



HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD (HAF) PROGRAMME 2021:

**London's experience and
recommendations for government**

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Foreword

The Covid-19 pandemic raised many issues, perhaps none more so than the epidemic of food insecurity amongst some of our children and young people. The realisation, highlighted so ably by Marcus Rashford, that some children in our society are hungry caused outrage – an outrage shared by politicians of all hues, businesses, celebrities and the general public. There was a national outcry and a call to action, with many giving to charities such as ours to enable us to support community partners, plus an expectation that the Government should 'do something'.

Well, the Government has done something. This is not, in fact, merely a knee jerk reaction to the public furore, but the result of three years of careful policy development and piloting, following lobbying by the Mayor's Fund for London, alongside many others nationally, about the need to tackle holiday food insecurity. The result is the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, aimed at providing nutritious food and wider support during the school holidays for children in need. This is a major achievement and should be applauded.

However, as with many policies, it does not meet all our aims, whilst there is now learning to be done. As the largest and most established independent provider of support to local community groups to deliver holiday and food programmes, we wanted to make sure that we gathered as much information as possible on how the scheme was running in order to make sure we collectively do even better in London in the years to come. The result is this report.

Our research, commissioned from an independent researcher, shows how amazingly well London has done in stepping up to rollout HAF across the capital in 2021. It also shows how, thanks to the Government's HAF policy, many more young people not only benefited from good quality, healthy food, but also crucially, were able to see and make new friends, be active, learn new skills, stay safe, have fun, relax and, hopefully, begin to recover emotionally and physically from the challenges of the pandemic. However, it also shows powerfully the gaps in the provision and the changes that could helpfully be implemented as the programme continues into 2022 and beyond.

Our many thanks go to the Greater London Authority for supporting this work, alongside our gratitude to the local authorities, local community providers, families and young people who gave their time and shared their views so willingly. A special thank you to Laura Wyatt-Smith for her excellent research and helping to create this report.



Kirsty McHugh
CEO, Mayor's Fund for London

Mayor's Fund for London

This report has been produced by the Mayor's Fund for London (MFL) with support from the Greater London Authority (GLA).

MFL is an independent charity championing opportunity for young Londoners from low-income backgrounds. It uses its campaigning, convening and galvanising power to make the case for investment in opportunities for young people across the capital. Our work raises awareness of the barriers facing young Londoners, promotes the activities which best increases their opportunities and brings together the partnerships to make a measurable impact on their lives.

In addition to campaigning for statutory responsibility of holiday provision, MFL runs Kitchen Social¹, which funds and supports around 100 local community organisations to run holiday food and activities programmes around the capital each year. Operating since 2017, the programme provides

nutritious food, safe community spaces and enriching activities. It is run on an inclusive basis, with no child in need required to prove their free school meals (FSM) eligibility.

After the pandemic hit, Kitchen Social was selected to trial delivery of HAF in 2020 in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. Using its experience, Kitchen Social then supported local authorities with training and capacity building activity to ready them for delivery of the 2021 HAF scheme across London.

In response to the needs arising from HAF delivery, the charity also developed its successful Take & Make² recipe boxes, which are now retailed to local councils and delivery partners. These contain ingredients for four portions of healthy vegetarian meals, supported by recipe cards and fun and engaging 'how to' videos for the whole family.

1 www.mayorsfundforlondon.org.uk/kitchen-social

2 www.mayorsfundforlondon.org.uk/kitchen-social/take-and-make



**Kitchen
Social**
good things to eat and do

**Take &
Make**

Greater London Authority

The GLA is the regional authority responsible for the strategic administration of Greater London. It consists of one Mayor (currently Sadiq Khan) and 25 London Assembly members elected every four years by Londoners. With the support of the GLA's staff, they work to make London the best big city in the world. Also referred to as City Hall, it was created after a referendum in 1998, when Londoners voted in favour of a directly elected mayor to represent London's interests and a London Assembly to scrutinise their work.

The Mayor is responsible for making London a better place for everyone who visits, lives, or works in the city by providing citywide leadership, setting an overall vision for London, and creating plans and policies to achieve this. The GLA has powers and interests in a range of policy areas, including transport, economic development, and emergency planning.

In his London Food Strategy, published in 2018, the Mayor committed to supporting the Kitchen Social programme in order to address holiday food insecurity and advocate for the introduction of statutory funding for holiday food and activities provision. Following the expansion of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, the GLA funded the Mayor's Fund for London to support local authorities to commission and deliver HAF funded provision between February-June 2021 and is now funding this research to capture learning from the delivery of HAF in London this year, which will help inform policy decisions at a national and local level.

The GLA is also working with partners to support London's economic and social recovery post-pandemic and officers are scoping and delivering a range of other proposals under the London Recovery Board's 'Robust Safety' Net mission. The mission aims to ensure 'by 2025, every Londoner can access the support they need to avoid or alleviate financial hardship', which includes food insecurity.



Introduction

This report is a summary of London's experience delivering the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme³. The HAF programme was originally piloted in 2018, then again in 2019 and 2020, before being expanded across the whole of England in 2021. The programme covers six out of the 13 weeks of school holidays and, in 2021, during four weeks in summer and one week each over the Easter and Christmas holidays. In the November 2021 Budget, the Chancellor announced a further £200m annual commitment to continuing the HAF programme over the three years covered by the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The HAF programme is about food and wider support. It is intended for “children who are eligible for and receiving benefits-related free school meals” and provides healthy meals, enriching activities, nutritional education, signposting and referrals to other support and services.

The HAF programme aims for children to:

- eat more healthily over the school holidays
- be more active during the school holidays
- take part in engaging and enriching activities which support development of resilience, character and wellbeing along with wider educational attainment
- be safe and not to be socially isolated
- have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition
- be more engaged with school and other local services.

And for families who participate in this programme to:

- develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting
- be signposted towards other information and support, for example, health, employment and education.

We welcomed the HAF programme's expansion in 2021 and the commitment to its continuation in the Comprehensive Spending Review. As an established independent provider of food and activities outside term-time, through our Kitchen Social programme, we are committed to working with central, regional and local government to ensure that every child and young person who would benefit is both able to access this support and have a positive experience.

However, as this report shows, there remain concerns. HAF provision is very welcome, but it is not generous. First, the funding is available for only six out of 13 school holiday weeks.

As the voices of HAF providers in this report show, this is likely to be inadequate, with providers saying powerfully that they want to be able to cater for children throughout the school holidays. Second, the provision is targeted primarily on children with FSM eligibility (meaning a family income of just £7,400 a year after tax and before benefits). Even before the pandemic, research from the GLA indicated that there were likely to be around 400,000 children in London at risk of food insecurity, with roughly half eligible for free school meals. This figure is likely to have increased as a result of Covid-19. Across the country, this means that 16–18 year olds are missed from the funding, whilst there is a question mark about the long term eligibility of those children with no recourse to public funds.

