



What does good holiday provision look like?

North East Child Poverty Commission online workshop

15 February 2021

Event background

In November 2020, [the Government confirmed](#) a significant expansion of its Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme – increasing funding from £9million in 2019 and 2020, to £220million in 2021 – so that free holiday provision will be available to children in all parts of England during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays this year, with funding allocated to local authorities.

With our region having the highest proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals and the second highest rate of child poverty in the country, the North East Child Poverty Commission (NECPC) has long campaigned for the universal provision of free holiday activities and food in areas where the incidence of child poverty is high, given the significant proportion of children and young people in our region at risk of food insecurity – but also because of the well-established benefits of such programmes for children’s health, wellbeing and education.

More recently, this has included hosting [a webinar in September 2020 on the need to fund holiday provision](#) in all parts of the North East, which resulted in [this written submission to the Spending Review](#).

And, following the Government’s welcome announcement on HAF funding for this year, we held [an online workshop](#) in February 2021 to discuss how we can work together across different sectors, and different parts of the North East, to maximise this opportunity – ensuring as many young people as possible benefit from this year’s HAF scheme and it makes a real difference to the lives of children and families in the region. Crucially, we want to ensure the delivery of this year’s programme in the region helps to make the case for long-term, sustainable Government funding for holiday provision.

Almost 100 people from a broad range of sectors across the North East registered to attend this event which heard from the following speakers, before attendees took part in facilitated discussions in smaller breakout groups:

- **Professor Greta Defeyter** (Northumbria University)
- **Matt Chappell** (Department for Education)
- **John Downes** (StreetGames) and **Ian Stevenson** (Gateshead Council)
- **Michele Deans** and **Luke Bramhall** (Children North East)
- **Emma Richardson** (Northumberland County Council)

This note is a summary of the common themes, issues and ideas discussed during the event.

What does 'good' look like?

It was recognised that the North East starts from a strong position, having pioneered both high quality holiday provision and the evaluation of such schemes. Indeed, what has been on offer in many parts of the region in recent years is what DfE would like to see replicated elsewhere in England in 2021.

During the event, 'good' holiday provision was described as:

- Ambitious – not focussed on being 'good enough', but the best it can be.
- Worth getting out of bed for, for everyone involved.
- Providing a wide variety of structured, high quality, fun, stimulating, exciting, enriching, life-enhancing and age-appropriate activities (physical and non-physical).
- Delivered by well-trained, engaged, passionate and competent staff (whether paid or volunteers).
- Offering balanced, healthy food – to school food standards – and prepared/planned by staff who understand nutrition and are well-supported to deliver the quality of food expected.
- Planned, co-ordinated and delivered through a jigsaw of strong, dynamic cross-sector local partnerships.
- Tailored to local needs and adaptable to changing circumstances (including Covid requirements).
- Developed and delivered with a flexible, 'can do' attitude from all involved.
- Providing reassurance to parents/carers that their children will be cared for in a safe environment with appropriate safeguarding procedures in place.
- Welcoming and appropriately accommodating to all children and young people, including those with additional support needs (e.g. SEND, or with English as a second language).
- Offering referral pathways for families to support outside of holiday provision (e.g. health and wellbeing advice / financial inclusion), where appropriate.
- Connected to year-round community activity for local families – not viewed as a one-off programme by local authorities.
- Having all parts of the community invested in its success – and recognising that it is all of our responsibility to make holiday provision work.
- Improving parental wellbeing, including by reducing parental stress / social isolation.
- Belonging to 'all of us' – not just local authorities or big organisations.
- Enabling children and young people to go back to school fully-engaged, ready to learn – and with a good story to tell about what they did during the holidays.
- Offering experiences to children and young people they wouldn't otherwise receive.
- Providing non-stigmatising, dignified schemes, which children, families and staff are proud to be part of – and which 'normalise' holiday provision as part of families' lives.

