



# Hungry Holidays

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A report on hunger amongst children during school holidays

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This report was written by Andrew Forsey.



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## Foreword

### The route march to eliminating school holiday hunger

Here is a report picturing the horror of hunger amongst some children in the school holidays and the heroic efforts by local activists to combat this horror.

The report is an address, first, to the nation – to alert it to the evil of hunger that is in its midst. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger aims to ignite an anger that will spread throughout the country and will not abate until hunger as we know it has been abolished.

The report is likewise addressed to the Government. It has now had time to take on board the fact that under its stewardship of the fifth richest country in the world, too many children are stalked by hunger.

That this hunger ends for many children soon after entering the school gate owes everything to the devoted head teachers, teachers, governors, and volunteers of those schools. The APPG salutes the band of people who are not prepared to see children be hungry for whatever reason and irrespective of who is responsible for that hunger. They provide breakfast clubs and, increasingly, supper clubs in addition to free school meals during term time.

The report is also addressed to that valiant group of citizens who have set themselves the task of showing that child hunger can be eliminated during school holidays. The APPG rejoices in their successes, salutes their determination, and calls on the nation to witness what they achieve for so little cost, as well as what they are not able to achieve. Free meals and fun during school holidays are provided only sporadically throughout the country. This is, of course, no criticism. But this limit on success is a call to the nation and to its politicians for actions.

The impact of countering holiday hunger with meals and fun is at least fourfold. First, some

parents' income falls when they face increased costs of feeding their children during school holidays. Projects providing free meals and fun provide a welcome source of relief for those parents. The report cites two parents from Oldham who comment on this double whammy: 'I work for an agency where I don't get paid in the school holidays [...] it's tight [because] it's school holidays so having your breakfast free here releases that little bit of extra money at the end of the week', and, '[I] probably save about two boxes of cereal a week by them coming here, so that is a brilliant thing'.

Second, the vast majority of projects are open to parents' involvement. This involvement in holiday schemes has important longer term impacts on the families' wellbeing. The report cites two examples. Birmingham City University recorded effects on parents' wellbeing by noting, 'the majority of parents and carers felt that they ate more healthily than normal at Holiday Kitchen. Most parents and carers felt more confident in making healthy meals and snacks for their children following participation in Holiday Kitchen [and] there was increased awareness around food budgeting and how to prepare healthy meals on a budget'.

Similarly, Leicester City Council reported on the changed home lives of families participating in their holiday schemes in the following terms: 'many of the parents interviewed said they enjoyed sitting as a family and eating breakfast at a table which many of them don't usually do. Children were able to try new food such as fruit and cereal bars and were able to make their own sandwiches and learn about making healthy choices. Parents said their children now sit at a table to eat their breakfast at home and parents were now more conscious of providing healthy options such as more fruit and vegetables'.

Third, holiday meal and fun projects each act as an important weapon countering isolation that all too many parents face. Oral evidence to our inquiry cited, 'one mum [who] felt like hugging the teacher who referred her to our club. She felt like she didn't have any friends before coming

to the club. Having met other parents who were in a similar situation, she has made friends’.

Fourth, holiday meal and fun projects also importantly act in some instances as pathways to work. By participating in these projects, some parents’ confidence is so boosted that they begin to see work as not only a proper, but desirable goal. MakeLunch shared the story of how one parent, ‘who hadn’t taken any exams since dropping out of school was boosted by passing her food hygiene certificate and has gone on to complete English and Maths refresher courses leading to her now working as a TA in a local nursery’.

Our plea to each of the political parties as they draw up their General Election manifesto is not, therefore, for old fashioned school dinner provision during holiday time – although that is far, far better than nothing – but for new schemes with parents gaining skills to help combat low income by fellowship and knowledge.

Abolishing hunger during school holidays is beyond the ability of individual community groups and volunteers alone. It needs, above all, a government lead in:

- giving local authorities duties to convene schools, churches, community groups, and businesses in their area; and
- allocating a top slice of the sugary drinks levy to fund each local authority with a £100,000 grant to abolish school holiday hunger.

Impossible on such a modest grant? No.

The new politics requires this £100,000 to be multiplied over many times by schools, churches, community groups, and businesses. This report shows how that can be done.

Action by the Government along the lines set out in our report will:

- be the first step towards abolishing school holiday hunger;
- have a major impact on preventing the gap in attainment between rich and poor children widening still further, especially during summer holidays; and
- play a strategic role in meeting the Government’s ambition for recycling good food that would otherwise be destroyed.



**The Rt Hon Frank Field MP**

**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger**

## Summary

### 1. The extent of hunger amongst children during school holidays

- Up to an estimated three million children risk being hungry in the school holidays. This group comprises over a million children growing up in poverty who receive free school meals during term time, as well as an estimated two million who are disqualified from free school meals because their parents work for their poverty.
- The increase in the number of families with children relying on food banks during school holidays, compared with other parts of the year, demonstrates that there are particular difficulties that arise at those times of the year which restrict families' ability to afford food.
- The survey data submitted to the inquiry suggest that a significant proportion of teachers and school staff notice children returning to school hungry on the first day after the holidays.
- Hunger amongst children during school holidays is one of Britain's hidden costs of poverty. It is a cost paid by children. Those individuals and organisations who are actively trying to address the problem report it to be a significant one that affects growing numbers of children.

### 2. The different forms of hunger amongst children during school holidays

- The hunger that sneaks up on children and, in many cases, their parents during school holidays shows itself in four different forms:
  - There is, for some children, the occasional or persistent hunger that results from a total absence of meals when the cupboards at home are bare

and there is no money for them to buy food.

- There is also the hunger that some parents put themselves through in a last ditch attempt to ensure their children can eat something, anything, each day.
- For those families that are managing to scrape together enough money for a filling, stodgy diet to stave off immediate hunger, the poor quality of the food that has been bought to fill hungry stomachs often brings malnutrition into play.
- The daily struggle with hunger, for some families, rules out any chance they might otherwise have of going out and enjoying themselves, or even sticking to any kind of routine, in the holidays. Hunger and malnutrition seem to thrive in those families that have been softened up by inactivity, isolation and loneliness.

### 3. The causes of hunger amongst children during school holidays

- There is, of course, a whole series of underlying trends not only in Britain, but across all advanced Western economies, that give rise to families' vulnerability to hunger during school holidays. Looking only at those factors that are unique to the holidays themselves, rather than the rest of the year, leads us to conclude that it is the additional demands placed on the budgets of families on low incomes – most notably from food, fuel, activities, and childcare – at those times of year that lower children into the clutches of hunger. In some cases, this horror is compounded by parents' lack of confidence or a shortage of skills to cook and shop on a budget.

#### 4. [The impact of holiday hunger on children's life chances](#)

- We are concerned that hunger amongst children during school holidays serves to exacerbate the inequalities in life chances that already exist between children from wealthier and poorer backgrounds.
- The evidence we have received on the impact of hunger on children during school holidays is deeply troubling. It reveals how those children who exist on an impoverished diet, while taking part in little or no activity, return to school malnourished, sluggish, and dreary – some even lose 'significant' amounts of weight, while others gain a lot of weight.
- Moreover, it suggests that this group of children start the new term several weeks, if not months, intellectually behind their more fortunate peers who have enjoyed a more wholesome diet and lots of activity during school holidays.

#### 5. [The types of provision in place to address hunger amongst children during school holidays](#)

- As is the case with the many hundreds of food banks, manned by tens of thousands of volunteers, that have sprung up to try and protect large numbers of people in this country from destitution, the natural urge to counter hunger amongst children during school holidays has inspired a multitude of responses in different communities.
- We have a limited snapshot of initiatives that feed children during school holidays. Even so, within a diverse national picture comprising hundreds of organisations which mostly, although not exclusively, operate in deprived communities during summer holidays, we have identified four main types of provision:

- individual churches and community groups that quietly do their bit to try and address holiday hunger;
- small networks of churches and community groups that seek to address holiday hunger with the help of start-up grants from local authorities or businesses;
- larger networks of schools, children's centres, churches and community groups that are supplied with food and, in some cases, materials for fun activities by local authorities and other organisations; and
- local authorities and devolved bodies that run projects in schools.
- Most projects try to combine hot meals or packed lunches with fun activities – sports, arts, crafts, games, and cooking – as this ensures children can receive food without any sense of stigma.

#### 6. [The cost of delivering projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays](#)

- The costs of providing free meals and fun activities for children during school holidays can be as little as £1.50 per child, per day for projects that rely largely upon volunteers and operate in their own community facilities. Projects taking place in schools, and staffed by paid employees, tend to cost in excess of £5 per child, per day.

#### 7. [The sources of food for projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays](#)

- The evidence we have received suggests that projects seeking to address hunger amongst children during school holidays tend to purchase the food they need from retailers, wholesalers, or caterers.

- Occasionally, though, one of the ways in which some projects attempt to control their costs is to tap into the huge amounts of good, wholesome food that is currently burnt or thrown to landfill by supermarkets and their suppliers after it has become surplus to their requirements.
- Those projects relying exclusively on food that is bought from retailers, wholesalers, or caterers can face higher overall costs. Others relying exclusively on food that is recycled from the surplus stocks generated by retailers and manufacturers can face a degree of unpredictability in both the quantities and quality of the food they are given.
- Ideally, projects should be in a position to secure a reliable supply of food at as low a cost as possible. This may perhaps involve a combination of bought goods supplemented by food that is recycled from surplus stocks which would otherwise be destroyed. The establishment of a reliable supply of quality food from recycled surplus stocks across the country would greatly diminish the cost of providing free meals and fun for children during school holidays.

#### 8. [The impact of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays](#)

- The inquiry has been presented with evidence of three main advantages – financial, educational, and in physical and mental health – that add an important element of happiness to the lives of those families who are supported by projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays. Each of these advantages improves children's quality of life, as well as their chances of growing up to become healthy, well-educated adults, while simultaneously

increasing parents' confidence and adding to their skills base.

- It was reported to the inquiry that children who attend free meal and fun projects during school holidays eat more healthily, undertake more exercise, demonstrate better behaviour, and return to school in a much improved condition than they would otherwise have done in the absence of those projects. This helps to ensure those children are well-positioned to profit from their education, rather than fall behind their classmates.
- The financial benefit derived from free meal and fun projects, by parents on low incomes who struggle to afford food, is considerable – at least several hundred pounds per year. Moreover, for working parents the projects offer a form of childcare that would otherwise be unavailable or prohibitively expensive. For those parents who are not in work, and others who perhaps work part-time, the projects offer a way of building their confidence and developing new skills, as well as to meet new people, which produces a variety of longer term gains both for themselves and their children.

#### 9. [The limitations of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays](#)

- We cannot emphasise enough just how much admiration we have for those individuals and organisations who have got on with the task of addressing hunger amongst children during school holidays. They are the active custodians of that rich cultural tradition in British life whereby volunteers humbly meet a local need, while at the same time linking arms with other similarly minded individuals to begin a national campaign to rectify a major social evil.



- Their efforts have both improved the quality of life for thousands of children across the country, and given those children a greater chance of flourishing in their adult life. But the risk of hunger amongst children during school holidays is now so great, and the provision of free meals and fun so sporadic and piecemeal, that those existing efforts alone cannot be viewed as a sufficient response to the problem. A scarcity of funding, a lack of co-ordination, and a heavy reliance on donations limit our country's ability to protect every child from hunger during school holidays.
- Some parts of the country are covered only sporadically by free meal and fun projects during school holidays, but these are the lucky areas. Others are not covered at all. Large numbers of children who stand to gain the most from those projects are currently missing out.
- There is an urgent need for projects seeking to address hunger amongst children during school holidays to be developed and extended across the country, so they are both available to all children who need them and capable of exerting the greatest possible influence on those children's life chances.

#### 10. Proposals for the next stage in the life of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays

- Both those individuals and organisations in favour of a school-based approach, and others who instead advocate a more diverse approach to future attempts at preventing hunger amongst children during school holidays, strongly agree on the need for local authorities to facilitate any such attempts.
- Local authorities know where hungry children are most likely to be. Moreover, they are well-placed to co-ordinate the

efforts of schools, churches, community groups, public bodies, and businesses, to ensure projects are:

- crafted by local communities themselves;
- capable of reaching as many children as possible, wherever there is evidence of need; and
- exerting the greatest possible influence on children's life chances.
- Crucially, one size does not fit all, so any scheme must enshrine a sufficient degree of flexibility, thereby enabling local projects to meet local needs.

#### 11. A blueprint for abolishing hunger amongst children during school holidays

- We encourage the Government to adopt the following reform package for the eradication of hunger amongst children during school holidays:
  - A statutory requirement for local authorities to facilitate and co-ordinate the delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays, with utmost flexibility granted over the actual delivery methods used. The voluntary sector should be in the driving seat wherever possible. We ask that the Government lends its backing to the Free School Meals (Provision in School Holidays) Bill which we will present to Parliament after the General Election. The Bill would enact this statutory requirement while giving local authorities the flexibility they need to implement programmes that are best suited to the needs of children in their area.
  - An adequate funding base, combined with an invitation to businesses to add to this base, to enable local authorities to meet their statutory duties. We recommend that the Government allocates £41.5

million – one tenth of the Healthy Pupils Capital Programme that will be funded by the revenues from the sugary drinks levy – towards the provision of free meals and fun for children during school holidays. If it were divided equally between every local authority in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (the Welsh Government has already committed funding), this sum would deliver an annual budget of over £100,000 with which each local authority could counter holiday hunger. Alternatively, if it were targeted on deprived communities, this allocation would, according to the House of Commons Library, cover the annual cost of school-based provision for every child entitled to free school meals in those parts of England where more than one in five children hold this entitlement.

- National minimum standards laid down by the Department for Education, in respect of the safe and effective delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays.
- A national portal which enables those individuals and organisations delivering free meals and fun for children during school holidays to receive the training, information, advice and guidance they need to at least meet the national minimum standards.
- A robust research base to guide the ongoing development of projects.
- The measurement of hunger amongst children during school holidays. Following our most recent report published a year ago, the United Kingdom Statistics Authority announced that it would consult on how best to measure how many people in our country are hungry, or vulnerable to experiencing hunger. That consultation was due to have been launched several months ago, however, it remains elusive. We recommend that it

be opened as soon as possible and that it should set the country on a path towards being able to measure the extent of hunger amongst children during school holidays.

## Introduction

Schools are on the frontline of Britain's battle against the hunger that afflicts an unknown number of children each day.

The central pillar of the strategy for winning this battle has long been the provision of free school meals for children whose parents would otherwise struggle to pay for them to eat at lunchtime. There are currently more than a million such children who are able to draw upon this provision.

A second and increasingly prominent pillar of the strategy is the daily offer of a free breakfast before school. Likewise there are schools that, in trying to build a third pillar, have set up supper clubs after the day's lessons have finished.

The combination of these three pillars is designed to ensure as many children as possible can access three square meals a day throughout the school term.

However, for thirteen weeks of the year – about three months – children growing up in households that struggle to get by from one week to the next are exposed to a sudden attack from the hunger that their schools fight so hard to keep at bay during term time. It is the half term breaks and extended holidays that open up a gap in the frontline schools have formed. Hunger all too easily bypasses schools at these times of the year and, in so doing, wrecks the lives of those children.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger raised the alarm on this breach of the frontline in our first two reports on the unprecedented numbers of people in our country who need to rely on food banks. One of our findings three years ago,<sup>1</sup> and again a year later,<sup>2</sup> was that the need for emergency supplies from food banks tends to accelerate, particularly

amongst families with children, with the arrival of each school holiday.

We also called on the Government to introduce a levy on sugary drinks to fund a programme that could counter this worrying development. When that levy was subsequently announced in the 2016 Spring Budget it was accompanied by a welcome commitment from the Government: the proceeds would be used exclusively to improve children's health. The commitment fell short, though, of taking specific action to tackle the largely hidden problem of hunger amongst children during school holidays.

We therefore launched a short inquiry two months ago to gain a deeper understanding of hunger amongst children during school holidays, namely: the extent of the problem; its causes; the various ways in which it blights the lives of children and their families; as well as its impact on the chances of those children fulfilling their potential at school and achieving good health, plus a decent standard of living, once they reach adulthood. Our findings on each respective matter are set out in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this report.

