An evaluation of Holiday Kitchen 2015
Learning, food and play for families who need it most in the West Midlands

Jane O’Connor, Alex Wade, Phil Taylor and Shannon Ludgate in collaboration with Caroline Wolhuter & Sian Every.

May 2016
Holiday Kitchen Evaluation 2015: Learning, food and play for families when they need it most in the West Midlands.

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Jane O'Connor, Alex Wade, Phil Taylor & Shannon Ludgate in collaboration with Caroline Wolhuter, Sian Every & Mark Gibbs
Other reports related to this project include:

*Executive Summary of Holiday Kitchen Evaluation 2015: Learning, food and play for families when they need it most* by Caroline Wolhuter (April 2016).

*Holiday Kitchen: Supporting integrated Prevention and Early Intervention outcomes for vulnerable families in Sandwell* by: Sian Every, Caroline Wolhuter and Mark Gibbs (April 2016).

*Holiday Kitchen Evaluation 2015: Learning, food and play for families when they need it most Greater Manchester* by Jane O'Connor, Alex Wade, Phil Taylor & Shannon Ludgate in collaboration with Caroline Wolhuter & Sian Every (April 2016).

*Holiday Kitchen Evaluation 2015: Learning, food and play for families when they need it most in Wythenshawe* by Jane O'Connor, Alex Wade, Phil Taylor & Shannon Ludgate in collaboration with Caroline Wolhuter & Sian Every (April 2016).


Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the children, parents and delivery partner staff who generously gave of their time to share their views on Holiday Kitchen - your participation in these activities is greatly valued. Many thanks also to BBC Children in Need who provided funding towards both the Holiday Kitchen activities discussed in this report, and the evaluation. Finally, we are grateful to His Church for their food contributions which enabled local providers to bring people together to enjoy and share breakfasts.
Foreword

When I speak to people about Holiday Kitchen, they instantly get it. We all want holidays to be a stress-free time, exploring the new, eating good food in good company. These should be the times that restored our souls and cement our relationships. Unfortunately, the reality is that the thirteen weeks of school holidays each year often leave us in debt, emotionally over-stretched, poorly nourished and physically at risk. Holiday challenges are disproportionately harder for families with young children who live on low-income or are faced with a complex need.

Ashrammoseley is rooted in a commitment to social justice and inclusive participation. In 2012 we first conceived of Holiday Kitchen in response to calls for better food and holiday provision in a neighbourhood we serve, and we began a journey. This journey was based on the understanding that the best way to meet community interests is through partnership, collaboration and co-delivery. Along the way we have travelled uncertain paths, but the immense goodwill and commitment of Holiday Kitchen supporters has spurred us onwards.

This report is the culmination of Children in Need funding, a collaboration with Family Action, the academic support of Birmingham City University, corporate sponsorship, the tireless work of frontline staff and volunteers, and the generous engagement of participant families. Together we have learnt much about the value holiday learning, food and play holds. At a time when prevention and early help services are being reconfigured, and a national movement around holiday food and enrichment programmes is on the rise, we believe our learning shared here has much to offer. We hope you find this a useful insight into a cost-effective programme of co-delivery, focused at its heart on strengthening community wellbeing.

Please share our message, or better yet, join us in meeting holiday challenges together.

Jas Bains, MBE
CEO of Ashrammoseley Housing Association, part of the Accord Group
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Background and rationale of Holiday Kitchen

For many children and families on low incomes, school holidays are a difficult time. Research has identified a range of negative outcomes associated with time away from formal education, especially during the long summer break, including learning loss (Alexander et al, 2007; Campbell et al, 2015), financial stress and food poverty in the absence of Free School Meals (Gill and Sharma, 2004; Trussell Trust, 2014; All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food, 2014 & 2015, Forsey and Mason, 2015) and lack of social interaction and meaningful activity (Defeyter et al, 2015; Campbell et al, 2015). There is also anecdotal evidence that demands on school nurses, police, social services and relationship support spike around the school holiday periods. Based on this knowledge, school holidays may be recognised as periods of disproportionate risk for low income and vulnerable households.

The Holiday Kitchen programme has been designed by the Accord Group\(^1\) and Family Action\(^2\) to positively address these issues by providing holiday learning, food and play for families when they most need it.

The over-arching vision of the programme is to improve families’ wellbeing during school holidays and to enable families to thrive throughout the year (Holiday Kitchen Business Plan, 2015). The definition of wellbeing for this purpose is based on the New Economics Foundation’s (NEF) understanding of feeling good and functioning well’ (2009). Underpinning this organising principle, the core objectives of Holiday Kitchen are:

- Improved holiday nutrition
- Improved relationships
- Increased positive holiday activities

These objectives are pursued through a structured programme of fun learning activities, supported free play, educational trips and nutritious, communal food activities with families of pre- and primary school aged children. These are delivered in local community settings over two to four weeks of the summer holidays in deprived areas of the UK.

Recognising that ‘feeling good and functioning well’ (NEF, 2008) is central to good health and educational outcomes, the NEF’s Five Ways to Well-being Framework has been drawn upon during the programme’s development as a tool to help achieve the three key objectives around improved holiday nutrition, improved relationships and increased positive holiday activities. In so doing, the programme works to ensure each

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\(^1\) [http://accordgroup.org.uk/](http://accordgroup.org.uk/)

\(^2\) [https://www.family-action.org.uk/](https://www.family-action.org.uk/)
of the NEF framework’s five activities evidenced to support wellbeing are integrated into daily delivery. These activities comprise ‘be active, keep learning, take notice, connect and give’ (NEF, 2008: 13).

Holiday Kitchen began in 2013 with a short experimental programme funded by Children in Need that delivered 3000 days of quality activities and free lunches to almost 500 children in Birmingham. The success of this pilot led to a more developed version of Holiday Kitchen being delivered across 11 sites in low income neighbourhoods in Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull in the summer of 2014. This was supported by a diverse range of community, commissioner, staff, sponsor and volunteer stakeholders. Birmingham City University was asked to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of Holiday Kitchen 2014 in meeting its key outcomes, and findings from this strongly indicated the positive impact that the programme had on the participating children and families in relation to its core child poverty objectives (see O’Connor, Wolhuter and Every, 2015).

Based on the success of the 2014 Holiday Kitchen, 23 community settings were recruited to deliver the programme over the summer of 2015 - twelve in the Greater Manchester area, ten in the West Midlands and one in Lincolnshire. This report by Birmingham City University is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Holiday Kitchen programme in eight delivery settings in the West Midlands area which were funded by Children in Need.
Programme principles, purpose and the West Midlands settings

Holiday Kitchen recognises that a nutritious diet, strong functional relationships and continued learning opportunities are cornerstones upon which wider education, family, employment and wellbeing outcomes are built. On this basis it provides positive, free family-focused learning, food and play activities during school holidays that aim to improve both children and parent’s wellbeing, educational opportunities and life-chances.

