

**University of
Northampton**

Evaluation Report

Holiday Activities & Food Programme

For Northamptonshire Sport

Executive Summary & Key Findings



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Table of Contents

Executive summary	4
Methods	7
Outcome evaluation findings	8
Achieved aims	8
Be more active.....	8
Take part in engaging and enriching activities to develop resilience, character and wellbeing	9
Be safe and not socially isolated.....	9
Partially achieved aims.....	10
Eat more healthily	10
Greater knowledge of health and nutrition	11
Unachieved aims.....	11
Be more engaged with school and other local services.....	11
Parents develop understanding of nutrition and food budgeting.....	11
Parents are signposted towards other information and support.....	12
Process evaluation findings.....	12
Timing	12
Marketing.....	12
Booking system.....	13
Staffing, training, and resources.....	14
Transport.....	14
Co-ordinator and Provider reflections	15
Co-ordinators' reflections	15
Providers' reflections	15
The need for the HAF Programme	17
Recommendations	18

Executive summary

According to the Department for Education, there are 1.63 million children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). Within Northamptonshire there are estimated to be 184,308 children and young people, aged 0-19 years old, of which 14% are eligible for FSM¹. As FSM eligibility is a proxy for socioeconomic disadvantage, these statistics highlight that a significant proportion of children in Northamptonshire are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Due to increased costs and reduced income, children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience a gap in learning and have 'unhealthy holidays' during the school holiday period. To bridge this 'gap', the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme was created by central Government.

This report evaluates the HAF Programme that was delivered in Northamptonshire during the July to August 2021 Summer Holidays. 2,490 children and young people attended the HAF Programme (15.12% of FSM eligible children), from areas across Northamptonshire, with a catchment area of approximately 2,335 km² and 215 schools were engaged in the Programme. The HAF Programme's 'Holiday Clubs' were delivered by 46 Providers across 103 different locations, which offered a variety of activities and enrichment opportunities in a range of environments (e.g. soft play, outdoor education, schools). Central Government's offer was for FSM eligible children to receive the equivalent of at least six weeks of provision over four days a week for a minimum of four hours a day over a year. The daily hour requirement was met by all 46 Providers, and the days per week and number of weeks requirements were often exceeded by most providers. Overall, the Northamptonshire HAF Programme was positively received by parents and children, with hopes that the Programme would continue to run in the future.

To investigate the attainment of the Government's Aims and Standards for the HAF Programme, a mixed methods approach was used, utilising focus groups, surveys and a child focussed activity (Tree of Hope). To gain a well-rounded holistic perspective of the HAF Programme, data were collected from Co-ordinators of the HAF Programme, Providers of the HAF Programme, Parents whose child(ren) attended the Programme, and the children who attended the Programme. As some Government Aims addressed multiple measurable components, the aims were broken up into smaller Evaluation Objectives. These data were then triangulated and analysed in relation to the Government's Aims and Standards. The results (table 1) showed that there were several aims that were met, some that were not met, and several wider factors that impacted upon the delivery of the HAF Programme, with the major hinderer being the late award of Programme contract, which in turn impacted upon the attainment of the Government's Aims and Standards.

Table 1. Identifying which Government Aims and Government standards were met by the Programme. Table key: ✓ means that the aim/standard was met, O means that the aim/standard was partially met, and X means that the aim/standard was not met.

Evaluation Objective	Aligning Government Aim	Aim Achieved?	Aligning Government Standard	Standard Achieved?
Child Focus				
1. To examine opportunities for healthy eating	1. Eat more healthily over the school holidays.	O	1. Providers must provide at least one meal a day (breakfast, lunch or tea) and all food provided at the holiday club (including snacks) must meet school food standards.	✓
			2. Our expectation is that the majority of food served by providers will be hot. However, we acknowledge that there will be occasions when this is not possible and a cold alternative may be used.	O
			3. All food provided as part of the programme must comply with regulations on food preparation and take into account allergies, dietary requirements and any religious or cultural requirements for food.	O

¹ Health and Wellbeing: Children's Services (2015) Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of Children and Young People in Northamptonshire. *Northamptonshire County Council*.

Evaluation Objective	Aligning Government Aim	Aim Achieved?	Aligning Government Standard	Standard Achieved?
2. To examine opportunities to engage in for physical activity.	2. Be more active during the school holidays.	✓	4. Holiday clubs must provide fun and enriching activities that provide children with opportunities to develop new skills/knowledge, consolidate existing skills/knowledge and try out new experiences.	✓
			5. This could include physical activities, creative activities or wider experiences (for example, a nature walk or visiting a city farm).	✓
			6. Local authorities/Providers should set out how they can support providers to deliver a rich and varied mix of fun and enriching activities that are age-appropriate.	0
			7. Holiday clubs must provide activities that meet the physical activity guidelines on a daily basis.	✓
3. To examine the development of health and wellbeing outcomes (such as resilience, character, wellbeing and educational attainment).	3. Take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of resilience, character and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment.	✓		
4. To examine opportunities to engage in enrichment activities.	3. Take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of resilience, character and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment.	✓	4. Holiday clubs must provide fun and enriching activities that provide children with opportunities to develop new skills/knowledge, consolidate existing skills/knowledge and try out new experiences.	✓
			5. This could include physical activities, creative activities or wider experiences (for example, a nature walk or visiting a city farm).	✓
			6. Local authorities/Co-ordinators should set out how they can support providers to deliver a rich and varied mix of fun and enriching activities that are age-appropriate.	0
			7. Holiday clubs must provide activities that meet the physical activity guidelines on a daily basis.	✓
5. To examine social opportunities.	4. Be safe and not to be socially isolated.	✓		
6. To examine opportunities to improve knowledge of health and nutrition.	5. Have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition.	0	8. Providers must include an element of nutritional education each day aimed at improving the knowledge and awareness of healthy eating for children. For example, activities such as getting children involved in food preparation and cooking, growing fruit/vegetables and taste tests.	0

Evaluation Objective	Aligning Government Aim	Aim Achieved?	Aligning Government Standard	Standard Achieved?
7. To examine opportunities to be more engaged with school and other local services.	6. Be more engaged with school and other local services.	X	10. Holiday clubs must be able to provide information, signposting or referrals to other services and support that would benefit the children who attend their provision and their families.	X
Parent/Carer Focus				
8. To examine opportunities to improve understanding of nutrition and food budgeting.	7. Develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting.	X	9. Providers must include at least weekly training and advice sessions for parents, carers or other family members. These should provide advice on how to source, prepare and cook nutritious and low-cost food.	X
9. To examine signposting opportunities to other information and support (for example, health, employment and education).	8. Be signposted towards other information and support, for example, health, employment and education.	X	10. Holiday clubs must be able to provide information, signposting or referrals to other services and support that would benefit the children who attend their provision and their families.	X

Attainment of these Government Aims and Standards was influenced by several factors that facilitated and hindered the HAF Programme Provision.