The evidence we have gained over the past two months from 52 written submissions, two panels of expert witnesses who contributed oral evidence at the House of Commons, and recent meetings of the Feeding Britain network – a charity we set up to galvanise anti-hunger activities across the country – paints an unsettling picture of life at the bottom of what is, after all, the world's fifth largest economy.

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. We have learnt of one young person who vomited during the holidays because their diet consisted

<sup>1</sup> Forsey, A., *An Evidence Review for the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom* (London: The Children's Society, 2014): pp. 47-48

<sup>2</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, *A route map to ending hunger as we know it in the United Kingdom: Feeding Britain in 2015-16* (London: The Stationery Office, 2015): pp. 97-99

exclusively of packets of crisps. Elsewhere a group of children taking part in a holiday football tournament had to drop out of the latter stages of the competition, as they had not eaten a meal in the days leading up to the event. Their bodies simply gave up on them.

Likewise there are parents staving off hunger with dinners consisting of flavoured water, cereal, or any scraps of food left on their children's plates, in a last ditch attempt to feed their children as best as they possibly can during school holidays.

Teachers report with dismay that, despite such noble efforts from some parents, malnourished children are falling a long way behind their peers in the weeks after the holidays. In some exceptional circumstances the hunger with which schools are grappling is so powerful that teachers pay from their own pockets to ensure food is available for children who begin their lessons on an empty stomach after the holidays.

Our country must now face up to this troubling scenario, the crux of which has been set out in Kellogg's submission to this inquiry:

'Traditionally holidays are a time when children should be having fun and taking part in activities with their families and friends. It's a worrying fact that many families in the [United Kingdom] on low household incomes are being left to struggle in the school holidays'.

We also sought examples of, and suggestions for ways in which this hunger could be countered in a cost effective manner. Just as we have noted before about the birth and development of food banks,<sup>3</sup> it comes as no surprise that a growing number of compassionate, diligent, and gutsy church volunteers, community groups, local authorities, and businesses are channeling their energies into confronting the threat that often moves under the ominous label of 'holiday hunger'. Those inspiring individuals and organisations have led the way in countering this

threat. Crucially many of them have done so in a way which affords children growing up in grinding poverty the same opportunities, both to learn and have fun, as well as eat a decent meal each day, as their more fortunate classmates enjoy during school holidays.

Far from undermining parental responsibility, those individuals and organisations who, in some cases, are preventing whole families from being hungry during school holidays, are also giving parents the confidence and skills they need – cooking decent meals on a budget, for example – to give their children a better start in life.

The experiences, lessons, ideas, and suggestions we gleaned from the evidence contributed by people who are throwing themselves into battle against holiday hunger – covered in chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 – have been invaluable in the production of this report. Those inspiring individuals and organisations have made clear the devastating impact of holiday hunger on children. They have also guided us in the process of drawing up a reform programme for eradicating the threat of hunger amongst children during school holidays, thereby improving their chances of growing up to become healthy, well-educated adults.

The programme we present in chapter 11 will require a firm legislative, financial, and strategic commitment from the Government. But the findings from this inquiry suggest that in return for a relatively small investment – one tenth of the revenues from the sugary drinks levy being given over to projects which aim to improve children's health – the Government would be seizing a major opportunity to deliver significant gains both in the immediate quality of life, as well as the life chances, of large numbers of children growing up in families that are struggling to keep their heads above water.

<sup>3</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England*,

*Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland* (London: The Children's Society, 2014): p. 17

## **Chapter 1 – The extent of hunger amongst children during school holidays**

### **How many children are at risk of being hungry during school holidays?**

We are not in a position to report on how many children experience hunger during school holidays. The data required for us to do so simply does not exist. Nonetheless, the evidence we have received has enabled us to reach conclusions on the numbers of children who are likely to be at risk of going without food at those times of the year.

Children who usually receive free school meals during term time – particularly those whose entitlement is triggered by low household income, rather than through the universal offer of free school meals for infants – were identified in evidence as those at greatest risk of being hungry during school holidays.<sup>4</sup> According to the most recent data published by the Department for Education, this group numbers a little over a million children.<sup>5</sup>

One of the conclusions submitted to the inquiry by Professor Greta Defeyter of Northumbria University was that, ‘the summer break was thought to be considerably challenging for those entitled to free school meals during term time’. Likewise Dr Clare Pettinger of Plymouth University reported that, ‘children who usually have a free school meal or universal infant free school meal provided during term time, and who do not receive this during the holiday period, are more at risk of malnutrition/undernutrition (particularly during the holiday period)’. Nathan Atkinson, Headteacher of Richmond Hill Primary School in Leeds, meanwhile, remarked that, ‘children who are eligible for free school meals

don't suddenly stop being hungry in the school holidays’.

In addition, a survey of organisations conducted for this inquiry by the Lead Association for Catering in Education (LACA) revealed that between 40% and 90% of children receiving help in the form of free meals during school holidays are those who usually receive free school meals during term time.

While the risk of holiday hunger does indeed appear to be greatest for this group of children, we do not believe it is confined to them alone.

The evidence we have received suggests there is a second group of children who are similarly vulnerable to hunger during school holidays. Child Poverty Action Group, FareShare, Fiona Twycross AM, and Sustain raised the plight of those children who, despite growing up in poverty, are not entitled to free school meals during term time. It was estimated in the evidence we have received that this group numbers approximately two million children. Children whose parents work for low wages, but receive Working Tax Credit, for example, are not entitled to free school meals. They are disqualified because their parents work for their poverty. One teacher in Leeds spoke of, ‘lots of our parents [who] work in lower paid jobs and don't get benefits but struggle to meet every day costs’. This applies both during term time as well as school holidays.

The evidence we have received does not lead us to believe that all children growing up in families on low incomes are always hungry during school holidays. To pretend this is the case would be to misrepresent the situation.

<sup>4</sup> To be eligible for free school meals, children must live in households in which their parent or guardian is in receipt of: Income Support; income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; income-related Employment and Support Allowance; support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; the guaranteed element of Pension Credit; Child Tax Credit (provided they have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190); Universal Credit; or Working Tax Credit run-on.

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education, *Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2016* (Last updated in September 2016), available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/552342/SFR20\\_2016\\_Main\\_Text.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/552342/SFR20_2016_Main_Text.pdf)

What the evidence does suggest is that those children are most at risk of having to go without food on a number of occasions at those times of year – some of them may even be persistently hungry on a regular basis. Looking at the overall numbers of children in London, for example, whose parents are on low incomes, the Mayor's Fund for London estimated in its submission that, 'over half a million children in London will struggle for food during school holidays'.

A helpful guide to which groups of children are most likely to be hungry in the holidays was given by the Great Places housing association, a member of the Independent Food Aid Network serving Sheffield, Stoke, and the north west of England, which said that, 'the biggest group affected [by holiday hunger is] those pupils who are eligible for free school meals as the additional meal costs place a significant burden on struggling families. The additional cost for other families can also be difficult and we anticipate this will increase as food inflation continues to rise and wages and benefits remain frozen'.

**Up to an estimated three million children risk being hungry in the school holidays. This group comprises over a million children growing up in poverty who receive free school meals during term time, as well as an estimated two million who are disqualified from free school meals because their parents work for their poverty.**

#### [Does the extent of hunger amongst children increase during school holidays?](#)

The unique threat to children's diets that exists during school holidays, as opposed to the rest of the year, was highlighted in a submission from Birmingham City University, which argued that, 'for vulnerable and low-income families the risks relating to nutrition, learning, emotional wellbeing, social interaction and financial security are most pronounced during thirteen weeks of school and nursery holidays', and that, 'this is most pronounced during long summer holidays where parents and carers find themselves under increased pressure to feed children and provide

activities for them [...] upon returning to school, children and their wider family network experience decreased health and wellbeing, are less prepared for school and see an increase in referrals to specialist services'.

The uniqueness of this threat during school holidays is borne out by the information submitted to the inquiry on the need for food banks at those times of the year.

Annie Connolly, a PhD student at the University of Leeds, reported in her submission that families who struggle to get by without using their local food bank become particularly anxious in the run-up to each school holiday. The evidence we have received suggests those families in Leeds are not alone. Parents on low incomes in other parts of the country fall back on food banks to ensure their children are fed during school holidays.

Together Lancashire, for example, informed us that, 'many food banks report a spike in demand for parcels during school holidays', and Ruth Fox of Footprints in the Community, based in Redcar, noted that the number of families with children relying on the local food bank 'rose significantly' during the most recent six-week summer holiday.

In similar vein, Heather Black of Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland reported to us that, 'child poverty is high in Middlesbrough, average 30-35% rising to 60% in some wards. The programme we developed was in response to a significant rise in families using the food bank in the summer holidays and also vulnerable families not coping with children at home 24/7 for six weeks with no extra money for activities'.

Nadine Daniel, the Project Manager at Hope+ Foodbank, outlined a similar situation in Liverpool:

'The summer of 2016 saw a very noticeable rise in the number of [local] families needing to access our services. Contact and conversations with other emergency food aid providers in the city region over the summer months of 2016, indicated that all had been significantly busier than



in previous years [...] at least one provider opened a distribution centre that has previously closed through lack of need during summer months [...] we are greatly concerned that what we and other emergency food aid providers experienced in the previous two summers, by way of a statistically significant rise in families accessing our services, will only continue to increase this year’.

Ms Daniel commented further that, ‘the need is continuing into the start of the school year. At the beginning of September we were regularly seeing over 250 people a week’.

The evidence we have received suggests that this growing need for food banks in the holidays is not confined to any particular town, city, or region.

The Trussell Trust, Britain’s largest network of food banks, reported in its submission that the numbers of people seeking help because they could not afford to buy food for their children during school holidays almost doubled in the 2016 summer holiday compared with the previous year. Moreover, Trussell Trust food banks gave 5,000 more emergency food supplies to children in July and August last year than in the previous two months.

**The increase in the number of families with children relying on food banks during school holidays, compared with other parts of the year, demonstrates that there are particular difficulties that arise at those times of the year which restrict families’ ability to afford food.**

#### [How many teachers notice hunger amongst children during school holidays?](#)

A telling sign of the hunger which intrudes upon children’s lives during school holidays is the condition in which they return to school at the end of those holidays. Three submissions – from the National Union of Teachers, Annie Connolly, and Kellogg’s – provided survey data on this issue.

Half of those responding to a survey of 600 school staff that was submitted to the inquiry by the National Union of Teachers, reported that pupils at their school are affected by hunger in the holidays. Of this group, 78% reported that children were turning up to school hungry once the holidays had drawn to a close. A similar proportion (73%) expressed concerns over the negative effect of this hunger on those children’s education, with 69% reporting negative effects of holiday hunger on children’s social wellbeing, and 57% saying that children’s physical health was affected. 80% of those who said that children were affected by holiday hunger concluded that the numbers so affected had increased over the past two years.

37% of the 99 school staff and child protection officers in Leeds who responded to Ms Connolly’s survey, said ‘a few’ children in their school go hungry during school holidays. A further 37% said ‘some’ children do, and an additional 8% said ‘a lot’ go hungry. Moreover, 35% said a few children eat less during school holidays, 40% said some do, and 13% said a lot do. Almost all the respondents said that either a few, some or a lot of children eat more unhealthy food in the holidays. 63% of those who provided these answers agreed that this was due to financial restraints at home.

Similar findings were reported by Kellogg’s in its submission, with 39% of teachers who responded to the survey saying there are pupils in their school that do not get enough to eat over the school holidays. The submission reported also that 41% of parents on low incomes say they sometimes feel isolated in the school holidays due to being unable to afford to go out and entertain their children.

In addition, Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) shared findings from The Catholic Children’s Society Westminster where teachers, ‘are concerned about lack of food during school holidays as parents struggle without free school meals’.

**The survey data submitted to the inquiry suggest that a significant proportion of teachers and school staff notice children returning to school hungry on the first day after the holidays.**

[How much hunger amongst children during school holidays remains hidden?](#)

Despite the growing awareness amongst food banks and teachers around the problem of holiday hunger, it remains one that is largely hidden from the rest of the country. Ken McMeikan, the Chief Executive of Brakes Group, remarked in oral evidence to the inquiry that:

‘I don't think [the Government realises how big an issue holiday hunger is] but equally I don't think those in business and even some in the communities in which that hunger is very evident are aware of it [...] yet when you think about it, it's obvious. When you've got free school meals, what happens when there are thirteen weeks of holiday but nobody thought about what they could or should be doing?’

Those individuals and organisations who have picked up on the problem, and are actively trying to address it in their communities, reported that the extent of hunger amongst children during school holidays is significant and likely to be affecting growing numbers of children. The Croxteth Gems project in Liverpool noted that, ‘for the past four years we have seen an increase in child hunger, over the past year this has been dramatic [...] during school half terms we have 60 children in our building by 9.45am’. David Dorward added that hunger amongst children during school holidays, ‘has been more than apparent in the City of Dundee for some time’, while Gerry Allen, Children’s Centre Manager in the Huyton area of Knowsley, said in oral evidence that holiday hunger, ‘is a big problem, and it’s getting bigger every summer’.

**Hunger amongst children during school holidays is one of Britain’s hidden costs of poverty. It is a cost paid by children. Those individuals and organisations who are**

**actively trying to address the problem report it to be a significant one that affects growing numbers of children.**

We look in the next chapter at the different ways in which hunger weaves itself into the lives of those children, as well as their parents, during school holidays.



## **Chapter 2 – The different forms of hunger amongst children during school holidays**

**The hunger that sneaks up on children and, in many cases, their parents during school holidays shows itself in four different forms:**

- **There is, for some children, the occasional or persistent hunger that results from a total absence of meals when the cupboards at home are bare and there is no money for them to buy food.**
- **There is also the hunger that some parents put themselves through in a last ditch attempt to ensure their children can eat something, anything, each day.**
- **For those families that are managing to scrape together enough money for a filling, stodgy diet to stave off immediate hunger, the poor quality of the food that has been bought to fill hungry stomachs often brings malnutrition into play.**
- **The daily struggle with hunger, for some families, rules out any chance they might otherwise have of going out and enjoying themselves, or even sticking to any kind of routine, in the holidays. Hunger and malnutrition seem to thrive in those families that have been softened up by inactivity, isolation and loneliness.**

### **Empty stomachs resulting from empty cupboards at home**

A most disturbing finding emerged from a recent meeting of the newly formed Feeding Lambeth project which is part of the Feeding Britain network. The organisers of a holiday scheme in the borough reported that some children could not make it through to the end of a football tournament that had been organised, as their

bodies simply gave up on them after the early stages of the tournament. They had not eaten a meal in the days before the tournament. That morning's breakfast, for some, had consisted of an energy drink. Elsewhere, a sense of defeat was expressed by one parent who informed the inquiry they were simply, 'unable to feed my children every day'.

This persistent hunger seems to afflict those children who are queuing to get into projects that offer free meals during school holidays – a LACA member in the south west of England reported that, 'we have had queues of children waiting at the location as we've turned up'.

It can also be seen to afflict children who eat two or three plates of food very quickly once the meals have been served at those projects. Leicester City Council, for example, which has supported projects over the past two years to provide free meals in the holidays, noted that, 'some children were clearly hungry and asked for more breakfast [...] parents were also hungry but many were conscious of eating at the clubs, preferring to give the food to their children [...] many children were not used to eating breakfast at all'.

Similar findings were shared by the Croxteth Gems project, where, 'even if you just look at our February half term, one week feeding 60 children per day for five days, this equates to a minimum of 600 meals (300 breakfasts and 300 lunches). I say "minimum" because many of these children are so hungry they will eat two or three breakfasts and dinners'.

Looking deeper into the poverty which had engulfed their lives, the project went on to outline some of the circumstances confronting those children at home during the Christmas period:

'Amongst them was a 10 year-old boy who had never celebrated Christmas and totally accepted this because his mother told him they could not afford Christmas. At another home we saw four small children in a house and their only furniture

in their living room was a single bed. Another home had only a child's picture of a Christmas tree on the wall to reflect it was the festive season'. A similarly striking account was given by the St Vincent de Paul Society at a recent meeting of Feeding Birkenhead. The Society had observed while delivering food parcels to families that some of the rooms in their homes had nails sticking out from wooden floors, with large gaps between floorboards, even though babies and young children were living there.