There are also specific London challenges. Rising house prices and the impact of welfare reform have moved lower income families to the edges of London from the central zones. This has led to a well documented mismatch between where youth provision, which has survived a decade of cuts, is concentrated and where many young people now live. Also, where do those families, who have relatively good incomes in London but still cannot afford commercial provision rates and are excluded from the HAF scheme, go? What all local authorities, HAF providers and partners agree on, as well the Department for Education (DfE) itself, is that HAF should never be a stigmatising provision. It is about more than just food. It is about reducing social isolation, communities coming together, meaningful educational experiences, safe spaces and it is about having fun.

Given the importance of this agenda, this report aims to outline London's experience of HAF. Our researcher, supported by young people, spoke with children, young people, HAF providers, local authorities (LAs) and other relevant experts to generate an overview of delivery in London until the autumn of this year. This report is the summary of our findings and includes recommendations to central Government on how we think the policy can be further improved so that more children and young people can gain the greatest possible benefit from this much needed investment.

We hope that policy makers will take on board our five key recommendations. We also hope that this report will help local authorities and other important bodies such as the GLA understand both the challenges and good practices of delivering this policy so that we can work together, as a region, to improve our support to young Londoners.

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2021



Methodology

MFL consulted a range of stakeholders through multiple methods to attempt to capture a range of views and perspectives about HAF across London.

- **112 children and young people and 38 parents** were consulted over the Summer and October holidays by MFL's Young Researchers.
- **16 HAF providers** were consulted across several interviews and group workshops and were selected to represent the full range of different provider types in London – schools, youth centres, nurseries, volunteer-based organisations, etc – and to provide a geographic spread of inner and outer boroughs across North South, East and West London.
- **LAs:** All 32 boroughs in London were invited to take part and give their views to inform this report via an individual interview or participation in a group workshop. We spoke to those responsible for coordinating and/or commissioning HAF programmes in their areas. Additionally, we also invited LAs to submit short “pen profiles” – brief overviews on how HAF was delivered in their area so as to capture the most holistic view as possible. These are available separately to this report. All in all, **25 LAs** took part in the research.
- **An expert steering group** guided the consultation process and verified initial findings and feedback on draft versions of this report (see Appendix A).

London's HAF experience

A huge community effort saw the HAF programme delivered across a great variety of settings across London – from schools to youth centres to nurseries to community-owned spaces and religious centres. This diversity of providers was a major strength of the programme. It meant that by commissioning experienced youth work providers already embedded in communities, LAs could receive the benefits of their expertise in attracting the target audience and designing appealing youth work activities. It also meant that school providers were able to identify FSM-eligible young people and utilise their expertise in SEND and safeguarding, whilst other community centres or religious organisations were able to reach specific communities and access affordable buildings. Some of these groups were also sometimes more well-placed to work over Christmas – a time that is harder to staff with professional youth workers.

Specialist organisations such as football clubs, theatre groups, food art therapists, music production units and many more offered a range of enhancements that left many young people with memorable experiences that lifted their spirits over the summer in particular. Sometimes, providers subsidised the cost of HAF through fundraising or other LA funding sources so they could provide overnight trips or day trips to the beach for some young people. However, the budget did not allow for as much of this activity as hubs would have liked.

Food was provided by school caterers, local cafes, volunteers, youth workers and more. Healthy food, whether hot or cold, and mealtimes that created positive food experiences were important to all involved in the programmes. Food education happened best when it was non-judgemental and united parents and children in fun and celebration. Children relished the opportunity to play with other children and engage in activities that they could not otherwise do at home, regardless of whether it was arts, crafts, sport, musical or cooking-related. Older young people appreciated having somewhere to be together and socialise, with good food and fun activities, at times and in locations that appealed to their age. Often this meant evening provision, in contrast to the daytime provision which was valued by families and children of a younger age.



There were challenges too. It was a great success that the HAF programme attracted new families and young people to engage and that there was a large increase in the number of young people attending with SEND requirements. However, ensuring families' needs were met appropriately often required additional resources and a coordinated approach, which was challenging to organise with such a short lead in time to this year's programme. Attracting older young people also proved a challenge in some cases, but more experienced youth workers were able to increase engagement in some areas and will be able to share learning on this for future delivery. Local level data reporting and analysis also proved to be a steep learning curve, regardless of the support introduced by the DfE. Many LAs felt this might benefit from greater collaboration in the future.

Despite challenges, the universal message from London is that it wants HAF to continue and to be expanded to support more young people. At every level, London has invested time and resources into making HAF a success and the capital is committed to developing the offer to help more young people in the future.

What did young people tell us?



Preventing social isolation, developing positive community networks and creating new friendships and connections



Improving family wellbeing through the alleviation of parents' financial and emotional strain



Increasing young people's mental wellbeing through access to fun, social and learning activities



Increasing children's physical activity



Creating opportunities to learn about food, health and cooking in a fun way



Mitigating or monitoring safeguarding risks by – crucially – giving older young people somewhere safe and appealing for them to go with their friends



Access to nutritious food that alleviates hunger and expands children's food experiences

We know this from our surveys of children and young people, who tell us that ***“It keeps you out of the house, I get to play and cook”*** and that ***“I like playing with everyone here, it’s fun and enjoyable. It also tires me out and allows me to have a better sleep”*** and that, ultimately, ***“It’s more fun than being at home – there’s new people, equipment and we can socialise”***.

Specifically, children tell us that they like:

- 66 making new friends and the activities, not just going to the park”
- 66 doing things that we can't do at home”
- 66 being around new people and the activities”
- 66 that I get to play with people of different ages and make friends”



making friends



playing with people of different ages



being around new people

From listening to young people, the benefits of HAF were clear. We heard consistent reports that the HAF programme has the potential to support families from communities with fewer opportunities in a multitude of ways. And the alternative to HAF is clear. When asked, ‘if you were not here, what would you be doing?’, a significant number replied that they would be watching TV or playing on the iPad / XBOX / mobile games / video games. Others replied that they would be playing at home, in the park or playground. Others simply said that they would be bored. When asked how the HAF programme could be improved, children responded that they wished it was open longer (with 60% wishing they could attend more frequently) and many others wishing that there were better facilities and resources for play – as equipment was sometimes broken – an example of the funding shortfall experienced by many providers.

Children also commented on the food, with some wishing that there was more of it and others wishing for more sweets and less vegetables! This is perhaps anecdotal evidence that the programme is gently expanding children’s food experiences and supporting healthier eating habits.

Older young people consistently reported to youth workers that having a physical space that felt safe and welcoming in which they could socialise was vital to their wellbeing. The food was a key attraction that encouraged take up and the opening hours were also very important. Many providers therefore evolved to offer a “teatime”

meal and open during early evenings to attract more young people, as this was the time when they would ordinarily meet with friends and, with nowhere appropriate to go, potentially engage in riskier activity. Older young people also cited the positive activities available during the HAF programmes.

We understand from providers that music production / videography was generally the most popular option with young people. Although they also told us this is also an expensive option as they need to bring in expert organisations, which meant that it was out of budget or a rare treat in some locations. For some older people – especially boys – we heard that football was popular, especially when run in conjunction with big name clubs. However, uptake of exercise was mixed and even off-putting to many older young people (especially in mixed gender groups) and providers reported consistently that young people felt that the provision of structured activities was secondary to just having somewhere to go to be with friends.

