Success so far:**

<b>Lessons learnt:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is important to have the support of local health professionals</li><li>• Staff organising the play need to be aware of school holidays and other school events which are planned</li><li>• Schools need to be aware of event details as early as possible to encourage attendance.</li><li>• It is important to allow spare time in the running order of the day in case transport bringing school children runs late or breaks down.</li><li>• Venues need to be visited prior to the show day to ensure that they are suitable and to find out whether necessary alternatives need to be made.</li><li>• It is very important that teachers and teaching assistants are approached for permission to take photographs in advance.</li></ul>
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