The extraordinary response by some members of the community to the problem of hunger amongst children during school holidays was explained within an evaluation of Hull's Holiday Hunger project which was submitted to the inquiry by Food4Hull. 'During the pilot', the evaluation said, 'staff members have been willing to give up their time to serve the children at the clubs whilst only being paid half pay. They do this to ensure the children are eating because otherwise they know that "most of the children would just go without"'.

There are, of course, other children whose hunger remains under the radar. King's Church, Leicester, reported that, 'we have come across a few children that are really in need and hungry [...] we believe that there are more hungry children out there in our area but part of the problem is getting the parents to bring them along'.

#### Parents' last ditch attempts to feed their children

Several of the incidents of persistent hunger that have been shared with the inquiry may have arisen from the carelessness, occasionally bordering on neglect, with which some parents bring up their children. However, much of the evidence we received was of parents doing everything they possibly can with limited resources to feed their children. As Lindsay Graham, an independent school food and health advisor, said in oral evidence to the inquiry, 'when the children are hungry, you can bet your bottom dollar that the parents are hungry too'.

We were touched by some of the parents' coping mechanisms that were described to the inquiry. Rachel Warwick, the founding director of MakeLunch, told us in oral evidence of, 'whole armies of parents who do the absolute best they can for their children, and that often means they go without meals themselves, or they're surviving on water with lemon, cereal, or whatever leftovers there are from what their children eat. They can't afford to buy food for the whole family'.

Likewise, a school governor in Birkenhead reported that, 'parents are also going without food in order to feed their children and this in itself becomes a health concern as a parent who has malnutrition due to going without to feed a child/children is at risk'. Such sacrifices, according to the governor, occasionally extend beyond children's parents to the, 'many grandparents [who] step into the breach when able, they do what they can to support and do so with incredible tact and diplomacy. Grandparents are also finding themselves with tremendous burdens or financial strain and worry and this again has the potential to impact on health resources'.

Further coping strategies were cited by Kellogg's which, in its submission, drew upon the findings of a research project undertaken by Northumbria University's Healthy Living Lab. One of those findings was that, 'parents adopted a range of strategies to ensure their children ate enough, including reducing their own food intake by cutting portions or skipping meals completely, compromising on the nutritional balance of meals by providing a greater quantity of cheaper, less nutritious foods and accepting support from family, friends and external agencies such as food banks'.

One of the Healthy Living Lab's members, Dr Pamela Graham, expanded on this point in oral evidence to the inquiry:

'Parents talk about struggling with things like the additional cost of meals during the holidays, as well as childcare and activities, and one thing that parents really do stress when we speak to them

is they do everything they can to make sure their children are fed. But some of the things that they rely on – skipping meals themselves, pooling food with neighbours and family to make sure there's enough to go around, and relying on cheaper, processed foods to feed their children – is because what a lot of them perceive is that the quantity has to take precedence over the quality.'

In all too many cases, though, parents' last ditch efforts fail to protect their children from hunger. Professor Defeyter, a colleague of Dr Graham's, noted in her submission that while many parents, 'do whatever is possible to feed their children, often at times it is not enough and the children are left undernourished and hungry'.

### Malnutrition

However difficult some families may find it to afford food from week to week, or even day to day, during school holidays, they do not necessarily exist on an empty stomach. It was reported to the inquiry that, in some cases, it is malnutrition, rather than persistent hunger, that takes root. This is particularly likely to be the case when families are surviving on cheap, stodgy food that temporarily keeps hunger at bay without necessarily giving children and their parents the nutrients their bodies need for a healthy existence.

A clear indication of this problem came from one of the projects helping to deliver Feeding Britain's programme of school holiday meals and fun in Birkenhead. During one half term, the project had prepared a small table with cakes and biscuits, and another with fresh fruit. The project reported that upon arrival, all of the children coming through the door headed directly to the fresh fruit, as they had had enough of the sporadic, unhealthy snacks on which they had been surviving at home.

In the light of this finding, it is not surprising that one of the town's schools, St Peter's Catholic Primary School, reported to the inquiry that children, 'are fed in a haphazard manner during the holidays', and that, '[a] lack of food in houses

or inappropriate food, e.g. reliance upon crisps, biscuits, sweets etc., is more apparent where a range of problems exist in a family, e.g. parental dependency upon alcohol/drugs, parental mental health problems, parents have learning difficulties'.

Moreover, Val Barron, a Development Worker with Communities Together Durham, reported that, 'there are incidences in a number of cases of visible child hunger, however access to affordable, healthy food is often the problem [...] responding to this we have tried wherever possible to provide healthy meals and have bowls of fruit and veg available throughout sessions'.

Based on its own school holiday meal and fun project, FutureVersity noted that, 'fresh fruit is a surprising hit with all. Our experience is that genuinely few youngsters were hungry, more that the types of food they consumed provided very poor nutrition and were very calorific'. Similar observations were made within the evaluation of Hull's Holiday Hunger project included within Food4Hull's submission, which noted that, 'at home, parents can provide substance rather than sustenance such as bread or potatoes, and be lured by the cheap supermarket deals. Local amenities on the estates typically provide frozen food and takeaway shops'.

Several troubling findings on this front were presented to the inquiry by StreetGames:

'Many of those who had attended the sessions [in our summer pilot] had never before been exposed to common fruit and vegetables; [...] food with less nutritional value was often more affordable; and, for many parents the cost and logistics around transport was an additional barrier to securing nutritious food. During an evening holiday football session at Wirral Positive Futures a staff member asked a participant who had vomited what he had eaten that day and was told he had only eaten a packet of crisps for breakfast and lunch.'

### Inactivity, isolation and loneliness

While most children are able to go out and enjoy themselves, be it with their parents, other relatives or friends during school holidays, the evidence we have received suggests that families who are most at risk of being hungry or malnourished at those times of year are simultaneously likely to be inactive, isolated or lonely.

It was put to the inquiry by Heather Black that children, ‘become socially isolated as there is no money to take part in activities, when they return to school in September there is significant stigma from having nothing to share from holiday activities’. One aspect of this inactivity is a lack of any kind of routine, with one parent in Oldham commenting to the Healthy Living Lab that, ‘[the children] do lack [routine] during summer, then it’s hard when they start back in school, it’s really hard to try and get them back into a routine’. Moreover, in an evaluation of Hull’s Holiday Hunger project submitted to the inquiry by Food4Hull, it was reported that some young people, ‘are “kicked out of the house” while parents go to work. They can have limited money to buy food; are without a key to the home; and have very little to do’.

The Ashrammoseley housing association reported to us that for poorer families in particular during school holidays, ‘opportunities for learning, socialising and playing significantly contract relative to more affluent families and term-time periods’, while research submitted to the inquiry by Professor Defeyter found that, ‘isolation was thought to be an issue that numerous families faced during school holidays as many of the activities available for families incur a cost thus parents are restricted in what they are able to do with their children’.

Drawing upon the experiences of those families relying on Hope+ Foodbank, Nadine Daniel argued:

‘Families that are struggling to provide food for their children, demonstrably will not be in a

position to provide stimulation and opportunities for development during school holiday periods [...] Children in financially distressed households are likely to spend disproportionately lengthy periods in the home environment, with the use of television and internet as electronic nannies. This has the following effect on physical and mental wellbeing, which is carried forward into term time: lack of exercise together with overreliance on foods with high carbohydrate and sugar content are already statistically leading to a significant increase in childhood obesity amongst families in food poverty; lack of outdoor activities results in vitamin D deficiency with consequential effects on both physical and mental development; lack of peer interaction leads to poor socialisation and behavioural development.’

Hunger affects different groups of children and their parents in several different, although equally horrific ways during school holidays. We examine in chapter 4 the impact of these different forms of hunger on children’s quality of life, as well as their chances of growing up to become healthy, well-educated adults. But, first, we look at what are likely to be the main causes of hunger amongst children at those times of the year.

### Chapter 3 – The causes of hunger amongst children during school holidays

The APPG on Hunger has, in its previous reports, identified those factors which are most likely to bring individuals and families face to face with hunger. They include the delayed processing and payment of benefits and tax credits, benefits being sanctioned, low and unpredictable earnings, and the disproportionately high utility costs, plus rent and Council Tax, paid by households on low incomes. Throughout the course of this particular inquiry we looked at those specific factors which make it difficult for families to afford sufficient food during school holidays.

There are three unique factors that heighten the risk of hunger amongst children during school holidays: the loss of free school meals that are available during term time; the lack of affordable childcare for working parents; and the higher overall costs of looking after children when they are not in school.

#### The loss of free school meals

The provision of free school meals during term time represents an acknowledgement by the state that the parents of those children in receipt of the meals would otherwise struggle to pay for their lunch. This begs the question, therefore, as to why the logic ceases to apply during school holidays. It was put to the inquiry in oral evidence from Rachel Warwick, that, ‘if you have free school meals for kids, and then take them away during the holidays, obviously there is going to be a problem’.

Professor Defeyter estimated that the loss of free school meals adds between £30 and £40 per week to parents’ outgoings during school holidays, although this figure will, of course, increase if there is a greater number of children to be fed. Over the course of the year this amounts to a total cost of anything between £390 and £520. For families living in poverty, this can be a source of great difficulty.

On the basis of the local authority’s own work to counter hunger amongst children during school holidays, Brian Kieley of Gateshead Council remarked that, ‘holiday hunger is a real problem for families in Gateshead who normally receive free school meals. Providing those extra meals during school holidays can be a real struggle for many families [...] so there is real concern that some families will struggle to meet the costs of feeding their children during the holidays.’ Ken Campbell, a Facilities Manager with North Ayrshire Council, another local authority that has been active on this front, similarly remarked that, ‘causes [of holiday hunger] in North Ayrshire are around [the] additional burden on families to pay for food for children during long spells of holidays when they would normally be provided a meal at school.’

#### The lack of affordable childcare

A second additional cost served up by the school holidays – that of finding suitable childcare – is acutely felt by parents who work for low wages. What Works Scotland reported to the inquiry that this additional cost alone is large enough to ‘impoverish families’ during the holidays.

The Family and Childcare Trust focused much of its submission on, ‘the dramatic increase in childcare costs that working families face during school holidays’. The Trust reported that:

‘For low-income families, these fluctuations can throw off carefully managed budgets. In addition, our research shows that there is not enough childcare to meet demand during school holidays. If a family is not able to find appropriate childcare, they are left with little choice apart from stopping work or reducing their hours [...] for many areas of the UK, parents who normally rely on after school clubs or childminders for childcare cover during term time must pay over double for holiday care.’

Fiona Twycross AM echoed this concern, noting how, due to a shortage of affordable childcare in the holidays, ‘those who are in insecure jobs may have to reduce their hours so the household

income takes a hit at the same time their children are not receiving free school meals', as did Children in Scotland, which said, 'childcare is obviously one of the most significant costs for parents that is not shared by other household types. High childcare costs are one of the key issues affecting parents on low income in particular, and form a major barrier to taking up employment or increasing hours worked for many parents'.

The Family and Childcare Trust presented data showing that three out of four local areas do not have enough childcare in the school holidays and the shortages are even more acute in some regions and nations: no local authorities in Wales or the East of England reported having sufficient holiday care. What Works Scotland reported likewise that in Scotland, 'not only is holiday childcare expensive but it is also in many areas inadequate and unavailable'.

The consequences of this scenario were outlined by Rev. Steve Carpenter and Catherine Hitchell from Tranmere Methodist Church, who noted from their school holiday meals and fun project that, 'parents are often under pressure through lack of time because of work commitments', and Rochdale Councillor John Blundell, who reported that holiday hunger, 'tends to [occur] because there is nobody at home to feed [the children]; [their parents] are too busy working'.

According to CSAN, those parents working on zero-hours contracts, in which shifts can fluctuate from one week to the next, with no guaranteed minimum number of hours, are particularly vulnerable to the higher costs of childcare during school holidays.

### [The higher overall costs of looking after children when they are not in school](#)

Several of those individuals and organisations submitting evidence to the inquiry identified food and childcare as just two of the many additional costs that parents incur during school holidays. It was suggested to us that it is the overall package of additional costs, including fuel and activities, as

well as food and childcare, brought on by the holidays which makes it difficult for some families to afford sufficient food for their children.

One example given by CSAN was, 'the additional gas needed to cook the meals - 30 minutes extra usage of the cooker each day equals two and a half hours extra gas each week, which can be significant for those who have a pay as you go meter'. Nathan Atkinson developed this point further, saying that, 'a number of our families live in fuel poverty, this impacts on hunger too. Lack of power makes it difficult to cook food but also to the extent of even keeping milk cold in a fridge that may have been without power for some time'.

CSAN added that, 'the majority of the [Cardinal Hume Centre's summer holiday programme] attendees are unemployed and often face other pressures, such as cramped accommodation and a lack of money to find ways to entertain their children during the holidays', while Sustain concluded that, 'throughout these periods, parents have the challenges of managing increased childcare demands, heavier domestic bills and the cost of providing extra meals. Children living in these circumstances often experience multiple difficulties including hunger, poor quality food, social isolation, learning loss and family tension'.

The burden of these additional costs on families who scrape by from one week to the next during term time can become unbearable. Several projects reported that the number of families seeking their help tends to increase towards the end of each holiday as money becomes increasingly tight – the Epsom Street Centre, for example, highlighted how donations to the 'giving plate' in the summer holiday were far more likely to come at the beginning of the month, and that more people made use of the informal provision of tinned food towards the end of the month as money ran out.

Based on the experiences of those families in Knowsley who were accessing the borough's free meal and fun projects during the summer holiday, Gerry Allen reported that when the burden of



additional costs had become unbearable, ‘very often, food was going close to the bottom of the list [...] The key issue is that strain on household budgets, for all sorts of reasons. Things like this can push them over the edge’.

It was suggested to us that this burden could be particularly heavy in Northern Ireland. Children in Northern Ireland noted in its submission that, ‘while families in Northern Ireland are struggling to feed their children day to day, during school holidays this becomes an even bigger problem. School holidays - particularly the summer period - within Northern Ireland are extremely long (8 weeks)’.

The broader point raised here, about the school holidays representing a financial cliff edge for families struggling to manage from week to week, was developed by Child Poverty Action Group, which argued that:

‘The extra costs of feeding children who may have been in receipt of free school meals in term time, and of providing both childcare and activities for their children, can push families who were previously just about managing into hardship, or make things even harder for those who were already struggling. Often, the costs of the school holidays can present themselves as holiday hunger, given that the food budget is often the only one within the household in which there is any leeway, but it is important to note that this issue is not only about food.’

Several other submissions raised similar points. Heather Black reported that, ‘the issue is not simply around food, but families already facing many challenges, struggling to make ends meet, maybe suffering with mental health and wellbeing issues. When the children are at home all day the cracks really begin to appear’, while Nadine Daniel argued that, ‘[There is] the obvious requirement to spend more on children during the holiday period. Not merely the cost of food, but the additional cost of fuel to prepare that food, and the need to provide a main meal, whereas in term time reliance is placed on main

meal provision being via one or more free school meals’.

Further evidence provided by What Works Scotland highlighted how school holidays can move families on low incomes, ‘from “coping” into debt, food insecurity, isolation and poor health’. The organisation shared the findings of a survey undertaken by Child Poverty Action Group Scotland with 223 parents in Glasgow:

- Just under two thirds of parents responding to the survey said that their debts increase during school holidays and two thirds have no savings.
- Just over one third of parents responding to the survey said that they had found it hard to pay for meals in the holidays.
- Over a quarter of parents had skipped meals to feed their children during school holidays. In addition, parents in several groups indicated that ‘return to school’ expenses, particularly uniform costs, affect budgets during school holidays and their ability to pay for holiday activities.
- 14% of parents had reduced their working hours and 37% had changed their working hours to manage childcare.

Picking up on the increased risk of families digging themselves deeper into debt during school holidays, The Children’s Society reported that, ‘for many families problem debt begins with an unexpected income shock’, and that, ‘[if] temporary financial setbacks do not quickly improve parents find that keeping up with repayments on top of living costs only make things harder, and the use of further credit in order to try to regain control can lead to families spiralling into a debt trap’.