One young person wanted to tell the Prime Minister that the HAF programme, means the most – I have something to do and something to talk about when I go back to school.”



something to talk about



more food



60% wished they could attend more frequently

Another said, it means a lot, there aren’t many safe places. The hubs boost mental health and stops us playing on devices all the time. Adults nag about sitting around but don’t give children enough opportunities to socialise.”

What did parents tell us?

Our parents survey revealed that parents appreciate the community, freedom, fun and safety provided by the programme – as well as the food.

Parents reported:

- “ I love the community here, the children are able to have human interaction and have fun, they are active, happy and run everywhere.”
- “ It’s fun, everyone is friendly and there’s lots of space and snacks. All the parents love it because it’s a secure, safe place.”

Food was important. One parent simply said,

- “ I come here to collect food for them.”

Others also appreciated how it has helped with their child’s development,

- “ [the HAF programme has] improved his behaviour as he has ADHD, [it] helps with his listening skills too.”



fun and safety



food collection



freedom



community

When asked what they would be doing if the HAF programme was not available, parents were clear that it would be challenging and that they would typically either just be at home or at the park. One parent summed it up when they said, **“The park for long hours at a time and trying to find other activities to occupy their time.”** Another commented, **“I would try and organise some trips but it is very difficult with three young children – they have the best holiday at the hub, it is their favourite thing to do and they love it”.**

Parents felt that attending the HAF programme means that children get to spend their time more wisely and have something positive in their life. One said simply, **“[it] stops the children from being stuck at home and watching TV and allows them to socialise with other children”**; another added, it gives them **“something to look forward to each week”** and another, it **“keeps them busy during the holiday so it doesn’t make them feel like they are missing out on anything fun”.**



relax and join in the fun



good support network

Furthermore, there were benefits for the parents who felt able to relax, socialise and even join the fun and share bonding experiences with their own children. There were many comments to the effect that,

“It provides me with a good support network and makes the holidays less stressful, I love the love we get from the community.”

And many remarks about the mental health benefits of being able to relax whilst their children are active and safe...

“As parents this is also ‘me time’ and allows us to relax as the children have fun – at the park I have to be wary.”

“I get some alone time to relax and not stress with children. [I] can also participate in activities too which is relaxing.”

However, parents felt that many more were missing out on the opportunity to participate with lots mentioning the need to advertise more and wishing it was better known so more parents could attend. One parent said, **“Some are afraid and some do not know it exists”**. Another highlighted that it was a matter of **“first come, first served”** because there is not enough space.

What did providers tell us?

Many experienced youth work providers told us that it was a fantastic opportunity to guarantee young people access to free meals – or much better meals – for the first time. However, some also remarked that sometimes expectations for what they could offer were too high. One provider – who was typical of many we spoke to – explained that to keep their costs within budget, they relied on donations from food aid organisations like The Felix Project or FairShare, which meant that planning their meals to school food standards was sometimes difficult because they did not usually know what food would be delivered. Such partnerships are, in general a positive thing – they reduce food waste and reduce costs, critical for the youthwork sector that does not have a single reliable support of income yet strives to provide a consistent service for young people – but it is important to note that such initiatives are heavily subsidising the true cost of the HAF programme. That is one of many challenges providers need to overcome to meet the quality standards for HAF food provision.

Conversely, we heard about schools that said that they could not access their own kitchen facilities during the holidays because the schools did not own them and were too expensive to rent or not viable for staffing reasons. The point is that facilities, skills, experience and time varied by provider and common sense judgements must be applied.

Providers told us how important it was to recognise the differences between younger and older children and wanted to be trusted to make decisions about what style of provision – food, activities, opening times, session duration, locations – works best, based on their years of experience. For instance, younger children tended to need longer daytime sessions with lots of fun activities – crafts, sports, games – whereas older young people needed sessions that started later and they could “dip in and out of”, with activities that appealed to them, for example, music production or cooking.

In principle, providers all supported the intention to have physical activity available, but some highlighted that some older young people feel uncomfortable doing traditional sport and exercise and it can be a barrier to uptake, especially in mixed gender groups. Anecdotally, it seems that in the older ages, as well as more boys than girls are attending, which is possibly due to some unconscious bias in the activities commissioned – for example with commissioning football providers, which typically appeal less to girls.

One provider explains:

66 The Government needs to know that we are being judged on food standards which are usually provided by trained chefs in a fully kitted professional kitchen with enough budget and dedicated staff time to cater at scale. Whereas we are just youth workers with basic food hygiene qualifications, trying to cater en masse whilst supporting young people in the centre at the same time whilst working in small, out of date facilities that were not designed for this.”



catering challenges



physical activity for all ages and genders

One provider spoke about girls-only groups being one approach that helped support uptake, and many mentioned the need to expand the activities on offer to ensure there is enough that appeals to girls and boys alike. Additionally, providers told us older young people may not be interested in attending the entirety of a four-hour session and that it was better that young people attend for some time, rather than all or nothing.

There was a clear universal message from providers that 16–18 year olds need this support just as much as younger teenagers and it was a huge error to have excluded them from this policy. Providers talked about “losing” young people to the streets, when provision is inconsistent or stops too soon in a young person’s life. This was the same reason that youth work providers felt strongly that provision during every single school holiday was vital – because, said one, **“You can work with them all summer but if you’re not there for them in October half term when they need you, what’s the point? If they’re not with you then they’re back out there and you’ve lost them. If you don’t commit to doing it properly it’s just a waste of time and money. It just doesn’t work like that.”** They also spoke of children on the programme taking home food for older siblings or of feeling guilty because they were eating and their family was not. This was just one reason schemes like the MFL Take & Make boxes were a popular addition to providers’ service offerings (see Appendix B).

We learned that some Ofsted registered childcare providers were offering a paid for service alongside free places for FSM-eligible young people as part of the HAF programme, as recommended by the Government. There was a feeling that this could work in some cases to a limited extent. However, there was universal concern that this approach created a big “gap” of support in the middle, through which the families who were not registered to receive FSM, but could not afford childcare would fall. Providers told us that they were shocked at how often families they knew well who were in very difficult financial circumstances were, for many reasons, some of which are detailed in the eligibility section below, not in receipt of FSM and therefore would be excluded from this support if they had not been subsidising their places through other charitable sources. For many providers who offered “walk in” services for older young people, it was unthinkable to turn away a young person who approached them for support and they would find ways to ‘make it work’ and worry about the funding afterwards. Providers wanted the Government to know that they know when a family needs support because they are embedded in communities and they wanted trust and flexibility to use their judgement when classifying who is “in need” and who is not.

Providers all commented on the new families that they had engaged with for the first time this year due to enhanced funding and marketing of the HAF scheme. They noted a significant increase in young people with SEND and wanted more resources to support them appropriately. One provider commented, **“We should be given the same level of support as teachers when a child has an EHCP [Education Health Care Plan] – like a TA [Teaching Assistant] to support us with more challenging behaviour”**, and added, **“It’s even harder when we don’t have any information about them in advance because they have invisible disabilities and the families don’t know or don’t want to tell us.”** Another commented that greater coordination between providers would enable them to cross-refer families to the most appropriate services and ensure that there was always a suitable offer, even if they could not support their needs directly.