More explicitly it is committed to pursuing positive outcomes associated with its three core objectives which are shown below with their associated indicators, along with the information collection tools which were used to evaluate each area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 1</th>
<th>Improved Holiday Nutrition</th>
<th>Improved Relationships</th>
<th>Increased Positive Holiday Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levels of access to nutritious meals</td>
<td>Types of peer relationships</td>
<td>Interest in learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Information Collection Tools**
- Parental exit questionnaire; Attendance register; No. of meals served; Food Quality Assurance measures
- Parental exit questionnaire; Weather maps; staff interviews; case studies; Tree of Learning
- Tops & Pants; Table cloths; Tree of Learning; Attendance register; Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 2</th>
<th>Improved Holiday Nutrition</th>
<th>Improved Relationships</th>
<th>Increased Positive Holiday Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of experience of healthy food</td>
<td>Types of family relationships</td>
<td>Level of participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Information Collection Tools**
- Children's questionnaire; Parental exit questionnaire; staff interview; Attendance register; photographs, case study material; Food Quality Assurance measures
- Parental questionnaires; staff interviews; case studies; Tree of Learning
- Parental exit questionnaire; weather maps; attendance register; staff interviews; Case studies

| Information Collection Tools | Table 1: Core objectives |
The rational for each objective is understood as follows:

1. **Improved holiday nutrition**

The programme aims to improve participants’ access to nutritious meals and experience of nutritious food during school holidays when Free School Meals (FSM) are unavailable, food bank referrals spike and there is a food poverty premium based not only on reduced consumption of fresh fruit, vegetables and oily fish, but the over consumption of convenience ‘junk’ food and drinks high in sugar, salt and fats. Through supporting positive, informative and hands-on experiences of healthy food, including through experimental ‘make and taste’ opportunities alongside access to nutritious meals, the programme strives to support good nutrition experience, knowledge and related health behaviours for parents/carers and children.

Work in this area is understood to be of wider societal importance following the Chief Medial Officer’s call on the government for obesity to be included in the national risk planning (Department of Health, 2015); the growing evidence of food poverty and the health implications thereof; the recognition of the right to food as a basic human right (UNICEF, 2016) and the acceptance that a well-balanced diet is central to children’s cognitive development (Save the Children reports and DfID studies), concentration, mood regulation in adults and children (Cornah, D., 2016) and academic success (Littlecott., H.J. et al, 2015). Strengthening nutrition can thus be understood to address the wider determinants of health and educational attainment.

2. **Improved relationships**

Supporting and strengthening family relationships is central to the psychological wellbeing and the functioning of family units. When families have limited resources and experience stress, positive family bonding can be affected and contribute to poor mental health outcomes, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. Social isolation and poor peer relationship can similarly impacts on children and families’ social inclusion, participation and sense of self agency within a community. Holiday Kitchen focuses on supporting relationship through fun, non-intrusive,

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3 Food poverty can be defined as the inability to obtain healthy affordable food. This may be because people lack shops in their area or have trouble reaching them. Other factors influencing food access are the availability of a range of healthy goods in local shops, income, transport, fear of crime, knowledge about what constitutes a healthy diet, and the skills to create healthy meals.

Due to this complex mix of factors, people on low incomes have the lowest intakes of fruit and vegetables and are far more likely to suffer from diet-related diseases such as cancer, diabetes, obesity and coronary heart disease. Food poverty can also be about an overabundance of ‘junk’ food as well as a lack of healthy food (Sustain, 2015).

4 See data from Faculty of Public Health’s position, the Fabian Society, Feeding Britain, Save the Children and Trussell Trust
practical family and group activities in safe and engaging environments. In so doing it is committed to supporting social and emotional learning through creative interaction. The programme embraces the ethos of multi-agency working, liaising with referral agencies and signposting to support services to ensure that vulnerable families are appropriately supported. Holiday Kitchen’s focus on improving relationships works to support child and vulnerable adult safeguarding and related Early Help interventions associated with the Department for Education’s Support For Families and Troubled Families agendas (Ofsted, 2015; Department for Education 2016).

3. Increased positive holiday activities

School holiday periods make up 25 percent of the year. For low-income and vulnerable families, this is a significant period of time for which they have limited resources to support. As a result, families can become isolated, inactive and stressed while opportunities for learning, socialising and playing significantly contract relative to more affluent families and term-time periods. Learning loss has been attributed to holiday periods (Campbell et al., 2015) which may exacerbate the attainment gap between children eligible for Free School Meals and their more affluent peers. Holiday Kitchen is committed to providing enriching family learning activities focused around life skills and healthy lifestyles that families can replicate and/or build upon independently beyond the confines of the programme.

Based on a Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach to developing and evaluating the programme, a Holiday Kitchen Theory of Change has been developed (figure 1). A summary of the short, medium and long term outcomes for children, parents and carers and other key stakeholders including the delivery venue and to some extent the Local Authority is shown below. These outcomes have been thematically coded in relation to each of the core objectives and grouped for each of the programme’s primary stakeholders in line with SROI principles. The outcomes and their related objectives identified in this model will be further discussed in light of the evaluation findings in the Conclusion section of the report.
Holiday Kitchen (HK) Theory of Change: Inputs, Activities, Outputs and Outcomes for key stakeholder groups in 2015

**Inputs (What stakeholders contribute):**
- Venue / premises
- Staff salaries
- HK management
- Resource costs
- Food / catering
- Transport
- Sponsorship
- Funding
- Volunteers’ time
- Staff/volunteer training
- Referrals
- Partnership working
- Registration process

**Activities:**
- HK Core offer
- 23 venues in W. Midlands, Gl: Manchester & Lincolnshire
- 8 day programme over 2-4 weeks:
  1. Music/drama
  2. Get Active challenge
  3. Money fun & games
  4. A field to fork
  5. Local trip
  6. Make & taste
  7. Forest school
  8. Music, dance and celebration
- 2hrs activities incorporating free play & family socializing.
- Resource provision dissemination / distribution and low level signposting
- Food: Breakfast & community lunches

**Outputs:**
- 350 children attending
- 8 day HK programme
- 200 parents / carers attending
- 4000+ community lunches
- 3000+ breakfasts
- Volunteers / intern supporting activities
- 23 delivery programmes
- Delivery partner staff development
- Evaluation toolkit, reports & media

**Child outcomes (short term):**
- Improved holiday nutrition and nutrition knowledge
- Increased positive holiday activities
- Increased holiday physical activity
- Increased exposure to reading and language development
- Improved child holiday emotional health
- Improved relationships
- Increased safety of children

**Child outcomes (medium term):**
- Improved confidence (through diverse social contact)
- Improved wellbeing

**Child indirect / contributing outcomes:**
- Reduced obesity
- Reduced child food poverty
- Reduced health inequalities
- Reduced child poverty
- Improved educational outcomes
- Reduced opportunity gap

**Parent/carer outcomes (short term):**
- Reduced food insecurity during holidays
- Reduced holiday financial strain
- Reduced financial exclusion (from holiday activities & good nutrition)
- Improved parental wellbeing (& reduced stress)
- Increased opportunities for family bonding and learning outside the home

**Parent/carer outcomes (medium term):**
- Improved family knowledge of nutrition
- Improved knowledge of budget recreational holiday activities
- Improved social inclusion (through participation and social contact)

**Parent/carer indirect / contributing outcomes:**
- Raised family aspirations
- Improved parental confidence and involvement in child’s education
- Improved family financial confidence
- Increased employability
- Reduced family indebtedness

**Other key stakeholder outcomes (short term):**
- Contribution towards achieving business plan objectives (delivery venue)
- Contributing towards LA outcomes
- Contributing towards PH outcomes

**Other key stakeholder outcomes (medium term):**
- Increased reach and uptake of services (delivery venue)
- Increased profile and reputation (delivery venue)

**Other key stakeholder indirect / contributing outcomes:**
- Reduced child protection, looked after children cases (LA)
Health Context

Much of our current health policy for children is driven by the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) (figure 2) with particular emphasis on eating, maintaining a healthy weight through physical activity and the emotional and mental health of parents and children. Mental health has been given equal status with physical health following the publication in 2013 of ‘Closing the Gap: Priorities for essential change in mental health’ (Social Care, Local Government and Care Partnership Directorate, 2014).