It was also suggested to the inquiry that the onset of additional costs for families on low incomes becomes much more difficult to manage when parents do not have the confidence or skills they need to shop and cook on a limited budget.

One witness told the inquiry that, ‘whilst it might not be a popular observation, it is a fact that many people do not spend their limited budget wisely in respect of food. We would assert that this is due to: a lack of basic budgeting skills; [and] an inability of unwillingness to cook’. In addition, Ken Campbell highlighted, ‘a generational change around being able to cook food and understanding what is a nutritious diet for children’, and CSAN identified, ‘a lack of life skills, including money management and cooking skills’, among some families.

A further compounding factor, again in some cases, rather than across the board, is the restricted availability of support services for particularly vulnerable parents during school holidays – the time of year when, it could be argued, the need for them is most acute.

Birmingham City University, in particular, pointed out how, ‘conventional support networks, especially those provided through and by schools, are not available in school holidays’, and the Ashrammoseley housing association raised concerns around, ‘risk factors including debt which are heightened during school and nursery holiday periods due to the increased demand for food and activities alongside the contraction of mental and physical activity support services, social contact, free school meals and safeguarding’.

**There is, of course, a whole series of underlying trends not only in Britain, but across all advanced Western economies, that give rise to families’ vulnerability to hunger during school holidays. Looking only at those factors that are unique to the holidays themselves, rather than the rest of the year, leads us to conclude that it is the additional demands placed on the budgets of families on low incomes – most notably from food, fuel, activities, and childcare – at those times of year that lower children into the clutches of hunger. In some cases, this horror is compounded by parents’ lack of confidence or a shortage of skills to cook and shop on a budget.**

Our task in the next chapter is to identify the impact of this hunger on children, both in terms of their quality of life as well as their chances of growing up to become healthy, well-educated adults.



## **Chapter 4 – The impact of holiday hunger on children’s life chances**

**We are concerned that hunger amongst children during school holidays serves to exacerbate the inequalities in life chances that already exist between children from wealthier and poorer backgrounds.**

**The evidence we have received on the impact of hunger on children during school holidays is deeply troubling. It reveals how those children who exist on an impoverished diet, while taking part in little or no activity in the holidays, return to school malnourished, sluggish, and dreary – some even lose ‘significant’ amounts of weight, while others gain a lot of weight.**

**Moreover, it suggests that this group of children start the new term several weeks, if not months, intellectually behind their more fortunate peers who have enjoyed a more wholesome diet and lots of activity during the holidays.**

### **Returning to school in poor physical and mental condition**

It was reported to the inquiry that, due to a shortage of food and activity over the holidays, some children are returning to school in a worse condition at the beginning of each new term compared with the final day of the previous term.

The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland has recorded that, ‘some children in receipt of free school meals during term time have arrived back at school in a worse physical and mental condition than when they left to go on holiday, having not had a decent meal during that period. Clearly this can have a detrimental impact on children's mental and physical wellbeing, as well as their educational attainment.’

Similarly, Jane Hicken, Derbyshire County Council’s Public Health Manager, mentioned how, ‘during protracted school holiday periods such as the summer holidays the impact [of holiday hunger can include] children returning undernourished and underweight’. Likewise, the Great Places housing association reported that, ‘the impact is worse during summer holidays, which are longer, with some of the children’s centres we work with reporting significant weight loss and signs of malnutrition in September’. Together Lancashire too informed us that, ‘malnutrition leading to obesity or underweight children and young people is ever more evident across Lancashire; rickets is emerging as a health issue again [...] malnutrition during school holidays together with lack of structured [and] positive activities leads to poor engagement of children on their return to school’.

We also heard in oral evidence from Ken Campbell that in North Ayrshire, some children return to school thirsty, as well as hungry, after the holidays. He explained that, ‘it’s not just about holiday hunger. It has an impact on obesity, nutrition, hydration and education. When people come back after a long holiday, they are thirstier. Even after a week-long midterm holiday, children come back really thirsty. It’s a whole mixed bag – holiday hunger crosses all of these boundaries’.

Further unsettling evidence was forthcoming from Children in Scotland, which reported that, ‘going to school hungry and struggling through the long school holidays not only impacts these children’s happiness and wellbeing<sup>6</sup>, it also severely limits their mental and physical development with long-lasting and wide-ranging consequences. They are most likely to suffer from type 2 diabetes, obesity and to have a healthy life expectancy of 23 years less than their most affluent counterparts<sup>7</sup>’.

Focusing on the malnutrition element of holiday hunger, an evaluation of Hull’s Holiday Hunger project submitted to the inquiry by Food4Hull,

<sup>6</sup> Child Poverty Action Group (2014) Free School Meals Campaign: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/school-meals>

<sup>7</sup> The Scottish Government (2015) *Long-Term Monitoring of Health Inequalities*

reported that school cooks, ‘noticed a marked difference in the weight of certain children following the holiday periods. Children that are receiving food at home are often receiving food of little or no nutritional value and thus exacerbating weight gain’.

FutureVersity, meanwhile, linked the shortage of wholesome food with a lack of exercise, arguing that, ‘[a] lack of access to free school meals means poor nutrition that along with proven reduction in mobility and exercise leads to rising Body Mass Index’. Likewise the Mayor’s Fund for London highlighted how, ‘health services report that the Body Mass Index of poorer children increases dramatically in the school holidays. This is thought to be because these children engage in less activity and eat a poor diet’.

Professor Defeyter submitted research linking this weight gain with the consumption of ‘primarily unhealthy cheap food, rather than more expensive fruits, vegetables and lean protein’. Additional research included with Professor Defeyter’s submission highlighted how hungry, or malnourished, children:

- show higher prevalence of dental caries;
- have frequent headaches and stomach aches;
- have higher prevalence of chronic illnesses;
- suffer from increases in anxiety, depression and other forms of psychiatric distress; and
- have increased levels of off-task, irritable, aggressive and oppositional behaviour.

### Starting the new school term at a disadvantage

Lots of children take a while to get back into the swing of things when they return to school after a long break. One example of this is the significant decline in children’s spelling performance over the holidays, which is a preliminary finding of research from primary schools in England and Scotland that was submitted to the inquiry by Professor Defeyter.

However, the evidence we have received suggests that those children who are hungry or malnourished during school holidays are likely to suffer the most severe effects of this ‘learning loss’ – their behaviour and concentration levels deteriorate at a rapid rate and they take the longest amount of time to readjust to school after the holidays.

Summarising the available research on this matter, What Works Scotland reported that, ‘low-income children’s skills regress more than those of middle- and high-income children during summer [...] by the time school begins each year, low-income children’s lack of access to enriching summer activities results in their falling weeks, if not months, behind their more advantaged peers’.

Part of the research base included within What Works Scotland’s analysis has been formed by the Northern Housing Consortium, which identified that, ‘children living in poverty dropped further behind their better-off peers when schools closed and they had no access to free school meals’, and were, ‘often physically and mentally unprepared for learning when they returned’.<sup>8</sup>

This is particularly likely to be the case, according to Together Lancashire, after the six-week summer holidays, ‘where the chair of governors of the primary school, in one of the 10% most deprived wards in the country, notes that it can take up to five weeks for a child to be physically

<sup>8</sup> Rai, S., *Food poverty: school holidays and wider impact* (Northern Housing Consortium, 2015)

and mentally ready to reengage at school after the long holidays’.

Along similar lines, the Mayor’s Fund for London told us how teachers report, ‘malnourished children returning to school after the holidays having fallen behind compared to their peers’, while Ken Campbell stated that in North Ayrshire, ‘some school children returning to school after holiday periods were not always as alert and focused on learning as they were on days when they had been attending school regularly and having regular meals, it was felt that some children were indeed returning to school hungry’.

The submission from Professor Neena Modi, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, meanwhile, noted how, ‘hunger affects the ability of children to concentrate in school as well as impacting adversely on their health’. Evidence to support this statement was produced by schools in Wirral, one of whom reported that hungry children, ‘are less able to concentrate and they often become distracted; this can lead to either aggressive behavior or highly emotional children. These children seem to be on ‘high alert’ always looking around and never being able to sit still; they often shout out or become involved in other children’s issues and make comments [...] some staff use their own money to provide some food as pupils are unable to work otherwise’.

Each of these themes was crystallised in the submission we received from Nathan Atkinson, who reported that, ‘we identified hunger as being a major barrier to learning and believe this has a negative impact on the outcomes achieved by children [...] an empty stomach affects concentration, energy levels, attentiveness, and emotional wellbeing. Prolonged exposure to lack of food ultimately results in children working below age-related expectations [...] close to 70% of the 630 children on roll here at Richmond Hill are eligible for free school meals. The behaviour of children after the school holidays is generally poor, this links to their vulnerability during school holidays and hunger can be a factor in this’.

Similar concerns were expressed by Jane Hicken, who said, ‘children who regularly miss out on meals and arrive at school hungry and thirsty are at a significant disadvantage, lacking concentration and the ability to learn’, and FareShare, which noted how, ‘children who go to school hungry are less likely to be prepared for learning and therefore more likely to fall behind, affecting both their long term mental and physical development’.

Referring in particular to the responses gained from a survey of 150 teenagers, FutureVersity emphasised that, ‘it’s not only physical but mental wellbeing that can be affected. With the closing of the school gates and all of the support mechanisms that are provided there, isolation and loneliness are commonplace [...] these multiple issues lead to problems when the young people go back to school, difficulty adjusting to learning again and making up for learning loss. Teachers do worry about vulnerable pupils over this period and have to spend a long time in the new term getting back to where they left off - estimated to be around six weeks for catch up. This is not rocket science, it’s clear that it is an educational blind spot’.

The summary with which we conclude this chapter, and which also covers much of the evidence we received on this matter, comes from research that was submitted to the inquiry by Professor Defeyter:

‘Children who are hungry more frequently fall behind academically, particularly in Maths and spelling. They also find it more difficult than non-hungry children to maintain self-control, form and maintain relationships and show sensitivity to others, which are as much social problems as they are educational problems. Research has also shown that during school holidays, the decreases in structured activity that children engage in compared with term time can negatively affect children’s learning and attainment. Clearly children who come from food insecure households are at a disadvantage academically to students whose families are food secure.’

In the next section we explore the various attempts that are being made across the country to counter this evil – one which, as we have seen, severely diminishes the ability of those children who experience hunger during school holidays to profit from their education and enjoy healthy lives.

## Chapter 5 – The types of provision in place to address hunger amongst children during school holidays

**As is the case with the many hundreds of food banks, manned by tens of thousands of volunteers, that have sprung up to try and protect large numbers of people in this country from destitution, the natural urge to counter hunger amongst children during school holidays has inspired a multitude of responses in different communities.**

### The national picture

A national survey that was submitted to the inquiry by Professor Defeyter identified 428 different organisations that provide food to children who might otherwise be hungry during school holidays. Of those 428 organisations:

- 29.2% are voluntary or community groups;
- 25.5% are run by local authorities;
- 14% are schools;
- 11.7% are church or faith groups;
- 2.1% are food banks;
- 1.6% are housing associations; and
- a further 15.9% classified themselves as 'other'.

In the light of these findings, we agree with Kellogg's that, 'holiday feeding and breakfast club provision is at best described as a patchwork of different models and ways of working'.

This diverse mixture of organisations currently providing free meals to children during school holidays was broken down in detail by Lindsay Graham, who noted that, 'provision is very mixed from hot meals in church halls, children's centres, schools, and activities in play groups, community centres, and even libraries, to packed lunches

handed out in seaside towns. Cook and eat sessions are popular. I have also seen soups and sarnie sessions, BBQs, picnics, buffets, Christmas hampers, uniform exchange, pay as you feel market stalls, and food boxes. Many of the schemes signpost to services. Education in a mix of forms: physical, nutrition lessons, cookery, coding, children learning arts and crafts, circus skills, sports. [Also] parental support groups signposting to welfare and opportunities for volunteering and employment skills, CV sessions, IT and literacy skills. The list goes on.'

Likewise, LACA stated in its submission that, 'the existing provision for holiday hunger in England and Wales is considerably varied in terms of both the methods of funding used and the size of schemes that are run. There is no set structure for provision of holiday hunger schemes, with local authorities, contract caterers, suppliers and schools all running bespoke schemes in their local areas'.

Referring to the national survey in oral evidence, Dr Pamela Graham reported that the overall number of organisations providing free meals during school holidays is likely to be increasing, but that they are likely to operate in isolation with very little co-ordination. They also tend to be located in communities with higher levels of deprivation. Dr Graham explained that, 'there were clusters of more provision in areas of high deprivation, but similarly what we also found is that some of those areas of high deprivation were lacking provision - there was very little to no provision available [...] a lot of these organisations are running in isolation and there isn't very much joined-up thinking between the organisations and I think that's why that provision is quite piecemeal'.

The greater number of projects providing food for children in deprived communities is likely to be a reflection of what Hilary Hamer from Food4Hull reported to the inquiry, namely, '[the] lack of the ability to access food for families with children is undoubtedly higher in areas of high [deprivation]'.

Moving on from their geographical location to the times of the year in which those organisations are active, Dr Graham noted that, '93% of the holiday clubs were available during summer; when we looked at what was available during Easter and half term, it drops to 66%; and then just 33% during Christmas. Some of the issues that were highlighted were things like funding and recruitment of staff, so they're really up against it in trying to get these clubs off the ground'.

LACA too found that, 'the schemes run by respondents are mainly done so during summer holiday period. Just under 50% of schemes being run are done so through the whole of the summer holiday period'.

**We have a limited snapshot of initiatives that feed children during school holidays. Even so, within a diverse national picture comprising hundreds of organisations which mostly, although not exclusively, operate in deprived communities during summer holidays, we have identified four main types of provision:**

- **individual churches and community groups that quietly do their bit to try and address holiday hunger;**
- **small networks of churches and community groups that seek to address holiday hunger with the help of start-up grants from local authorities or businesses;**
- **larger networks of schools, children's centres, churches and community groups that are supplied with food and, in some cases, materials for fun activities by local authorities and other organisations; and**
- **local authorities and devolved bodies that run projects in schools.**

**Most projects try to combine hot meals or packed lunches with fun activities – sports,**

**arts, crafts, games, and cooking – as this ensures children can receive food without any sense of stigma.**

### Individual churches and community groups

There are some churches and community groups whose reaction to hunger amongst children during school holidays has been to incorporate the provision of meals and, where possible, fun activities as an additional strand of their work. With sheer guts and good will, but also considerable difficulty, they have just got on with the job of preventing children from going without food.

Ruth Fox, for example, told the inquiry that, 'every August we open our Lunch Box project three days a week at two venues, South Bank Baptist Church and East Cleveland Baptist Church in Redcar. We open from 10am to 11am, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. A parent or carer must attend with the child. On their first visit the children choose a lunch box, they choose which sandwich filling they would like and while their sandwiches are being made there are a range of crafts, quizzes and games for them to take part in. At 11am they come back and collect their sandwich, a crisp/corn snack, fruit, snack bar and juice or water to be put in their lunch box. Each time they attend they bring their lunch box to be refilled [...] September 2016 saw a total of 338 packed lunches provided in South Bank (to 57 different children) over the month and 196 (to 32 different children) in Redcar'.

Val Barron reported of a further church-led initiative in the north east of England, in which, 'the aim has been to bring people together to have Fun, Food and Friendship in areas where we know families struggle during the holidays. [There are] church-led activities in approximately 30 locations including Sunderland, Gateshead, Stockton and Hartlepool. Over the last two summers we have provided over 10,000 meals to children and families in areas of high child poverty.'



The inquiry was really encouraged to learn of the steps being taken by some projects to provide wraparound support for parents whose children's hunger is but one of the problems being faced by their family.

Dr Graham informed us in oral evidence of a club in Northern Ireland which had, 'brought people in as part of the holiday club, but within that they were running extra groups for parents once children had gone back to school because the parents wanted to come and meet up. They had a CV club going and a sewing group, and things like that. The holiday clubs offer an opportunity that is quite non-threatening for parents. They come in, bring their children in to play, have a meal, and then there's additional support there that isn't like having to walk into somewhere a bit more formal'.