A critical point providers highlighted was that whilst the funding was hugely welcomed, they needed greater consistency and guaranteed income to secure these services for years to come. They pointed out that their overheads were fixed – whereas HAF is a free service and attendance is never guaranteed. Also, that HAF funds only a small proportion of the young people that they support – and the funds available vary per contract and never cover the full costs of running their operation, so they need to heavily subsidise the scheme through finding alternative income sources to cover overheads like training and accommodation to operate a viable long term service.

Finally, providers told us that there were also other local young people who sometimes needed more intensive or bespoke provision and that they wanted the flexibility to use HAF for these things. Particularly, young people with social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) challenges – some of whom struggle with their behaviour – who would benefit from full days out or residential trips. Equally, providers would like to see more consideration of the depth / quality of the HAF programme impact on lives, not just the quantity / numbers reached because sometimes the best work reaches fewer people and costs more time and money but has an exponential impact on lives.



What did local authorities tell us?

For some LAs with well-established youth work and childcare sectors or pre-existing holiday schemes, HAF provided much needed funds to enhance or expand their offer to more families. Sometimes this meant that food, or better-quality food was available for the first time. For other LAs, it was the first time in many years that they had provided a holiday activity and food scheme at this scale and there was a lot of work and learning to get things set up in time due to the complexities of commissioning processes and not having existing staff and systems in place.

The diversity of providers commissioned by LAs was a clear strength for HAF provision in London, with each type of provider offering a unique contribution. However, the short turn-around time from the 2021 programme being announced and the limited funding availability posed challenges for many. We learned that some good quality providers were unable to access funding this year because the amount of work that would have been involved in coordinating the commissioning process for dozens, if not hundreds, of smaller contracts meant that some LAs were forced to prioritise working with fewer, larger scale providers who could deliver high

volumes and had the resources and experience to navigate the application process and the lengthy technical documents involved. Some LAs required every provider that bid to offer “4-4-4” – i.e. four hours for four days for four weeks”. Some did this because of initial confusion around the Government policy, which requires that offer is available to families but does not state that any single provider must offer this as a minimum. Whereas, other LAs intentionally used this approach to simplify the bidding process and limit the number of providers that they would need to manage due to having insufficient staff to manage the process and the relationships. However, with appropriate management support in place, LAs were all keen to have as diverse range of providers as possible and planned to open up the opportunity for more providers in future years, assuming sufficient notice was provided.

LAs were all committed to reaching as many FSM-eligible children as possible, and we heard of staff going above and beyond to meet deadlines, visit programmes and support providers. Yet, it takes time to build word of mouth, generate trust and fully embed an initiative in communities and, whilst LAs were pleased with uptake, all expected to reach more next year.

A clear message from LAs for Government was that “underspending” on a budget now, does not equate to a lack of need from families. LAs know that there is overwhelming need in their communities, but the process of engaging communities takes time – it is not a switch that can be flicked to achieve instant results and this situation was made harder still by having such a tight lead in time, with little time for marketing the programme. Additionally, this year, LAs were still rebuilding after the disruption of the pandemic, with staff shortages and many staff “doubling up” responsibilities to make the HAF programme happen.

diversity of providers



LAs appreciated where DfE gave flexibility with the spending, but felt that clarifications often came too late for proper planning. For example, LAs welcomed the additional flexibility around Christmas provision as staff shortages and lower demand from families who want to be together at this time is a concern that they have been expressing from the outset, but clarification came after the commissioning process was already complete for most and excellent providers were not engaged because they could not offer the original requirements of the policy.

LAs want to achieve better coordination and information / good practice sharing between boroughs and there is a role to play for the GLA and MFL here. Many LAs commented that their primary source of support was MFL due to the bank of helpful support resources that has been built up since 2017 and its trusted relationships with independent and experienced staff. Some LAs expressed reservations about the support service commissioned by DfE, reporting that clarifications were unhelpful or came too late, and that, due to the close association with DfE, the forums did not feel like it was a “safe space for sharing about our challenges”. Rather, most LAs preferred to have local or regional learning events coordinated by the GLA or other regional organisations, such as MFL.



trying to reach as many children as possible



an overwhelming need

Recommendations

Based on the feedback from local authorities, providers, parents and young people and children themselves, this report offers five key recommendations to build upon the success of the 2021 HAF scheme in London and beyond now that funding has been confirmed for at least the next three years.

1

Provide details to LAs on funding allocations and requirements

for HAF in 2022 and beyond as early as possible to ensure clarity, consistency and sufficient planning and investment by local authorities and partners. Put in place multi-year policy evaluations to capture the impact of HAF across various social outcomes.



3

Use learning from 2021 to more realistically fund the costs of the programme

including vital overhead costs, and provide additional funding to meet the needs of young people with SEND or SEMH challenges.

5

Listen to local authorities and providers in determining the requirements of future HAF scheme

Allow them sufficient flexibility to reflect the varying needs of young people, for instance by removing the requirement for “weekly training and advice sessions for parents” and encouraging, but not mandating, the inclusion of whole family activities that engage and connect around food.

2

Extend HAF eligibility criteria

to ensure that all young people who would benefit from HAF up to age 18 (or 25 if they have SEND) can access this support. This includes young people with no recourse to public funds.

4

Ensure that young people can access HAF during every week of school holidays

whether in person or remotely.

Ask 1

Provide details to LAs on funding allocations and requirements

for HAF in 2022 and beyond as early as possible to ensure clarity, consistency and sufficient planning and investment by local authorities and partners. Put in place multi-year policy evaluations to capture the impact of HAF across various social outcomes.

Longevity of the programme

For many LA commissioners, a one-year policy and a lack of policy detail meant that they were unclear on delivery partner requirements and unable to make longer term investments in staff to coordinate the initiative or infrastructure support such as a centralised booking system. This created intense staffing pressures and, in some cases, confusion, inefficiency and inconsistency.

Short-term funding commitments also meant that providers could not recruit and train staff, invest in systems or commit to communities that delivery will be available. Short term funding would therefore collectively undermine both the delivery infrastructure of the policy and, for families and communities, an inconsistent offer would mean that the stress and uncertainty of holiday periods remained.

The announcement in the Comprehensive Spending Review therefore needs to be followed up with more detail to local authorities as soon as possible, giving details of funding allocations and requirements for HAF 2022 and beyond.

The announcement of long term funding should also be accompanied by plans for long term evaluation of impact, rather than merely measuring the immediate, short-term outputs e.g. how many attended. It is likely that benefits will accrue over years and will have far wider socio-economic benefits than are immediately obvious in the policy intent.



Ask 2

Extend HAF eligibility criteria

to ensure that all young people who would benefit from HAF up to age 18 (or 25 if they have SEND) can access this support. This includes young people with no recourse to public funds.

* MFL defines 'at risk' young people as those who face avoidable risks outside of the school term, including but not limited to: a lack of access to social opportunities, educational attainment loss, safeguarding issues, mental health issues and obesity.