The Holiday Kitchen rationale recognises the health and wellbeing impact for participating families. This falls in line with the NHS England/Public Health England (PHE) position on community based health interventions whereby local partners are required to consider the ‘family’ of community centred approaches to improve health and wellbeing in their areas (Public Health England, 2015). In so doing it aligns to several of PHE’s priority areas, including: Ensuring every child has the best start in life; mental & physical health; reduction of health inequality; place based health; building community health assets and contributes to support PHOF Domain 1: Improving the wider determinants of health and Domain 2: Health Improvement – particularly in relation to addressing health inequality.
Public Health Outcomes Framework

**OUTCOMES**

**Vision:** To improve and protect the nation’s health and wellbeing, and improve the health of the poorest fastest

**Outcome 1:** Increased healthy life expectancy
- Taking account of the health quality as well as the length of life
  (Note: This measure uses a self-reported health assessment, applied to life expectancy.)

**Outcome 2:** Reduced differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities
- Through greater improvements in more disadvantaged communities

(Note: These two measures would work as a package covering both morbidity and mortality, addressing within-area differences and between area differences)

**DOMAINS**

**DOMAIN 1:** Improving the wider determinants of health
- Objective: Improvements against wider factors that affect health and wellbeing, and health inequalities

**DOMAIN 2:** Health improvement
- Objective: People are helped to live healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices and reduce health inequalities

**DOMAIN 3:** Health protection
- Objective: The population’s health is protected from major incidents and other threats, while reducing health inequalities

**DOMAIN 4:** Healthcare public health and preventing premature mortality
- Objective: Reduced numbers of people living with preventable ill health and people dying prematurely, while reducing the gap between communities

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*Figure 2: Public Health Outcomes Framework (Department of Health, 2012 p2)*
Educational focus of the programme

The educational aspirations of the programme are to support out of school learning in a dynamic and sustainable manner, which parents could continue independently beyond the course of the programme. The design of the programme’s activities has drawn inspiration from elements of the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning and Early Years evidence based toolkits. These toolkits summarise research evidence and costs associated with a wide range of educational interventions and approaches used to close the attainment gap for children from low income households through pupil premium funding (see the EEF Teaching & Learning Toolkit).

The Holiday Kitchen programme is structured around eight daily family learning themes. Each day's theme and delivery format aimed to closely align to several of the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit topic areas as summarised in the table below. Notably, given the programme requires parents to participate in activities with their children, much emphasis is placed on supporting parental involvement in learning and supporting their confidence to do so beyond the programme.

Table 2: Holiday Kitchen’s eight daily family learning themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Daily Theme</th>
<th>Alignment to EEF Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adventure stories, drama and craft</td>
<td>Arts participation, collaborative learning, parental involvement; social and emotional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Change for life – get active day</td>
<td>Parental involvement, outdoor adventure learning, sports participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Money fun and games</td>
<td>Parental involvement, collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Field to fork</td>
<td>Parental involvement, outdoor adventure, collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local trip</td>
<td>Parental involvement, aspiration intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Make and taste</td>
<td>Collaborative learning, parental involvement; social and emotional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Forest school fun</td>
<td>Parental involvement, outdoor adventure learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Music, dance and celebration</td>
<td>Arts participation, parental involvement; social and emotional learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In line with this health and education rationale, Holiday Kitchen operates through existing local infrastructure and is delivered in community sites by partners who work directly with low-income and vulnerable families, children and young people. It is premised on a flexible and responsive community delivery ethos that meets the cultural, demographic and socio-geographical nuances of its client group.

The programme requires families to register and commit to eight half-days of Holiday Kitchen activities spread across two to four weeks of the summer 2015 holidays in a local participating centre. Parents are expected to attend and participate in activities alongside children in line with family learning principles.

Holiday Kitchen operates in communities with poor diets, low levels of physical activity, mental wellbeing and poor children’s educational outcomes. The type and location of participating settings in the West Midlands are shown in the following table, along with the name of the social housing partnership that took the lead in planning and delivering the Holiday Kitchen programme. All centres committed to meeting the Quality Assurance Framework for Holiday Kitchen. This framework is based on four standards:

- Programme fidelity to achieve better outcomes for families
- Effective Safeguarding Practice
- Provision of healthy, nutritious and enjoyable meals
- Effective Programme Management

Each standard has a subset of criteria which includes both mandatory statutory requirements and aspirational benchmarks.

A brief description of each delivery venue and it’s suitability for hosting Holiday Kitchen was requested from each centre manager and are included below in a summarised/edited format. Eight out of the ten participating centre managers provided this information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Type and location of delivery venue</strong></th>
<th><strong>Brief description of venue and suitability for HK</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence refuge, Ashrammoseley</td>
<td>Fern Brooke is a domestic violence refuge supporting mothers and children. The refuge is a 16 bed self-contained unit. The communal areas in the refuge include a large lounge, kitchen, garden with a children's playground, car park facilities, a play room that can hold up to 20 children and a music studio. Due to the nature of the project, the building size and large space allowed us to facilitate holiday kitchen successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s centre, Rowley</td>
<td>Includes a kitchen area suitable for meal planning, rooms for the sessions to be held, outdoor area for up to 30 individuals. Easy access to venue on local bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Church building, Oldbury

St John's is a community church close to the Children's Centre. It has a good sized hall for activities, tables and chairs, toilets, access to a kitchen with cooker and fridge and a grassed area for outdoor play. It was an ideal venue to deliver Holiday Kitchen. It was local to most families but easily accessible for others using public transport. Outdoor area was clean and tidy and we used it every day.

Children's Centre, Small Heath

The rooms were equipped with resources for activities, an overhead projector to do 'Wake Up, Shake Up' and included a kitchen with all crockery and utensils. Combined, the two rooms used were large enough to hold 20 children and 10 adults. We also used the Nursery garden and outside play area. The canteen was used to serve lunch and the outside area adjacent to the canteen was used for the 'Field to Fork' activity. The only shortcoming of the venue was the lack of outdoor facilities. Families were able to access the venue easily, either on foot or by catching the local bus.

Children's Centre, Balsall Heath

In term time the building functions as a nursery so has plenty of resources on site including playground, children toilets and kitchen.

Children's Centre, Bushbury

The building has one large room, a kitchen and a meeting room. The large room accommodates up to 30 people.

Community Centre, Chelmsley Wood

The community centre was an ideal location for the activities, located in the heart of the community. We used one room for activities and the other for lunch. Kitchen facilities were also available.

Children's centre, Friar Park

The children's centre has been purpose built for children and families in the local area. It is accessible for all children and adults and adapted for wheelchair users. We have a café area and a staff kitchen where the preparation of food was undertaken. The school hall was used for indoor activities and outdoor space and a wooded area was used for activities such as forest school, sports day, etc. The children's centre was able to facilitate all aspects of the holiday kitchen program during the 8 days.

Table 3
Following a day of training and access to an activities toolkit and on-line guidance and resources, each setting took responsibility for delivering the Holiday Kitchen learning, food and play activities including gathering evaluation material.

Nutritious communal breakfasts and lunches were provided for parents/carers and children on each day of the programme in line with the 2015 Children’s Food Trust guidelines.5

Evaluation methodology

The aim of this evaluation is to understand, measure and communicate the impact of the Holiday Kitchen programme in the participating West Midlands settings in relation to the programme’s core objectives and the associated outcomes for key stakeholder groups.