Provision was facilitated by:

- Co-ordinators and Providers with existing links with one another, (further developed by Co-ordinators visiting during the Programme) as well as schools/facilities/communities prior to start of the HAF Programme.
- Providers who already had sufficient training to deliver ‘Holiday Clubs’.
- Both Providers and Parents receiving sufficient information regarding the HAF Programme.
- Providing transport that was able to overcome travelling barriers to attendance.
- That Parents perceived the ‘Holiday Clubs’ as safe places for their child(ren).

Provision was hindered by:

- Late awarding of the HAF Programme contract, which severely impacted on the planning and resourcing of multiple components of the Programme.
- There needed to be clearer guidance about the Government’s Aims and Standards and how they could be met. Likewise, there was greater need for training on food standards.
- The online booking system was difficult to use and navigate for both Providers and Parents.
- There were challenges to providing nutrition education for both children and parents.
- There were challenges when providing for older children and young people.

Further findings of this report highlighted the need for future HAF Provision to consider how to be more sustainable to continue to help children/young people and their families in the future.

Overall, perceptions from Co-ordinators, Providers, Parents, and Children demonstrated that the HAF Programme had a positive impact for children and young people and their families. The wider emerging message highlighted that there is a need and a high demand for the Programme to continue in the future and that there should be similar Programmes conducted throughout the year. At the end of this report, there are suggested recommendations (tables 4 – 6) to help facilitate the planning and delivery of future programmes in the hope that they can improve and continue to aid children and young people and their families for years to come.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was conducted by utilising a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods along with the inclusion of multiple perspectives (parents, children, providers, co-ordinators). These methods and viewpoints were triangulated to get a rounded account of the effectiveness of the HAF Programme in the attainment of short-term outcomes for children and families (outcome evaluation), and to understand the process of implementing the HAF programme, such as what facilitators and barriers were in place (process evaluation). The data collection tools that were used for each evaluation objective are outlined in table 2.

Ethical approval for the evaluation was provided by the Faculty of Arts, Science, and Technology Ethics Committee, University of Northampton. Informed written consent was provided by parents/carers, providers, and co-ordinators. Whilst consent for children’s participation was provided in loco parentis by Northamptonshire Sport, as the organisation responsible for the safeguarding of children during the HAF Programme.

Table 1. Summary of data collection tools used to achieve each evaluation objective.

Evaluation task	Evaluation objectives	Government aims	Government standards
Tree of Hope for Children and Young People	1 - 6	1 - 5	1 – 7
Focus Groups with Parents/Carers	1 - 11	1 - 8	1 - 10
Focus Groups with Providers	1 - 11	1 - 8	1 – 12
Focus Group with HAF Co-ordinators	1 - 11	1 - 8	1 – 12
Survey completed by Parents/Carers	1 - 11	1 - 8	1 – 10
Survey completed by Providers	1 - 11	1 - 8	1 - 12

For the tree of hope and parent focus groups, the evaluation targeted 11 Holiday Clubs to participate in order to obtain data from at least 1 - 2 clubs within each locality of Northamptonshire. These targeted Holiday Clubs were based in churches ($n=1$), soft play centres ($n=2$), schools/colleges ($n=4$), leisure centres ($n=3$), and art and creative centres ($n=1$). For the tree of hope activity approximately 95 children participated from 10 holiday clubs. For the parent focus groups, 17 parents participated ($n=3$: one-to-one interviews; $n=4$: two-person interviews; $n=2$: three-person focus groups) from 8 holiday clubs. See table 3 for a breakdown of holiday club details. For the Provider focus groups, all Providers across the county were invited to participate, but particularly the Providers from the 11 targeted holiday clubs. Nine Providers participated (focus group 1: $n=5$; focus group 2: $n=2$; focus group 3: $n=2$) from 8 holiday clubs. There were 27 out of 44 respondents for the Provider’s survey and 81 respondents for the Parent’s feedback survey.

Table 3. Breakdown of holiday clubs and the data collection phases they were involved in.

Holiday club number	Location	Number of participants per data collection phase (n)		
		Tree of hope	Parent focus groups	Provider focus groups
1	Rushden	3	2	1
2	Northampton	10	3	0
3	Kettering	10	0	0
4	Corby	10	0	1
5	Wellingborough	12	3	1
6	Kettering	10	2	0
7	Corby	0	3	1
8	Kettering	10	0	2
9	Brackley	10	1	0
10	Northampton	10	1	1
11	Wellingborough	10	2	0
12*	Northampton	N/A	N/A	1
13*	Northampton	N/A	N/A	1
Total number of participants:		95	17	9

*Holiday clubs 12 and 13 were only contacted to take part in the provider focus groups and therefore there are no data for the child tree of hope activity or parent focus groups. N/A – Not applicable.

Outcome evaluation findings

The HAF Programme was attended by children from all over Northamptonshire, and in some cases further afield, covering an area of approximately 2,334.6 km². The HAF Programme was attended by a variety of children of different ages and ethnic backgrounds with an attendance rate of 73.2%:

- 18,795 attendances were recorded over the summer.
- 5,040 further bookings were made but the person who was booked on did not attend.
- Average number of sessions attended per child was 9 sessions and 6 sessions for Primary and Secondary School age groups, respectively.
- 2,490 unique individuals attended the Programme.
- 435 unique individuals booked sessions but did not attend anything they had booked.
- Children from 215 schools attended the Programme.
- 15.12% of FSM eligible children attended the Programme.
- 89% were of Primary School age and 11% were of Secondary School age.
- 44% of attendees were female; 56% were male.
- 19% stated that they were an Ethnicity other than White-British.
- 16% said they had a disability.