Top tips / best practice

The following 'tips' or best practice for delivering good holiday provision were shared during the event:

- Effective co-ordination requires working with a broad range of local partners to undertake early and ongoing mapping:
 - To understand the geographies and different levels of need
 - To build a comprehensive picture of existing provision (both for activities, as well as other food support such as foodbanks and citizens' supermarkets/community larders) and gaps
 - To understand what assets exist and how they could be used (physical and people/skills)
 - To understand what different organisations want/are able to deliver and the support they need
 - To understand how existing provision/models could be resourced as a means of scaling-up
 - To avoid wasting money on funding lots of the same activity across many different venues
- Avoid stigmatising the programme by making it open access – but use sensitively targeted marketing/ close engagement with community partners – particularly schools – to ensure it is located appropriately and families eligible for free school meals (FSM), as well as other disadvantaged children and young people, are being reached.
- Get started now with ensuring VCS organisations – embedded within local communities with longstanding, trusted relationships with local families – are centrally involved in planning, co-ordinating and delivering provision, including by being on holiday provision steering groups.
- Provide networks/forums for local VCS organisations to engage with each other and share learning/best practice/understand where each other's assets are and match need – particularly useful at a very local level (e.g. with 5-6 organisations), which is much more manageable/time-efficient than city or borough-wide networks.
- Engage early with parents/carers – including through non-HAF related conversations (e.g. when providing financial inclusion support) – to build trusted relationships and find out what they want from holiday provision, and involve them in planning to make it as family-friendly as possible. Don't assume families will engage with a programme because they are having a challenging time, or fit a particular measure of deprivation.
- Listen to children and young people – including through schools and existing forums, such as youth councils/youth advisory boards/young carers' groups – to understand what they want from holiday provision, for different age groups.
- Ensure young leaders can be centrally involved in planning and delivering provision (this offers important opportunities for young people to develop skills and gain experience) – and consider how apprenticeships/traineeships could play a role too.
- Create an attractive, simple, positive, non-stigmatised 'brand' for the programme which binds all working on it together and creates a sense of momentum/excitement about what is on offer (e.g. 'Best Summer Ever' in Newcastle or 'Brighten The Day' in Gateshead).
- Think carefully about your messaging/the most appropriate marketing tools (e.g. social media; or clear, exciting, non-stigmatising flyers) and targeting methods (e.g. flyering certain streets/postcodes/wards), whilst recognising that word of mouth may be the most effective form of marketing you will have.
- Ensure that information about what is available within a local area is easily accessible, in one place, by parents/carers – and any booking systems are simple/easy to navigate.
- Work with VCS and community organisations who may not be involved in HAF delivery/planning but have everyday contact with local families (e.g. Citizens Advice, GPs, foodbanks, faith organisations) to ensure they have the information they need – and in good time – to help promote the programme.

- Set clear standards – both for the provision of activities and food/nutrition – and monitor them.
- Work with partners across local areas to sweat assets/investigate different funding pots to make the programme as inclusive and far-reaching as possible (e.g. £10.1m [recently announced by DfE / Sport England](#) to support schools to open their facilities outside of the school day).
- Ensure that HAF programmes don't sit in a silo, but align with other national/local priorities and work across local authority departments – e.g. public health, culture, leisure, education, family support, education, financial inclusion, community safety and engagement – and that all are invested in its success.
- Develop new, dynamic and flexible ways of working that serve mixed sector co-production – and consider a gentler, trust-based approach which facilitates strong relationships and a culture of sharing/collaboration (e.g. local authorities using memorandums of understanding rather than commissioning).
- Work hard to ensure the HAF scheme has the buy-in of senior leaders (political and officers) and they are fully invested in its success
- Don't get bogged down in minutiae and keep 'funding chat' to a minimum – work out what you want to achieve with partners, and work on the details as you go along.
- Have an excellent implementation strategy, monitor this intermittently (e.g. what is working/how do you know/what could be improved/any unexpected outcomes?) and change/adapt your programme accordingly.
- Build in research and consider how you will measure/evaluate impact to demonstrate the value of this investment – but ensure that monitoring/reporting requirements don't put organisations and people off.

Key challenges

Several issues were identified as key challenges / barriers in successfully delivering the HAF programme in 2021:

- Scaling-up existing provision – particularly for Easter – with limited lead-in times and ever-changing Covid restrictions/ongoing venue closures/staff furloughed will be very challenging.
- Reaching families who don't access free holiday provision and engaging with them to understand why/the barriers to access. Have you poverty proofed your 'free' provision?
- Delivering as much face-to-face provision as possible will be extremely important after the last year with children and young people significantly affected by social isolation/lengthy periods out of school, but this is difficult to plan for in ever-changing Covid circumstances.
- Effectively engaging with marginalised communities, e.g. refugees or asylum seekers, those with no recourse to public funds, Traveller families.
- Concern that some families eligible for FSM will anticipate being able to continue to access vouchers in future school holidays/will not want to use holiday provision as an alternative.
- Achieving genuine collaboration between local organisations, rather than competition.