The evaluation methodology was informed by the Theory of Change which was developed for the 2014 Holiday Kitchen programme and refined ahead of the scaled up 2015 programme. Theory of Change is a tool which sets out a clear path from inputs, through activities to outputs and outcomes. This emergent ‘plan’ offers a valuable basis for measuring whether the intended outcomes of a project or intervention are being achieved. It is through reflection on these outcomes (Figure 1) that the social value of an initiative can best be understood.

This evaluation draws on the Social Value principles and corresponds with the early stages of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology. ‘Social Value is the value that stakeholders experience through changes in their lives (Social Value Network, 2015). SROI provides a clear framework for measuring, managing and accounting for social value or social impact. The early stages involve firstly, establishing scope and identifying stakeholders, secondly, mapping outcomes (developing the Theory of Change) and thirdly, evidencing outcomes (identifying indicators and data collection). The latter stages of the SROI methodology involve assigning financial values to outcomes and taking impact into account in order to calculate a ratio which represents the sum of value generated through the programme in relation to the input costs. It has not been possible within the scale and scope of this evaluation to continue to these stages, although the evaluation design (including the identification of indicators for all outcomes, the development of the monitoring framework and the engagement of multiple stakeholder groups) lends itself to this type of detailed evaluation.

Consent, participation and research ethics

5 Children’s Food Trust guidelines available at: http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/
The evaluation, and analysis of evaluation findings, was deemed as ethically appropriate by the Faculty Ethics Committee at Birmingham City University.

For the children’s evaluation activities, staff were briefed before the start of the programme about the importance of tuning in to the children and recognising and respecting both verbal and non-verbal indicators of their willingness to participate or withdraw consent to participate. Similarly, for adults participating in all the evaluation activities, delivery staff were asked to respect parent/carers’ willingness to consent to share information.

It was made clear that all evaluation information would be treated as confidential and anonymous, and parents/carers had a right to withdraw their consent to participate at any stage.

Below is an explanation of the approaches used for gathering evaluation data from the children and adults who participated in Holiday Kitchen.

**Evaluation materials and activities**

Evaluating the value and the impact of the Holiday Kitchen programme from children’s points of views and specifically recording and listening to the ‘child voice’ was a key focus of the evaluation.

Planning for Real6 (part of the Accord group) took the lead in designing evaluation tools and materials to use with the families who attended the Holiday Kitchen in 2013 and 2014. Versions of these tools were adapted and used for the 2015 evaluation.

Given the wide age range of children attending the programme the intention was to provide clear, effective and fun evaluation materials which could fit into the daily Holiday Kitchen activities. All of the evaluation activities were visual, participative and inclusive. The aim was for the older children to be able to engage in the evaluation activities independently, and for younger children, or those with additional needs, to be able to voice their ideas and thoughts and to be supported by an adult to record their views. The data was collected by staff at each setting and then centre managers inputted the responses onto a bespoke website designed by the research team at Birmingham City University (BCU). The data was then collated and analysed by the BCU research team in relation to the key outcomes of improved holiday nutrition: improved relationships and increased positive holiday activities.

Each evaluation activity was used on one day of the programme, although there was not an evaluation activity every day. This was in response to feedback from the 2014 Holiday Kitchen evaluation which indicated that children and parents/carers felt there was too much evaluation of Holiday Kitchen last year. The research team also found that there was much repetition and missing data when evaluations were over-used in

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settings and staff also reported finding evaluating every activity, every day too onerous. The activities are described below with the day on which they were carried out:

_Evaluation techniques for children_

**Day 1: Thought and speech bubbles**

This evaluation activity was linked to the drama day and exposure to speech and language development outcomes. The activity leader asked children for their thoughts before and after a specific activity. The aim was to gain an understanding of what children already knew about the topic before the session began and to gauge whether and what children had learnt during the session. As part of the introduction to the session the activity leader asked the children: ‘What do you think of when someone says ‘stories’, ‘drama’ and ‘craft’ to you?’

Immediately after the session children were asked: ‘What new words and ideas have you learnt today?’ Responses at the beginning and end of the session were noted down by children (and parents/carers or staff where support was required) directly onto table cloths.

**Day 2: Washing line**

This evaluation activity was linked to the park challenge day and physical activity outcome. The aim was to gather the children’s views on doing exercise and being active. All children were asked to write down on ‘pants’ and ‘tops’ symbols (or be supported to record their thoughts by a parent/carer or member of staff) their views on what was ‘tops’ (great) or ‘pants’ (horrible, not good) about doing exercise and being active at Holiday Kitchen. The children could then hang up the completed symbols on a string washing line.

**Day 6: Food evaluation**

This evaluation activity was linked to the Make & Taste day. After lunch all children were asked to complete a food monitoring form (with parental support if needed) asking what they had learnt about food on the programme and asking them to circle what they liked about eating at Holiday Kitchen. They were also asked to say if there was anything they did not like about Holiday Kitchen. The aim was to ensure that the food provided was appropriate and positively received, and for centres to be able to respond to any poor feedback or complaints.
Day 7: Weather maps

This evaluation activity was linked to well-being outcomes. On the second to last day children were asked: ‘How do you feel about coming to Holiday Kitchen?’ and responded with weather symbols including sun, rain and fog. The children were also asked to comment on their response in relation to aspects such as friends, family, play and food.

Evaluation techniques for parents/carers

Three evaluation methods were developed in order to engage with parents/carers. These were: the registration questionnaire, the Family Learning Tree of Change and the exit questionnaire, all of which are described below. The aim was to explore how and to what extent the programme was having an impact on parents/carers themselves and also to find out the views of parents/carers on how the programme was having an impact on their children.

Pre-delivery: Registration questionnaire

A detailed registration form was completed by each family registering on to the Holiday Kitchen programme to gather baseline family level data. In addition to fairly standard information fields such as contact details, information about children attending, permission for information sharing and photographs, parents/carers were also asked to complete an ‘evaluation data form’. The aim of this form was to try to establish baselines about the activities and local facilities parents/carers already used in the local area and around eating habits and knowledge of healthy eating. The form also gathered information on education, working status and benefits.

Day 8: Family Learning Tree of Change

This evaluation activity took place on the last day of Holiday Kitchen and was linked to learning and social impact (which was cross checked against anticipated impact). Parents/carers were asked: ‘What have you learnt, enjoyed and will now do differently after coming to Holiday Kitchen?’

Day 8: End of programme/exit questionnaire

On the final day of Holiday Kitchen all parents/carers were asked to complete an end of programme questionnaire. This aimed to explore the ways in which parents/carers felt that Holiday Kitchen had made a difference to them, whether this was in terms of taking part in activities, the
provision of breakfast and lunch, gaining confidence in preparing healthy meals and snacks or any other ways. The questionnaires were designed to explore key outcomes, distance travelled and child and parent/carer well-being. Questions exploring wellbeing are a modified sample of the questions asked in the Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WENWBS) (Tenant et al, 2007 p7) which is widely used by within the NHS7 and those used to measure children’s outcomes by children’s centre practitioners (NEF, 2009). The purpose of using these questions is to allow findings to be cross-referenced with other WEMWBS studies in the future.

Lastly, there was also a space for parents/carers to add their comments on what they had found most and least useful about the Holiday Kitchen and to explain why.

Evaluation techniques for centre managers

On-line post-delivery questionnaire

An on-line questionnaire was completed by centre managers after the Holiday Kitchen had finished. They were asked to describe the venue and neighbourhood. They were also asked about agencies which were involved in planning and delivering Holiday Kitchen, how families were recruited onto the programme, attendance and retention rates, impact of Holiday Kitchen on families and benefits of Holiday Kitchen for their service.