Programme eligibility

Research by the GLA Survey of Londoners, released in June 2019⁴, identified 400,000 children aged 16 or under in food insecure households in the capital. The figure is estimated to be closer to 500,000 because of the pandemic. However, approximately half of the children in food insecure households are excluded from the HAF programme because they are not claiming or not eligible for FSM. The current policy is aimed at young people who are eligible and registered for FSM, with only a 15% tolerance for other types of 'vulnerable' young people. Consequently, charity or LA operated and funded schemes including MFL's Kitchen Social programme, are providing a "top up" level of support that remains critical to ensuring that no child goes without activities and food during the holidays.

Our research this summer supports these survey findings, with some well-established youth clubs reporting huge upturns in interest in places, with one centre citing 500 applicants for 270 places on their scheme and another "**unprecedented demand since lockdown**" with 122 young people attending one day compared to the planned 80 meals. Providers told us about 'just about managing' families who struggle more over summer because of reduced working hours due to having less childcare. They also told us about would-be FSM-eligible families who were unregistered or unknown due to confusion around Universal Infant FSM (often parents do not understand that they need to register for FSM if they are already receiving universal Infant FSM); cultural or language

barriers; plus time lags in the application process. There were also families whose income makes them ineligible for FSM, but who are trapped in a cycle of poverty due to payday lenders and high private rents and children and young people with no recourse to public funds – a hugely vulnerable group that simply must be able to access this support.

And yet – HAF is about so much more than food; the original pilot was intended and designed to help at risk families in many ways: with safeguarding, crime prevention, mental health and prevention of summer learning loss. As such, **FSM is a misleading eligibility measure because it reduces the discussion about HAF to the alleviation of food insecurity when its objectives are much broader than this.**

This quotation was provided by an Advisory Group member from his local community and shows that the positive impact of the HAF programme goes well beyond the alleviation of hunger.

“ I have worked as the local officer on this estate for the last six years. During the school holidays I usually have an increase in complaints of anti-social behaviour (ASB) across the estate including the communal areas of the housing blocks and the main square as the young people are away from school with little to engage them. This is the first year that I have received very few complaints of ASB and while out on patrol in the evenings I have noticed that the estate has been generally quiet and there have been no groups gathering/congregating. I feel that this has been down to the structured programme that has been put on by the Youth Club that has involved the young people going on different trips that has kept them all engaged and busy. Some of the young people that I have spoken to have actually told me that they have been too tired after going on the trips to hang out on the estate and just want to go home and sleep!!”

Furthermore, the current criteria encourages the use of strictly "closed" programmes to achieve the minimum of 85% FSM-eligible young people. Some LAs do this by issuing personal codes for FSM-eligible families. Whilst understandable, this approach is problematic as it excludes many young people who are in need but not FSM-eligible and risks stigmatising the programme. It also separates friends which respondents from many providers anecdotally reported, makes the programme much less appealing to many young people, particularly the older groups, and this in turn negatively impacts take up amongst even the FSM-eligible young people who would benefit.

Recommendations

One youth club manager delivering HAF for the first time explains,

“We run a drop-in service for 13-year-olds and up – they just turn up so pre-booking is not possible. Even when they do pre-book, the older young people are too embarrassed to give their eligibility code. The first week we tried to identify the FSM-young people but by the second week we decided we just had to feed everyone and worry about it later.”

Another very experienced youth work manager also running the HAF programme agrees that the need goes far beyond FSM-eligibility, saying,

“The food bank support is critical. There are lots of families who are not eligible for FSM [and therefore the HAF programme] but are really struggling and need our help. It’s just not clear cut and the Government needs to know that.”

Youth clubs like these are subsidising the cost of the HAF programme by fundraising through other sources to top-up their income and cover their costs rather than turn away young people in need of their support.

Additionally, one community organisation manager cited the challenges with evidencing FSM-eligibility. This organisation works with a transient and multicultural population who may only attend the programme for a few days and many of whom speak English as a second language or are seeking asylum. She says, **“the admin is intense when supporting families with language barriers – it might not seem much, but to evidence FSM-eligibility for 50 families and then for them not to attend the following week and to have to do it all again is hard. Also, parents are shamed to declare, which is why we now just give it to everyone and not highlight this issue to families.”**

For these reasons, many LAs have decided to simply absorb the additional cost of places on HAF for families who would benefit but are not FSM-eligible, and thereby keep the programme open access. They mitigate this risk by adopting intelligent targeted marketing campaigns to attract only those most in need.

For other LAs, whose leaders feel unable to risk the overspend associated with “ineligible” young people attending the HAF programme, restricting attendance on



programmes has been the only option. Some providers do offer additional paid-for places alongside the subsidised places, but this is unaffordable for many families, meaning that they fall through the gap in the middle of those who can afford to pay, and those who are paid for via the HAF programme.

Ultimately, we believe that the programme benefits should be extended to any young person who faces avoidable risks outside of the school term, including but not limited to: a lack of access to social opportunities, educational attainment loss, safeguarding issues, mental health issues and obesity. All these factors are contributors to and signals of poverty. There are many ways to ascertain young people in need, but local schools and youth support providers know these families well and should be trusted to identify them appropriately for this support. A family in need might have a number of indicators, other than being FSM-registered, for example they might: be in receipt of means-tested benefits; be a care-experienced child or have a social worker; live in an area of high deprivation according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation⁵, family uses local foodbank services, experience mental health challenges; have low school attendance or challenging behaviour; have physical health concerns such as obesity or not otherwise be thriving, etc.

Furthermore, whilst the current policy stops at age 16, those we consulted across London universally feel that it is vital this be extended to age 18 (25 for young people with SEND) to ensure that young people – who are supposed to be in education and training until this age – are also able to access holiday time support through HAF during these critical and formative years.

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833959/loD2019_Infographic.pdf

Ask 3

Use learning from 2021 to more realistically fund the costs of the programme

including vital overhead costs, and provide additional funding to meet the needs of young people with SEND or SEMH challenges.



Funding formula

As the formula used to allocate funding to each local authority is not publicly available, LAs have independently estimated uptake and average budget per head to balance the books. Anecdotally, LAs have independently concluded that the HAF formula allows for around £11 – 15 a day, which in general is far too little to fully fund the true costs of running a programme. LAs do not want DfE to dictate a unit cost – prices per provider will always differ based upon the nature of the offer – but they do want greater clarity over what assumptions are being made about how many young people they are expected to support and the level of take up so that they have a “yardstick” to measure their impact by.

It is clear that the overall costs of this programme are being heavily subsidised by the charity sector as providers are having to strip out overheads to meet the price point, such as insurance or training for staff and volunteers in safeguarding or food preparation, or the cost of altering premises or buying equipment for food provision. One major cost is venue rental or lease costs, which are typically excluded from the calculation – this creates a huge issue for potential providers who do not have their own venue. Throughout London, wage bills also tend to be higher than elsewhere in the UK due to the London Living Wage initiative and many providers cited the need to manage their food costs very carefully to keep them within budget. Almost all we spoke to rely on donations from FairShare or The Felix Project as mentioned previously.

MFL understands that the funding calculation is based on 2020 census data. This information has rapidly dated due to Covid-19 negatively affecting family's circumstances, meaning that many more young people are now eligible for FSM than a year ago.