- Ensuring the money is allocated quickly by DfE to local authorities and VCS organisations are then funded properly to deliver provision. Local authorities must also recognise that smaller VCS organisations, whilst often best placed to provide holiday schemes, may not have the capacity to quickly pull together funding bids.
- The VCS sector/its capacity to engage and deliver may look very different in parts of the region than it did a year ago – and those remaining are extremely stretched after the last twelve months. Local authorities have a role to support them through this period.
- Regional collaboration would be beneficial in a number of areas but the tight timescales involved may prevent this from happening effectively.
- Ensuring that HAF programmes remain focussed on fun, playful and social activities, rather than being drawn into academic ‘catch-up’ provision.
- Accepting that Easter may well be a learning experience – and ensuring that learning from this is shared well in advance of the summer, for which we have sufficient time to create an outstanding programme across the region.

Ideas for maximising HAF / collaboration

A number of ideas were put forward to maximise the impact of the HAF programme, or collaboration to achieve this:

- Getting creative to offer very low cost/free provision for non-FSM eligible pupils and/or fund provision in the remaining two weeks of the summer holidays (HAF only covers four) – such as leveraging support from other grant funders, the private sector or schools’ Pupil Premium funding to achieve this (whilst recognising school budgets are very stretched at present).
- Can we talk collectively to public transport providers about offering free travel for children during holiday periods in order to access HAF programmes/make the most of the North East’s assets?
- Could local authorities – or groups of local authorities – consider bulk-purchasing from supermarkets and/or work with organisations like FareShare to reduce costs/make funding go further?
- Can we co-ordinate the provision/donation of food by the private sector so that it is evenly distributed?
- Could local authorities put a small amount of funding into a central pot, which non-local authority partners could use to purchase items/produce materials at reduced costs (e.g. physical or digital resources/activity packs)? For example, last year the Centre for Life produced science-based resources which were shared across Newcastle and Gateshead within activity packs – could this be done again across an even wider area?
- Could a ‘Holiday Passport’ be developed, enabling holders to access different activities/schemes across an area?
- Could a regional knowledge bank/resource hub for sharing learning/best practice/offers of collaboration/examples of documentation (e.g. risk assessments) be made available – containing easily accessible/snippets of information, rather than hefty toolkits?
- Could a regional ‘mapping’ group be created to offer peer support/advice to those undertaking a mapping exercise?
- Could a network of volunteers be created across local authority boundaries to promote cohesion?

Further reading / resources

Several papers and reports were referenced during the event, including:

[**Holiday Activities and Food: Literature Review**](#) (December 2020, Department for Education)

[**NBSE Report 2020**](#) (StreetGames report on the HAF programme delivered in Newcastle)

[**Summer Camp 2020**](#) (Northumberland County Council compilation video)

[**Playful Lives Summer 2020**](#) (report on the Children North East pilot developed in conjunction with the West End Schools' Trust, the West End Children's Community and Sussed and Able)

[**Lamp-Post Play Project 2020**](#) (evaluation report of a Play in Newcastle project)

[**Holiday Provision 2019**](#) (Children North East review, funded by the Tyne & Wear and Northumberland Community Foundation)

[**Holiday Clubs as Community Organisations**](#) (Stretesky, Defeyter, Long, Sattar and Crilley. (2020) *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 689: 129-148)

[**Holiday Hunger and Parental Stress: Evidence from the North East of England**](#) (Stretesky, Defeyter, Long, Ritchie and Gill. (2020) *Sustainability*, 12 (10): 4141)

[**Implementing Holiday Provision Programmes: A Qualitative Investigation of the Experiences of Senior Stakeholders**](#) (Mann, Widdison, Defeyter. (2020) *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8, 7.)

[**Holiday Club Programmes in Northern Ireland: The Voices of Children and Young People**](#) (Shinwell, Finlay, Defeyter. (2021) *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (3), 1337)

[**Covid-19: Back to school, Rebuilding a Better Future for All Children**](#) (Defeyter, von Hippel, Shinwell, Mann, Henderson, Brownlee, Pepper, Stretesky, Long, McKenna, Daly-Smith, Lalli, Bundy and Drake. (2020) *A submission (CIE0042) to the Education Select Committee inquiry on The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services*)