Telephone interviews

Centre managers were contacted by telephone or via e-mail to agree a mutually convenient time for a telephone interview, all of which were undertaken by the national Programme Co-ordinator. Prior to the interview, the interview process and aim of the interview was explained. Eleven questions were asked based on the anticipated outcomes of the project and notes were made. A summary of the findings from these interviews is included in Appendix 2.

Photographic data and case studies

In addition to the structured evaluation activities, all participating centres were asked to keep photographic diaries of Holiday Kitchen activities to support other evaluation data gathering. This provided a rich visual ethnography of children’s experiences of Holiday Kitchen from the

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perspective of support staff. Settings were also given the opportunity to provide case studies of particular families who they felt benefitted from the programme and to post these on the Holiday Kitchen evaluation website. Examples of these photos are used throughout this evaluation to illustrate different aspects of Holiday Kitchen.

The following section presents the findings from the evaluation data collection tools and activities in relation to Holiday Kitchen’s core objectives and indicators previously outlined. The conclusion will reflect on the extent to which these objectives and the short, medium and long term outcomes for key stakeholder groups have been met in the West Midlands settings.

Evaluation findings

This section focuses on the experiences of children, families and staff who participated in Holiday Kitchen set against the outcomes of ‘Improved Holiday Nutrition’, ‘Improved Relationships’ and ‘Increased Positive Activities’. Each outcome has two indicators attached to it which are provided as sub-headings to the findings and discussion. Ongoing commentary is provided on the quantitative and qualitative data collected using the various tools detailed in the earlier methodology section.

The first sub-section examines demographics and background of the participants of Holiday Kitchen; the second the experience of children, the third the experiences of parents/carers and the final sub-section examines the data collected from setting managers/operational leads. Tables and charts are used to convey data visually.

a. Demographics

The information presented here is derived from data collected from the nine settings promoting Holiday Kitchen and was gathered via a pre-delivery registration form. A total of 83 families enrolled on the programme. The largest ethnic cohorts were British (42; 50%) and Pakistani (15; 18%). A further 20 minority cohorts were identified, demonstrating the broad ethnic reach of the programme.

With Children’s Centres primarily focussed on 0-5 age range, Holiday Kitchen’s remit for inclusion of all children within a family unit is distinctive. This is reflected in the age ranges of the children which spanned newborn to 15 years old. A strength of the programme, this is nevertheless a challenge for staff and volunteers who must design and deliver activities to diverse and varied groups, where the accent is on family learning for vulnerable/potentially vulnerable families.
Yet the need for these activities is palpable. As the table below shows, only 30 (42%) of families reported that their children participated in daily physical activity of 30 minutes or more, falling well short of the current government guidelines of 180 minutes of activity per day for under-5s (DHSSPS, 2011). Of greater concern is that over a third of children (24 families; 36%) exercised once a week or less.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>71/83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often does your child/children currently participate in physical activity like dance, sport or playground play for 30+mins?

This seclusion is not limited to physical activity, but to the propensity for families to undertake activities together. Only 41 (55%) of 74 families had been on a day trip in the six months prior to Holiday Kitchen, although trips to parks and playgrounds were more frequent with 55 families (75%) visiting once a week or more. Whilst 44 (58%) of families read stories together, nearly a third (34; 30%) read less than once a week. The wider aims of Holiday Kitchen - and its associated Children’s Centre settings - to improve literacy, socialisation and healthy living are clearly relevant to the participating families.

Targeting families who may be vulnerable, at risk of poverty or deprivation and on welfare benefits, two-thirds (38; 66%) of Holiday Kitchen families were residents in social housing and 17 (24%) of 71 families stated that they had accessed food bank support in the 12 months prior. Meanwhile, 39 (51%) of 76 respondents stated that their children received additional education, health and social support. These are sound indicators that Holiday Kitchen is reaching vulnerable families, but a poor indicator of wider socioeconomic conditions.

At the start of the programme 35 (46%) of 77 respondents claimed to have a ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ knowledge of nutrition. The majority (67; 81%) of 74 respondents said that they ate together as a family ‘most days’ or ‘everyday’. This awareness and centrality of eating to the family experience provides a good basis from which to introduce healthy habits around food. This will be explored in greater depth in the findings from children and parents/carers below.
b. Children’s findings

Objective: Improved Holiday Nutrition

Indicator 1: Levels of Access to Nutritious Meals

In the period prior to the Holiday Kitchen programme, 4 of 45 respondents (9%) said that their food was nutritionally ‘poor’ to ‘extremely poor’. 15 (33%) of families stated that it was ‘good’ to excellent’. Following the eight sessions at Holiday Kitchen zero (0%) families identified their food as nutritionally ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ and 29 (64%) said it was now nutritionally ‘good’ to ‘excellent’. The changes introduced through Holiday Kitchen are outlined in the table below, with ‘eating healthy food’ and ‘new ideas’ the most common responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food changes</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We eat healthy food</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried new foods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know of a substitute for baby milk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children now help prepare food</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not many changes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have eaten more junk as food provided was not enough</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We eat together</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat more fruit and salad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We make our own food</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The menus were good</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know about how much sugar is in drinks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We make tasty meals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

This feedback indicates that Holiday Kitchen has had a broadly positive effect on access to nutritious meals and this is reflected in individual observations as to how children are now active participants in enabling access to healthy food:

my daughter gets involved in preparing healthy snacks.
Whether or not providing and advocating nutritious meals will have an immediate or direct impact on the families, it is apparent that some families recognise that commensality, or eating together, can be encouraged through peer and family learning:

not much change but seeing other kids eating encouraged my child to eat too.

These positive eating habits which were instilled through family togetherness were enhanced by a high quality of food offered at Holiday Kitchen settings. Of 45 respondents, 44 (97%) reviewed the food; ‘very good’ constituting 31 (68%) of responses. 25 (56%) said that Holiday Kitchen food was ‘more healthy than usually eaten at home, with 19 (42%) stating that it was ‘about the same’. The similarity in results is geographically and historically precedent in Holiday Kitchen programmes. A follow-on question asking ‘do you feel more confident to make healthy meals/snacks with your children’ finds 38 (88%) replying positively.

Indicator 2: Types of Experience of Healthy Food

In accordance with the family learning ethos of heuristic education and exposure to new experiences in a safe setting, children's views of foods are formed through exploration and experimentation. This is reflected in the responses below; the children (with an average age of 5.5 years), demonstrating that learning by doing is an effective method of delivering the messages of Holiday Kitchen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What have you learnt about food?</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making new healthy food</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy eating</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasty food</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where food comes from</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying new foods</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy food</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasting food</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money saving advice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple recipes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with others/ making friends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing things</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

The Holiday Kitchen’s programme’s emphasis on the new, experimental and unexplored is apparent in the children’s’ experiences with food. Their learning isn’t limited to understanding what constitutes healthy food, but also safe preparation:

[you learn] what’s good for you, how to prepare food safely.

For this child, Holiday Kitchen has expanded their knowledge of nutritious foods:

I really love healthy fruits especially bananas. Holiday kitchen introduces me to different types of food.

As the chart below shows, there are numerous benefits of eating at Holiday Kitchen as children responded to this question with multiple responses. The focus on ‘trying new things’ is consistent with other responses in this evaluation and the encouraging response to eating fruit and vegetables indicates that children are eager and willing to try fresh food. Breakfasts were positively highlighted by only 46% of respondents, with the time of day, food choice and its low sugar content of the food perhaps bearing upon this.
The individual feedback reveals that children are particularly keen on doing and learning more:

I wish that the sessions could have been longer because we could have done more activities.

