



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger inquiry into hunger amongst children during the school holidays

CPAG's response

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Introduction

1. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has worked for more than 50 years to prevent and relieve poverty among children and families in the UK. We have a wide range of expertise and evidence from which to draw. Each year, we author and publish *The Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook*, the authoritative guide to social security in the UK; provide specialist advice and training to expert and non-expert frontline advisers; coordinate and collate evidence from the National Association of Welfare Rights Workers; collect evidence and case studies of the impacts of welfare reform in Scotland through the Early Warning System (EWS); and are currently providing frontline welfare rights advice to food bank users in Tower Hamlets.
2. We are submitting as our main evidence to this inquiry our September 2016 report on the future of extended schools, *Unfinished Business*, which is our key piece of recent relevant research evidence. We briefly outline key themes and findings below.
3. We also attach a December 2015 report from CPAG in Scotland, *The Cost of the School Holidays*, which considers the key costs and pressures faced by low-income families in Glasgow during school holidays; looks at how existing holiday provision in the city is used and perceived by families, and what barriers exist to accessing these services; and makes recommendations as to how holiday service providers in Glasgow could design their services to better meet the need of low-income families.
4. In summer 2015, CPAG welfare rights advisers based in Tower Hamlets food bank conducted 'benefit health checks' of 12 of the approximately 20 families using the summer meals project run by the food bank. CPAG researchers conducted interviews with five parents and two of the school-based referrers to the programme. We discuss some reflections on this unpublished research below.

CPAG's view on holiday hunger

5. We are glad that the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger has chosen to investigate the important and very real issue of holiday hunger. There are a range of structural causes of poverty that increase the vulnerability of children and families to experiencing hunger in the school holidays, and in that sense, holiday hunger is not a discrete issue to be considered in isolation. That said, it is true that many families find that the school holidays are a tough time financially. The extra costs of feeding children who may have been in receipt of free school meals in term time, and of providing both childcare and activities for their children, can push families who were previously just about managing into hardship, or make things even harder for those who were already struggling. Often, the costs of the school holidays can present themselves as holiday hunger, given that the food budget is often the only one within the household in which there is any leeway, but it is important to note that this issue is not only about food.

6. CPAG's belief is that provision aimed at tackling holiday hunger should be universal; located in existing facilities that children and families know and trust; be inclusive and available to all rather than aimed solely at children in poor families; and be centred around activities, helping to ease other holiday burdens on parents, rather than risk becoming simply 'feeding stations' for the poor. This belief is based upon our decades of experiencing working with and on behalf of families, as well as a range of research evidence. We discuss three pieces of research recently conducted by CPAG below.

Extended schools report

7. We attach to this submission a September 2016 report, *Unfinished Business: Where next for extended schools?*, carried out in conjunction with Family and Childcare Trust. The report maps current provision of, and funding mechanisms for, extended schools, and compares this with parental demand for services. It compares this provision with parental demand for services, and also considers the role that such services have in tackling disadvantage and poverty. The research included a large survey to a sample of head teachers of primary and secondary schools in England, an online YouGov survey to gauge attitudes and interests of children towards before- and after-school activities; in-depth interviews with two head teachers, a charity, and a national organisation supporting the arts; and a literature review of previous research in and evaluations of extended schools in the UK.
8. The report identifies two key benefits of extended schools for tackling disadvantage and poverty: they can help to support children's learning and social and emotional developments, improving educational attainment; and they can support parental employment. In this context, we could add a third dimension – addressing holiday hunger.
9. The report identifies evidence that low-income families make better use of school- than non-school-based activities. Extended schools are popular with children, too, with only 7 per cent not interested in extended school services.
10. With regard to holiday hunger, there is evidence of hunger extending beyond those receiving free school meals, which suggests that universal provision is likely to capture more need than targeted provision. There is an unmet need, however. Thirty-nine per cent of schools said that a need had been expressed for holiday provision, but only twenty-nine per cent provide such a service.
11. Services over school holidays can help to tackle the challenges families face over school holidays, but they can avoid the stigma associated with targeted services, and with charitable provision, through the provision of support in a trusted location.
12. Our vision for extended schools is one that enables children to broaden their interests, through encouraging activities beyond the curriculum; that enables parents to work, knowing their child is in a safe and nurturing environment; that provides nourishing food before and after school and in school holidays, making food programmes unnecessary; and that tackles

disadvantage through promoting achievement. This requires current areas of best practice to be spread to every school, and dedicated funding, so that every family has access to high-quality, reliable services.

