

Addressing holiday hunger via community holiday programmes: The National Holiday Activity & Food (HAF) programme & Oxfordshire Play:Full projects

An Executive Summary



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Purpose of report

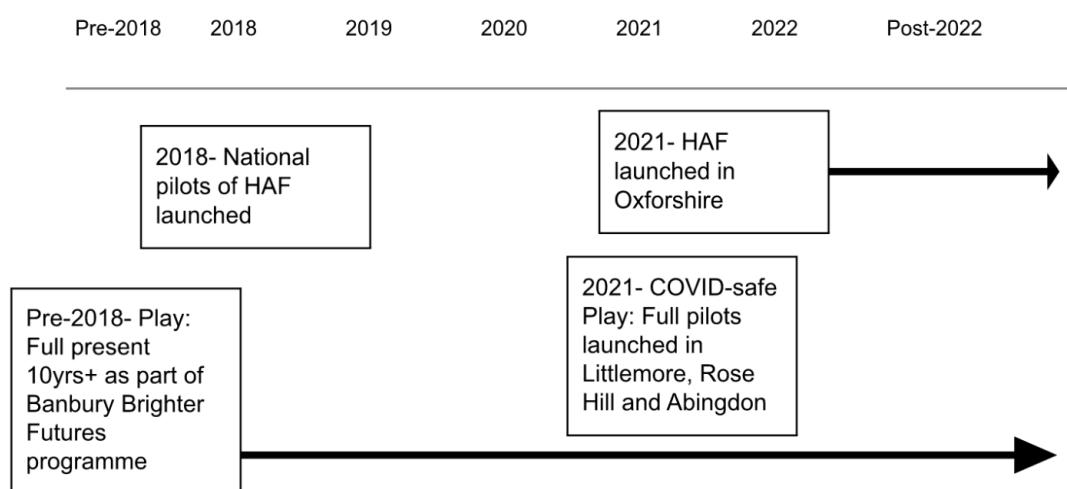
To explore delivery of the key elements of the HAF and Play:Full holiday programmes, and propose suggestions for maximising their benefits.

A service evaluation of a selection of HAF and Play:Full providers was conducted in August 2022, with visits to observe programme delivery of ten providers across Oxfordshire.

Background

Holiday hunger faced by disadvantaged school children has been an important national issue for many years, and is expected to amplify in the coming months with the rise in cost of living. Recognition of holiday hunger in recent years, has led to the introduction of the Department of Education funded national Holiday Activity & Food (HAF) programme for school children eligible for Free School Meals. The HAF programme has been running in local authorities, including Oxfordshire County Council since 2021, in addition to pre-existing community-led holiday activity projects, such as Play:Full- initiated as part of the Banbury Brighter Futures Programme.

Figure 1: Timeline of HAF and Play:Full programme implementation



A timeline of Holiday & Activity Food (HAF) and Play: Full (example of community-led approach) implementation

Key Findings

- Oxfordshire is making tremendous efforts to provide high-quality holiday activity programmes for wide access by the target groups in the community.
- Children and families greatly benefit from the programmes, which offer free healthy food provision, enriching activities (e.g. sports and arts & crafts) and nutrition & food education.
- Nutrition & food education is an important element in the Oxfordshire programme delivery, and the Oxfordshire County Council has made much effort to ensure incorporation of education by providers.

Examples of nutrition & food education by providers include:

- Healthy eating boards with fruit drawings and posters
- Food preparation activities e.g. coriander planting at Banbury Mosque or allotment growing at Rose Hill
- Participatory approaches where children plan the meals and food-related activities e.g. “Name It” youth project.

As one of the providers stated: *“Most things we do involve food.”*

- Delivery of food education was variable across HAF providers.
- Oxfordshire County Council is focusing on inclusion of food education for children and families, as a key part of the Oxfordshire HAF funding application process.
- HAF coordinators are very active in delivering webinars and providing resources on nutritional guidance and food education activities, including resources developed from Play:Full, (e.g. recipe cards, Eatwell sheets) to support providers.
- Additional plans include organising meetings for HAF providers to share examples of successful food-related activities that children engaged well with.
- Community-led holiday activity projects demonstrated advantages including reducing stigma and improved community cohesion. For Example: Play:Full – a community-led holiday programme, commits their partners to embedding food-related activities and healthy eating as central features via the Play:Full pledge.
- Critically, as the Play:Full programme is free to everyone participating (as is the case with other community-led activities), it was non-stigmatising to families and encouraged attendance.

“Our families are very sort of shy to come forward about food ... We actually sent the food home with them [the children]”.

– HAF Provider

- Other important features of the Play:Full approach included:
 - Being hosted in community centres, youth clubs and other voluntary & community sectors that serve as ‘community hubs’.
 - Providing activities for children outside of term-time, which allowed staff to build relationships with the children and families.
 - Providing continuous support throughout the year.

Suggestions for maximising benefit

As might apply to other local authorities, some of the barriers to community programmes such as Play:Full entering the HAF scheme have been:

- The application process
- Turnaround time between application outcome and start of programme
- The requirement to fulfil 4 hours per day for 4 days a week for programme delivery

Oxfordshire have recognised these barriers and are working hard on the ground to help community centres and youth clubs to apply for funding.

Other support currently under progress includes allowing funding of consortiums of local community centres, between which, the minimum duration of programme delivery required can be distributed.

Additional suggestions for programme delivery improvement, some of which are already being implemented, include:

- Continued support for HAF providers as well as community-centred providers in joining HAF.
- Resource provision (e.g. healthy eating posters) to holiday activity providers.
- Promotion of resource sharing (e.g. examples of successful activities) between holiday activity providers.
- Clarification for providers around Play:Full and what it constitutes.
- Reducing stigma associated with access to holiday activities programmes by making them universally available to the community.
- Address issues of language and digital literacy amongst the community to improve access to holiday activities.
- Improve communication and signposting to local service providers