An Evaluation of Southwark Council's Holiday Activity Food and Fun Programme

• Authors: Dr Louis Goffe, Ms Anita Sewornu, Dr Bronia Arnott, Dr Jen Bradley, Dr Lorraine McSweeney, Ms Charlotte Pollins, Dr Nai Rui Chng, Dr Andrew Passey, Dr Eilish Crilley, Ms Laura Denning , Prof Ashley Adamson

Background

• For many families in England, the school holidays are a challenging time. Many children have no access to organised activities, experience social isolation and feel holiday hunger.

• In 2018, responding to this issue, the Department for Education piloted the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF), providing opportunities for disadvantaged children to access healthy food and enriching activities.

• In Southwark, the HAF programme is delivered in partnership with community organisations over the Easter, summer and winter holidays.

• An Evaluation was carried out by Public Health Intervention Response Studies team (PHIRST Fusion) and Southwark Council to better understand the impact and implementation of HAF in the borough.

Methods

We conducted an evaluability assessment (EA) to engage stakeholders in Southwark to develop an evaluation plan. Based on the recommendations from the EA, we used the following research methods;

• A survey to parents and carers to understand the impact of HAF on family food security and wellbeing.

• Analysed attendance data to understand the reach of the programme.

• Interviews and discussion groups with young people to understand the acceptability of the HAF programme.

• Interviews with parents and carers to understand the impact of HAF, provider's signposting and connecting families to longer-term support.

• A stakeholder survey to understand the influence of the HAF programme on local food systems.

Results

Parent/ Carer Survey

- The parent-carer survey indicated that HAF clubs were reaching one of their target populations, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- Many parent-carers of HAF-eligible children scored low on mental wellbeing.
- There was some indication that families of HAF attending children were less food insecure than those not attending

Attendance Data

•Analysis of attendance data was limited due to the availability of data

•In some areas characterised by high deprivation and/or greater proportions of non-white British ethnic heritage

•Attendance and reach could be improved by increasing awareness of less utilised clubs and increasing capacity where clubs are oversubscribed.

Interviews with Young people

•Interviews with young people delivered insights around acceptability, with those who attended valuing and enjoying the clubs.

•Our understanding of why secondary school aged children may choose not to attend is restricted, due to difficulty engaging eligible non-attenders in the research.

•However, a lack of awareness of the full HAF offer in the borough is a potentially limiting factor, as knowledge of the extent of provision was low even among those who attended.

Interviews with Parent/Carer

- Interviews with parent-carers highlighted a low level of awareness of the full extent of HAF provision among parent-carers of HAF eligible children attending clubs.
- Parent and carers also faced difficulties navigating the booking process, but once their child secured a place and attended a club, acceptability was high.
- Although held in high positive regard, HAF clubs were not necessarily recognised by parents as a place to access wider support

Stakeholder Survey

- A low response rate (15%)limited the utility of the survey, but the results show 'proof of principle' of the method.
- With further data collection, there could be opportunities to increase the value of the HAF offer to the local economy and increase awareness of the wider support available for families.

Key Recommendations

•A standardised club information and an improved booking process would be valued by parents and carers to allow parents to access information about providers, activities and availability in one place.

• A single point of access could also allow parents to register, book, and provide background information which could support future monitoring and evaluation.

•HAF providers could maximise family food security and income by increasing referrals and signposting to community support available such as food banks and welfare support services.

•Southwark Council to explore SEND training for HAF workforce and support HAF needs to further improve SEND provision.

•Southwark to repeat the survey, collecting before and after data in summer 2024, to gain further insights into the impact of HAF provision on parent-carer wellbeing and family food security.

•To celebrate the impact HAF on the children and young people's personal development. For example, events where children and young people receive certificates and recognition.

•Southwark Council could consider extending and embedding a youth development ambassador scheme. This would be in alignment with the wider objectives within the borough around youth development

• Future data collection may allow the identification of opportunities to maximise the value of HAFs to local businesses and raise awareness of the wider food offer

•Future HAF research and evaluations should seek to include the views of fathers and male carers, as their views were under-represented in this study.

NIHR | Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams

Southwark Council