A similarly impressive example was outlined by CSAN, in which, 'The Epsom Street Centre [...] have the older children cook the meals for the younger ones, often their siblings, and share in the meal. This way, they are not given the meal, but earn it. In addition, they are taught basic culinary skills, such as how to produce cheap but nutritious food in large batches'. The Centre, 'also offers a holistic approach to problem solving and has many community partners who come along and support the local community members with other issues such as health and wellbeing, benefits, housing, debt advice, tax credits, and education (formal and informal) including NVQs and AQAs [...] the immediate needs of the families are met (hunger) and the long term problems they face can also be addressed'.

### [Small networks of churches and community groups](#)

Feeding Birkenhead's programme of school holiday meals and fun was established with the help of start-up grants worth £2,500. The grants were awarded to each individual project by Wirral Council and the Magenta Living housing association. The programme has operated in every school holiday since May 2015, helping over 2,000 children in Birkenhead access free food and

fun activities. Eight projects have, at various stages, been involved in its delivery.

The inquiry learnt of a similar approach being taken in Gateshead, where in 2016 the local authority provided financial assistance to 23 community groups to help families with the cost of feeding their children during the six-week summer holiday. Gateshead Council provided funding totalling £10,000 for food and activities.

Elsewhere, in Glasgow, two primary schools in Dalmarnock and Ibrox are among those receiving start-up support from Brakes Group as part of its Meals and More programme. Children in Scotland believes this model, 'to be most effective in eliminating holiday hunger and aptly demonstrates all that can be achieved when communities take action to forge partnerships that are appropriate to local needs'.

A main finding from those networks that have begun directly to address hunger amongst children during school holidays is the importance of incorporating fun, as well as food, within their provision. The Tranmere Methodist Church, for example, has found from its activities as part of Feeding Birkenhead, that:

'The parents are looking for low-cost activity for their children and the added benefit of food is very welcome. Our provision has ranged from crafts and other activity sessions led by sports, and even magician professionals to use their energy creatively. We try to be educational in engendering team work, teaching new skills on occasion, appreciating other people and food. We believe that if we published the provision as free food, the take up would not be so high as families wish to retain their dignity and may not wish to declare their children are hungry for fear of being accused as poor parents or even neglect.'

FareShare agreed that, 'it's important that holiday provision is positioned as something that children and young people can access for fun activities, socialising and eating'.

Jo Jobling of the WomenCentre echoed this sentiment, based on a Holiday Kitchen project which ran once a week for five weeks of the 2016 summer holiday in Mixenden, Halifax, stating that, 'Holiday Kitchen had a unique format that included demonstrations by an award winning professional chef. The preparation tips helped to motivate parents, encouraging them to try it for themselves. The sessions were designed to be fun and engaging for all ages and included craft activities, outdoor play, and take home ingredients with recipe cards to help make the meal at home'.

We also heard in oral evidence from Rachel Warwick how projects try to combine their food and fun elements. She reported that, 'our team of volunteers plays games to get children eating healthier: "you get more points for eating a green item, than a brown one", for example, or, "I'll try it, if you try it." Parents are learning recipes they can then go home and cook. If there are barriers to healthy eating, you can get around them by making them fun'.

### Larger networks of organisations

Three of the devolved bodies and local authorities, as well as a housing association, submitting evidence to the inquiry reported that, rather than give individual projects start-up grants, their role in countering hunger amongst children during school holidays has been to pay for a variety of organisations to provide food, alongside additional activities, for children at those times of the year.

First, the Mayor's Fund for London informed us that in an initial pilot project it, 'worked with 14 existing clubs across seven London boroughs to provide healthy meals and a range of social development activities during school holidays and delivered over 4,000 meals to 600 children and young people. As well as food and social activities, children learnt new skills like cooking and budgeting'.

Second, Gerry Allen reported in oral evidence that Knowsley Council's investment, 'was in the

voluntary, community and faith sector. We didn't do too many additional activities or set things up, but we worked with those voluntary organisations to find a way of adding food into their projects. There was increased footfall for those projects as a consequence. We did not involve schools at all. We managed to deliver 71 projects in those five weeks. We reached 1,052 individuals - 400 adults and 652 children.'

A similar approach appears to have been piloted by Dundee City Council in partnership with a local catering contractor, although, as David Dorward's submission noted, it gradually encompassed many different parts of the community:

'In 2016 Tayside Contracts made a commitment to provide cold meals over the six week summer period, at a cost of £2 per meal. The meals were to consist of rolls, sandwiches, wraps, fruit, yogurts, desserts and water. The meals would be prepared at the Tay Cuisine facility at Claverhouse, and then delivered by vans to the individual projects throughout the City. It should be stressed that the meals were to be delivered to existing or planned holiday projects, and that the programme in itself did not run any new projects, but simply provided and delivered the meals.

'In the first two weeks the meals were delivered by drivers and attendants from the Children and Families Department. These staff then went on holiday, and the last four weeks the meals were delivered by a combination of drivers from Communities at Mitchell Street and the Brooksbank Centre, and attendants from Police Scotland Youth Volunteers and members of the public. The daily average meals over the 30 day period was 638 to an average of 20 projects.'

Holiday Kitchen, meanwhile, provides family learning, food and play activity programmes to low-income and vulnerable families in school holidays. It was founded by the Accord Group following community consultations in East Birmingham. The programmes are primarily delivered through the existing infrastructure of



children's centres, domestic violence refuges and, to a lesser extent, community centres and faith centres which are open, meet statutory requirements and are staffed in some way to facilitate community activities. Over the last four years the project has delivered over 16,000 activity days with meals to 2,138 participants in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester.

A partnership between Liverpool Council for Voluntary Services, Merseyside Play Action Council, Liverpool City Council's Public Health department, and Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group, resulted in the Positive About Play project. In the 2016 summer holiday, the project provided 48,071 meals and snacks via 58 play schemes. Most of the schemes supplemented this food with fun activities and cooking sessions. Some also provided debt advice for parents attending with their children.

### Projects run in schools

A further option for the provision of free meals and fun for children during school holidays, which again has been pursued by some devolved bodies and local authorities, is to operate through networks of schools.

The Welsh Local Government Association provided details of Wales' Food and Fun club model which was developed and piloted in Cardiff in 2015, and implemented in 19 schools the following year in Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Neath Port Talbot, Denbighshire, and Wrexham. A total of 323 children attended the 10 Food and Fun clubs participating in the evaluation during the 2016 summer holiday. Each holiday club opened for a total of 12 days over a three or four week period in the summer holidays, with core daily components involving a free breakfast, a minimum of one hour of physical activity, free lunch and nutrition education. One day each week, family members were invited to join the children for lunch.

As an additional feature of the project, according to the submission from the Waste Resources and Action Programme (WRAP), Love Food Hate

Waste worked with Green City Events to run two sessions for parents and children in three schools - one focused on a 'Grub Gremlins' food storage activity, whilst the other focused on portioning, and had the families creating a burrito, learning how to portion correctly for the age and number of people they were cooking for, including measuring rice, cheese, and vegetables, equipment needed, and cooking times. The families were then given the opportunity to eat this lunch that they had prepared together at the school.

In an attempt to build on the success of this activity, the Welsh Government has committed to funding a national rollout of food and fun activities for children during school holidays.

The school-based approach has also been taken up by North Ayrshire Council, as explained by Ken Campbell:

'The [Council] decided to create a pilot where three schools would open covering the pupils from five schools, the [Council] looked at the percentage of pupils on school rolls receiving free meals and chose the locations according to this information [...] our holiday meals programme has now been running for three years and has gone from strength to strength, we provided 11,800 meals in 2016, reaching 23 schools [...] A marked increase in number of children attending the initiative was recorded with the introduction of the activity sessions before the lunch service.'

Mr Campbell elaborated in oral evidence, that:

'56.5% of all primary school children [in North Ayrshire] are entitled to free school meals. That's one of the reasons why we started four years ago. We've now got 23 schools operating, as well as a number of community partners. We're close to a cumulative total of 12,000 meals being served - close on 500 meals a day - across the 23 schools. It's underpinned by not just school lunch, but activities and making it a community place and a social event. We're also expanding to deliver support for families, whether that's money matters or working with other agencies on

training and advice [...] there's training for the parents as well as the young people. We let them build their own pizza and salads, and things like that, so we're getting them engaged in the meal. It's making food fun.'

In response to an invitation from Feeding Britain, Aberdeen City Council announced it would soon begin trialling a similar approach.<sup>9</sup>

Schools have formed just one of the venues in Derbyshire County Council's initiative to counter holiday hunger, which again has been more prominent in relatively deprived parts of the county, including Grassmoor, Gamesley, Amber Valley, and Bolsover. Jane Hicken informed us that, '6,266 children and young people were fed during the six-week holidays (this ranged from breakfasts, packed lunches and snacks) [...] venues where food was provided included three schools, five children's centres, four church communities, five community centres, one sports centre, and one green space'.

Another venue being used for the provision of free meals and fun for children during school holidays is the community library. Rochdale Councillor John Blundell informed the inquiry that, 'during summer 2016, [266] children who attended Smallbridge Library and read for one hour were given a packed lunch. The concept is simple, cheap, and was an instant success [...] many youngsters were introduced to the joy of reading for the first time as a result [...] children in Smallbridge were learning and getting a healthy meal at the same time [...] the scheme genuinely reached out across communities, attracting many people who had never been to the library before'.

We were informed by Dr Clare Pettinger and Brad Pearce that a similar scheme is being developed in Plymouth to, 'provide increased and targeted access to library facilities and provide a healthy meal during the summer holidays. The scheme will provide a free meal and book to feed both body and mind'.

We explore in the next chapter whether this great diversity in the provision of free meals and fun for children during school holidays is reflected in the cost of each project.

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<sup>9</sup> Calvert, J., 'Free school meals could be given to Aberdeen kids in holidays', Evening Express (20 September 2016)

## Chapter 6 – The cost of delivering projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays

The costs incurred by projects providing free meals and fun during school holidays are generally comprised of food, staff, and activities.

Among those organisations based in churches and community centres, the daily cost per child tends not to exceed £5 and, in many cases, does not even reach £2.

The following examples are indicative of the evidence we received on this matter:

- The daily cost per child of StreetGames' Caerphilly pilot varied between £1.07 and £2.01 over the four weeks that sessions ran. Other pilots reported they spent about £1.50 per child per day.
- Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing spent less than £12 per head on each child for up to a week's activities.
- The total cost of MakeLunch Amersham's summer holiday project was £256.33 across 10 sessions with hot meals for 17 different children, and it costs between £1.50 and £2 per meal across the MakeLunch network as a whole, depending on how many children there are and how much food is donated.
- It typically costs Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland around £3 per child per day to cover food and resources for activities.
- The meals served at WomenCentre's Halifax project were easy to prepare, used fresh vegetables and cost an average of £1 per head or less.

In addition, the Mayor's Fund for London reported that, 'in 2016 we piloted a new scheme to help community groups working with children in some of London's most challenging areas

during the holidays to provide healthy food. It proved highly successful, providing a healthy meal and more for less than £5 per child per day'.

The costs associated with providing free meals and fun in schools are generally higher. We were informed that in North Ayrshire a daily cost of £7 per child covers a freshly cooked meal, supervision, play activities and the costs of transporting food. Moreover, in its evaluation of the pilot projects that took place in Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association found that, 'accounting for the average number of children in attendance over the 12 day period, the average unit cost of providing a school-based Food and Fun project is £30.71 per child per day'. Much of this, according to the oral evidence given by Katie Palmer of Public Health Wales, is due to staff costs. She said, 'the food is not the expensive part of the deal; childcare is the expensive element. You're looking at around £20 per child, per session'.

One innovative way of controlling costs was presented in Dr Clare Pettinger's submission. She informed us that Plymouth has a school meals service called CATERed Ltd. It was set up in 2015 as a local authority co-operative trading company, supplying all of Plymouth's primary schools. All schools as shareholders of CATERed Ltd commit some of their budgets for school food to the company and allow it to be spent and allocated where the need is greatest. CATERed employs 274 people, has a production kitchen in every school and procures all the food that is used to feed children throughout the academic year. Ed's Big Summer Food Tour, a free meals project in Plymouth, has in the past two summer holidays delivered food bags to people in parks and other locations across the city, with priority given to deprived areas. Crucially, all food was supplied free of charge by suppliers and all labour to produce the lunches was provided on a voluntary basis by CATERed staff.

**The costs of providing free meals and fun activities for children during school holidays can be as little as £1.50 per child, per day for projects that rely largely upon**

**volunteers and operate in their own community facilities. Projects taking place in schools, and staffed by paid employees, tend to cost in excess of £5 per child, per day.**

## **Chapter 7 – The sources of food for projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays**

**The evidence we have received suggests that projects seeking to address hunger amongst children during school holidays tend to purchase the food they need from retailers, wholesalers, or caterers.**

**Occasionally, though, one of the ways in which some projects attempt to control their costs is to tap into the huge amounts of good, wholesome food that is currently burnt or thrown to landfill by supermarkets and their suppliers after it has become surplus to their requirements.**

Buying in food from retailers can be quite costly for some projects. King's Church, Leicester, for example, informed us that, 'it costs us roughly £70 a day to open [...] at the moment we buy all our food from Aldi'.

On the other hand, Croxteth Gems informed the inquiry that it sources its food from FareShare, Britain's largest network for the redistribution of surplus food. Moreover, the Great Places housing association wrote that, 'some projects have secured food via community allotments, some by FareShare or the Real Junk Food projects, some have obtained donations from local supermarkets and in other cases we have paid via external funding such as the lottery or our own budgets'.

Within a submission from Peter McGrath was the following information from Northern Ireland's Resurgam Trust on the benefits of tapping into this supply of surplus food:

'As the lunch club progressed we expanded our partnership with the SOS Bus, which allowed us to take possession of food to be redistributed from waste. This enabled us to hold food taster sessions for parents who tried new foods, fruits and healthier alternatives and when possible could take some food home. In discussion with parents many remarked that they would not have spent money on trying these new foods and some

of the foods available had not been tried before by the adults. This was an unanticipated benefit of lunch club, which also contributed to reducing food waste'.

Another advocate of this approach was Nathan Atkinson, who wrote:

'We have become aware of the vast amounts of entirely edible waste food that is created each day. Supermarkets, caterers, independent retailers and wholesalers all generate tonnes of waste food that predominantly heads straight to landfill sites. Businesses are charged for the disposal of their waste yet it seems they accept such fees as part of their running costs. With the support of our partners we have been able to intercept waste food products and utilise them within our school based cafe [...] a wide variety of products have been distributed through this initiative: fruit, vegetables, pastries, cakes, bread, cheese, cooking oil, tinned and jarred products to name a few.'

FareShare informed us of its growing level of activity in helping to counter hunger amongst children during school holidays. It will be working with StreetGames on their Fit and Fed programme, which, 'will see the supply of surplus food to help feed over 1,760 children via 44 projects across Yorkshire, the North East, Hull and London. If successful, there are ambitions to extend this programme UK-wide for the summer break potentially targeting between 200-300 community projects (serving between 8,000 and 12,000 young people)'. StreetGames added that, 'deliveries will be once a week, with organisations able to visit FareShare warehouses to collect extra food if required and if it is available'.

FareShare informed us also that, to date, it has supplied meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy and carbohydrates for the preparation of hot meals as well as bread, snacks, juice, water and biscuits to projects with more limited storage and cooking facilities. Dr Clare Pettinger argued that, 'there is a clear role for food surplus organisations to consider how the food chain infrastructure might be improved to support most consistent redistribution of surplus food',

which would enable more projects to provide meals for children at a lower cost, perhaps freeing up resources to cover the costs of staff or activities.

There was, however, a note of caution sounded on this matter. It was reported to us that occasionally, both the quantity and quality of surplus food can be unpredictable.

The Ashrammoseley housing association, for example, whilst noting that its use of surplus food, 'has been very cost effective', pointed out that it, 'sometimes makes meeting health requirements of the Eat Well Guide and Children's Food Trust guidance difficult to achieve'.

Katie Palmer outlined several concerns in her oral evidence to the inquiry:

'We work through existing school suppliers. It's dangerous to be linking surplus food with children's food provision. I have concerns over the sustainability of those models - the unpredictability of supply [and] the safety of the products available through that mechanism. Having said that, we do identify that from an environmental perspective it's prudent to look at how we reduce surplus food. We chose to connect with FareShare as an approved supplier. We use their breakfast cereals as there's plenty of supplies that fit with the nutritional standards for school foods, and they were easily delivered in one batch.'

