



TACKLING INEQUALITIES DURING HOLIDAY PERIODS

A SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS 2024



How Holiday Activity Programmes can help to Tackle Inequalities Summary of Key Findings

The Holiday Gap

Research has shown that the school holidays can be pressure points for some families and for some children that can lead to a **holiday experience gap**.

Information from the Department for Education (DfE) states that children from low-income households are:

- More likely to experience ‘unhealthy holidays’ in terms of nutrition and physical health.
- Less likely to access organised out-of-school activities.
- More likely to experience social isolation.

With 4.2 million¹ (29%) children currently living in poverty across the UK and over 2.1 million pupils (24.6%) eligible for free school meals there are significant numbers of families, for whom the holidays place an increasing financial burden.

A report produced by Clare Holley and Emma Haycraft from Loughborough University ‘*Fighting food poverty in the school holidays*’² highlights data and evidence in relation to some of the key issues being faced, including:

- Eligibility for free school meals is an indicator of potential **food poverty** -which is defined as “the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet” (Department of Health, 2005³). Research asserts that children who experience food poverty are less likely to eat fruits, vegetables and brown bread, and are **more likely to consume unhealthy foods** such as chips and hamburgers (Molcho, Gabhainn, & Kelly, 2007).
- Children who experience food poverty are also likely to experience **holiday hunger**; the phenomenon by which children who rely on free school meals during term-time fall into a nutritional and **calorie deficit** in the school holidays – with information in a report by Kellogg’s (2015), finding that almost one third of UK parents on lower incomes reporting that during school holidays they miss meals to allow their child to eat, serve less healthy (cheaper) foods, and even serve smaller portions to their children.
- One in five children under the age of 15 years are estimated to live in households where there isn’t enough money to buy food, with **4% of UK children not eating three meals a day**⁴
- Holiday hunger is likely to have a detrimental effect on **school children’s educational performance**. The disparity in educational performance between high and low socio-economic status (SES) children is well established (Ladd, 2012) and so this issue of food poverty, which disproportionately affects children from lower income families, has serious implications for the educational future of these children. Statistics from the UK’s Department for Education (2010) state that by the end of primary school, pupils receiving free school meals are estimated to be 1.5 school years behind their more

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024): *UK Poverty*

² Clare Holley & Emma Haycraft, Loughborough University (2016), *Fighting Food Poverty in Holidays*

³ Department of Health. (2005). *Choosing a better diet: a food and health action plan*.

⁴ Pereira, A. L., Handa, S., & Holmqvist, G. (2017). *Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity among Children across the Globe (Issue June)*.

financially secure peers. Whilst analysis⁵ of data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and using data on children in receipt of FSM as a proxy for disadvantage found that by the time children reach the age of 16 years, children who were in receipt of free school meals were 24.3 months behind children who did not.

- Even intermittent food insecurity, such as that experienced during school holidays, has been associated with poorer academic functioning in low income children (Murphy, Wehler, & Pagano, 1998⁶).
- Research also suggests that food poverty is associated with **health status and emotional wellbeing** (Ashiabi, 2005⁷). Alaimo, Olson, and Frongillo Jr (2001⁸) found that 6 to 11-year-old children from food insufficient families demonstrate difficulty getting on with other children and are more likely to have seen a psychologist. With Holley and Haycraft asserting that: it seems “highly likely that holiday hunger exacerbates such difficulties, and that providing food during school holidays will go some way towards closing the gap between children who experience food poverty and those with a reliable source of food”.
- Research has also identified, that there can be a **social stigma associated with free food services** (Holford, 2015⁹), which may inhibit families from utilising them. However, food provision as part of holiday clubs represents an opportunity to encourage more individuals to attend these clubs, as well as removing the social stigma associated with attending free food services and that this increased engagement by families can facilitate other advantageous aspects of holiday clubs, including promoting physical activity, and participating in other valuable developmental and social opportunities (Defeyter, Graham and Prince, 2015¹⁰).

