

Ending the negative impact of school holidays on the most vulnerable children and young people.

Holiday Hunger sits within a broader concept of Food Poverty

There isn't a widely accepted definition of Food Poverty in the UK. However, there is an indisputable consensus that Food Poverty revolves around a lack of income to purchase, store, prepare and eat sufficient food, and a lack of access to healthy food.

For the purposes of this paper we have chosen a broad definition: 'The physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet [people's] dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, and the confidence that access can be assured in the immediate and long-term future, alongside the freedom not to have to make trade-offs between immediate poor nutritional status and long-term livelihood sustainability'¹.

Holiday Hunger is a symptom, or an escalation of food poverty. Holidays for vulnerable families can be a far cry from being the joyous, positive and memorable time that they can be. In the absence of the routine of school, and healthy food² provided at breakfast³ and lunch times⁴, children and young people may go hungry, relying at best on unhealthy choices offered by poor quality snacks and fast food outlets.

What's the extent of Holiday Hunger in the UK today and what are the consequences?

The combined efforts of Kellogg's, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger, reveal the extent of the Holiday Hunger crisis in 2017:

- Kellogg's research reveals that 'one in eight children don't get enough to eat during the holidays with many returning to school noticeably thinner, according to teachers'⁵
- The APPG on Hunger⁶ states that 'up to 3 million children risk going hungry during the school holidays - more than 1 million children who receive free school meals during term time, and 2 million more with working parents still in poverty are at risk of hunger over the summer'⁷.

The consequences are stark. Holiday Hunger is a significant contributor to the widening of health inequalities in the UK. Let's have a look at some of the detail:

¹ Elizabeth Dowler – COOKING UP IDEAS: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF FOOD POVERTY IN KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA 2016: https://issuu.com/kcscskuldip/docs/cooking_up_ideas_-_single_pages

² This paper presumes that healthy breakfasts and lunches are provided at school, but acknowledges that without monitoring this may not always be the case

³ There is no universal offer breakfast offer for children and young people but organisations such as Magic Breakfast 'work with 467 Primary, Secondary and Special Educational Needs schools, plus Pupil Referral Units, to make sure that over 31,000 children start their school day in the best possible way':

<https://www.magicbreakfast.com/what-the-charity-does>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

⁵ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/Kelloggs-Holiday-Hunger-release.pdf>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/24/school-holidays-leave-3-million-children-at-risk-of-hunger-report-says>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/24/school-holidays-leave-3-million-children-at-risk-of-hunger-report-says>

A negative impact on educational attainment:

- (Children) 'start the new term several weeks, if not months, intellectually behind their more fortunate peers who have enjoyed a more wholesome diet and enriching activity' (in the school holidays)⁸.
- '73% (of interviewed teachers) said that their pupils' education was being negatively affected as a consequence of holiday hunger'⁹.

Longer holidays are disruptive to routine:

- 'There can be no escape from the reality that in 2017, children in different parts of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are arriving back at school hungry and totally unprepared to learn after the holidays'¹⁰.
- 'After the summer holidays, it may take 2 or 3 weeks for children to get back into routines and settle down into learning'¹¹.

Poor health:

- 'Almost three quarters - 69% - (of interviewed teachers) said that pupils' social wellbeing was negatively affected by holiday hunger; and 57% said that their physical health was impacted'¹².
- '78% of respondents (interviewed teachers) who had witnessed holiday hunger among their pupils said that children were turning up to school showing signs of hunger; and shockingly, more than a third (37%) said that pupils were returning to school with signs of malnourishment'¹³.

Safeguarding risks

- During term time, schools can monitor safeguarding issues almost daily, with the longest gap in seeing and observing children and young people being the weekend. The lengthier holidays can quite literally expose children and young people with safeguarding concerns to far too long a gap in supervision, despite the efforts of other support services.
- 'Summer School allows us to quickly react to safeguarding issues in the long holidays'¹⁴.