Forty-six Providers delivered the HAF Programme across 103 different sites. 77% of Providers delivered at least 4-weeks or more of Holiday Club sessions, 88% delivered four sessions per week, and 100% delivered at least 4 hours of activities per day. Overall, many Providers exceeded the provision offer.

Achieved aims

Be more active

It was strongly evidenced across Provider, Parent, and Children data that the HAF Programme provided at least 60 minutes of physical activity per session and the children were provided with opportunities to try a range of activities that they would not normally get the chance to engage with. New activities included organised sports such as, Fencing, Basketball, Badminton, and Rounders, as well as a range of playground games such as, Tag and Monkey Bars. Subsequently, these opportunities encouraged the children to participate in physical activity (figure 1) outside of the Programme, as evidenced by Parents in the feedback survey:

“Cricket, he now has a cricket set at home and has asked to join a cricket club”

“MMA and joined the cricket club”

“He will now cycle to the park which he did not have the confidence to do before.”

“Getting involved in PE at school more happily. Also we are going swimming every week now.”

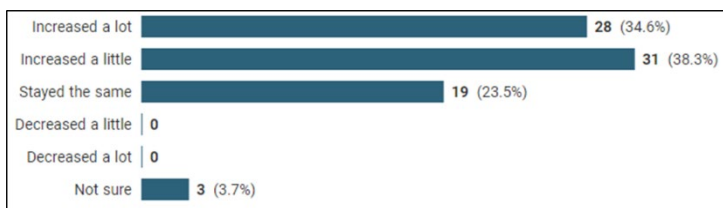


Figure 1. The answers given by parents in response to the question “By attending the Holiday Activities and Food Programme, has your child(ren)’s activity levels changed from what they normally are in the Summer?”

- Survey responses from Parents

Take part in engaging and enriching activities to develop resilience, character and wellbeing

Overall, the HAF Programme provided a wide range of enrichment activities that focused on skills development, character, and personal wellbeing (figure 2). Both Parents and Providers stated that the children learnt about crafting, food preparation, group problem solving, and reflecting on wellbeing. Some Providers used a ‘young leaders’ scheme to assign responsibility to certain children to develop their sense of leadership and behaviour expectations.

“...young leader schemes - getting the children that were challenging to become children that were helpful and seeing the benefits of that helped keep them in our programme. And will hopefully change a lot of their futures. That's what I can see for miles.”

– Provider’s focus group

“So, on Friday, my two-my twins were made ‘young leaders’. Which actually made me really proud as well that actually, ya know what, it just shows... that you can follow right from wrong...And like it's a godsend because it gives children that sense of mmm well if I do this, I'm not gonna get this but if I do this this way then actually, I can get higher up. And it gives them that feeling of having a little bit extra responsibility.”

– Parent’s focus group

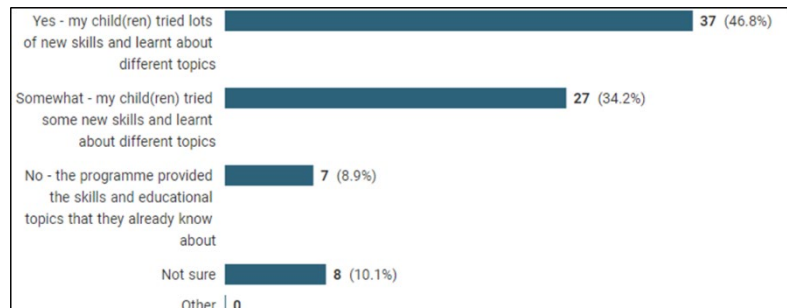


Figure 2. The answers given by parents/carers given in response to the question “Did the Programme provide opportunities for your child(ren) to try new skills and learn about new topics that they would normally not be able to do in the Summer holidays?”

There were some concerns from HAF Programme Co-ordinators and Parents that there was a limited offer for young people or that it was not fully advertised. Therefore, future Providers should consider their offer to young people.

“Obviously one of the big challenges is that older age group trying to get the delivers out of the mindset of nine o'clock start... Secondary school age teenagers, they're not going to be there for 9:00 o'clock. Get them there two o'clock onwards. Uh, have that kind of drop in drop out feel to it. So if the teenager only comes for the meal, they're coming for the meals get them involved in something, just to do a check in with them. Uh, and a lot of the delivers were probably aimed at the primary, and that's where their skillset is... So I think that some of the big work is around that secondary offer.”

– Co-ordinator’s focus group

“Yeah, just age appropriate. So here is perfect for the under elevens but over that you need to think more older. As a mum of older children, you know teenagers as well as young children I need to try and find something that will benefit all of them. Cuz I've got the sixteen-year-old and the thirteen-year-old sitting at home.”

– Parent’s focus group

Be safe and not socially isolated

The opportunity of children to socialise was viewed as one of the most important outcomes of the HAF Programme by Providers and Parents. The majority of Parents said the HAF Programme provided a safe environment for their children, which allowed the children to develop their social skills and confidence.

“They are keen to go back and love seeing the staff and friends they have made. This makes me feel like they are well looked after and emotionally ok. The consistency is reassuring for them. The staff are attentive and always happy”.

- Survey response from a Parent

“Because of Covid, they've had a lot of time off because of that as well. So I think the kids really need it [the holiday club]. It's [the holiday club] important for their social skills; I've noticed a big difference with both my children, their

social skills, so this has probably helped them...with our massive period off [referring to the Covid-19 pandemic], they've come back, they've not really been themselves with other children, they've struggled to open out and, you know, make friends and stuff. Whereas here, they are going into groups, they have teams, they cheer each other on and all that, and half the time, I've noticed the kids be more positive about it all compared to what it was."

- Parent's focus group

"I met [child's name removed] and I'd seen her before at the Hindu Centre and it was nice to see her again."

"[Child's name removed] is my best friend because he is funny and coo coo and crazy. We are going to get our mum's to swap numbers so we can talk again."

- Children's Tree of Hope responses

Partially achieved aims

Eat more healthily

Delivering hot meals was challenging for Providers due to the late award of the Programme contract. The late confirmation meant that the majority of catering staff at schools had taken annual leave for the summer and it was difficult to outsource to other catering companies. Therefore, the quality of healthfulness of meals varied between Providers.