Data from Sport England’s Activity Check-in Wave 3¹¹ captured data in relation to the impact of the summer holidays on **levels of physical activity** amongst children and young people. Data from the survey highlighted that those from the lowest socio-economic groups (LSEG) were the most likely to be in the group that **does no organised activity** in holidays (45% cf 27% for those from the middle social groups) and that most (66%), are not meeting the Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines for physical activity. However, this is not down to a lack of demand, with the data captured showing that LSEG families were more likely than others to want to do more – but that key barriers, predominantly related to cost inhibit them from doing so. Related to this is analysis of data from the Living Costs and Food Survey¹² which showed that households with the 20% lowest income typically spend just £3.75 per week on active sport compared to £12.67 for an average earning household.

⁵ Andrews, J., Robinson, D., & Hutchinson, J. (2017). *Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage*.

⁶ Murphy, J., Wehler, C., & Pagano, M. (1998). *Relationship between hunger and psychosocial functioning in low-income American children*. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*,

⁷ Ashiabi, G. (2005). *Household food insecurity and children’s school engagement*. *Journal of children and poverty*

⁸ Alaimo, K., Olson, C. M., & Frongillo Jr, E. A. (2001). *Food Insufficiency and American School-Aged Children’s Cognitive, Academic, and Psychosocial Development*. *Pediatrics*.

⁹ Holford, A. (2015). *Take-up of Free School Meals: Price Effects and Peer Effects*. *Economica*

¹⁰ Defeyter, M. A., Graham, P. L., & Prince, K. (2015). *A Qualitative Evaluation of Holiday Breakfast Clubs in the UK: Views of Adult Attendees, Children, and Staff*. *Frontiers in Public Health*

¹¹ Sport England (2022) *Activity Check-in Wave 3*

¹² Sheffield Hallam University – Sports Industry Research Centre (2022) *Leisure spending of low-income UK households 2019*

In addition, whilst government published figures on youth crime nationally do not break down by season, there is evidence from local police data to suggest above average incidences of youth crime, including serious youth violence **during the summer months**.

Holiday Activity Programmes

Targeted holiday programmes such as the DfE Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and StreetGames Fit & Fed Initiative have been playing a vital role during the holiday periods in helping children and young people living in underserved communities to have happy and healthy holidays.

The information below provides a summary of key benefits which have been identified in external evaluation and research studies from these holiday activity programmes – which include benefits, not only for the children taking part, but also for their wider families.

Overview of the benefits identified in relation to holiday activity programmes:

1. Access to affordable childcare for children & young people from low-income families

- Data from a survey undertaken by Northumbria University¹³ in 2022 of over 2,400 parents living in Birmingham showed that parents typically struggle to find affordable childcare during the holidays. When asked on a score of 0-10 how difficult it is to find affordable childcare (where 0= not at all and 10 = extremely difficult, the average score across all parents was 6.14.
- HAF programmes are playing a significant role in alleviating these difficulties – with for example over 53,000 children attending the Bring it on Brum (BioB) HAF programmes during 2023/24.
- Monitoring data from HAF programmes also shows, that careful selection of holiday activity providers and the provision of activities within low-income communities result in high levels of up-take from children and young people that are eligible for free school meals (FSM). For example, in the 2023 Summer holidays:
 - 82% of those attending Birmingham City Council’s ‘Bring it on Brum’ were eligible for free school meals
 - 84% of those attending Newcastle City Council’s ‘Best Summer Ever’ were eligible for free school meals.

2. Increased Levels of Physical Activity / Reduced Sedentary Behaviour

A core element of both the DfE Holiday Activities & Food Programme and StreetGames Fit & Fed initiative is the provision of opportunities for children and young people from low-income families to take part in a variety of sport and physical activities whilst attending holiday programmes. These activities have been shown to increase levels of physical activity for those attending – see below:

- An evaluation¹⁴ of StreetGames Fit and Fed pilot undertaken by Northumbria University in 2017 stated that the holiday clubs had ‘*helped young people to remain active and reduced sedentary behaviour during the holidays*’.