Ken Campbell added that, 'we found it difficult to get some products through FareShare, and we follow the school nutrition standards. To do that we need to be structured in what we're buying. To rely on food waste may not get you the guaranteed products you require'.

One particular issue raised by Rachel Warwick was the mismatch that exists between projects' needs which arise in the holiday periods only, and the preference of retailers and manufacturers to have a year-round agreement:

'We only want [supermarkets' and manufacturers'] supplies seasonally, and the suppliers want an ongoing solution for that problem. Holiday hunger is not a great fit for them, but also for us there's the unpredictability of what you're going to be given, and the volunteers we work with are not professional cooks. That said, where things are available and we can make use of them, we do. That happens quite a lot locally, rather than centrally.'

This issue, which is most likely to cause difficulties when the infrastructure for collecting and storing surplus stocks is limited or non-existent, was raised by StreetGames too, which reported that, 'our need is for holiday time food and these organisations [supermarkets] would rather agree year round deals'.

Lindsay Graham, meanwhile, argued that, 'while surplus food is helpful it still has a cost and effort required to access it and it cannot be guaranteed what projects will get, so it is difficult to plan meals ahead of time'. She added that, 'the food must be easily available and suitable for each club. A basic allocation to pay for food and preparation from government would achieve much more equity of provision and help with [the] quality and standards of meals provided. Surplus food could then help to supplement menus and recipes rather than being reliant on haphazard end of day/week food surplus'.

Despite these concerns, Together Lancashire outlined a desire amongst projects for further supplies of surplus food to be made available:

'For those organisations in the know, food can be sourced from FareShare, Junk Food projects and other significant food banks. Some private companies (e.g. Warburtons – bread) are keen to be involved in provision, where the logistics can be addressed and effective. There needs to be more joining up of activity providers and food providers.'

Moreover, two local authorities in the East Midlands who relied upon surplus food for their school holiday meal and fun projects both

reported initial difficulties with the quality and quantity of the supplies they received, before eventually managing to resolve them.

**Those projects relying exclusively on food that is bought from retailers, wholesalers, or caterers can face higher overall costs. Others relying exclusively on food that is recycled from the surplus stocks generated by retailers and manufacturers can face a degree of unpredictability in both the quantities and quality of the food they are given.**

**Ideally, projects should be in a position to secure a reliable supply of food at as low a cost as possible. This may perhaps involve a combination of bought goods supplemented by food that is recycled from surplus stocks which would otherwise be destroyed. The establishment of a reliable supply of quality food from recycled surplus stocks across the country would greatly diminish the cost of providing free meals and fun for children during school holidays.**



## **Chapter 8 – The impact of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays**

**The inquiry has been presented with evidence of three main advantages – financial, educational, and in physical and mental health – that add an important element of happiness to the lives of those families who are supported by projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays. Each of these advantages improves children’s quality of life, as well as their chances of growing up to become healthy, well-educated adults, while simultaneously increasing parents’ confidence and adding to their skills base.**

### **The impact on children**

**It was reported to the inquiry that children who attend free meal and fun projects during school holidays eat more healthily, undertake more exercise, demonstrate better behaviour, and return to school in a much improved condition than they would otherwise have done in the absence of those projects. This helps to ensure those children are well-positioned to profit from their education, rather than fall behind their classmates.**

Eight of the submissions we received placed a heavy emphasis on the positive impact of free meal and fun projects on children’s life chances. We were told by:

- The Welsh Local Government Association that, ‘The evaluation [of School Holiday Food and Fun in Wales] found evidence of positive impacts on children’s activity levels, diet, social isolation, and opportunities for learning and engagement with school. Data collected via activity monitors worn by 48 children showed children were significantly more likely to achieve the daily recommendation of 60 minutes moderate to vigorous physical activity when attending the club (71%) compared to other non-club weekdays (48%). The majority reported consuming more fruit and vegetables (67%), less sugary snacks (66%), and less sugary/fizzy drinks (81%) at the club than at home. Potential social and educational benefits were also found: 75% of children reported making new friends at holiday club; parents and staff observed more positive attitudes to school among children attending the holiday clubs’;
- Ken Campbell that, ‘the schools taking part in the initiative [in North Ayrshire] have given feedback on how the children attending the holiday meals initiative return to school after holiday period happier, more alert and ready to learn. [Schools report that] children who attend the holiday meals clubs are not as hungry when they come back to school after a long break and can adapt back into school life quickly as their concentration levels are more receptive than when they have not had the meals’;
- Leicester City Council that, ‘staff, volunteers and parents saw changes in the behaviour of some of the children, with some learning to sit quietly with a book after watching other children doing the same, both at the club and now also at home. Activity facilitators said that the children had more energy and higher concentration levels [...] children also grew in confidence, making new friends and joining in the games and activities’;
- Children in Northern Ireland that, ‘[we] decided to run a pilot holiday hunger programme to support families [in Newry and Mourne] during summer months [...] a total of 15 young people registered for the pilot programme. The analysis of the evaluation found the following outcomes had been achieved: improved mental health and wellbeing for young people; improved nutrition during summer

- holidays; improved educational achievement and no loss of educational memory; increased confidence and skills; reduced poor health through nutrition and exercise [...];
- Birmingham City University that, 'there was increased participation in physical activities during Holiday Kitchen [...] there was increased exposure to reading and language development during the programme [...] the majority of families felt that their children were more ready for school following the programme [...] the increase in mental and social wellbeing is an element of the programme which is a stated aim, but one which continues following the end of the programme';
  - Nathan Atkinson that, 'families are becoming better educated about food and nutrition. The families have built trust with the school and as a result of this outcomes for children are improving. These outcomes have been made possible by utilising food that "the system" deemed useless and not fit for purpose';
  - StreetGames that, 'in 2016 the network ran 18 summer pilots across England, Scotland, and Wales. A total of 1,456 children and young people were engaged in physical activity and fed. Improvements were reported in concentration, behaviour, mood, performance, and healthy eating'; and
  - Professor Defeyter that, 'holiday breakfast clubs were thought to support children and families by providing a reliable source of breakfast throughout the summer break [...] the breakfast meal provided a more varied and substantial breakfast meal than people would have access to at home [...] additionally, it was proposed that attendees would be more likely to eat

breakfast at breakfast club and would consume healthier items than they would have at home [...] it was suggested that providing food to families in need through a free community breakfast club was less stigmatizing than other methods of providing food aid, particularly for children'.

Moreover, almost all of the 17 parents interviewed by the Healthy Living Lab in Strabane, Oldham, and Trafford agreed that the holiday breakfast clubs would make it easier for their children to get on with their work once they returned to school after the summer holidays.

In respect of the longer term impact such projects are having on children, Ken McMeikan commented in oral evidence, that:

'When you have children with food in their stomachs, their attention level is going to be higher, they have a better chance of learning, and there's a positive cycle. If they're learning, they may find a way of getting an education that gets them out of poverty further down the line. This is about much more than just providing food. But food is the essential basic need that children have. What we're trying to provide is about creating the future generation - it's hard as parents to sit by and watch children who for thirteen weeks of the year starve, but from a practical business point of view this is a future workforce that, if we can get them a better education, they will come out better colleagues in the workforce. At the heart of this is developing a better society.'

Similar views were expressed by Katie Palmer – 'that investment you're putting into the holidays is impacting on the physical and mental health of children' – and Gerry Allen, who said that, 'when you actually see kids sitting, eating, and socialising with their friends, they're happier and their esteem gets stronger. The happier the kids are, the healthier they will be - especially at primary school age. The knock-on effect will then last for generations'.

Examples of this impact were reported by parents to Gateshead Council, who said, 'it's brought my son out [to become] more self-confident and more socialising', and, 'when it's on, it's ideal [because] I'll bring them here and they've got stuff on like art stuff or they make pizzas for the kids and the kids can design their own and they'll cook it and they always do cooking, they cook different stuff. They get like fruit and everything and they make fruit cocktails or fruit on a stick with chocolate and there's something different every time, it's not the same thing every week'. A similar comment was made by a parent in Willesden Green to the Mayor's Fund for London: 'As a parent it's good to see my children making new friends, being active and eating healthy food as at home they just watch TV and eat junk food'.

At one recent meeting of Feeding Birkenhead it was reported that during the February half term, one little boy who had never attempted to cook anything in his life was taught how to cook a pasta dish with vegetables. The following week, when he came home from school one evening, the boy could not wait to cook dinner for his family.

According to Dr Pamela Graham, this improvement in children's wellbeing is a main advantage of school holiday meal and fun projects. She reported in oral evidence that, 'we know from speaking with parents and children that they often become quite sedentary over the summer, so they spend a lot of time indoors. What the holiday schemes do, by getting them out, they offer physical activities and sports clubs, so they get children physically active as well as feed them'.

It is also clear that in the absence of such projects, some parents struggle to feed their children, help them socialise, and get them to undertake physical activity. A parent in Trafford, told the Healthy Living Lab that they would have, 'struggled to find activities to amuse [my son] probably because it would have been just me and him whereas [at the breakfast club] he gets the

chance to just play with other kids and he's quite a sociable child so he's happy'.

### The impact on parents

A Healthy Living Lab survey included within Kellogg's submission provided evidence of the vital financial boost given by free meal and fun projects to parents on low incomes who struggle to afford food for their children during school holidays.

Two parents in Oldham informed the Lab respectively that, 'I work for an agency where I don't get paid in the school holidays [...] it's tight [because] it's school holidays so having your breakfast free here releases that little bit of extra money at the end of the week', and, 'It saves on milk as well and milk's not incredibly cheap nowadays ... probably save about two boxes of cereal a week by them coming here, so that is a brilliant thing'. Such evidence led the Lab to conclude that, 'the provision of additional food during school holidays was found to have wider reaching implications as some parents stated that they had missed household bill payments to be able to allocate the money to the family food budget'. Not surprisingly, staff and volunteers in Leicester reported a decrease in the need for food banks in those areas where free meal and fun projects were in operation.

Children's life chances are further enhanced by the increased confidence and additional skills gained by their parents who, in many cases, accompany them to the projects. The inquiry received evidence to suggest that parents learn new cooking skills, make new friends and, in some cases, receive additional help with managing their finances when they accompany their children. A general improvement in their mental health has also been picked up, as they know they can rely upon a free source of food for their children. One mother in Leicester explained how, in the absence of her local project, 'I would have been at home crying'.

Professor Defeyter explained in her submission how free meal and fun projects help to reduce,

‘sedentary behaviour and isolation by providing families with an accessible place to go where food and activities [are] available free of charge. In addition, where it became evident that families were facing particular difficulties, holiday club staff were able to signpost them onto other agencies that could help them to address a variety of needs beyond the alleviation of hunger alone’.

Birmingham City University recorded similar effects on parental wellbeing, noting that, ‘access to nutritional food and activities [was] often constrained by the budget of families. The majority of parents and carers felt that they ate more healthily than normal at Holiday Kitchen. Most parents and carers felt more confident in making healthy meals and snacks for their children following participation in Holiday Kitchen [and] there was increased awareness around food budgeting and how to prepare healthy meals on a budget’.

Indeed, 88% of parents and carers surveyed by Holiday Kitchen felt more confident about making healthy meals/snacks for their children as a result of what they had picked up from the project, and one volunteer at a project in Brent told the Mayor’s Fund for London that, ‘I learned that sharing my experience of cooking on such a larger scale encouraged lots of parents to change in terms of the meals they go on to provide at home’.

Similar reports were forthcoming from Jo Jobling who noted from the Holiday Kitchen project in Mixenden, Halifax that, ‘32 families attended over five weeks; a total of 125 adults and children. Adults reported on their improved confidence in preparing food at home; on the financial savings they made and their willingness to make some changes around food preparation as a result of attending the events’.

Evidence of additional changes in the home lives of families receiving help during school holidays was provided by Leicester City Council, where, ‘many of the parents interviewed said they enjoyed sitting as a family and eating breakfast at a table which many of them don’t usually do.

Children were able to try new food such as fruit and cereal bars and were able to make their own sandwiches and learn about making healthy choices. Parents said their children now sit at a table to eat their breakfast at home and parents were now more conscious of providing healthy options such as more fruit and vegetables’.

Meanwhile, the opportunity to meet and make friends with other people was said to have improved parents’ mental health. Rachel Warwick informed us in oral evidence that, ‘one mum felt like hugging the teacher who referred her to our club. She felt like she didn’t have any friends before coming to the club. Having met other parents who were in a similar situation, she has made friends’. Leicester City Council too noted that, ‘parents provided positive feedback about the clubs, highlighting that the sessions helped with the financial burden of providing additional food and activities, for their children, throughout the holiday break. Also, that they were able to socialise with other parents and engage with agency staff, in a more informal way and environment’.

In some cases, the boost to parents’ confidence has enabled them to get back into work. MakeLunch shared the story of how one parent, ‘who hadn’t taken any exams since dropping out of school was boosted by passing her food hygiene certificate and has gone on to complete English and Maths refresher courses leading to her now working as a TA in a local nursery’.

The additional benefit of more intensive support for parents accompanying their children to free meal and fun projects was covered in Peter McGrath’s submission by Chomp, a project in Cardiff which ran nine sessions last summer for 57 attendees. The project said, ‘we don’t just want to be there for families to feed them the meals they would normally miss out on in the holiday, but also help them improve their situation. We build relationships with the families, find out what their needs are and help address them by signposting them to other service providers or helping them directly’. In another example given by MakeLunch, a single parent,

‘referred to her local Lunch Kitchen after a suicide attempt in 2013, was signposted to a debt advice course by the volunteer team and has now not only managed to pay off her debts, she has also saved nearly £1,000 to be able to take her daughter on holiday’. Likewise in Gateshead where, according to the information provided by Brian Kielty, ‘the holiday clubs helped organisations to establish relationships with parents and build community cohesion’.

According to Lindsay Graham, one of those organisations with which parents are building stronger relationships through school holiday meal and fun projects is the schools themselves. She explained in oral evidence how, ‘I’ve seen synergies between parents and schools that never happened before [...] over lunch, they’ve understood what each other’s problems are and the food - that sitting down together and eating a meal - is the one thing that starts that conversation’.

The ethos behind this element of such projects, according to MakeLunch, ‘is to provide meals and support for the family as the beginning of a supportive relationship which allows our volunteer teams to signpost on to other support, whether that’s debt advice, addiction recovery, employability, or other upskilling or rehabilitative services’.

Much of this, of course, applies to parents who are currently out of work, or work part time. It was suggested in Professor Defeyter’s submission how, for working parents who do not attend the projects with their children, ‘holiday clubs [...] help parents to remain in employment and keep children engaged in activities, thus ensuring maintenance of a consistent routine, income stability for parents and less boredom for children’.

**The financial benefit derived from free meal and fun projects, by parents on low incomes who struggle to afford food, is considerable – at least several hundred pounds per year. Moreover, for working parents the projects offer a form of**

**childcare that would otherwise be unavailable or prohibitively expensive. For those parents who are not in work, and others who perhaps work part-time, the projects offer a way of building their confidence and developing new skills, as well as to meet new people, which produces a variety of longer term gains both for themselves and their children.**

### The impact on staff

The longer term advantages delivered by school holiday meal and fun projects extend beyond children and parents, to the staff and volunteers who run those projects.

For paid teaching, catering, and childcare staff – many of whom are on low pay – the projects represent an opportunity to earn money during school holidays. Katie Palmer informed us that as a result of Wales’ School Holiday Food and Fun project, ‘there were 5,000 hours of additional employment last year in the summer - catering staff and teaching assistants. They enjoy the additional employment as well as the training opportunities’.

Elsewhere, Leicester City Council, ‘identified the integral role of volunteers to the project, particularly in relation to their local knowledge and experience. Volunteers also said they found it a positive experience and really felt like they were helping their community. Approximately fifty volunteers now hold basic food and hygiene qualifications and will be able to use these for further volunteering or potential employment opportunities’.

Along these lines, Gerry Allen reported how volunteering opportunities with school holiday meal and fun projects could open the way to paid work within the childcare sector. He said in oral evidence that, ‘there’s growing demand in the childcare workforce, so there’s almost a virtuous circle in this. It’s one of the ways you can engage with communities: get involved with the holiday projects, if you wish to, and you will gain the

knowledge and qualifications to then apply for jobs in childcare’.