"Last minute planning made it hard to find a hot caterer, other than fast food chains which we didn't want to use. The kitchen facility we had could not cook enough hot meals for the amount of children attending."

"No cooking provision on site, which made it unfeasible to provide hot food. Transport of hot food not possible. Would have gone with a provider that could have provided hot food if available."

- Survey responses from Providers

Due to the late award of the Programme contract, the healthy eating aim of the Programme became a lower priority amongst Providers and their main concern was to ensure that each child was provided with a meal.

"With regards to the meals that were provided. If we will focus in on healthy eating and giving these children an opportunity to have good food, then that box wasn't ticked up because it was white bread and long life white rolls and then at times it was put some brown bread, but you know the yoghurts weren't were very long life and not that enjoyable. There was no...the fruit was an apple or an orange, or you know it just wasn't varied enough, but I would say it didn't focus on healthy eating."

"Some children did not like eating the healthy food, so we ended up getting more and more choice and selections to cater for children. It was more important to us that they were fed and full over the fact of whether it was 100% healthy. I know that this may have been an issue with other schemes as trying to change eating habits overnight is not easy."

- Focus group responses from Providers

The majority of Parents thought the food provided was of good quality but there were instances where alternative meal options could be improved to meet dietary requirements.

"Here she's like, mummy it's cheese sandwich every day, cheese sandwich [laughs]. But I think I understand, because she's vegetarian sometimes it's a bit more complex to find something vegetarian for her every day."

"At [club name removed] they had limited choice for vegetarians or lactose free children...she came back bloated most days."

"My autistic son wouldn't like anything on offer and despite discussing and agreeing an alternative with the provision, it wasn't provided and led to my son becoming distressed".

- Survey and focus group responses from Parents

However, one Provider outlined and explained the importance of getting the children to eat together at mealtimes, which was viewed as a strong example of good practice by the researchers.

“They would all sit down at a table and eat lunch; [that] was quite a big part of the day. And that was that was not, you know, we weren't told to do that. It's just kind of an active thing that we chose to do...I think that the act of sitting at a table and eating with other young people, I think is something that you don't often do, probably so you might do that at school but I'd say that you might not do that...I think there is something in it, the act of sitting at table eating with other people understanding the importance of mealtimes and taking time for meal times, and it being an integral part of the day rather than just something that you need to get through. And learning how to act around other people and seeing how other people eat and their attitudes to food.”

– Provider focus group

Greater knowledge of health and nutrition

The provision of health and nutrition education varied between Providers, with only a small percentage not providing any education sessions (11%, $n = 3$). Examples of good practice included: design a healthy plate, smoothie making, food preparation, and resourcing guest providers who had relevant expertise.

“They did some nice activities where they make their own dinner plates that with craft items, so it opened up a lot of conversations and I think they did some work about budgeting in the shop, 'cause that's what it is. It boils down to education on that side of things”

– Provider focus group

However, some Providers would need support in the future to develop their health and nutrition educational offer for children. This was also suggested in the Parent's feedback survey, as 60% stated that their child had learnt 'nothing' about health and nutrition during the Programme.

“That was actually a part of the thing that we were meant to provide and that was in the contracts that we were meant to provide nutritional and information...but then again I think in our environment, I don't know whether we would have achieved that because I could say kids... come through the doors and they're gone and they don't want to sit down and chop up a tomato or cucumber and taste it, or anything. You know, they just want to go and play. So I'm not sure how much of that we would have achieved anyway.”

– Provider focus group

Unachieved aims

Children be more engaged with school and other local services

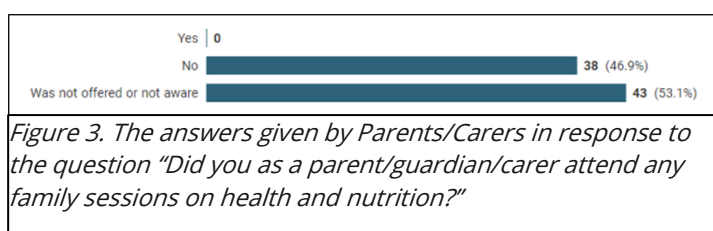
This aim was difficult to evaluate as it requires a long-term follow-up to determine children's engagement with school and other local services as a result of attending the HAF Programme. There was some evidence that children had joined new clubs (see 'Be more active' section) and there was also qualitative evidence of one child who had joined to local leisure facility as a result of visiting the facility for the HAF Programme.

Parents develop understanding of nutrition and food budgeting

Evidence from the Parent's feedback survey demonstrated that little to no provision was offered to parents to develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting (figure 3). This was noted by the HAF Programme Co-ordinators and they were already looking at solutions for the future.

“A few nutri-cooking companies have said is there the option to do like an hour at five where it's the families coming in with that one day a week to do nutrition? Afterwards, so the parents, when they picking up, can they do an hour cooking class? As a family afterwards.”

– Co-ordinator focus group



However, the provision of meals at the HAF Programme meant it made food budgeting and planning easier for parents to manage during the summer holidays (figure 4).

“It really helped me to spend less on food, which I don’t have a lot of money for.”

“One less meal I needed to provide my child, as money is tight at home being a single parent on a low income.”

- Survey responses from Parents

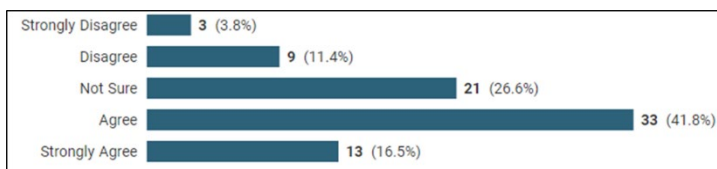


Figure 4. The extent to which parents agreed/disagreed with the statement “The provision of meals for the children at the programme helps support our meal planning at home”.

Parents are signposted towards other information and support

To identify wider opportunities that would inform and support Parents/Carers and their child(ren) the Parents/Carers were asked in the surveys what recommendations they have for the HAF Programme that would help their child(ren) to continue engaging in physical activities and skill/knowledge development after the Programme finishes. Many of the Parents/Carers identified that they would like the Programme to continue in more holidays and more opportunities as their child(ren) are missing out due to financial constraints however, there are no opportunities for this to occur:

“I think it would be good if the children could continue attending the holiday and food programme even when back at school. My children enjoyed the activities they did and wanted to continue them but are not able to now they are back at school and most activities after school cost a lot of money which I don’t have.”