Also, the funding formula is predicated on the assumption that a certain proportion of young people will not attend all provision. Whilst this is the right approach as every young person will never attend every day of provision, the data used was from the 2018-2020 pilots, and **as the programme becomes established we should expect to see young people numbers increase and therefore, costs rise for LAs.**

This year, the contingency fund has been most helpful as it has enabled local authorities to support those families they know are in need. As already stated, there are many more young people who need the support of the HAF programme and so eligibility must be extended. **Meanwhile, flexibility in how the contingency fund is used is welcomed and important to ensure that young people do not go without.**

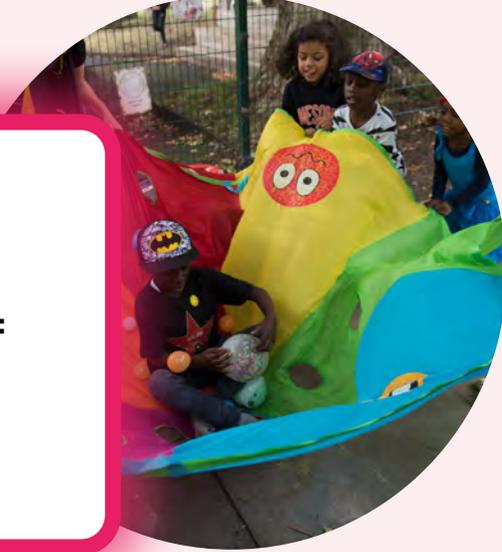
Fully meeting the needs of young people with SEND was a challenge for many this year. From engaging families, to understanding and providing appropriate support, to ensuring that providers had suitable resources and simply meeting the scale of need. It is a great success that the HAF programme attracted new families and young people to engage however, the provision and experience of young people varied by locality and although some families were thrilled with the offer, most LAs and hubs want to achieve greater consistency and confidence in their approach next year.

Specifically, LAs lacked confidence and clarity with how much they could invest in SEND specific support due to fears of overspending and running out of funding and want reassurance from DfE that they can spend what is needed to support young people with SEND needs safely and well. Knowing how to equip a programme appropriately – whether with skilled staff or physical resources – is even harder when many young people have “invisible disabilities” or suspected SEND conditions but are not stated, or families chose not to declare because of fears that their child may be turned away – whether founded or not. Consequently, providers are having to make on the spot decisions on how to support families and balance the needs of all young people. We believe that this is wrong and that when additional needs are suspected, HAF providers should be able to quickly request – and LAs promptly authorise – SEND support at a comparable level to what a school would offer a child with known additional needs.

Ask 4

Ensure that young people can access HAF during every week of school holidays

whether in person or remotely.



Recommendations



Year-round provision

The HAF programme is funded for six⁶ of the 13 weeks of school holiday. As such, Kitchen Social, MFL's only charitably funded programme, which had aimed to end in 2020 when HAF funding was secured, has committed to operate for a further three years to help fill the gaps that HAF has left for children across our city. Many charitable programmes across the country are doing the same. As such, the HAF programme is being subsidised nationally by the charity sector.

Over summer, MFL spoke with parents with children attending HAF-funded provision to ask whether they felt that being able to access support across all school holidays was important to them. Unsurprisingly, 100% responded that it was. Whilst there is recognition that not all young people will attend all sessions and LAs must estimate volumes, without exception, Londoners expressed concerns that young people do not stop being hungry, lonely or at risk in half terms and feel strongly that the current HAF offer of six weeks out of 13 is unacceptable.

Some even felt that the policy could be seen as misleading because the public perception is that the 'problem is solved' when this is far from the case. One experienced youth worker from a hub in South London suggested that providing support during some holidays rather than all, is destined to fail young people, because unless you provide a holistic intervention – i.e. keeping young people hopeful and positively engaged (and “off the streets”) all year round, you will inevitably “lose” them at the next holiday, which will undo all your previous good work.

⁶ HAF policy states provision covers four weeks in the summer one additional week at Christmas and Easter. Delivery over Easter and

Christmas may be spread across two weeks. Practically therefore, HAF implementation may last up to eight weeks, being funded for six.

⁷ See appendix B.

Other providers cited the frustrating loss in momentum from the summer holidays, where trust and relationships were built with families, which was then lost again when they enquired about October half term and the support was not there for them. Consistency and relationships drive uptake.

London welcomed the recent revised guidance regarding greater flexibility over the Christmas holidays. Like DfE, face to face delivery is preferred. However, this is occasionally impracticable due to staff or volunteer shortages e.g. due to Covid-19 or Christmas – and sometimes there is lower family demand for in-person activities because families want to be at home together. This does not mean that support with food and activities is not needed. Alternative offers e.g. a recipe box with food and activities, like MFL's Take & Make initiative⁷, can still play a vital function in taking pressure off of families and providing opportunities for fun, relaxation and connection – and should be provided through the HAF scheme so that no family goes without support during what otherwise could be a difficult time.



5

Listen to local authorities and providers in determining the requirements of future HAF scheme

Allow them sufficient flexibility to reflect the varying needs of young people, for instance by removing the requirement for “weekly training and advice sessions for parents” and encouraging, but not mandating, the inclusion of whole family activities that engage and connect around food.



Flexibility and parent education

A major message from providers, local authorities, children and their families is that the needs of young people differ. As set out above, the needs of older young people regarding type and timing of provision were very different from that of younger children. There needs to be sufficient flexibility built into the design of HAF to allow these needs to be catered for.

A particular example related to the requirement for parent education. The current policy states, ‘Providers must include at least weekly training and advice sessions for parents, carers or other family members. These should provide advice on how to source, prepare and cook nutritious and low-cost food.’

The feedback on this was strong. Sessions that target parents and carers in this way are not the right approach. Focusing on the perceived deficiencies of parents risks alienating communities, who may resent assumptions being made about them and detracts from the purpose of supporting young people. This is particularly problematic for some providers that may be excellent with children and young people but who lack confidence in engaging parents and it detracts resource away from the main objective of HAF – to support young people. We found that whilst provision

targeted specifically for parents was offered this year, take up was low and impact was low or unknown, whether in person or virtual.

Our research suggests that it is much better that parental engagement happens naturally and that the best way to achieve this is to take a whole family approach that engages parents and carers together with their children. For example, many providers would run celebration days at the end of the week where children would showcase what they had learned in art, drama, music, sport, cooking or nutrition with their parents, often followed by a shared food experience. The primary focus was not always specifically on “how to source, prepare and cook nutritious and low-cost food” but it united families and providers around good food. Alternatively, food and recipe boxes, including MFL’s own Take & Make offer, that provide enough to feed a family, creates benefits for the child and parents alike, as they make the meal, learn and eat together. One provider says of these that **“they learn more from the Take & Make boxes than anything,”** and another explains, **“Young people were teaching their parents and siblings how to cook.”** Other schemes included young people creating their own cookbook which was then taken home and shared with parents and Food Champions schemes where parents train parents – but engaging parents takes time and trust and should be grown organically, if at all. It should not be a core part of the HAF programme.

