



The Food
Foundation



A Yorkshire-based review of the implementation and impact of the Holiday Activities and Food programme

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
OCTOBER 2021



About The Food Foundation

The Food Foundation is an independent charity working to address challenges in the food system in the interests of the UK public. Working at the interface between academia and policymakers (parliamentarians, civil servants, local authorities, business leaders), we use a wide range of approaches to make change happen including events, publications, media stories, social media campaigns and multi-stakeholder partnerships. We are independent of all political parties and business, and we are not limited by a single issue or special interest. Our **Children's Right2Food Campaign** is a nationwide initiative led by young people to ensure every child in the UK can access and afford good food. www.foodfoundation.org.uk



About FixOurFood

FixOurFood is a 5-year research programme led by the University of York and is part of the 'Transforming the UK Food System for Healthy People and a Healthy Environment Strategic Priorities Fund Programme' which is delivered by UKRI. FixOurFood has a vision to transform food systems across the UK towards being 'regenerative'. We are working in schools and nurseries to transform food menus, environments, education and procurement and we are supporting the HAF programme in Yorkshire to evaluate its benefits to young people and their families. FixOurFood is evidence-based and we are committed to all young people having a voice in the future of the UK food system. www.fixourfood.org



Research undertaken by:

Maria Bryant, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, Hull York Medical School, University of York

Grace Gardner, Department of Health Sciences, University of York

Maddie Sinclair, Department of Health Sciences, University of York

Bob Doherty, The York Management School, University of York

Annie Connolly, The Food Foundation

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Report design

whitecreativecompany.co.uk

Background

About the Holiday Activities and Food programme

School holidays are a known pressure point for families who can face increased costs, such as food and childcare, and reduced incomes. Evidence gathered during the Covid pandemic shows low-income families struggle to afford food during the school holidays, cutting back on food or skipping meals, resorting to cheaper and less healthy options and using foodbanks¹. There is also concern that the impact of summer holidays on learning loss disproportionately impacts children from disadvantaged backgrounds².

Last Autumn, the Government confirmed that the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) would be expanded to all 151 top-tier authorities in England, as recommended in the *National Food Strategy: Part One*³. This substantially expanded the Department for Education's pilot scheme which has run since 2019. The programme has grown from four weeks in the summer to a minimum of six weeks for 2021, including one week at Easter, four weeks in the summer and one week at Christmas⁴.

The HAF programme provides free healthy meals and activities to children eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals (FSMs), in line with School Food Standards. Local authorities are expected to ensure all FSM-eligible children in their area have access to provision, should they want it. They are also encouraged to make the holiday clubs available to any children not eligible for FSM, who can pay to attend.

Evaluation approach

Given this is the first year of the expansion of the HAF scheme, FixOurFood researchers have undertaken an evaluation of the implementation of the scheme focussed on delivery across Yorkshire. This focuses on four local authority areas (York, North Lincolnshire, Bradford and Sheffield) in the summer holidays of 2021.

Data were gathered between 10 August and 8 September 2021 by several means to provide a robust set of findings and recommendations. This included focus groups with parents and interviews with local authority HAF leads as well as HAF activity providers. Data were also collected between 26 August and 13 September through a nationally representative survey of 1,418 children aged 7-17 conducted by Childwise Research Ltd, and by gathering information from local governments. Data from all sources were combined to generate themes and key recommendations.

This report provides a summary of the preliminary findings. At the time of publication, a full set of data on uptake were not available from local authorities but will be included in our final report.

● Please see the [Appendix](#) for further details on research methods.

KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDING 1

Provision

was diverse across local authorities.

Implementation models differed between public and private organisations as well as Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs). This allowed for local leadership and creativity in delivery, but also a varied quality between providers.



KEY FINDING 2

The meals served

had a positive impact on food insecurity and provided children with a more varied, healthier diet than if not attending the clubs.



KEY FINDING 3

The benefits of

attending the holiday clubs were felt both by children and their wider families. Children enjoyed the opportunity to socialise and learn new skills and some were reported to be better behaved at home as a result.

With their children attending the clubs, parents were able to work. Parents also benefited from opportunities to socialise within their local community.



KEY FINDING 4

Local authorities

stepped up to the challenge of the short turnaround time between the confirmed funding and provision delivery.

Despite the time pressure, they delivered well-rounded programmes and established a strong foundation for delivery of future provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Government should commit to long-term funding of the HAF programme to enable local authorities to plan and build on the learnings gained this year. Ongoing evaluation of the scheme will ensure it is fit for purpose.

2 Places on the programme should be available to all children, not just those with Free School Meal (FSM) status, to reduce stigma and continue to provide a lifeline for families regardless of FSM eligibility. A model of free and paid for places should be provided by local authorities, tailored to the local need.