“Have activities offered during other holidays. Plus during term time.”

“Continue the free clubs! Unfortunately, parents like myself don’t have the luxury of paying for clubs but my kids absolutely loved every second”.

“To signpost to after school or weekend activities that are not too expensive!!!”

- Survey responses from Parents

Process evaluation findings

Timing

There were several facilitators and hinderers that impacted the delivery of the HAF Programme. The main hindrance was the late award of the Programme contract allocation, which had a ripple effect on planning and provision.

Participant 1: *Fortunately, it did get started back at Easter, and we got involved in that. And that ran reasonably well, although it was very tight on time and getting it all set up, which was the same issue we had with the summer programme, that it took a while for the government to actually agree to run the programme in Northampton. Then it took even longer.*

Participant 2: *I echo everything [participant 1] said in terms of late-last minute.*

Participant 3: *Again, echoing [participant 1] it was obviously, yeah, quite late in terms of how they were able to process things to get things up and running.*

- Provider’s focus group

Marketing

The delay in the Programme contract subsequently had an impact on marketing and communication with schools, which led to some parents experiencing difficulties in obtaining their HAF Programme ‘free entry’ codes.

“I don’t know if anyone else found as well though, like we’ve, especially with everything with Covid, schools were in and out of the members of staff that you were actually trying to locate and talk to. Then they’re in isolation or they were off for whatever reason or classes were off...people didn’t know who to contact and talk to.”

"I don't know how that a lot of kids and parents didn't know their codes. In fact, a lot of schools didn't know their HAF codes. I would contact the school contacts who were still in, or maybe the host person from my school venue, and they didn't often know their HAF codes. They had to find out from someone else 'cause...I think it was 'cause it was so late."

– Provider's focus group

Developing strong links with schools is essential to maximise the reach of the HAF Programme, as 74% of parents found out about the Programme through school communications (figure 5). Co-ordinators and Providers acknowledged that more work can be done in the lead up to the holidays to ensure schools and families were aware of the programme, such as liaising with the school Bursar, Co-ordinators and Local Authority raising awareness that Providers will be contacting schools, distributing newsletters, and attending assemblies.

"If we had more time at the very beginning, we could have got into schools 'cause I would have gone to all my schools and done assemblies that were holding the course. Now, luckily as soon as we hit the ground we were like right, let us go out that Thursday, the next day. Friday I was in somewhere like [area name removed] and I drove and said look to both the contacts with deputy heads at school at [school names removed] where we are, 'Can I come now?' I just talked to the kids, they pulled them out the classroom...the free school meal children and I was able to speak about it. But it was not enough 'cause I needed the parents and I needed a bit more time."

– Provider focus group

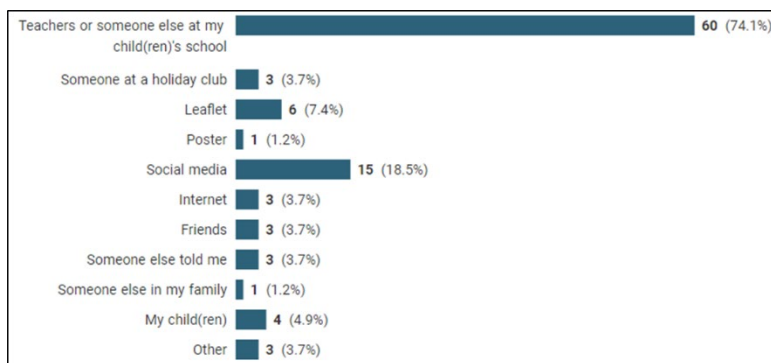


Figure 5. The answers given by parents/carers in response to the question "How did you find out about the Holiday Activities and Food Programme?"

Booking system

The central online booking system provided useful demographic insight for attendance monitoring and was generally easy to use, but a few cases occurred for both Providers and Parents (figure 6) when trying to use the booking system. Providers experienced difficulties when uploading sessions to the booking system and did not receive pertinent personal circumstances information about children who had booked on such as, dietary requirements, allergies. There was also concerns that the online booking system could exclude families who do not have internet access. Co-ordinators and Providers acknowledged that off-line solutions need to be implemented in the future.

"I'm not sure if it was just me but I found the [online booking system name] portal very un-user friendly when trying to add bookings and couldn't find any support for this."

"It was not very intuitive, and I found it highly frustrating. For example, adding a new user through the add tab on the activity page never worked. Eventually I found that if you went in through a different page it would."

- Survey responses from Providers

"Some activities were easy but some [club name] wouldn't load and had strange dates so you couldn't book. Also, it was difficult to filter events by age as it wasn't clear if it filtered by minimum or maximum age. Having 2 children it was difficult to find activities for both of them to do together."

– Survey response from Parent

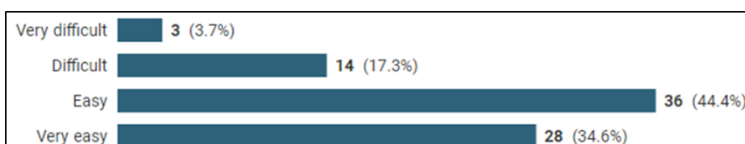


Figure 6. Answers given by Parents/Carers in response to the question "Please select the answers that best reflects your experience. Booking my child(ren) onto the Holiday Activities and Food Programme was..."

One of the main issues was the inability for Parents to cancel previously booked sessions, which Providers thought was a key reason for the increasing drop-off rates throughout the summer holiday.