A final comment on food in the HAF programme

London wants to recognise and support DfE's position towards food within the HAF programme. The policy encourages the provision of healthy food aligned to school food standards and gives appropriate trust and flexibility to LAs and providers to ensure that this is being achieved. And it seems as though this is paying off as we found that the provision of food this summer has been generally very good. There have been some learnings, especially around logistics, such as plastic usage, food wastage and access to appropriate cooking facilities, but overwhelmingly the food offer has been very strong.

The policy states that, 'Our expectation is that most of the food served by providers will be hot. However, we acknowledge that there will be occasions when this is not possible and a cold alternative may be used'. Our view is that the policy is broadly correct but that the HAF programme should focus less on food temperature and more on consistently providing healthy food and great food experiences that enhance a young person's relationship with food. Research conducted by Professor Greta Defeyeter⁸ this year utilised the Diet Quality Index⁹ to show that meals on the HAF programme had a similar compliance to school food standards regardless of temperature (71% hot and 70% cold). Similarly, a great food experience can be achieved regardless of food temperature.

As the policy acknowledges, hot food can be fantastic, but sometimes young people do not want a hot meal – for example on a hot day, or mid-way through a physical activity session. This does not mean the only alternative is a second-rate unsociable mealtime with a basic sandwich packed lunch. Likewise, there are often practical barriers to hot food. Some schools cannot access their kitchens over holidays because they are owned by other companies and are too expensive to hire. Providers may have no or small kitchens. Or a shortage of qualified staff. Or operate "offsite" e.g. in a park or at a more remote location. Caterers and local cafes can deliver pre-prepared hot food from cafes or deliver hot boxes or do simple food e.g. jacket potatoes but this isn't always manageable. Hot food also creates excess food wastage, whereas cold is more likely to be re-used another time. As such, local delivery partners should be trusted to consider their own local circumstances and plan accordingly.

Additionally, the policy requires providers to follow school food standards. This is a good idea generally, but it is worth noting that these standards are based upon the nutritional content across a one to three week menu plan and anticipate that young people attend daily, whereas our survey of parents suggests that only around a third of young people attend four or more times a week. Similarly, as detailed previously, facilities, skills and time for food preparation varies greatly between providers for good reason. As such, providers should be trusted to make sensible judgements in interpreting the standards as relevant and consideration should be given to the fact that many HAF providers do not have the same resources as schools to provide a full menu. For instance, during term times, schools typically have the benefit of superior kitchen facilities, dedicated chefs with the skills and time to cook food, and the economies of scale to provide a menu of options to suit a variety of tastes. Conversely, HAF providers often rely on staff with only basic training, minimal time, and are creating meals from unpredictable ingredients – donated to them through FairShare or similar initiatives and can offer only one or two meals a day, which means they need to ensure that these options are appealing to all young people.



8 Crilley, E. (2021). An investigation into the 'Kitchen Social' holiday programme in terms of the operation and impacts on the wellbeing, diet and activity of service users.

9 <https://index.nutrition.tufts.edu/data4diets/indicator/diet-quality-index-international-dqi-i>

What we still don't know

This research represents London's views on the HAF programme during 2021.

We have learned about trends in good practice as well as common “pain points” that need to be addressed in the next iteration of this policy to help the scheme reach more young people and make a bigger positive difference. We have heard many anecdotal stories of the positive impact that the programme has had this summer on young people and families – children who made new friends, engaged in fun activities, had new experiences, were kept safe and ate well. And parents too, who were able to relax as the pressure to entertain and feed their families was lifted, access family support, ease financial worries, improve their own social connections – and feel better that their children were not missing out on life-enhancing holiday experiences like their peers would have.

However, as the programme only started in April 2021, this research project can only capture the short-term impact, and there is so much more that we cannot know yet about how HAF can change young lives for the better. In just six months we cannot possibly know the extent to which HAF might be keeping young people safe from violent crime, preventing gang involvement, preventing youth mental health challenges, reducing obesity, improving cooking skills, developing social skills and confidence or contributing to reducing holiday learning loss.

By making HAF a permanent part of the funding landscape, we have the opportunity to conduct valuable long-term research into the positive impact of this policy, which is the only way to determine the full value to society – personal, social and economic – of this vital investment.



Conclusion

The HAF programme set out to help children eat more healthily, be more active, take part in engaging and enriching activities, be safe, avoid social isolation, improve their knowledge of health and nutrition and engage more with other services and for families to develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting and be signposted towards other information and support.

With the support of the GLA, MFL undertook this research to understand London's experience of HAF and to present findings and key recommendations to Government. Guided by an expert steering group, we spoke in person with 112 children and young people, 38 parents, 16 providers and 25 LAs and the overwhelming view was that London applauds the Government's decision to invest in the HAF programme and wants it to be a permanent and inclusive part of the landscape.

Our findings reinforced the Government's view that HAF is about so much more than food. Indeed, despite welcome and high profile publicity focused on the issue of FSM and 'holiday hunger', HAF should never simply be regarded as a direct replacement of term-time FSM entitlement – not least because it is not a financial benefit and uptake will never be 100%. Rather, London felt that using FSM-eligibility criteria was preventing far too many children and young people who desperately needed this support from accessing HAF because they were not eligible (i.e. not in receipt of benefits-related FSM). Consequently, all LAs and providers told us that eligibility needs to be significantly expanded. Parents too talked about the need to make this support available to more families and children wished their friends could come too.

This project concluded that LAs, schools and providers know their communities and they know who the families are that would benefit. What they need from Government is much more flexibility and the trust and resources to build up their provision infrastructure and get this support out to all those that need it.

London also firmly believes that six weeks of provision out of 13 school holidays a year is just not good enough. Every week that passes without some support, children are going without activities, social contact, safe spaces and good food, and their stressed families are trying hard but struggling to keep their children entertained, happy and well fed. Furthermore, youth clubs tell us that building community trust and momentum and simply "being there" for young people when they need you is what makes the difference to young lives. Closing during half terms threatens to undermine all the good work that is done over summer.

Universally, London feels young people who need it should be able to access at least some HAF support during every week of the school holidays, with the details of provision decided according to local need.

Without exception, LAs and providers told us that HAF-funding is a most welcome contribution, but it is insufficient to maintain a viable service without "top up" funding from other sources, such as other LA funding pots or fundraising through charitable means. It simply does not cover the cost of recruiting or training staff or the overheads incurred in running a professional operation. We heard about savvy money-saving practices such as food budgets being achieved through the help of partnerships with food aid organisations that donate food, and wage bills being kept low by using volunteers from the community. But the bottom line was that this policy is not fully funding this initiative and this is a risk to quality of delivery. For instance, insufficient funding forces out providers with higher fixed costs. It also means that children and young people with SEND or SEMH needs cannot be supported properly. And that the offer available is subject to a postcode lottery whereby boroughs that can invest more from their own budgets – or who have the benefit of long-standing youth organisations who are more successful with charity fundraising – are able to provide a much better offer than those who are starting from scratch building a service on the Government's shoestring budget. The situation may be worse in London due to higher building rents and the London Living Wage that drive up core costs.