3 The continued provision of tasty and varied meals should remain an important part of the HAF programme.

“ They have blossomed a lot by coming here... they communicate more, they have got confidence, they talk a lot which is good, they smile, they exercise, it just ticks all the boxes.”

PARENT OF CHILD
ATTENDING HOLIDAY CLUB

● See Recommendations in full on [page 10](#).

The National picture

23% of children aged 7-17 experienced food insecurity over the summer holidays

25% children aged 7-17 had attended a summer holiday club

64% of children said they 'really enjoyed' the holiday clubs they attended

In Yorkshire

23% of children aged 7-17 experienced food insecurity over the summer holidays

22% of children said they had visited a summer holiday club

71% of children aged 7-17 said they 'really enjoyed' the holiday clubs they attended

From a nationally representative survey of 1,418 children aged 7-17 undertaken by Childwise Research Ltd. Yorkshire data sample size was 208 respondents. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26 August and 13 September 2021. The holiday clubs referred to were not necessarily part of the HAF programme.



Awareness of HAF

Of households in England with a child aged 5-17 years olds:

IN JUNE

24% had heard of the HAF programme

IN SEPTEMBER

52% had heard of the HAF programme

Data collected by Focaldata from a representative sample of 2,032 parents of school-aged children between 8-11 June and 1,085 parents of school-aged children between 27-28 September 2021.

Overview of HAF in Yorkshire

Providers of the holiday clubs varied and included local authorities, Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs), public and private organisations. Some clubs were newly set up through HAF funding; others already existed but used HAF funding to extend and improve their offer.

For example, existing community projects used HAF funding to enrich activities and bring in session providers at spaces already set up for young people, hosting up to 60 children daily and run by a mix of volunteer and paid staff.

The age range of children attending the clubs was 4 to 16 years, although there was a predominance of younger children. The clubs provided a safe environment, indoor and outdoor space for the children, with a wide assortment of activities ranging from sports days and yoga to drumming and football.

A meal was offered at all the programmes. Depending on the kitchen facilities available to the provider, a hot meal

or a packed lunch was supplied. Providers taking part in the HAF programme were expected to adhere to School Food Standards outlined by the Department for Education (DfE). In some instances, HAF funding from the DfE was topped up by providers to allow for a better quality of lunch – although there remained a mix of quality in food provision.

Interviews with local authorities indicated some providers offered places to all children, regardless of FSM eligibility. It was left to the discretion of the provider to decide whether paid places were offered or not.



What were the benefits of the programme?

1 CHILDREN ENJOYED A HEALTHY MEAL, AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE NEW FOODS >>

Food was well received by children and their parents, and certain providers also offered parents the opportunity to eat with the children. Additionally, some providers allowed families to take home leftover portions and excess food from the meals. Attending a holiday club meant that if children were from households experiencing food insecurity, they were guaranteed a full, nutritious meal that day. Some providers were aware that some children attending would be benefiting from their only hot meal of the day at the holiday club.

“HAF makes sure that vital food goes to some of the most vulnerable families, and children go to sleep happy and fed.”

HAF PROVIDER/LOCAL AREA COORDINATOR

Parents across the programmes often praised the food, deeming the meals to be healthy and nutritious. This was particularly important in deprived areas where they may not be able to afford or access such food in their local area.

“Normally he doesn't eat healthily at all but since he has come over here, the food, he is eating a lot healthier at home as well so I am kind of really glad and happy about that, he loves it.”

PARENT, VCSO ACTIVITY

1 continued

Some parents felt that their children's diets had improved because of attending the holiday club, as they were more willing to eat healthier food than when at home.

“ My two eldest...they always used to eat junk food and burgers, and their clothes wouldn't fit...It's like magic because they literally have lost weight, they fit into their clothes and they don't ask for burgers all the time or if we can go to the shop and buy sweets and chocolate.”

PARENT, VCSO ACTIVITY

Children were able to experience a variety of different foods that they hadn't eaten before. As well as trying different fruit and vegetables, children were also able to sample foods from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

“ The best part about this place is the food.”

CHILD AT A HAF ACTIVITY

2 ACTIVITIES PROVIDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE, SOCIALISE, AND LEARN NEW SKILLS >>

Children responded positively to the vast range of activities on offer across providers, which included arts and crafts, physical activities, nutrition-based activities as well as day trips. Activity examples ranged from drumming sessions, in which children made their own percussion shakers, to teaching children how to swim.

Both the young people and their parents talked about a wide range of benefits from taking part, including children gaining new skills, socialising and improving their wellbeing. Parents praised both the quality and variety of the provision and voiced relief that their children were kept occupied.

“ I was dreading the 6 weeks because it would have been another 6 weeks of them being at home doing nothing so having the opportunity for them to come here and to learn and keep them socialising because they have missed quite a lot of that over the last year and a half.”