Tower Hamlets summer meals programme

13. A small number of interviews conducted as part of this programme suggest remarkably similar themes to those in our extended schools report. Parents taking part in the programme were very keen to emphasise the activities offered as part of the programme, and clearly valued the offer of somewhere to be with activities for their children, noting how difficult this was to find locally and affordably. Meanwhile, they downplayed the food element, with one parent even stating that she hadn't realised it was run by a food bank. A reasonable interpretation of this, in the wider context of the interview, might be that they did not want to be associated with charitable food provision.
14. There were also suggestions from the benefit health checks carried out by welfare rights advisers that many families were receiving all the benefits to which they were entitled, but still struggling. This is different from findings of research conducted, partly at the same food bank, for *Emergency Use Only*, which found that it was typically a sudden significant or total loss of benefit income that was the crisis that triggered food bank use. An interpretation of this contrast might be that it is the school holidays themselves which constitute the crisis leading to the need for additional support during holidays. This points both to the inadequacy of many family incomes – with broad implications for public policy – and to the immediate need for greater public provision to tackle the financial and social pressures associated with the school holidays.

Glasgow school holidays provision report

15. CPAG in Scotland's research into *The Cost of the School Holidays* (attached to this submission), published in December 2015, comprised six focus groups with parents in different areas of Glasgow; three focus groups with children aged 6-13 across the city; an online survey of 59 voluntary and public sector organisations working with families on low incomes across Glasgow; and a survey of parents – primarily online, but with paper copies handed out at a range of summer family events – in Glasgow, which received 223 responses.
16. The research identified three key sets of challenges:
 - a. cost pressures over the holiday period – notably feeding children, especially for families used to receiving free school meals, but also other costs such as summer clothing and leisure activities;
 - b. difficulties in sourcing and providing childcare – both for working parents and for those claiming JSA who need to be actively seeking work and signing on at the Jobcentre regularly, often accompanied by children in the holidays;

- c. emotional pressures – feelings of guilt for being unable to provide the same holiday experiences for their children as their peers receive, as well as for extra pressure placed on extended family, and at missing out on time spent with children when working.
17. The research identified a number of barriers to accessing existing holiday provision in Glasgow:
- a. financial barriers – direct costs, including the need for advance payment or block-booking with some activities; hidden additional costs for snacks, equipment or clothing, and the cost of transport; high costs for childcare mean that less money than usual is left over to fund activities;
 - b. availability and awareness of provision – parents do not always have access to information about free or low cost activities; services are concentrated in certain parts of the city and limited in others; and there are lengthy waiting lists for Out of School Care activities;
 - c. type of provision – provision is not always age-appropriate, and particularly hard to find for teenagers, pre-school children, and children with additional support needs; and timings of holiday activities do not mimic the working day, meaning it can prove impossible for working parents to pick up or drop off their children;
 - d. personal barriers – a lack of confidence can stop some parents from accompanying their children to new activities, or taking children on trips to unfamiliar destinations.
18. The research made a number of recommendations on how holiday service providers across the city might better meet the needs of low-income families:
- a. better planning and promotion of services – including through addressing the lack of facilities in some areas by using dormant school facilities;
 - b. supporting parents’ childcare needs – addressing unsuitable timings for holiday activities that do not fit with working hours; and addressing lack and unaffordability of childcare and Out of School Care provision in the city;
 - c. improving access and participation – addressing holiday hunger by offering free, healthy lunches within existing provision; addressing lengthy waiting lists; address barriers in payment methods, such as the requirements for block-booking, advance or face-to-face payment; promoting activities far in advance; and providing holiday travel passes;
 - d. adapting content and delivery – including by ensuring co-design of services with local people and diversifying content for different age ranges and support needs.

Conclusion

19. Holiday hunger is an important and pressing issue for many families in the UK. The pressure of meeting additional costs and children’s needs across the school holidays can push already stretched budgets to breaking point, and further entrench existing hardship. It is important, however, not to lose sight of wider issues of poverty, or of the need to ensure that provision

in the school holidays is inclusive, and conducive to children's educational, emotional, and social wellbeing.

20. To meet these combined goals, CPAG believes that extended schools should be the core of the policy response. They efficiently use existing public facilities; are known and trusted by parents and children; and the model mandates a range of enriching activities for children, which promote their development, provide affordable childcare for parents, are socially inclusive, and feed children as an integral part of their service, rather than as potentially-stigmatising 'feeding stations' for poor children. We would encourage businesses, philanthropists, and the voluntary sector to direct their support for holiday hunger towards helping schools to consolidate and expand their provision of extended schools.

For further information, please contact Moussa Haddad, Senior Policy and Research Officer, at mhaddad@cpag.org.uk.

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