For other volunteers, who themselves may not have much money, the projects represent one way of being able to access a decent meal. One particular example of this was supplied by the Mayor’s Fund for London which, at one of its projects in Harrow, ‘had an 18 year-old that had recently left home and was living in a hostel. She had decided to get involved with the pilots as a volunteer. We noticed that she was eating the food available with appetite.’

We have seen here that the advantages to children, parents, and staff, of free meal and fun projects during school holidays are plentiful. In the next chapter we analyse the limitations of those projects that have been reported to us and will need to be addressed if our country is successfully to counter the evil of holiday hunger.



## **Chapter 9 – The limitations of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays**

**We cannot emphasise enough just how much admiration we have for those individuals and organisations who have got on with the task of addressing hunger amongst children during school holidays. They are the active custodians of that rich cultural tradition in British life whereby volunteers humbly meet a local need, while at the same time linking arms with other similarly minded individuals to begin a national campaign to rectify a major social evil.**

**Their efforts have both improved the quality of life for thousands of children across the country, and given those children a greater chance of flourishing in their adult life. But the risk of hunger amongst children during school holidays is now so great, and the provision of free meals and fun so sporadic and piecemeal, that those existing efforts alone cannot be viewed as a sufficient response to the problem. A scarcity of funding, a lack of co-ordination, and a heavy reliance on donations limit our country's ability to protect every child from hunger during school holidays.**

### **Sporadic coverage throughout the school holidays**

It was reported to the inquiry that the provision of free meals and fun during school holidays remains sporadic, with coverage being patchy and inconsistent across the year and within individual communities.

Almost every project either operates for a few days per week, or a few weeks per month, during school holidays. Many of them operate exclusively in the six-week summer holiday. For children this means that on some days, or even whole weeks, of extended holiday periods there may be little, or no provision where they live.

Together Lancashire, for example, reported that, 'activities tend to run for a week, a day a week, a fortnight – but are not particularly well co-ordinated in any one locality', while Val Barron observed that in Durham, 'the activities have varied greatly and while some have run every week, others have been over a set week in the holidays'.

Further evidence on this was given by the Great Places housing association, which reported that, 'although [our Holiday Kitchen events] have achieved some good outcomes the projects only reach a small amount of affected families and can be very labour and cost intensive [...] most projects only run for a week or two weeks at a time so although they help the situation they are not meeting needs. Cover across the country is patchy at best and it can be difficult to reach the families who need it the most'.

Nonetheless, it was argued by Heather Black that, 'typically [projects] do not run every day of the holidays, rather for a couple of weeks of the holidays or 2-3 days each week. This is because they are volunteer-led, but we do find that this is enough to take the pressure off families, leaving more in the family budget for the remaining days'.

There is, though, a clear desire amongst parents for existing projects to be run more frequently throughout the year. One parent in Oldham told the Healthy Living Lab that, 'the only thing I would like is if it was continued, say, every mid-term, stuff like that if it was regular – not just summer but every holiday they have from school – because not only with mine but with a lot of 'em you see kids on the street at quarter past eight in the morning and if they didn't have here to come what are they doing?'. Likewise, a staff member from one project in Coventry told the Healthy Living Lab of their eagerness to extend its coverage across the year, saying that, 'I think it'd be lovely if we could carry it on next year or even through the half term'.



### Piecemeal coverage across the country

The vast majority of the United Kingdom remains uncovered by free meal and fun projects during school holidays. Even in those areas where such projects do exist, there may be whole estates or communities for whom they are out of reach. This is because the task of getting together the necessary funds, food, staff and, occasionally, venues to set up new projects or extend existing schemes is a challenging one.

St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Birkenhead noted in its submission how, 'as a school we do not have the staff or capacity to run holiday food clubs on site. Unfortunately our more deprived families rarely leave the estate and may, therefore, find it difficult to regularly use the Feeding Birkenhead scheme venues'.

A governor at another school in Birkenhead similarly reported that, 'the work that has been done during the time of Feeding Birkenhead is a testament to the compassion and generosity of local people and to companies prepared to support and donate food and goods [...] The gaps in provision are of course enormous as will be realised when the difference is compared between children who qualify for free school meals and the take up of the holiday provision. The gaps are often caused by people being embarrassed or ashamed to have it noted by neighbours that their child is accessing this provision and is more likely to happen in some geographical areas than others. The availability of the provision is additionally limited by available venues and resources as although many would like to assist they do not have the facilities to do so'.

Not surprisingly, given the piecemeal coverage of existing projects, just 17% of respondents to the National Union of Teachers' survey knew of any local initiatives, either at their own school or elsewhere in the community, to tackle hunger amongst children during school holidays. One teacher responding to the survey noted how projects, 'meet the needs of very few children, but work for those that attend'.

One piece of research submitted to the inquiry found that although, 'many organisations had managed to get holiday clubs up and running, 48% of organisations had faced difficulties with setting up and running holiday provision, with a lack of funding, difficulties with staff recruitment and attendance/issues with stigma frequently being cited as barriers'. This is reflected in the Trussell Trust's conclusion that, 'there is a desire to do more but funding and capacity can be significant challenges'.

The Tranmere Methodist Church is one such organisation for whom, 'volunteers to staff the project is a constant challenge'. Elsewhere, in Maidenhead, Lester Tanner of Foodshare wrote that, 'we are not aware of any holiday meal schemes in the town [...] [there is] supermarket surplus which is increasingly becoming more available through broker agencies such as FareShare. We have considered providing breakfasts and/or lunches during school holidays; we are experienced with providing meals for large groups, and can source food and volunteer resources, but the key constraint is having a suitable venue'.

FareShare developed this point further, noting that, 'currently the voluntary sector is stepping up to the plate to try and provide a solution, but this can be sporadic and not co-ordinated, often falling victim to the ability to access funding, safe venues and appropriate staffing', as did the Trussell Trust, which reported on how, 'holiday provisions are sporadic and appear where the funding and capacity exists rather than where the need exists. There are many families in areas of the UK that would benefit from holiday provisions if they were made available'.

The effect of this piecemeal coverage was outlined by Ken McMeikan: 'when you look at the scale - all of that effort and working with our companies - we're only going to be providing food and support for 2,000 children, rising to 6,000 by the end of this year. That's 1.3% of those who normally receive free school meals'.

**Some parts of the country are covered only sporadically by free meal and fun projects during school holidays, but these are the lucky areas. Others are not covered at all. Large numbers of children who stand to gain the most from those projects are currently missing out.**

**There is an urgent need for projects seeking to address hunger amongst children during school holidays to be developed and extended across the country, so they are both available to all children who need them and capable of exerting the greatest possible influence on those children's life chances.**

## Chapter 10 – Proposals for the next stage in the life of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays

There was broad support in the evidence we received for free meal and fun projects to be made more readily available across the whole of the United Kingdom, and for as many days as possible throughout the school holidays. There were also differing views around whether those projects should be based in schools, or elsewhere in the community.

### Should schools be given a lead role in the provision of free meals and fun for children during the holidays?

One argument proposed in evidence was that in future, projects should, if possible, be based in schools. This is because they tend to be well-known, trusted, and well-equipped venues that, as things stand, often lie empty during school holidays.

Twelve submissions came out strongly in favour of this argument, either advocating that schools directly run projects or that they allow other projects to use their facilities. We heard from:

- LACA that, ‘given that schools provide meals on a daily basis during term time and in significantly larger quantities than would be needed for holiday hunger schemes, it is logical that schools would be the first port of call to deliver holiday hunger schemes and are equipped to do so’;
- Sustain that, ‘projects should be able to access existing local expertise and infrastructure in providing healthy food for children. There has been huge investment in school kitchens and dining halls and food education is fast becoming a priority once again for children and young people. For these reasons schools, local education and school catering departments should all be involved in local provision. This should apply equally when delivery takes place beyond school premises. Importantly this would ensure that government-funded programmes meet the same standards as school meals’;
- FutureVersity that, ‘we want to campaign for schools in deprived areas to open their doors during holiday times. They have a host of facilities: fully equipped kitchens, sports and arts equipment, and access to all sorts of teaching support. It’s such a waste and a shame they sit closed’;
- Nathan Atkinson that, ‘my suggestion would be that schools open their doors during the holidays and are able to provide children and families with access to food and support. Here at Richmond Hill we employ two members of staff on 52-week contracts to be able to support our families. We leave a daily supply of food on our market stall during the holidays that families can access even if there are no activities planned in school that day [...] if schools were compared to businesses in terms of infrastructure and budget it would be regarded as very bad business sense to close for extended periods of time, as long as six weeks in the summer, and leave a skeleton staff in charge and in doing so neglect your "customers"’;
- Lindsay Graham that, ‘The Department for Education is set up for it. The kitchens are there, the school workforce is there. Sometimes they’re the only public buildings for miles depending on where you are’;
- Katie Palmer that, ‘you have schools and other fantastic public facilities lying idle in the holidays. In this day and age that’s a crime. It’s not just the buildings, it’s the staff and human capital that we’re also leaving aside’;

- Ken Campbell that, ‘we need to take the school building as an asset, not just an educational environment - more for community use, rather than just educational use’;
- Rachel Warwick, that ‘locally, some schools use the holidays for deep cleaning or maintenance, so it's maybe not safe for children to be around. But that's happening less and less. The more profile this issue gets, and the more the Government can help, the more people and schools realise this is something they should be doing’;
- Dr Clare Pettinger that, ‘schools themselves should be playing a more fundamental role to support collaborative work in the area of holiday hunger. They could, for example, be supporting organisations to let them use their facilities, either through funding or even renting spaces. For example, opening their doors more readily for use of kitchen facilities when it's raining, or using the grounds for outdoor activities. We acknowledge the complexities of governance structures etc., as barriers to this, but it is worth considering so that more innovative practices can be achieved’;
- Brian Kielty that, ‘sustainability is the key to future success for Gateshead's Fill the Holiday Gap programme. The Neighbourhood Management Team has started working with a number of local Primary Schools in Gateshead to measure their capacity and where requested support the delivery of a Primary School based programme in 2017’;
- Nadine Daniel that, ‘given that most schools kitchen facilities are unused during vacation period, a feasibility study into whether it would be possible to allow community groups to use them to provide community meals during the holidays, might provide some much needed support for children most in need’; and
- The National Union of Teachers that, ‘schools are often the focal point of a community while teachers are well placed to understand the needs of their pupils and the issues they deal with on a daily basis. On this basis, schools could act as hubs for the provision of holiday meal and activity schemes while teachers could occupy a central role in helping their pupils to access these services. However, any such scheme would require funding to ensure adequate levels of staffing and meet general running costs, including for necessary insurance.

There are, of course, logistical complexities involved with this approach. The Mayor's Fund for London, for example, ‘found that there were concerns around the logistics/costs of staffing and opening up school premises during the summer holiday’.

While generally supportive of schools taking on a lead role in any wider rollout of school holiday meal and fun projects, LACA too identified, ‘several issues relating to providing meals outside of term time, the following of which would need to be school-led: access to schools during the holidays; supervision of children where necessary; payment of utility expenses/school premises plus site manager salary would need to be factored in by school’. A suggestion for countering such difficulties was proposed by What Works Scotland, namely, that, ‘if schools are used, then those open 52 weeks a year, where janitorial costs are already covered make most sense in the first instance as these are steep – nearly £200 per day (for a 7.30 – 18.00 day)’.

Looking beyond the logistical complexities, StreetGames noted that, ‘schools can make excellent venues for activity and food programmes. They can also make very poor venues. It should not be assumed that all disadvantaged young people are keen to return to

school during the holidays. Many community organisations have excellent relationships with young people who do not feel at home in school’.

A similar argument was put forward in Food4Hull’s submission:

‘The statutory environment of a school may present negative connotations for parents, and perhaps they didn’t attend or like school when they were growing up [...] access to school sites during holiday times is difficult and requires special resources so location and logistics of food to eat is key [...] places such as local children’s centres (within the community) are thought to be a much better place where the stigma of going there is avoided as they are open all the year and there are many other things going on of which food and feeding is only one.’

#### Should community groups take on a more prominent role than schools?

Such complexities led some organisations to conclude that other community facilities should be utilised more fully in any future rollout of school holiday meal and fun projects. The Mayor’s Fund for London, for example, argued that, ‘working with existing grassroots networks [is] a far more effective approach in delivering a holiday food provision programme as it allows access to a much larger audience. Not only are the costs attached to opening schools during the holidays avoided, but there is also the opportunity to better target hard to reach children, especially those who have a hard time at school during term time and would be reluctant to return in the holidays’.

CSAN agreed that, ‘in our experience, food for children in the school holidays is best provided in a way which encourages interaction in community facilities, avoiding stigmatisation [...] We would strongly encourage the Government to consider how this neighbourly support which churches and charities are delivering on the ground might be scaled up to address the full extent of holiday hunger’.

This would, indeed, build upon the efforts of those organisations that have quietly got on with the task of trying to feed hungry children in their communities, a point that was made by Val Barron, who said that, ‘while churches may not have the capacity to provide daily programmes, and therefore they often miss out on some of the funding streams, they should be recognised as important community responses to these issues, and valued. In most of the communities we have worked in the churches were the only people responding’.

With a view to ensuring as many children as possible are able to access free meals and fun during school holidays, StreetGames stressed that, ‘community organisations in disadvantaged areas should be supported to provide meals as part of their holiday programme. Training and resources are needed to help the community organisations to make a success of providing meals’. Referring to its own plans, the organisation said that, ‘because transport and distance are a barrier, sessions will run in the heart of communities, in parks, in youth centres, on housing estates. At all sessions – both the activities and the food – will be free or very nearly free because we know cost is a major barrier to those at risk of hunger in the holidays’.

#### Local flexibility to meet local needs

**Both those individuals and organisations in favour of a school-based approach, and others who instead advocate a more diverse approach to future attempts at preventing hunger amongst children during school holidays, strongly agree on the need for local authorities to facilitate any such attempts.**

**Local authorities know where hungry children are most likely to be. Moreover, they are well-placed to co-ordinate the efforts of schools, churches, community groups, public bodies, and businesses, to ensure projects are:**

- **crafted by local communities themselves;**
- **capable of reaching as many children as possible, wherever there is evidence of need; and**
- **exerting the greatest possible influence on children's life chances.**

**Crucially, one size does not fit all, so any scheme must enshrine a sufficient degree of flexibility, thereby enabling local projects to meet local needs.**

The need for local flexibility, as set out in Professor Defeyter's submission, comes from the basic fact that, 'it would not be practical to implement a single breakfast club model across all areas without considering the needs of people living in those areas'. Nor would such uniform provision necessarily be desirable for school holiday meal and fun projects. In one area, for example, it might be most effective for schools directly to run a project, in another for a community group to operate from school buildings, and in others still for a community group to operate from a children's centre or a different venue.

This argument was developed within the Healthy Living Lab's research submitted to the inquiry by Professor Defeyter, which argued that, 'of course, there is ample opportunity for school-based interventions to run alongside community interventions, for example faith groups and community groups, and there needs to be a degree of flexibility within the model, driven by local need and demand'.

The Mayor's Fund for London argued likewise that, 'a long-term sustainable solution is only achievable through partnership across the private, public and charitable sectors [...] our aim is to create a steering group in each local authority which will represent key stakeholders across the voluntary, statutory and business sectors to ensure the roll out of Kitchen Social best fits the need of the local community'.

This point was given particular emphasis by What Works Scotland, which commented that, 'commitment and co-ordination at strategic level is important but so is buy-in at local level. Solutions need to be community-led, tailored to what is already in place, playing to local strengths and working to plug gaps. The commitment at strategic level will support and encourage local solutions to be found, but should not be too prescriptive about what these might be. We know how creative communities and community organisations can be, so this needs to be enabled, supported and encouraged'. Lindsay Graham added that, 'I don't think government can do this alone, because you need to work with the local champions. It's the small local champions that make things happen'.

The case for local authorities to facilitate this model was presented by Birmingham City University, which argued that, 'the involvement of the local authority with the venues, contacts and resources it possesses makes delivery of the programme more viable and has the potential to reach all of the unitary authority rather than areas which are specified by cost'. Katie Palmer agreed that such co-ordination, 'adds value in joining up services and existing agencies'.