¹³ Northumbria University (2023): *Bring it on Brum, an evaluation of Birmingham’s HAF Programme*. This study included a survey with over 2,400 parents including: N=1,339 parents/carers of BioB programme, N=220 parents/carers whose children attended childcare other than BioB sessions during the school holiday and N=889 parents/carers whose children did not attend any form of holiday provision outside of the home.

¹⁴ Northumbria University (2017): *Holiday StreetGames – what difference does it make to young people. An evaluation of the StreetGames Fit & Fed Pilot*

- Data from the parents' survey undertaken by Northumbria University in 2022 found that children and young people attending BioB sessions, were active over more weeks of the summer holidays compared to children that did not attend any holiday provision – with the data showing:
 - A significant difference between children attending BioB holiday clubs and children that did not attend a holiday club - with children participating in BioB sessions for 100+ hours engaging on average in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) for 4.24 weeks during the six-week holiday compared to an average of just 2.91 weeks for the children that did not attend a holiday club.
 - A significant positive correlation between the number of hours attending BioB sessions and the number of weeks that children were engaged in MPVA (*defined as at least 4 days a week for at least 60 mins a day*).
- In a survey of children and young people attending Fit & Fed (F&F) sessions¹⁵ responses showed that 91% of those attending shared that they were more active whilst attending F&F sessions compared to normal school holiday activity levels and that 82% said that they had tried new sports/activities at the sessions. Also, when asked what they would be doing if they were not attending F&F sessions, 39% said they'd be either watching tv or playing on devices, 18% said they'd be doing nothing and 6% said they be likely to be in bed.
- Partnerships with National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) have enabled holiday activity providers to: increase the variety of activities they offer, up-skill their workforce and enable young people to take part in a wide range of activities – often trying new sports for the first time. For example, as part of the BioB holiday programme in 2023, partnerships with:
 - England Hockey provided training and a kitbag to 19 BioB clubs who included hockey within their activities to over 500 children
 - Lawn Tennis Association provided training and kitbags to 37 BioB clubs who included tennis within their activities to over 500 children
 - England Squash enabled 140 children and young people from BioB clubs to attend the British Master event in Birmingham and to play squash in the Perspex court
 - British Canoe Union and the Canals & Rivers Trust enabled over 1,000 children from 30 BioB clubs to take part in activities across 7 paddle hub sites across the city.
 - Bikeability /TAWS a 20 hour Bikeability programme was delivered to 800 children from 12 BioB clubs.

3. Food insecurity

- National survey data shows that 4 million children (26%) have experienced food insecurity and that there has been an increase in the proportion of low-income households reporting low levels of food security during the summer holidays – which increased from 47.3% in 2021 to 57.7% in 2022.

¹⁵ Fit & Fed – StreetGames Wales 2019

- Evaluation undertaken by Northumbria University showed that household food security, measured by the USDA Household Food Secure Module (USDA Economic Research Services, 2020), improved significantly for households involved with HAF compared to those who were not.

4. Food Provision

- Data from the parents' survey undertaken by Northumbria University in 2022 showed high levels of satisfaction with the food provided for children and young people attending BioB sessions, with 89% agreeing that the clubs served nutritious food, 77% agreeing that their children enjoyed the food and circa one-third of parents sharing that their children had tried new foods and eaten a wider variety of foods at the club. Whilst 63% of children and young people attending Fit & Fed sessions said they had tried new foods at the sessions.
- In addition, an evaluation¹⁶ undertaken by Loughborough University in 2023 of the Hakuna Fruitata programme which is part of the BioB delivery, identified that there was generally *'generally good evidence that a range of the feeding practices that staff were taught about during the Hakuna Fruitata training were in use in the clubs. The most frequently observed practices were encouragement of balance and variety in children's diets, role modelling and child involvement in preparing food'*.

5. Safety

- Data from the parents' survey undertaken by Northumbria University in 2022 showed that 71% of parents strongly agree (*plus 19% agree*) that their children are safe whilst attending BioB sessions compared to just 32% who strongly agree that their children are safe in their immediate neighbourhood.
- In addition, 77% of the BioB parents strongly agreed/agreed that BioB kept their children from participating in anti-social behaviour.