Current solutions to Holiday Hunger

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<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/24/school-holidays-leave-3-million-children-at-risk-of-hunger-report-says>

⁹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/Kelloggs-Holiday-Hunger-release.pdf>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/24/school-holidays-leave-3-million-children-at-risk-of-hunger-report-says>

¹¹ Telephone interview with Tim Baker by Phil Veasey on 20 December 2017

¹² <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/Kelloggs-Holiday-Hunger-release.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/06/Kelloggs-Holiday-Hunger-release.pdf>

¹⁴ Telephone interview with Tim Baker by Phil Veasey on 20 December 2017

There is no joined up, consistent solution across the UK to Holiday Hunger. Today, in Tower Hamlets, for example, a mixed approach including the local authority, the third sector and a corporate¹⁵ is helping to ease the situation.

Just like for many health issues, the mitigation of Holiday Hunger is at the mercy of a post code lottery. As the APPG on Hunger report states - 'A scarcity of funding, a lack of coordination and a heavy reliance on donations limit our country's ability to protect every child from hunger during school holidays'¹⁶.

There are pockets of best practice, for example, where we see the provision of summer school activities – but we need to be more ambitious. The APPG on Hunger Report encourages the government to use some of the '£41.5m raised as part of the planned tax on sugary drinks to help each UK council set up support schemes with local churches and charities aimed at feeding hungry children when school canteens are shut'¹⁷.

This doesn't go far enough. We must create a systematic change where our community assets such as schools, and the considerable range of interventions around the Healthy School's agenda¹⁸ combine to 'end the negative impact of school holidays on the most vulnerable families with young children'¹⁹. There are 170 days per year when school is out, and it's the break in the routine that's the hammer blow to our most vulnerable families.

Solutions must, therefore, lie in keeping disruption to routine and the quality provision of the school day to a minimum, solving the problem for the long term. 'Schools are such a good community resource that we can't afford to close the grounds, the classrooms and the kitchens for the summer'²⁰.

Recommendations

- 1. Statutory services and their commissioners must think creatively around its budgets and its partnerships to provide free Easter and summer school provision in up a quarter of schools or equivalent community settings – in our most vulnerable communities**

We need to create partnerships in our most vulnerable communities to ensure 'school holidays have a positive impact on the lives of residents facing, or at risk of food poverty'²¹.

We must 'build on good practice provided by schools and leisure services to make local 'holiday plans' with vulnerable families for the 170 days per year when school is out'²².

¹⁵ See <https://www.morganstanley.com/about-us/giving-back/healthy-cities/london>

¹⁶

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/24/school-holidays-leave-3-million-children-at-risk-of-hunger-report-says>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/24/school-holidays-leave-3-million-children-at-risk-of-hunger-report-says>

¹⁸ <http://www.healthyschools.org.uk/>

¹⁹ Tower Hamlets Food Poverty Action Plan - submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board 7 November 2017

²⁰ Telephone interview with Tim Baker by Phil Veasey on 20 December 2017

²¹ Tower Hamlets Food Poverty Action Plan – submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board 7 November 2017

²² Tower Hamlets Food Poverty Action Plan – submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board 7 November 2017

‘The ‘holiday plans’ should aim to provide a mix of positive activities for children, including educational support, healthy food provision, and skills development for parents, such as improving healthy cooking skills, and activities for holiday periods’²³.

Charlton Manor Primary School fund their Summer School from a combination of Pupil Premium funding and profit from school hall hire fees. The recruitment of a Summer School workforce isn’t an issue - ‘the delivery team is a mixture of teaching assistants, some of the school’s teachers (who may do 1 or 2 weeks each), and volunteers from the local Housing Association’²⁴.

Extra staff can also be found from a pool of private tutors, student teachers, jobbing undergraduates, and local parents.

2. Healthy School interventions at a national and local level should shift their attention from a 100% focus on term time, to delivery spread throughout the calendar year, enabling positive holiday plans to be created for vulnerable families.

In school term time all children and young people in education may have access to a breakfast provided by the school²⁵, can eat a healthy school lunch, participate in a physical education offer, and may access an after-school club with healthy outcomes, such as Change4Life Sports Clubs²⁶.

Arguably, this can be considered an acceptable minimum offer for all children and young people.

It makes you wonder, therefore, why Healthy School initiatives and interventions, in the most vulnerable communities, continue to layer extra provision onto this ‘minimum offer’, when over the course of the calendar year there are 170 days per year when school is out.

170 days when to all intents and purposes, our most vulnerable families are left to fend for themselves.