This local element was also deemed to be important from a business perspective. According to Ken McMeikan, 'it's got to be local to businesses. They want to feel that sense of ownership, and that they are contributing to it. If their colleagues are going to take pride in it and support it, it needs to be at a local level'.

A comprehensive model of what local partnerships could look like was sketched out by Child Poverty Action Group:

'Provision aimed at tackling holiday hunger should be universal; located in existing facilities that children and families know and trust; be inclusive and available to all rather than aimed solely at children in poor families; and be centred around activities, helping to ease other holiday burdens on parents, rather than risk becoming simply



‘feeding stations’ for the poor [...] services over school holidays can help to tackle the challenges families face over school holidays, but they can avoid the stigma associated with targeted services, and with charitable provision, through the provision of support in a trusted location [...] extended schools should be the core of the policy response [...] we would encourage businesses, philanthropists, and the voluntary sector to direct their support for holiday hunger towards helping schools to consolidate and expand their provision of extended schools.’

The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland proposed a similar model:

‘Initiatives aimed at addressing holiday hunger should be universal. This will help to avoid the stigma that can come with targeted services. Initiatives should be located in existing facilities which the child is familiar with [...] food should be incidental to the programme, rather than the focal point of the activity [...] locate support where people are based - the biggest barrier is unfamiliarity.’

The Welsh Local Government Association, meanwhile, identified three ‘key ingredients’, that, ‘ensure this model is popular with families, can be implemented at low-cost, and provides health and education benefits: 1. The use of existing school facilities and staff; 2. The flexible, multi-agency partnership model; and 3. Involving the whole family. The model achieves a good balance between compulsory ‘core components’ that all clubs implement to ensure health benefits, while allowing for local tailoring and individual needs’.

### [An adequate funding base](#)

The need for additional, long-term funding for school holiday meal and fun projects was raised by Fiona Twycross AM, who argued that, ‘without additional ringfenced money from central government it is currently difficult to conceive a situation where children and young people’s services could support a wider programme to tackle holiday hunger’.

The current funding arrangements are often short-term at best, and precarious at worst. A staff member at one of Gateshead’s projects reported that, ‘we’ve got to apply for [grant funding] every year and it’s very hard because we are a type of project that relies heavily on funding for various activities so it’s that ongoing battle to get that funding and keep it going to provide the service we provide’. This point was emphasised by Ruth Fox, who added, ‘I think funding has to be the main issue. For small charities (like ours) providing these services is obviously a challenge’.

Presenting its own analysis of the funding situation, and pointing towards a clear remedy, LACA wrote that, ‘holiday hunger provision across the country is both intermittent and varied in size. In order to improve provision across all regions funding is needed to pay for food, labour and associated costs. The view of the LACA board is that if food and labour costs were covered most organisations would be able to provide a holiday hunger scheme if needed’.

Both Gateshead Council and the Mayor’s Fund for London, while making the case for additional funding, emphasised that it need not take particularly large sums to help set up and sustain projects. The former wrote that, ‘looking at the programmes [that were delivered] in 2015-16 we believe most schools could provide lunches without needing any large additional funding. However, we realise that this may not always be the case’, while the latter added, ‘support should be delivered in local communities by local organisations but they need resources to be able to do that. We do not think the solution requires significant capital or infrastructure investment. We believe that a lot of existing organisations such as affiliated youth clubs and church groups can be supported by good training and relatively small amounts of cash to improve their offer’.

Birmingham City University stressed that the local authority-led partnership model could play an important role in keeping costs down, arguing that, ‘to make the programme affordable, it is necessary to have a proper partnership model in place. This would include third sector



organisations, higher education institutions, and the corporate responsibility arms of large companies. It is recommended that these come from areas which are already closely tied to the production, distribution, and sale of food’.

We also heard that an initial allocation of public funding could be a catalyst which attracts additional support from businesses. Katie Palmer informed us that in Wales, ‘it’s not all public funding. The model we’ve developed is 50% of it will come from national government, 50% will be match funded by a mix of private sector, local authority, and third sector budgets. The budget covers food, training for staff, and the delivery of a programme running from 9am to either 1pm or 3pm, in which free breakfasts, lunches, a minimum of one hour’s sport, enrichment activities, and nutrition education are provided’.

Moreover, in an evaluation of Hull’s Holiday Hunger project shared with the inquiry by Food4Hull, it was reported that, ‘corporate sponsorship is important for the long-term sustainability of the project [...] Once a pilot phase has been completed and is deemed to be successful, a corporate sponsor will be more willing to add further social value to projects through possible professional help and advice to the management of the project. This could be offered through in-house support functions such as marketing, finance and social responsibility teams. Developed project timetables could also be supported by business volunteers who can offer support in delivery, activities, food educations, support for parents and importantly, they can provide accessible role models for children and parents alike. This type of corporate community partnership can bring many benefits to both parties. From the community perspective, a project is supported, and adult attendees can understand more about the corporate business and the opportunities that are on offer [...] children see positive role models and learn more about the working world. They feel encouraged to do more and aspirations may rise’.

Ken McMeikan too described the attractiveness of this model, both for businesses and individual

projects, noting that, ‘this is where business can actually make a significant contribution because the skills the families and parents are often looking for, are held in an abundance in the colleagues working for the companies. Colleagues take an enormous pride in your company as actually doing something in the community. Often they live in the community so they see some of this deprivation, and they are the ones who volunteer in the clubs’.

### [A strategic commitment from the Government](#)

A major hindrance for businesses looking to support projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays, according to Mr McMeikan, is that, ‘there is no infrastructure, there’s no strategy, there’s no easy way to get involved. Therefore, it’s not clear how you can actively support [efforts to address] the problem. The scale of it is quite daunting for people. For most businesses it’s scary and out of reach for them to do something to tackle it’.

This absence of a strategic commitment from the Government was also raised as a problem for individual projects by one contributor, who said that, ‘there’s no national helpline for parents, no national training structure, how to set up clubs, where to go to find them, what are the safety standards - safeguarding and food handling - that are needed for the delivery of projects. People want guidance, particularly when it comes to food. It has to be safe’.

### [Training for staff and volunteers](#)

Another barrier left in place by this lack of strategic commitment – one that is believed to stand in the way of the extension of projects that seek to address hunger amongst children during school holidays – is the shortage of guidance and training opportunities for staff and volunteers.

One example given by StreetGames, which also provided a source of hope, was that, ‘we had 284 responses to the survey from organisations [mainly sports clubs] in every region of the UK. The survey told us that 250 respondents already

delivered some holiday provision, but 232 of them did not provide food and drink. Almost all of the 232 were interested in doing so in the future but they are not so confident when it comes to preparing food. Our main task is therefore to develop their capacity to serve meals, source the food and to help them secure funding for delivery. This is a big task as the survey also indicated 51.1% of respondents felt they needed training in food hygiene, 60.4% in cooking and 59.8% in nutrition’.

Dr Pamela Graham agreed in oral evidence that, ‘one of the points that came up from the mapping exercise when organisations were asked about what was needed to move holiday provision forward, was a national portal looking at training and information for clubs. It's about covering those things with regards to, “how do we do this? Where do we start? Who can help us get this off the ground?”’.

One possible solution proposed by Kellogg’s was that, ‘to ensure consistent, high quality delivery of breakfast clubs across different areas, staff should be offered training in various aspects of breakfast club provision [...] a training package tailored to the needs of holiday breakfast clubs, structured around key guiding principles and including food hygiene etc., would [...] be beneficial to ensure that all aspects of breakfast club delivery are given careful consideration; these processes would also upskill and empower volunteers/organisers’.

An example of how those guiding principles could be established can be found in the Kitchen Social programme being set up by the Mayor’s Fund for London. It has established the following criteria for projects seeking to participate in the programme:

- Be located in an area of high deprivation.
- Run an open access centre (free for children and young people to attend) or be charging a minimal fee.

- Already be providing or have funds to provide a wide range of physical and educational activities during the holidays (minimum of one hour per day).
- Provide at least 20 days free food provision over the year for a minimum of 20 children and young people. 75% of meals must be hot cooked meals.
- Ensure the food provision adheres as closely as possible to food based standards (training will be given).
- Ensure a safe, fun, stigma-free environment, where everyone is treated with respect.
- Agree that no child who needs food will be turned away.
- Have all statutory policies around child safety and safeguarding in place.
- Invite parents to participate and get involved.
- Provide a family setting for meals.

We were informed that alongside these criteria, the Mayor’s Fund for London is designing a portal which helps local authorities accelerate the delivery of school holiday meal and fun projects. Among those items to be included in the portal are:

- a Holiday Provision Handbook and Training;
- a Cooking Handbook and Training;
- a Volunteer Management Handbook;
- platforms to share good practice; and
- networking opportunities

The reform programme we set out in the following chapter seeks to develop each of these points around how best to develop existing examples of good practice, and how to deliver the funding and changes in policy that are required for them to be scaled up across the whole country.

## **Chapter 11 – A blueprint for abolishing hunger amongst children during school holidays**

The findings from our inquiry are both alarming, as well as inspiring.

We are alarmed by the evidence of children in this country who, due to a lack of food and activity, begin their lessons after each school holiday in desperately poor physical and mental condition. Those children are totally unprepared to profit from their schooling and they are falling behind their more fortunate peers as a result.

The causes of their hunger during school holidays – a barrage of additional costs their parents are having to pay for food, fuel, activities, and childcare – suggest that large numbers of children who usually receive free school meals during term time, as well as others whose parents work for their poverty and are therefore disqualified from this support, find themselves particularly vulnerable to being left without food – either persistently or occasionally.

Our inspiration comes from those wonderful examples of communities pulling together to counter this injustice. By offering free meals and fun activities to children during school holidays, various organisations and individuals have, within tight budgets and using limited resources, delivered improvements in children's quality of life, as well as their chances of growing up to become healthy, well-educated adults.

But, as we have seen, these initiatives are largely sporadic and piecemeal. Their coverage – both geographically as well as across the duration of the holidays – remains incomplete and far from comprehensive. They remain out of range for many hungry children whose parents are either unable, or unwilling, to feed them.

The evidence we have received suggests that a comprehensive system for the protection of children from hunger during school holidays, as well as all of its nasty consequences, is achievable with the right backing. Communities themselves

are up for the challenge. A reform package consisting of legislation, funding, and a new policy could give them the tools they need to deliver disproportionately large gains in health, wellbeing, and educational prospects for children whose parents are struggling to get by from week to week.

**We encourage the Government to adopt the following reform package for the eradication of hunger amongst children during school holidays:**

- 1. A statutory requirement for local authorities to facilitate and co-ordinate the delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays, with utmost flexibility granted over the actual delivery methods used. The voluntary sector should be in the driving seat wherever possible.**
- **We ask that the Government lends its backing to the Free School Meals (Provision in School Holidays) Bill which we will present to Parliament after the General Election. The Bill would enact this statutory requirement while giving local authorities the flexibility they need to implement programmes that are best suited to the needs of children in their area.**
- 2. An adequate funding base, combined with an invitation to businesses to add to this base, to enable local authorities to meet their statutory duties.**
- **We recommend that the Government allocates £41.5 million – one tenth of the Healthy Pupils Capital Programme that will be funded by the revenues from the sugary drinks levy – towards the provision of free meals and fun for children during school holidays. If it**

- were divided equally between every local authority in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (the Welsh Government has already committed funding), this sum would deliver an annual budget of over £100,000 with which each local authority could counter holiday hunger. Alternatively, if it were targeted on deprived communities, this allocation would, according to the House of Commons Library, cover the annual cost of school-based provision for every child entitled to free school meals in those parts of England where more than one in five children hold this entitlement.
3. **National minimum standards laid down by the Department for Education, in respect of the safe and effective delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays.**
    - **We recommend that the Government adopts basic criteria for each organisation involved in the delivery of school holiday meal and fun projects, based on those recently drawn up by the Mayor's Fund for London.**
  4. **A national portal which enables those individuals and organisations delivering free meals and fun for children during school holidays to receive the training, information, advice and guidance they need to at least meet the national minimum standards.**
    - **We recommend that the Government again draws upon the recent work of The Mayor's Fund**
- for London, in designing a national portal which helps local authorities accelerate the delivery of school holiday meal and fun projects.
- **We recommend that the Food Standards Agency produces a one-page guidance sheet for organisations on the safe handling and preparation of food that has been recycled from supermarkets' and manufacturers' surplus stocks, and this should be included within the national portal.**
  5. **A robust research base to guide the ongoing development of projects**
    - **We recommend that an initial group of projects should incorporate robust evaluation frameworks covering, amongst other things, their impact on children's height, weight, body mass index, dietary intake, and academic attainment.**
  6. **The measurement of hunger amongst children during school holidays.**
    - **Following our most recent report published a year ago,<sup>10</sup> the United Kingdom Statistics Authority announced that it would consult on how best to measure how many people in our country are hungry, or vulnerable to experiencing hunger. That consultation was due to have been launched several months ago, however, it remains elusive. We recommend that it be opened as soon as possible and that it should set the country on a path towards being able to measure the extent of hunger amongst children during**

<sup>10</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, *Britain's not-so-hidden hunger* (London: The Stationery Office, 2016)

**school holidays.**

## Annex

### All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger

The inquiry was conducted by officers of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. The officers are Frank Field MP (Chair), Heidi Allen MP, Steve Double MP, Baroness Jenkin of Kennington, Emma Lewell-Buck MP, The Rt Rev. Tim Thornton, and Dr Philippa Whitford MP. The Group was established in 2013 to investigate the root causes of hunger in the United Kingdom.

### Oral Evidence

The inquiry took evidence from two panels of expert witnesses in the House of Commons on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017. The first panel consisted of Lindsay Graham (School Food and Health Advisor), Dr Pamela Graham (Northumbria University), and Ken McMeikan (Brakes Group). The second panel consisted of Gerry Allen (Knowsley Council), Ken Campbell (North Ayrshire Council), Katie Palmer (Public Health Wales), and Rachel Warwick (MakeLunch).

### Written Evidence

The inquiry received written evidence from:

1. Annie Connolly, PhD student, University of Leeds
2. Ashrammoseley/Accord Housing Association
3. Birmingham City University
4. Brian Kielty, Gateshead Council
5. Caritas Social Action Network
6. Child Poverty Action Group
7. Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
8. Children in Northern Ireland
9. Children in Scotland
10. Croxteth Gems
11. David Dorward
12. Dr Clare Pettinger, Plymouth University, and Brad Pearce
13. Family and Childcare Trust
14. FareShare
15. Fiona Twycross AM

16. FutureVersity
17. Heather Black, Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland
18. Hillary Hamer, Food4Hull
19. Independent Food Aid Network
20. Jane Hicken, Derbyshire County Council
21. Jo Jobling, WomenCentre
22. Kellogg's
23. Ken Campbell, North Ayrshire Council
24. Kilgarth School and Gilbrook School, Wirral
25. King's Church, Leicester
26. Lead Association for Catering in Education
27. Leicester City Council
28. Lester Tanner, Foodshare
29. Lindsay Graham
30. MakeLunch
31. Mayor's Fund for London
32. Nadine Daniel, Hope+ Food Bank
33. Nathan Atkinson, Headteacher, Richmond Primary School, Leeds
34. National Union of Teachers
35. Professor Greta Defeyter, Northumbria University
36. Professor Neena Modi, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
37. Rev. Steve Carpenter and Catherine Hitchell, Tranmere Methodist Church
38. Ruth Fox, Footprints in the Community, Redcar
39. St Peter's Catholic Primary School, Wirral
40. Stephen Knight
41. StreetGames
42. Sustain
43. The Children's Society
44. Together Lancashire
45. Trussell Trust
46. Val Barron, Communities Together Durham
47. Waste and Resources Action Programme
48. Welsh Local Government Association
49. What Works Scotland

Three submissions were contributed under anonymity.









This report was published on Tuesday 25 April 2017 by a cross-party group of Members of Parliament and Peers who serve as officers on the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. The document can be accessed online at [www.feeding-britain.org](http://www.feeding-britain.org).

Should you have any enquiries regarding this report, please email [andrew.forsey@parliament.uk](mailto:andrew.forsey@parliament.uk).