PARENT, VCSO ACTIVITY

Parents also considered the structure provided by clubs to have positively impacted children. Parents who attended activities with their children reported that it had enabled them to spend more time with their children and socialise with other parents. Other benefits noted by parents included improvement to wellbeing as well as providing a safe space for their children.

“ It keeps things healthy at home - it reduces everybody's stress levels - everyone isn't so pent up - gives them a sense of routine and structure – a sense of fun and new experiences.”

PARENT, PRIVATE ORGANISATION ACTIVITY

“ I'm so glad they are here and they are occupied instead of just being at home and playing games... it keeps him out of trouble.”

PARENT, VCSO ACTIVITY

3 THERE WAS
EQUALITY
OF OPPORTUNITY
FOR CHILDREN
TO ACCESS
ACTIVITIES >>

Children who were eligible for FSMs attended the programmes alongside children who paid for their places, at the discretion of the provider. Once children were participating in the programme, there was no indication that children were aware of who was attending with a free place or a paid place.

Children had lots of opportunities to socialise and make friends with other children both from their own school and others. This was particularly important after a period of much-reduced socialisation due to Covid restrictions.

“Because of the Covid they didn’t get to go out, the children had to isolate at home and it was really hard for them but this has really helped them...more confidence, making more friends.”

PARENT AT VCSO HAF ACTIVITY

The clubs also provided equality of opportunity for lower-income children to access activities they may otherwise miss out on due to financial barriers.

“By not being in a high-income bracket, it is a lifeline for me being able to work and to have them in childcare so I can actually work in school holidays as well.”

PARENT, PRIVATE ORGANISATION ACTIVITY

4 WHOLE
FAMILIES
BENEFITED
FROM CHILDREN
ATTENDING HAF
PROGRAMMES >>

Children’s attendance at HAF activities allowed parents to work over school holidays. Parents commented that they would not have been able to afford the cost of paid-for holiday clubs, which in some cases would be more costly than earnings from a day’s work.

“It has been a godsend for us to get them out of the house - it is a plus side that it is on so long during the day - like a school day - and with parents having to work and other commitments it’s been good.”

PARENT, VCSO ACTIVITY

Parents reported that their children behaved better at home and with their siblings and families as a result of attending the programme, as they were having fun and being active.

“At home, because they’re bored, they’re in each other’s faces, they’re ripping lumps out of each other, whereas coming to sessions here it has made such a different atmosphere at home, it’s like, ‘we have learnt this today’...”

PARENT, VCSO ACTIVITY

Depending on the activity and setting, there was flexibility for parents to either drop their child or stay for the whole session. This option helped parents to ease their children into the activities, which was especially important for parents of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) children.

Parents’ attendance allowed them to socialise with other parents in their community. This was particularly important for vulnerable families such as refugee and minority families, as it provided a safe space for them to meet other people. For example, one VCSO provider offered a session before the main activity time, specifically aimed at vulnerable families facing social isolation, which helped parents to form a social network in a safe space.

What were the learnings?

There are potential benefits of extending access to HAF programmes

Holiday clubs offered both paid and unpaid places for children to take part in activities. The efforts of providers successfully ensured children were unaware of who attended on a free or paid place.

However, despite no visible distinction between FSM and non-FSM children during the delivery of the programmes, some parents reported a sense of stigma about attending free clubs over the holidays.

For example, one parent said they were aware of other parents not sending their child/ren to free HAF activities because then people would know they were eligible for FSM. Providers reported that this may have had an impact on take-up.

“ ... I do know quite a few mums who have a sense of shame that these things are on offer - you want to come to them but you don't at the same time- [there's a] whole stigma attached to it...’

PARENT, ACTIVITY AT PRIVATE ORGANISATION

Research showed that some local authorities were aware that FSM eligibility didn't offer a free place to all children who would benefit from the programme, so decided to also extend free places to the 15% most vulnerable by household income as identified through schools.

Costs attached to activities for children not eligible for a free place at a club differed across local authorities and in some cases were quite costly. For example, one holiday club observed was charged at £20.50/day and another at £14/day.



Despite the short lead-in time, local authorities stepped up to deliver a wide range of programmes in their area

Given the extremely short lead-in time (the decision was made to fund the HAF programme in November 2020), providers were under duress to roll-out HAF during Covid restrictions over Easter, with then only weeks to prepare before summer delivery. This made it more difficult to plan and deliver the programmes.

Despite this, local authorities stepped up to the challenge and were successful in providing a wide range of activities across the board, with the inclusion of a meal.

However, the short turnaround for set-up may have affected activity take-up by children as there was very little time to market and promote the programme [data on take-up was not yet available from local authorities at time of publication].

