

DIGITAL DIGEST



HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACCESS NUTRITIOUS FOOD AFTER THE CORONAVIRUS

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Picture this: a school canteen lined with sausage rolls, whose paper bags are glistening with grease, and pastas with oil climbing up the wall of their pots. The salads are out of view, and what is there, is limited and unappealing. The fruit bowl contains a few sad apples, their only friends a couple of elderly bananas and a dull satsuma. The cheapest option for a snack is a sweet traybake. Just outside of school, we have fast food chains and corner shops boasting cheap prices and ranges of chocolate bars and fizzy drinks. Then the supermarket, with a full range of fresh and processed products and special offers reserved for crisps and multipacks of biscuits.

Healthy calories are **THREE** times more expensive than unhealthy ones¹. Fact.

Now, picture this: a school canteen lined with vibrant and perky salads and sandwiches, all available to buy at an affordable price. A balanced meal can be easily purchased with the free school meal allowance. The fresh fruit is easy to grab and go and there is a plentiful selection on offer. The cheapest, most filling option is a banana. There is always a tap for water in this canteen and cups are available for a quick drink. We step out onto the high street, where healthy options are being advertised as cheap and quick. There are no junk food adverts plaguing our streets or screens. Entering the supermarket, there are offers on fruit and veg, and the meal-deal is cheaper if you choose a piece of fruit as the snack.

Healthy calories are now **CHEAPER** than unhealthy ones. If only this was a fact. But it could be.

¹ The Food Foundation, 2019. 'The Broken Plate: Ten vital signs revealing the health of our food system, its impact on our lives and the remedies we must pursue'

With the food environment we are living in, it might be unsurprising that 37% of London's children are obese². Our world is just not geared up to help us to be healthy. I have been given the platform to speak up on behalf of other young people and now is the time to do this, more than ever before.

The coronavirus is likely to have only exacerbated the situation, with inequality worsening and wallets being squeezed even more, putting a balanced meal on the table is even harder for parents.

Having said this, the unprecedented change in our lives may pose opportunities for the taking!

Health is at the forefront of our minds, so maybe now is a better time than ever to push for healthy changes at school, home and on our high streets. Already there have been positive changes to our food environment. The extension of free school meals in the holidays so that fewer young people go hungry, the decline in unhealthy bulk buy deals to discourage stockpiling, the closure of fast food restaurants, and with it, the decline of fast food advertising, just to name a few. In some ways, the coronavirus has launched changes for the better and why stop here?

With school canteens already needing to be redesigned for social distancing guidelines, why not use this opportunity to put healthy and affordable options in the spotlight, and ensure things like a water fountain in all canteens across the country? I want it to be easy to be healthy, and that doesn't mean taking away treats or chips on a Friday, but just that the most accessible options should be the healthiest ones! The #Right2Food Children's Food Watchdog is a great way to achieve this and put standards on school food. Giving young people a voice and putting us where the decisions are made is crucial. Besides, our experience gives us expertise and we have a lot to say! The canteen was a massive talking point in the School Council at my secondary school, and everyone always had ideas on how to improve it. We want to be able to access nutritious food in school and out so that we can concentrate in the classroom and thrive out of school too. In fact, 86% of Londoners agree with me and believe that tackling obesity should be a top priority³.

With kids not at school right now due to the coronavirus, the need for access to food at all times, not just at school, has been highlighted. The government stepped up and responded by extending free school meal provision for 1.3 million kids over the Easter holidays. It can be done: we have seen it done and it should be continued for all school holidays. The coronavirus has seen the government make other remarkable policy decisions, like the cut in business rates, which proves that the government has the tools and ability to put young people's health before profits. These could stay

² London Health Commission, 2018. 'Global City Comparisons: overview'

³ Mayor of London, 2018. 'The London Health Inequalities Strategy: implementation plan 2018-2020'

low for food outlets, which are in line with the Children's Food Watchdog standards, so that lower prices for healthy meals can be passed on to consumers. This would realign the price of healthy versus unhealthy calories to make the cheaper options the healthier options.

This is also in line with the #Right2Food Health Before Profits initiative, which calls for more truthful labelling like compulsory traffic light labels across all products, and is currently the focus of several campaigns.

Despite the coronavirus crisis, I really feel hopeful about the future of our food environment.

I hope policy makers can seize new opportunities that the changing world is bringing, and make radical change that put the health of young people first. I really think that the Children's Food Watchdog, free school meal provision into the holidays, and lower business rates for nutritious food outlets could really improve young people's access to nutritious food.

I feel inspired by the change for the better that has already begun, and believe that with these recommendations we could live in a world where all young people have fair access to nutritious food. A world of lower obesity, lower food insecurity, and of better health for us all.