Despite the strengths of the exploratory nature of Holiday Kitchen, it remains important that activities are correctly structured and scaffolded in order to maintain a focal point:

I think there could be more structure today seemed a bit chaotic.

children started to get disruptive when others were making their food, could do with 2 projects each time to occupy each child.
It is understandably difficult to stay on task when there is a wide range and number of people in each setting, but running parallel sessions could be a future option.

**Objective Improved Relationships**

**Indicator 1: Types of peer relationships**

Peer-to-peer learning is central to the acquisition of educational and cultural capital amongst children. If an individual feels comfortable in the arena and the people around them, they are more likely to integrate. Over two thirds (29; 69%) of 42 respondents said their child’s mood had improved ‘quite a lot’ or a ‘great deal’ via Holiday Kitchen, whilst 36 (87%) said their children had benefitted from joining in with others. 27 (74%) parents said that their child has ‘enjoyed being helpful to others’. This affirms one of the NEF’s Five Ways to Wellbeing; giving. ‘Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy’ (Mind, 2013). While the range and type of activities provided by Holiday Kitchen largely account for the improvement in moods, it is also important to recognise the gains made by one of the most common – and overlooked – interactions; sharing meals together.

**Do you feel you and your children have benefited from having breakfast at the Holiday kitchen?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>91%</strong></td>
<td><strong>41/45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

**Do you feel you and your children have benefitted from having lunch at the Holiday Kitchen?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96%</strong></td>
<td><strong>43/45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Indicator 2: Types of Family Relationships

As noted previously, the majority of families already ate together on a regular basis and sharing meals had wide-reaching benefits. For Holiday Kitchen participants, effects on the immediate family unit are important outcomes for vulnerable families. Before Holiday Kitchen, only 16 (36%) of families felt that the quality of their family time was ‘good’ to ‘excellent’, but following the programme this had increased to 34 (69%), with zero (0%) of families feeling that this was poor.

The changes engendered through Holiday Kitchen focus not on increasing the amount of time spent together, but the quality of time spent together. This is facilitated by children and parents/carers feeling more able, knowledgeable and willing to undertake new challenges and opportunities, as seen by the following responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family time changes</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We spend more time together</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do more outdoor activities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know creative ways to do activities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The children join in cooking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do more indoor activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m more confident now</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

By increasing awareness of what is widely available, families are able to spend a greater deal of good quality time together; a sound basis for further solidifying relationships.

Objective: Increased Positive Holiday Activities

Indicator 1: Interest in Learning

With 5.5 years being the average age of children on Holiday Kitchen, the majority are likely to have already been exposed to informal or formal educational settings. Maintaining an interest in learning throughout the long summer break and across a diverse range of families is a challenge for the programme, yet one that seems to have been met. When asked if their children had learnt new things, 32 (78%) of 41 responded ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’. In terms of school readiness, over two-thirds (27; 67.5%) felt that Holiday Kitchen has allowed children to ‘feel more confident about the start of the new academic year’. 
The love of participatory learning and engagement among the children is evident in the responses below from children who strongly identify with fun, active play and games in their observations of ‘what’s tops’ about Holiday Kitchen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s Tops?</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s fun</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being fit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being healthy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach activities</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting strong</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s enjoyable</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gym equipment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s exciting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports games</td>
<td>10 (assorted games – boxing, cricket, star jumps, jumping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being outside</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting energy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

The combination of learning across age groups was particularly pertinent to one family as the ‘little ones’ learnt from the input of older peers:

It was nice to give each other ideas about how to make shield interesting, helped each other and little ones learnt ‘scissors’.

The importance of a healthy lifestyle is not limited to parents/carers, but engages children too, with one respondent particularly grateful for the opportunities for learning afforded by Holiday Kitchen:
excellent opportunity for my child she enjoys attending and learning about healthy eating, physical activities. Thank you :)

Learning also took on other forms. For one child, awareness of their family’s precarious financial situation impacted upon their capability to purchase the nutritious food:

mum said the cost of foods prevents us to buy healthy food.

The Holiday Kitchen programme aims to promote lifelong learning and change attitudes amongst families who are vulnerable and/or hard-to-reach. Family education can be the precursor to a range of positive alterations; in particular, changes in food habits, as detailed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food changes</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We eat healthy food</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried new foods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know of a substitute for baby milk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children now help prepare food</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not many changes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have eaten more junk as food provided was not enough</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We eat together</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat more fruit and salad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We make our own food</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

Observations around children's participation in both the learning and preparation of food are evident:

my daughter gets involved in preparing healthy snacks.

Good habits introduced at a family level also indirectly benefit children through the parents’ increased learning:

I have learnt new healthy snacks to feed my children.
Indicator 2: Level of Participation

Levels of participation fluctuated across sites and days as is highlighted by staff data. The reasons behind this are multi-fold and need to be considered within the context of the wider operating environment. Most apparently they relate to the complex needs of some participants, staff capacity, weather, cuts and uncertainty related to site budgets and operational challenges which are partially dealt with in Appendix 2.

c. Parents/carers findings

Objective: Improved Holiday Nutrition

Indicator 1: Levels of Access to Nutritious Meals

The provision of nutritious meals at Holiday Kitchen is the cornerstone of learning about healthy lifestyles. As seen above, the vast majority 44 (98%) of 45 respondents rated the food as being ‘good’ or ‘very good’. The benefits of eating together as a family are outlined above in children’s section relating to peer relationships.

In the wider social context, where vulnerable families are at risk of deprivation family budgets may be squeezed during the school holidays, access to nourishing and tasty food not be underestimated:

- Financially holiday kitchen helped with free activities and free lunch.
- More budgeting + thinking about what I spend.

Here, Holiday Kitchen has helped lay the foundations for increased and ongoing access to nutritious food after the cessation of programme, suggesting that the skills engendered through the family learning approach have been successful:

- A new way to join in cooking, taking part as a family.
- Started to buy more budget food and make nice and simple cooking that taste good.

Universal amenities such as parks, libraries and museums can help to reinforce this practical learning of the various aspects of a healthy lifestyle. Here there is a real opportunity for families under targeted services to progress. A follow-up study examining how parents/carers and their families have progressed since the programme would help evaluate the longer-term impact of Holiday Kitchen.
Indicator 2: Types of Experience of Healthy Food

As seen above, ‘simple’ and ‘cheap’ food does not have to infer ‘unappetising’ or even ‘unhealthy’. Yet habits around pre-prepared and pre-processed foods may remain if families feel time-poor. One way to mitigate this is to ensure that nutritious food is quick and easy to prepare; for example, this parent has learnt new methods to ensure her children eat more healthily:

It was when we had wraps from the start well lady, I have made them at home now, the kids don't want peppers so I have started slicing the peppers up and 'hiding' them in the wraps to get more vegetables in my children.

This shows how Holiday Kitchen is able to transmit good practices to the home environment through the alliance between activity delivery staff and the parent/carer. This parent’s specific recall of this the end of the programme implies a more long term application of their experiences of healthy food at Holiday Kitchen.

Regular meals, one of the key drivers in adequate nutrient intake (Food Standards Agency, 2007) improved amongst parents and carers following completion of the programme, though the improvement was not as pronounced as with children; 9 (22%) of parents/carers said that ‘it has helped me eat regular meals’.

Evaluation suggests that there is a keen interest not only in ‘why’ of implement healthy meals, but the ‘how’. One parent suggested:

maybe organise trips to places like the farm and give an alternative at lunchtimes for kids.