The relationships built between schools, local authorities and providers will be key for successful delivery of provision in the future

Relationships between schools, local authorities and providers were instrumental in ensuring that the most vulnerable families were made aware of the programme, especially families who may have faced digital exclusion and language barriers. Existing relationships were used to publicise the programme but, due to time restraints and short turnaround time before the summer programme, new relationships were not as well-established as they could have been.

Although some relationships were formed between schools and providers, it was noted by several providers ►



“ Schools are the biggest key and link to the success of this programme and to really increase the engagement...Obviously this year they were so stretched...but it’s not about the schools having to deliver it themselves, it’s the schools linking their families into it.”

LOCAL AUTHORITY

that it was difficult for schools to fully engage with the programmes due to issues including short turnaround, Covid-19 isolation/bubbles breaking down and lack of resources. For future programmes, earlier engagement with schools could be key to programme success.

Variation existed in the quality of provision

The quality of the provision varied – some providers were very experienced in working with children and organising activities and had access to more equipment and play spaces. Others had more limited space and resources and had less experience running holiday clubs.

In some cases, HAF providers had lived experiences of food insecurity. This was beneficial to building and maintaining their relationships with children and families.

Providers and parents experienced problems with systems



for signing up or cancelling sessions. Some booking systems made activity availability unclear, such as how many places were left for a session. This may have resulted in unsuccessful booking. Difficulty or confusion experienced by parents trying to cancel activities may have led to both spaces and food being wasted, if a meal was prepared for a child who did not attend.

More efforts are needed to involve older children in HAF activities

While there were activities on offer for older children, local authorities made clear that more effort was needed for future programmes to engage an older demographic.

One way would be to work with older children directly to plan and create activities. If local authorities know they will have funding for future holiday schemes, it will be easier to meet and plan programme delivery with young people.

Recommendations in full

1 THE HAF PROGRAMME FUNDING SHOULD BE EXTENDED FOR FUTURE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Despite the short turnaround time, the substantial efforts of local authorities and providers this year resulted in successful programme implementation, building the foundations for future holiday provision. Local authorities and providers have stressed the importance of guaranteed long-term funding for successful future planning and implementation. Continued evaluation of the scheme should be in place to ensure that it is being delivered to a high standard and reaching all children and families in need of support in the holiday.

2 A UNIVERSAL OFFERING OF THE PROGRAMME SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED WHERE POSSIBLE

Data from this research demonstrate that HAF is a lifeline for many families, regardless of FSM eligibility. Local authorities should be encouraged to allow all children to attend the HAF programme, seeking affordable activity charges at the discretion of individual providers for non-FSM places. Relationships between schools, local authorities and providers must be built upon an understanding that HAF is open to all children which will help reduce stigma. This should be implemented using a simple, streamlined system accessible to all that overcomes language barriers and digital exclusion. Efforts should be made to ensure that FSM children are indistinguishable from non-FSM children throughout the activities.

3 THE CONTINUED PROVISION OF TASTY AND VARIED MEALS SHOULD BE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE HAF PROGRAMME

Food provision varied across authorities and providers. The offer should not only meet School Food Standards but go above and beyond the minimum requirement to ensure a variety of quality food which is nutritious and appealing to children. Providers should involve children and young people in planning food provision and other food activities. Food could be further embedded within activities, and providers should be encouraged to be as creative as possible in incorporating food. Providers could also partner with school food catering partners, as well as local food hubs, food trucks and school food canteens which are generally vacant during school holidays. Ensuring a consistently high standard of food across activities will not only help to combat holiday hunger but also ensure children have opportunities to enjoy a varied diet incorporating healthy and tasty food which might not otherwise be available to them.



Appendix

METHODS USED TO GATHER DATA

- Local government documents were gathered and reviewed to explore what types of programmes were planned, how planning decisions were made and whether areas were able to deliver programmes as planned.
- Members from the research team completed 104 hours of observations (participatory ethnography) by volunteering at HAF summer programmes across four areas in Yorkshire to observe activities and talk informally to children, parents and providers; understanding how programmes were run and what people thought of them.
- Twenty interviews were conducted with HAF leads in local government and providers who delivered the programmes, in both Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs) and other types of public and private sector organisations.
- Discussion was facilitated amongst groups of parents at each location to hear their views of the HAF programmes.
- Views were gathered on issues including food insecurity and mental health from a national survey.
- Routinely collected implementation data were also collected from the four local authorities in Yorkshire, to measure uptake and reach.

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The Food Foundation CIO

c/o Spayne Lindsay & Co. LLP; 55 Strand, London, WC2N 5LR
+44(0)20 3086 9953

foodfoundation.org.uk  [@Food_Foundation](https://twitter.com/Food_Foundation)