Participant 1: *“Cancelling was an issue. I forgot about that...”*

Participant 2: *You end up thinking people are expecting her and she’s not there but that’s just kinda how it had to be.*

Participant 2: *Or it’ll tell you system error and you’ll keep trying to cancel, system error so I tried, I’ll screenshot it in case anyone tries to tell me off.*

Participant 1: *Somebody rang me up and said your children were expected and I said I cancelled three times. So you know....”*

- Parent’s focus group

Staffing, training, and resources

Providers felt that their Holiday Clubs were sufficiently staffed to achieve the Government aims (92% agreement) with the only limiting factor being COVID-19 self-isolations. 96.6% of Providers felt that they had been given sufficient guidance to meet safeguarding standards, with only one Provider disagreeing that there was not enough guidance. Additionally, 95.3% of Providers also felt that they had been given sufficient guidance to meet health and safety standards, again with only one Provider disagreeing. 96.3% of Providers felt they were given sufficient guidance to meet food standards. Finally, 88.4% of Providers also agreed that they were given sufficient guidance to meet inclusion and accessibility standards, with three providers (11.5%) disagreeing. The majority of Providers also found the Co-ordinator site visits were a helpful practice to reassure them that they were meeting the Government aims and standards. However, within the focus groups, many of the Providers reflected on the need for them to have access to training and information resources in order to support them in the delivery of various aspects of the HAF Programme provision. Providers highlighted that they felt this information and training should have been provided as part of a HAF Programme delivery package at the point they were funded to deliver the programme:

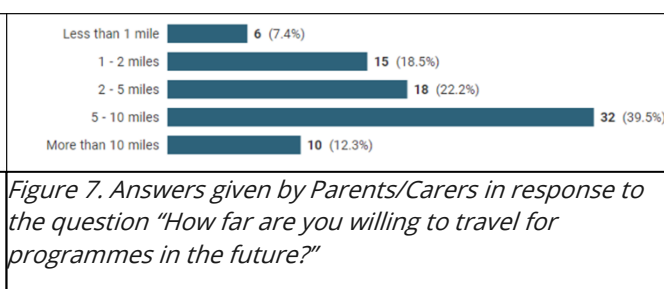
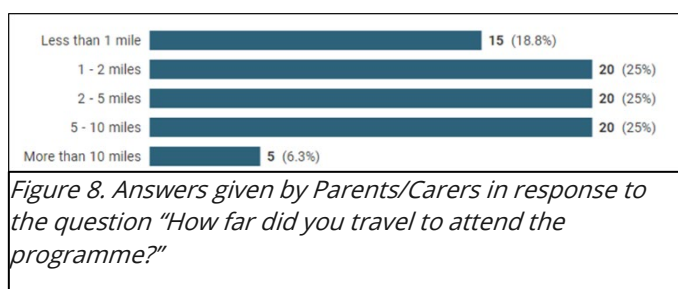
“We were meant to have safeguarding information about different stuff and this, that and the other. Uh, where we had very little ability to put that into place, and I think that needed to be something that was driven by, that was provided by the HAF Programme in that, here are your materials, this is what you need to deliver. And then it would have gone out across the everybody going out the same way. But uh, rather than having to rely on people in making them...might not be their specialism to provide nutritional classes and education and materials like that.”

“I think the other problem was, not so much a problem, but little things that we faced were simple questions like ‘why are they having a free lunch?’, you know? And it was quite a basic question. It’s actually quite a hard one to answer more for a child to sort of answer. It’s just probably being in the awareness of actually how to sort of answer those questions, and we might have been like awkward as well because, you know, how do I answer for this child that they’re getting food and they’re not?”

- Provider’s focus group

Transport

Parents were asked how far they had travelled to reach the Holidays Camps and how far they would be willing to travel in the future (figure 7 and 8). 39.5% of Parents would travel 5-10 miles and 12.3% would travel more than 10 miles to access the HAF Programme. This provides an indication that the potential catchment area for Holiday Clubs in future provision can cover a wider area and enable wider access to the programme.



Co-ordinator and Provider reflections

Co-ordinators' reflections

During the focus groups the Co-ordinators reflected that on a whole *"the positives far outweighed the negatives"*. However, the Co-ordinators referred to the fact that the food aims were not met in several instances, in particular the type of food that was provided for the children and young people attending the clubs and the education of parents in relation to healthy nutrition and food budgeting:

"I think some more some better information to the delivers around what is a nutritional meal would be useful because some of the ones I went to technically they probably did meet the food standard. But an egg Mayo sarnie from Greggs... Isn't the most healthy sandwich. But they'll be saying, well, it meets the criteria. Yeah, does it? The choc- the chocolate yoghurt. Yeah might have small bit of dairy. Is it the most nutritional?"

"...one of the aims is to get families more aware of healthy eating...unless the parents are taught how to how... to do it themselves. That's crucial."

– Co-ordinator's focus group

The Co-ordinators felt that this was due to the short time given to prepare for the Programme and more adequate time would have allowed for more healthy food provision because the food would have more sufficient planning time and more training could be given to the providers. The Co-ordinators reflected as a whole that more time and learning from this HAF Programme will enable better delivery and achievement of the programme aims in future HAF Programmes:

"...Moving forward. Now we've got a bit more of an understanding of where we can deliver and what's worked and what hasn't."

"...they're sort of things that you hope can be ironed out and can be learned from and dealt with, hopefully more efficiently moving forward 'cause ultimately we just we just want as many people to access it as possible."

– Co-ordinator's focus group

Some of the Co-ordinators also highlighted that they had to rely upon previously existing relationships with Providers to be able to deliver the Programme and meet the Government standards due to the limited time to organise the Programme:

"Embedded our relationship with- or stuff we've done over the last year to be able to ring our partners at the last minute and beg, borrow, steal another hours worth of activity from them. So a lot of providers who we managed to talk around into HAF had put out activity for 3 hour's hadn't involved the food... But 'cause we've got that relationship with them, we were able to say, can we get another hour in? Can we? Where can we get the food from to make it happen? Can you get the physical activity element in?... But it was crucial to be able to- be able to pick up the phone last minute..."

– Co-ordinator's focus group

Providers' reflections

Many of the Providers during the focus groups reflected on how effectively they delivered their Programme provision and achieved a number of broader outcomes for the children. The Providers highlighted a number of challenging impacts the last-minute timings of the HAF Programme had on their ability to plan and deliver the Programme. Under these conditions, one of the Providers felt that this negatively impacted on their Programme provision and the attainment of intended outcomes, and would have liked more time to improve their planning and delivery:

"I think the thing was that we just couldn't do it the best we could. That's the thing. We had an opportunity to reach out to a lot of kids and families. Ours were very much based on family play and involvement and, you know, we couldn't do that to the best of our ability because it was all a bit late and we didn't have the knowledge or the resources. So we, you know, we have a messy play area that, if we have the resources and the guidance, we could have done the nutritional activities and all sorts. But we just wouldn't be confident enough in what we were doing to provide that."