Finally, London felt that whilst activities that engage and connect whole families around food can work brilliantly, targeting parents for weekly training and advice sessions on buying and cooking food was the wrong thing to do and risked alienating communities. Our final recommendation is to trust local providers to learn from each other and to have sufficient flexibility, including by removing this detail from the policy.

To conclude, we welcome and celebrate the Government's recent decision to continue investing in the HAF programme. We agree with the Government that the benefits for children, young people and families are huge and we would like to see longitudinal research that explores these positive outcomes in more detail. We also urge the Government to take on board our five key recommendations to maximise the impact of this investment and ensure that not one young Londoner goes without fun activities, friendship and food during the holidays.

Appendix A – List of Advisory Group members

Andrea McDermott

Tooting Partnership Co-ordinator & Wandsworth Giving Development Officer

Brian Grady

Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Children and Young People, London Borough of Brent

Cllr Kemi Akinola

Be Enriched Partnership, CEO

Dan Drillsma-Milgrom

Senior Manager, Equality & Fairness, Diversity and Social Policy, Greater London Authority

Joe Dunton

Strategic Commissioner, Bi-borough Children's Service, London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Liam Weeks

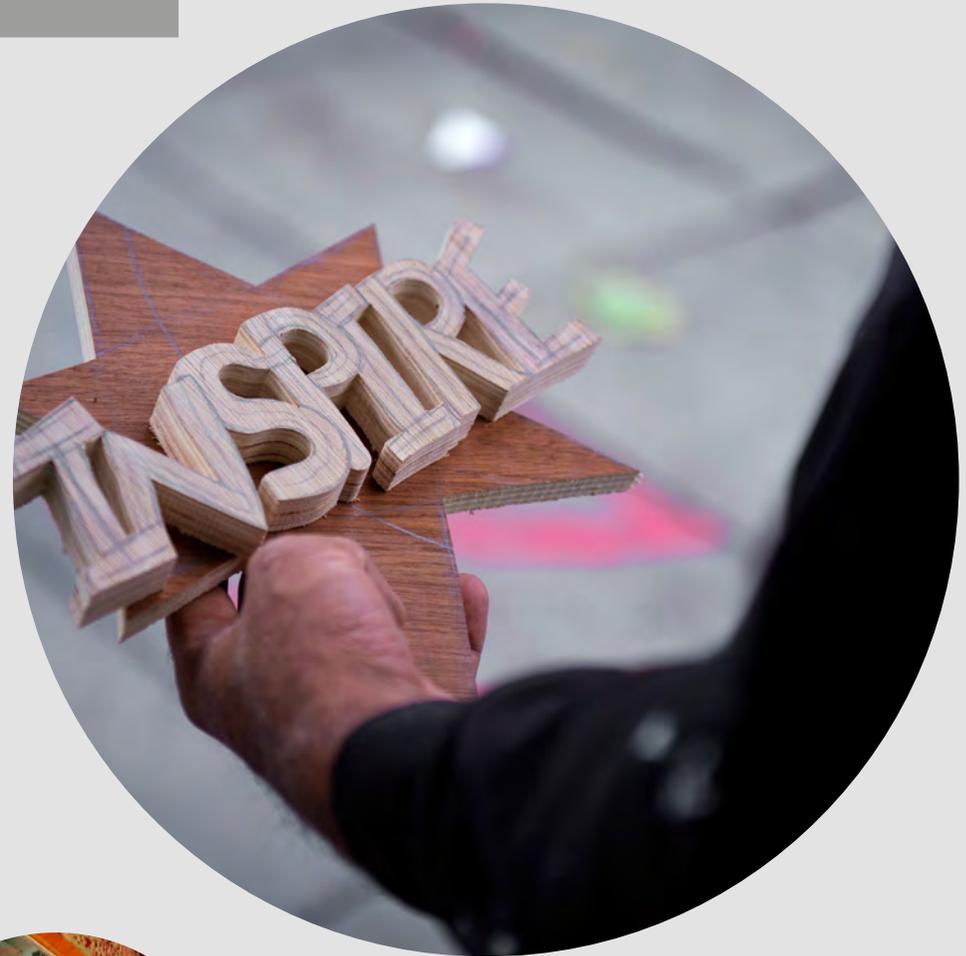
Senior Policy Officer, Financial Hardship – Equality and Fairness team, Greater London Authority

Professor Greta Defeyter

Director of Healthy Living Lab, Northumbria University

Sietske van der Ploeg

Director of Strategy and Campaigns, Mayor's Fund for London



Appendix B – Take & Make Case Study

Many local authorities and providers cited the Take & Make boxes as an excellent resource that their communities have benefited from, especially when face to face delivery was unviable. A case study is provided for illustrative purposes, but other similar schemes exist.

Take & Make recipe boxes provide young people with a fun, practical cookery activity in their home using a joyful and dignified approach. The purpose of Take & Make recipe boxes are to support children to increase their knowledge of food and cookery, and to feel more confident preparing nutritious meals.

Consuming home-cooked meals is associated with lower rates of obesity and better diet quality in both adults and children. Research in this area shows that helping with home meal preparation is a youth behaviour that is realistically modifiable and may substantially influence overall dietary quality. MFL's research into the role of food in low income households suggests that children are not frequently encouraged to participate in food preparation for two key reasons:

- Time constraints and budget constraints making prepared food a more viable option for these households;
- The risk of food wastage and financial loss.

To date, MFL has provided 95,635 recipe boxes to families across London, equating to the same number of hours of practical cooking experience and 382,540 meals.

Take & Make is the provision of branded recipe boxes which include four portions of nutritious, vegetarian food. Each recipe box contains every ingredient needed to cook a meal from scratch. Boxes are designed with a 5 day+ shelf life and high-quality contents so they are welcomed by families. Every box contains step by step instructions plus online video tutorials, which are hosted on YouTube. Each meal meets school food standards.

The boxes are marketed to families as a food activity for children with recipes that are easy enough to repeat. Each box teaches a different recipe, including a wide range of cooking skills, to young people and are designed to get children learning to cook in their homes, with their siblings and carers.

Take & Make was originally designed as a contingency programme prior to summer 2020 as part of the DfE HAF Pilot.

In a dignified and holistic way, they meet the intended HAF outcomes of:

- supporting children to have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition
- and to ensure that the families who participate in this programme develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting.

Ethnic groups including Black and mixed heritage families have a higher percentage of children living in low-income households than the national average. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the recipes are culturally appropriate.

In response to a recipe box containing jollof rice, one child wrote ***'My favourite box was Jollof rice because the seasoning made it taste nice. It is also a cultural dish and my friends are African so we like to share things from our culture and the Jollof was something we could talk about.'***

An evaluation of Take & Make has been limited by Covid-19. However, the MFL family survey – which is an opt-in online survey – offers indicative findings:

- Recipe boxes were cooked by children in **80%** of cases, with or without the support of parents;
- **95%** of respondents had all the equipment required to cook the recipes at home;
- **92%** of families would cook the recipe again;
- **78%** respondents said it was true that their children wanted to prepare food more often as a result of using the recipe box. **74%** said it was true that the children now feel more confident preparing food;
- **82%** respondents said it was true that the family explored recipes they haven't tried before;
- **85%** respondents said it was true that the children were entertained and enjoyed the activity.





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