By implementing both recommendations we can:

Provide healthy food for children and young people: The priority for Easter and summer school offers will be to provide vulnerable children and young people with healthy breakfast and lunch. But this is only the beginning ...

Offer curriculum enrichment activities – both academic and physical activity: There’s a real danger that vulnerable children and young people break up for the lengthier school holidays academically behind their peers, and return even further behind. Easter and summer school offers provide the perfect opportunity to help address this gap. There’s also the chance to provide exciting and motivational physical activity opportunities – as anecdotal evidence suggests that it’s the holiday times that encourage the most sedentary behaviour of the year for vulnerable children and young people.

²³ TH Tower Hamlets Food Poverty Action Plan – submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board 7 November 2017

²⁴ Telephone interview with Tim Baker by Phil Veasey on 20 December 2017

²⁵ There is no universal offer breakfast offer for children and young people, but organisations such as Magic Breakfast work with 467 Primary, Secondary and Special Educational Needs schools, plus Pupil Referral Units, to make sure that over 31,000 children start their school day in the best possible way:
<https://www.magicbreakfast.com/what-the-charity-does>

²⁶ <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/change4life-sports-clubs>

Monitor safeguarding issues: The extended contact time provided by Easter and summer school offers will provide significantly enhanced monitoring of vulnerable children and young people

Maintain routines for ease of transition to the next school term: It may take up to 3 weeks for a vulnerable child or young person to get back into the routine of school – timeliness, the submission of work to deadlines, bringing the correct books and kit to school etc. The Easter and summer school offers will help to maintain routine, making the transition from long holiday to the next school term relatively seamless.

Check in with parents around money management issues and benefits checks: There are numerous local organisations such as ‘holistic Food Banks’²⁷ and the Citizens Advice network²⁸ that can utilise moments when communities come together, such as in Easter and summer schools, to offer support to ensure that vulnerable families are in control of their finances, and are not under claiming on benefits.

Work with resourceful partners to develop innovative and sustainable approaches to building the asset base of the community: This may eventually be the most exciting outcome of all. Easter and summer school offers can evolve to help build community capacity. Schools and their kitchens, for example, are community assets. We cannot tolerate schools and their kitchens closing for the holidays.

Re-imagine the lengthier school holidays:

- At Charlton Manor School, children attending the Summer School learn by being outdoors in the school playgrounds and gardens, or through the medium of preparing and cooking food using weighing and measuring skills for example.
- ‘Berrymede Junior (School), in Acton Town, west London, now has its own food service thanks to the generosity of Independent readers and the work of the Felix Project, the charity partner for our (The Independent Newspaper) Christmas Appeal. As the school gates opened and children streamed out to meet their parents, the crowd gathering at Felix’s bright green gazebo found a bundle of recipe cards alongside piles of fruit and vegetables’²⁹.
- The Stoke North ‘Food and Fun pilot took place over the extended summer break of 2017 ... Monday to Friday for six weeks’³⁰. The pilot tested a range of methods including ‘direct delivery of food alongside multisport and craft activities for primary school children in their own school’; direct delivery of food alongside multisport at a secondary school; adding packed lunches to an existing holiday activity for predominantly primary school children. The pilot was supported by Synectics Solutions, City Learning Trust, Port Vale Foundation Trust, Swan Bank Church, North Staffordshire Allotment Network, Root ‘n’ Fruit, The Greggs Foundation, City Catering, Public Health, Co-operative Working, The City Council, Staffordshire Police, Tesco, YMCA, and Stoke-on-Trent Foodbank alongside 23 volunteers, who together contributed over 600 hours of their time, so that we could serve 4,323 meals to 150 individual children and their family members’³¹.

²⁷ The First Love Foundation in Poplar, East London, for example, offers benefits checks and debt advice in addition to emergency food support: <https://www.firstlovefoundation.org.uk/>

²⁸ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

²⁹

<http://www.independent.co.uk/helpahungrychild/help-a-hungry-child-felix-project-scheme-primary-school-children-healthy-food-a8111856.html>

³⁰ <https://www.holidayhunger.org/>

³¹ <https://www.holidayhunger.org/>

- 'There are many excellent targeted projects in Scotland which aim to address food insecurity and holiday hunger, including the primary schools in Dalmarnock and Ibrox in Glasgow'³².

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