Of 67 free answer evaluation responses, over a fifth (14; 21%) focussed on topics directly related to food and its experiences including statements such as ‘healthy eating ideas’, ‘trying new foods’ and ‘eating together’, all of which are central to key indicators around healthy living.

Objective: Improved Relationships

Indicator 1: Types of Peer Relationships

Fostering a community spirit and bringing parents/carers together who may otherwise feel isolated or cut-off is one of the founding principles of children’s centres. Holiday Kitchen builds on this by uniting parents/carers and their families for joint experiences focussed on the most social of activities; sharing food. Before this can take place, it is important that parents/carers feel as suitably accepted into/comfortable in the community. Two-thirds (28; 66%) of 42 respondents at the end of the programme said that they ‘have been feeling more relaxed’. A similar number (29; 67%) of 43 respondents said that Holiday Kitchen has enabled them to ‘feel better about myself’.
This positive impact on the well-being of individuals can then be employed in building relationships between peers. Accordingly, 24 (57%) of 41 parents/carers who have attended Holiday Kitchen report that they ‘have felt closer to other people’. It would be useful to understand the ways this manifested itself, but some observations from the end-of-programme feedback give an indication as to how this builds peer relationships:

- Making me friends + building confidence.
- children get to socialise and I got to meet mums and staff and feel confident.

If parents/carers feel less isolated and more integrated, they are more able to build in confidence and engage in activities that take place outside of the ‘safe haven’ of the children’s centre or other community setting. This is reflected in the increased proclivity of parents/carers to engage in wider social activities. Before Holiday Kitchen, only eight (19%) of 44 respondents rated their socialising with people outside of their family between ‘good and excellent’. Following Holiday Kitchen, this had increased to 25 (57%) of respondents. As regards to how this was achieved, of 14 free answers, four indicated that ‘it was good to meet new mums’ and three that ‘I’m more confident now’, showing how the shared space and shared purpose of the community settings can positively impact well-being and wider social engagement.

Indicator 2: Types of Family Relationships

By encouraging parents/carers to engage with their peers, there is also appreciation of the value of family relationships and how they can contribute to increased well-being. When parents/carers were asked about their confidence in undertaking family activities with their children, 16 of 45 respondents (36%), said they were ‘confident’ to ‘extremely confident’. Five families (10%) stated they were ‘unconfident’ to ‘extremely unconfident’. Following Holiday Kitchen, the number of families who felt confident undertaking activities with their children had nearly doubled to 31 (69%). Most tellingly, those who felt little or no confidence had reduced to zero (0%). This illustrates how Holiday Kitchen addressed the challenges faced by parents who struggled most at the beginning of the programme.

Some of these changes are based on an increase in awareness, as seen in the following examples:

- [I] wasn’t spending any time with the girls.
- usually I am busy but this made me concentrate on spending quality time and doing activities with the children.
Others reflect that having engaged in the social activities promoted through the programme, they are more confident to try new activities in their homes and the wider community:

[I am] confident to go to more places.

Although outings, day trips and events enable quality time among the family unit, it is the value of everyday contact which is important to the fabric of the family. In a free answer question, of 17 responses, seven, stated that they now ‘spend more time together’. Meanwhile in a question asking ‘how has Holiday Kitchen helped you or your family?’ 38 responses stated that ‘it has helped my family have fun together’.

Being able to undertake activities as a group is a recurring theme in the feedback from parents/carers, as seen in this example:

it got my family out of the house and interacting with each other and others.

As seen from these findings and others in this section, family togetherness and joint experiences support family learning which may have the potential to affect medium and long term change. Again, further evaluation on the long-term impact of Holiday Kitchen would ascertain if these changes are consistent over time.
Objective: Increased Positive Holiday Activities

Indicator: Interest in Learning

The unique position of children's and community centres to offer a variety of services is key to their success of working with families who need additional support whilst raising a young and/or vulnerable family. In the first instance this is reflected in the findings; two thirds of parents/carers reported that they were interested in new things:

I've been interested in new things:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>41/45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

With 28 (68%) of respondents showing 'quite a lot' or a 'great deal' of interest in new things, it appears to be an ideal environment to kindle interest in finance - one of the most challenging areas for vulnerable or at-risk families. Nine respondents (20%) said they were experiencing a 'good deal or a 'great deal' of financial stress before Holiday Kitchen, whereas afterwards this had reduced to five (11.6%). 12 (28%) of 44 respondents experienced 'little' to 'no' financial stress before Holiday Kitchen, with an increase to 23 (54%) following cessation of the programme. Feedback from parents and carers showed learning around making connections between healthy food, free activities and financial responsibility:

- Learn more about funding how to spend money wisely.
- the activities and learning new things you can do with kids like bug hunting.

If parents/carers increase their understanding of the links between universal activities, healthy eating and improved finances, this is likely to act as a motivating factor in improving overall well-being and longer-term implementation of the changes advocated by Holiday Kitchen.
Indicator 2: Level of Participation

Despite fluctuating participation rates the case for successful engagement of Holiday Kitchen participants is compelling; of 44 respondents, 43 (98%) said that they would recommend the programme to a friend.

d. Staff/manager findings

Findings from post participation on-line questionnaire

These online questionnaires gathered information about the local neighbourhood and the recruitment and retention of families on the programme. In addition, opinion based questions were asked about the impact and benefits of the programme for the participating families.

Summaries of this information are presented in the following tables. Eight out of the ten participating centre managers uploaded a post programme questionnaire, but not all managers completed every question. The information below is therefore based on the data received. This data has not been verified by any other source.

Question: Is the venue easily accessible for the families that attended HK?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of responses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within walking distance for most families</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a bus route</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

Question: How would you describe the age of the population of the neighbourhood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of responses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainly young families</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly older people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12
Question: How would you describe the ethnic make-up of the neighbourhood?

| Mainly white | 3 |
| Mainly BME | 4 |
| Don’t know | 1 |

Table 13

Question: How did you recruit families onto the programme?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment method (some managers identified more than one)</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referred by Early Intervention Service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by local school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families known to us</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited from local children’s centre</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other recruitment methods</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14

Question: Do you feel families who need support most in holiday times accessed the programme?

| Yes | 7 |
| No | 1 - Hard to reach families are the most in need of Holiday Kitchen |

Table 15

Question: In relation to the key objectives of HK, would you say that the programme had observable impact on the participating families?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On all families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On most families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a few families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18

Question: Do you think you had the right venue for your activities?
Key benefits of Holiday Kitchen for service providers as cited by centre managers included: ‘Improved engagement of participating families’, ‘Able to build relationships with new and hard to reach families’, Able to build relationships between service users and staff’, ‘Promotion of our service’, ‘Helped partnership working’, ‘Facility to signpost parents to other forms of support’.

The findings from the on-line questionnaire were used as a basis for the telephone interviews with centre managers, findings from which are reported below.

Findings from telephone interviews with setting managers

This section reports on the telephone interviews conducted with eight out of the ten setting managers (or equivalent) that hosted Holiday Kitchen in the West Midlands⁸. Please see further findings from the operational lead are reported at the end of this study in Appendix 2.

Firstly, each manager was asked what they felt went well with Holiday Kitchen in general. The answers, which related to activities, food, family engagement and partnerships, were overwhelmingly positive and encouraging from all interviewees. For example:

The families enjoyed the activities and the food. The planning went well and the training was good. We were lucky to get two free sessions at the MAC.

Spreading the programme across four weeks worked well. It gave the families something to look forward to for most of the holiday.