- Provider's focus group

Another Provider felt that, despite the last-minute conditions they were operating within, they delivered their provision effectively however, more planning time would have enabled them to achieve even more:

“The major success...I'd say the engage the engagement levels was a major success, like the amount of people that engaged and like the depth of the engagement was really good. And that's under quite difficult conditions. That's under like you know, all the conditions that we described. So I just think, imagine what we could do if it was, we had that lead in time and all the rest of it. I mean, I was on site every week bar one. Um... It was a brilliant like popping down, seeing them doing their things, it felt really worthwhile and great. And so I'd say, yeah, the engagement was brilliant.”

– Provider's focus group

Nevertheless, both examples highlight the importance of the HAF Programme contract being awarded and distributed earlier in order for holiday Providers to have more time to effectively plan and implement their Programme provision. One of the Providers also reflected on how their Holiday Club provision spanned across multiple government aims and enabled a range of outcomes for children:

“A week's course included what we class as water break activities, circle games, time to break. Have a drink of water or snack and small games. We did lunchtime activities, the physical activity, we did creative challenges so we did arts, outside or outdoor learning, we brought a specialist provider in to teach an outdoors programme. We had wellbeing discussions every day, we had personal bests challenges, and PB not just physical one was speed bounce - one looked at the memory - one looked at speed type in the use of a computer. So showcased their children self-esteem, confidence and talents and stuff that they had and parents will, 'I didn't even know she or he could do that', or 'I've never got him to stand up and speak about anything'. So that was our winners. And then the last thing was we also did a story stars reading where our members of staff read to children as well. We've got children reading at different times, but actually them seeing a role model reading.”

- Provider's focus group

Another Provider highlighted that they would like to continue to plan their provision so that their whole programme offer could come together and intertwine more effectively:

“I think in terms of the activities that we offered, I think there is something that we could do around, you know, structuring the food element as part of some of those [other] activities. So I just think, you know, we did a wilderness week for example, [and] making the connection between food and the natural environment or where their food comes from, they could have done an activity based on that. So we could, yeah, so we could feed it into the program a bit more. Or like filmmaking for fun, there could have been some element of food fun in there. There's definitely things that we could do to be more responsive...I mean, you know, it's in the contract explicit, but more emphasis as an outcome.”

- Provider's focus group

The need for the HAF Programme

Within the Parents/Carers surveys parents were asked an open-ended question to “provide any comments that demonstrate the benefits that the Holiday Activities and Food Programme has provided to you and your child(ren), which has not been asked in the previous questions”. The responses highlighted that the HAF Programme gave the child(ren) opportunities that they would not have been able to have before and the knowledge that their child(ren) was safe, cared for, receiving food and having fun, eased pressures on themselves/family. For example:

“My children loved it. The routines for them were very good. It was a good opportunity for them and I couldn’t have afforded it otherwise.”

“I think this programme is brilliant for me and my children. I am a single parent of 4 children and my twins are the most active and challenging at times. Attending the programme has enabled them to direct their energy in physical activities rather than being stuck at home. The food helped to as during the summer holidays the cost of my food shop goes up which I struggle with”.

“It was lovely to know that despite my mental health condition which I feel negatively affects my children ability to socialise or take part in activities that they were able to enjoy several activities over the holidays and that I did not have to worry about the cost of these activities. Being on a very low income I simply couldn’t have afforded these and without them the children would have rarely got out the house.”

“It has given me and her father much needed respite care knowing she is safe and fulfilled and mentally and physically stimulated. My daughter is up early every day and we cannot cope doing 14 hour days without help. Clubs are invaluable.”

“Allowed me to still be able to do work/college related stuff knowing that child is being looked after without having to constantly worry on how I was going to keep him entertained. Helped mine and his mental health as it meant not under each others feet for the whole of the holiday period. Allowed my child to learn and experience new things which he was then able to talk to me about afterwards. Allowed him to be outside in fresh air instead of in-front of a TV/Computer screen getting bored.”

- Survey responses from Parents

During the focus groups some of the Parents/Carers also reflected on the need for the HAF Programme, highlighting that it is a positive and meaningful environment for children to be in, it gives children something to do each day during the school holidays:

“I mean, the main aim is to keep the children in a positive environment in the summer months. And I think, really, what they’ve done is really good.”

- Parent focus group

Some Parents/Carers highlighted their gratitude for the Programme, and they would like the Programme to be available to families in future school holidays:

“The next big holiday is going to be around Christmas, if they did something around that time...I wish they would just organise themselves a bit and we can just get the kids into the activities around Christmas, that would be nice for them as well.”

- Parent focus group

It is evident that the HAF Programme is valued by families and that there is a need to deliver this holiday provision in the future. Consideration needs to be given to planning the sustainability and legacy of the HAF Programme.

Recommendations

Following the investigation and analysis of the evaluation objectives there are several Government aims and Government standards that were not met during the HAF Programme as a result of several factors. Conversely, there are numerous instances where the Government aims and standards were met and children and their families greatly benefitted as a result. Tables 4 – 6 suggest recommendations for consideration for future HAF Programmes that highlight both areas for improvement and examples of good practice. These tables are divided according to recommendations for Co-ordinators, Providers and general HAF participants in relation to the evaluation objectives of this report.

Table 4. Recommendations for Co-ordinators.