6. Social & Psychological Benefits

- The evaluation of StreetGames Fit and Fed pilot undertaken by Northumbria University in 2017 stated that the holiday clubs had *'facilitated new relationships; reduced the likelihood that young people would become isolated; and allowed them to spend time with peers that they would otherwise be unlikely to spend time with'*.
- Data from the parents' survey undertaken by Northumbria University in 2022 showed that BioB parents feel that attending the holiday club has a range of positive social and psychological benefits, including:
 - 77% of parents agreeing that the holiday club help to prevent social isolation
 - 73% of parents agreeing that the holiday club help to boost confidence
 - 62% of parents agreeing that the holiday club help to raise aspirations
 - 54% of parents agreeing that the holiday club help to improve school readiness.
- Children and young people attending Fit & Fed sessions also cited similar benefits, with: 94% saying they had enjoyed 'meeting up', 89% saying that they had made new friends and 68% saying they had learnt something new.

¹⁶ Loughborough University (2023): *Summary report of the Hakuna Fruitata evaluation*

7. **Parental Stress**

- Data from the parents' survey undertaken by Northumbria University in 2022, found that parental stress was lower amongst parents of children attending the BioB HAF programme than for parents whose children were not attending a holiday club. Using a global measure of perceived stress in which low stress scores = 0 and high stress score =16 the survey data showed:
 - Mean stress scores of 7.66 were recorded for those that attended less than 30 hours and 7.79 for those that attended between 30-100 hours and 7.89 for parents of children attending the BioB programme for 100+ hours.
 - A mean score of 8.09 for parents of whose children were not attending any holiday club.

8. **Workforce development**

- HAF investment has provided resources to support the up skilling of thousands of staff and volunteers within the voluntary and community sector to help them to prepare and deliver their holiday programmes. For example, in Birmingham over 3,000 holiday club leaders and volunteers (including young people) have been trained over the past three years – in areas including: first aid, food hygiene, safeguarding, youth mental health first aid and sports specific activator training.

9. **Social Value**

An economic evaluation¹⁷ of the BioB programme by Northumbria University used a cost per child formula of £250.93 and calculated the Social Return on Investment for the Bring It On Brum programme. The evaluation showed a value of £479.28 per child in relation to obesity, a value of £1380.11 per child in relation to wellbeing, self-confidence and learning opportunities, and for every child deterred from participating in antisocial behaviour and associated crime, it calculated an approximate investment return of £928.40. This evaluation reported a total estimated SROI per child of £2787.79.

Learning

Learning from the delivery of holiday activity programmes over multiple years, has shown that these programmes not only impact positively on the children who attend and their families, but that they can also help to build onto existing community assets and support sustainable change within the local voluntary and community 'eco-system' through purposeful design and co-ordination.

Building Sustainable Change

The information below summarises the key aspects which are considered to have been important in helping to build sustainable change – through purposeful design and coordination which prioritises efforts and resources to:

- **Build hyper-local connected networks** – which bring together holiday activity providers - nurtures collaboration and shared learning.
- **Provide opportunities to strengthen individual and community capacity and capability** through the provision of access to training, qualifications, workforce development and the up skilling of volunteers.

- **Provide support to holiday activity providers**, through one-to-one advice, access to insight, ideas and resources to enhance the quality of delivery and compliance.
- Provide **signposting and support** for community organisations to funding opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for holiday activity providers to **raise their 'collective' voice**.
- Use the collective voice of holiday activity providers to **advocate** on their behalf in order to influence strategic partners and funders.
- Build **connections with wider partners** (such as NGBs, wider cultural partners and food providers) who can help to broaden the holiday activities available and 'add value'.
- Implement a **quality assurance** system to review the quality of delivery and support continuous improvement and learning.

Many of these aspects 'model' the conditions and behaviours identified by Sport England's National Evaluation & Learning Partner as being important in place-based approaches / system wide change.



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