Recommendations for Co-ordinators	Highlighted from
To examine opportunities to improve knowledge of health and nutrition	
There needs to be greater uptake in provider training in relation to improving children’s (and parents) knowledge of health and nutrition, to enable them to plan and implement activities that support this aim in future provision.	Provider and co-ordinator data
To examine opportunities to be more engaged with school and other local services	
More successful Holiday Clubs were those that already had a relationship with schools, community centres and facilities etc. prior to the HAF Programme beginning. Therefore, it is recommended that links should be made with facilities and communities prior to implementation, in order to build relationships with facility staff, parents and children/young people to aid the success of any provisions.	Co-ordinator and parent data
To examine opportunities to improve understanding of nutrition and food budgeting	
There is a need for co-ordinators and providers to develop a range of activities that can engage the parents in the Programme to improve knowledge of nutrition and food budgeting.	Co-ordinator data
To examine what factors facilitated or hindered the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes	
It is recommended that there be an advertising template used for consistent marketing approaches across the different Providers to ensure all the provision of a Holiday Club is advertised with all the necessary information provided.	Co-ordinator data
It is recommended that schools assign a core member to deliver the responsibilities assigned to schools as key gatekeepers of the HAF Programme in order to support Co-ordinator planning.	Provider data
It is recommended to consider a non-digital booking alternative so that families without internet access are not missing out and can still benefit from the Programme.	Co-ordinator, provider and parent data.
It is recommended that the Co-ordinators incorporate more timely communication about the expectations to use a centralised booking system, in order to avoid holiday Providers investing time in adopting alternative booking systems.	Providers
It is recommended that Co-ordinators consider how to make the Programme more sustainable so that children and families can still benefit from the Programme in the future.	Co-ordinators
It is recommended that Co-ordinators reach out to Bursar’s within schools to assist Providers in making relationships.	Co-ordinator data

Table 5. Recommendations for Providers.

Recommendations for Providers	Highlighted from
To examine opportunities for healthy eating	
It is recommended that Providers should work towards offering more variety within their food provision, while considering a variety of dietary needs.	Parents and provider data
It is recommended that Holiday Clubs should further plan their food provision to enable them to work towards the provision of a healthy food offer rather than just the provision of food.	Provider data
It is recommended that that Holiday Clubs should plan to structure their mealtimes so that all children sit and eat together.	Provider data
To examine opportunities to engage in for physical activity	
It is recommended that Providers identify some opportunities to increase their physical activity provision.	Parent and provider data
To examine opportunities to engage in enrichment activities	
It is recommended that Providers reflect on their food-related activities to identify what ideas they can further implement and improve on, while considering what resources they need, or what they can achieve with the existing resources they have.	Parent data
It is recommended that Providers advertise staff qualifications (DBS) and safety procedures of the club/facilities to parents to increase assurances about the safety of their child(ren).	Parent data
To examine signposting opportunities to other information and support (for example, health, employment and education)	
It is recommended that Providers consider how to overcome the barriers that prevent children attending/participating in clubs outside of the Programme after that initial contact and link has been made. For example, an adjusted financial scheme or using facilities that are less of a challenge to reach.	Co-ordinator data
To examine what factors facilitated or hindered the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes	
It is recommended that Providers communicate more with parents to provide more detailed information about the specific sessions/activities they could book their children onto.	Parent data
It is recommended that Providers start to (or continue to) consider the remit of their provision and try to provide activities that are appropriate for children of a range of age categories.	Parent, provider and co-ordinator data
It is recommended that Providers check the remit of their provision, and where possible, ensure children with additional or complex needs are provided with relevant activities or additional support from staff.	Parent and provider data
It is recommended that Providers consider extending their provision to make transport arrangements (such as bus pick-ups) for families that would benefit from this service, if this is not already being offered.	Parent and provider data
It is recommended that Providers consider catering their food provisions for all children in order to destigmatise the process of HAF Programme funded children receiving free food.	Provider data

Table 6. Wider recommendations for future HAF Programmes.

Recommendations for future Programmes	Highlighted from
It is recommended that links should be made with facilities and communities prior to implementation to build relationships with facility staff, parents and children and young people to aid the success of any provisions.	Provider and co-ordinator data
It is recommended that Parents are informed in a timely manner about the Programme, to allow them sufficient time to plan and organise their family plans.	Parent data
It is recommended that the awarding of the HAF Programme contract be announced sooner by central government in order for local authorities and Holiday Providers to have more time to effectively plan and implement their Programme provision (e.g. the programme marketing, signing up and booking, gathering the resources needed, building relationships with gatekeepers and food and activity partners, etc.).	Provider and co-ordinator data
It is recommended that consideration should be given to the idea that HAF Programme funding could be provided to Holiday Clubs that already have an existing Programme offer, and therefore, the HAF Programme can extend the offer while benefitting from the existing resources and provision that is already in place.	Provider data
It is recommended that Co-ordinators and Providers reach out to Bursar’s within schools to assist in making relationships and ensuring that information reaches relevant families (i.e. HAF codes and club information).	Co-ordinator data
It is recommended that when marketing the HAF Programme, the Programme gatekeepers (particularly schools) need to provide sufficient information to parents to make it clear what the HAF Programme is and exactly what families can use the codes for.	Parent data
It is recommended that the technological challenges (e.g. the system being slow and crashing), the functionality challenges (e.g. being unable to cancel bookings) and generally improving the overall usability (e.g. providing a waiting list function) of the booking system be improved.	Parent data
It is recommended that schools should be provided with more information about the HAF Programme, what the role of the school will be and what to expect to happen as part of this role.	Provider data
It is recommended HAF Programme and its booking system needs to be reviewed to ensure the processes are not exclusionary to the most vulnerable families that the Programme is trying to target (e.g. those experiencing digital poverty/exclusion).	Parent, provider and co-ordinator data
It is recommended that the organisation responsible for developing and running the booking system should create a support system (e.g. email and telephone helplines) to enable technical and functionality booking system issues to be overcome.	Provider data
It is recommended that the HAF Programme considers incorporating formalised incentive schemes as a way of encouraging families to attend the sessions they have booked their child onto, and in order to reduce the drop-off rates they regularly experience.	Provider data
It is recommended that, to increase attendance rate, the future provision should incorporate aspects that are popular with children and young people at the moment in time for example, mixed martial arts are popular at the moment and that should be capitalised on.	Co-ordinator data
It is recommended that funding for the HAF Programme to continue to be provided to enable Providers to keep on offering food and activities to families from disadvantaged backgrounds.	Parent and provider data
It is recommended that a formal HAF Programme delivery package is developed, which provides training and information resources for Providers to empower them with the skills and confidence to deliver various aspects of the Programme (e.g. safeguarding training, ideas on activities to implement to achieve the HAF programme aims, sensitivity and wellbeing training).	Provider and co-ordinator data
It is recommended that the HAF Programme eligibility criteria is reviewed, as free school meal eligibility is only one proxy for food insecurity. Some families are not eligible for free school meals but are still from food insecure backgrounds and are therefore, missing the opportunity to access this vital provision for families from disadvantaged backgrounds.	Parent and provider data