For a first time of running the programme, it went well. The families were engaged and the activities used met the needs of the families.

The rest of the responses are presented below in relation to the key objectives of the programme and the objective indicators.

Objective 1: Improved Holiday Nutrition

⁸ It is important to highlight here that the telephone interviews with setting managers/operational leads were carried out by staff at Ashrammoseley/Accord Group and not by members of the Birmingham City University research team. They have not been verified by Birmingham City University. The analysis of the telephone interview data conducted by Ashrammoseley staff can be found in Appendix 2.
Indicator 2: Types of experience of healthy food

When asked ‘Do you think families have benefitted from learning about, making and eating healthy meals at Holiday Kitchen?’ all eight of the managers answered ‘yes’ and gave evidential examples such as:

Yes. The families tried new things. Learned where vegetables come from. Learned that non-branded food is not only cheaper than the brands but just as good. Learned that home cooked food is better and cheaper than takeaways.

Yes. The site is very near to takeaways which residents would frequently use. The programme demonstrated that healthy meals can be provided on a budget. Sessions on health eating have continued after the programme and families have been given a cookbook.

Objective 2: Improved Relationships

Indicator: Types of peer relationships

In response to the question ‘How has Holiday Kitchen helped children develop more positive relationships with each other?’ seven out of the eight managers described the ways in which participating in Holiday Kitchen gave the children the opportunity to make new friends and build on existing relationships. For example:

The children interacted well. They live in an area where there are very little organised activities. They looked after each other and were happy to share food.

The children sat down together in a positive atmosphere where they would help each other.

One manager noted how:

Some did but the wide age range made it more challenging. There were occasional arguments.

Managers were also asked ‘Do you think that Holiday Kitchen has helped parents to have greater social interaction with other parents?’ and all responses affirmed this. For example:

Yes. The families were drawn from a wide area so didn’t necessarily know each other prior to the programme but came together to discuss issues and the activities. Some felt able to share their personal circumstances such as financial issues. Some parents exchanged numbers and kept in contact.

Yes. Some of the parents became friends and came to the sessions together.

Indicator: Types of family relationships
In response to the question ‘Has attending Holiday Kitchen helped families to spend positive time together?’ all but one of the managers provided positive examples in support of this:

Yes. Families got up early and spent positive time together doing the activities. The parents joined in with the children.

Yes. The families enabled parents to be involved with their children; there were no computers or TVs. As a result parents reported better behaviour in their children.

Yes. The programme helped to take some of the strains off parents so they could spend more quality time with their children including reading to them.

**Objective 3: Increased positive holiday activities**

**Indicator: Interest in learning**

When asked ‘How do you feel Holiday Kitchen has helped stimulate children’s interest in learning?’ all of the managers answered positively and gave examples of children’s learning being stimulated by Holiday Kitchen activities. For example:

Yes. The activities were creative and stimulating. This encouraged the children’s engagement and them wanting to return for the next day. They talked about the activities and are likely to take their experience back to school.

Yes, especially for the older children and particularly with the Field to Fork and Forest School activities.

Yes. The children were stimulated by the activities such as the growing kits. They were fairly simple and ‘low tech’ but stimulating and were likely to be something they would remember and take to school.

**E. Indicator: Level of participation**

These findings on attendance and retention rates at the delivery settings are taken from the post participation on-line questionnaire.
**Question: Attendance on programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>How many families attended all eight days of the programme?</th>
<th>How many families dropped out?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 20*

**Question: What percentage of families registered for the programme attended each day?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 6</th>
<th>Day 7</th>
<th>Day 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 21*
It is worth noting that there were multifactorial processes impacting on venues abilities to deliver the programme, participate in the evaluation, recruit families and retain them. Some sites faced staffing challenges and/or recruited families with multiple and complex needs that required intensive support to sustain participation. In order to understand the wide discrepancies in retention and attendance rates at delivery sites, a further operational review of these figures is taking place.

Other positive outcomes of Holiday Kitchen

Centre managers were asked to comment on whether they thought that Holiday Kitchen played a role in helping vulnerable families manage risks during holiday periods, and all eight said that they felt that it did. Some of the reasons for this are shown below:

Yes. The programme offered families somewhere to go (especially for the under 5’s), without the pressure of worrying about how to pay.

Yes. The impact of the closure of the local children’s centre meant helping families to manage the risks that other services would have responsibility for.

Yes. The programme had a positive financial impact, especially for lone parents. The activities were low cost and something the families could do at home.

Managers were also asked whether they thought Holiday Kitchen attendance had helped improved the self-confidence of children and parents. Again, the answers were mainly positive with seven out of the eight managers providing positive examples, such as:

Many children began the programme shyly but grew more confident as it went on and they became more relaxed.

They got to know the staff and were confident to approach them. Shyer children came ‘out of themselves’. They built trust in each other in a different environment from school and had respect for each other and the adults.

Yes. Parents said that they would have felt isolated at home without the programme. They made friends with each other, asked questions of those providing the activities and are more confident to use other services offered by the children’s centre.

See also Appendix I for our case study which shows one family’s journey towards building confidence through participating in Holiday Kitchen.

One manager, however, was unsure if participating in Holiday Kitchen improved the self-confidence of all parents and children:

Mixing with others was positive, although one parent felt uncomfortable with the ethnic mix of the group, being the only white parent. It was particularly helpful for two parents with learning difficulties to be able to engage with other parents.

This is difficult to judge but some children were shy at the start but as they got to know the staff they spoke up more.
In response to the question: ‘Do you see any other key benefits of Holiday Kitchen for families and your service?’ all the managers were keen to share a range of examples, including:

Yes. Engaging the under 5’s and complementing other family support work.

The programme is much needed in an area that has seen a decline in local authority services for vulnerable families. It demonstrated to the centre that we need to do more work with children and young people. Also gave an opportunity to identify volunteering opportunities.

The staff got a lot out of the programme, a volunteer came every day and an apprentice also helped out. It was good to do something with families who might not have had these opportunities otherwise. The families have started to use the children’s centre more.

**Operational improvements**

Managers/operational leads were also asked to share aspects of the programme which did not go so well and were given the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement of Holiday Kitchen based on their experiences. The responses were grouped around the following themes:

**Planning**

Four of the managers felt that more time was needed for planning Holiday Kitchen and that the lead in time was too short.

**Financial support**

Two managers commented on the need for more financial support to assist with the running of future Holiday Kitchen programmes:

The local shops weren’t prepared to offer any free products apart from ASDA who gave fruit and water.

More financial support for resources and travel costs would have helped.

**Age appropriate activities**

Three managers identified challenges with meeting the needs of a wide range of children:

Older children were more difficult to cater for, the optimum age is probably 3-7.

With a wide age range (0-13), it was difficult to find activities suitable for all ages

Some of the children were too young to properly participate.
Recruitment and attendance

Finally, four managers spoke about issues relating to recruitment and attendance, for example:

The local schools weren’t engaged and didn’t provide any referrals.

The lead-in time was too short; we didn’t have enough time to recruit the families

Summary & Conclusions

“Social Value is the value that stakeholders experience through changes in their lives” (Social Value Network, 2015). It is by reflecting on and measuring outcome focused findings gathered from children, parents/carers and staff that participated in the Holiday Kitchen programme that the social value of this initiative has been explored. To do this, the study has drawn upon Social Return on Investment (SROI) principles as an organising methodology in developing research tools. Central to this process has been the Holiday Kitchen Theory of Change (see Figure 1). This has been used to map anticipated outcomes for children, adults and venues based on the activities and resources delivered in the settings and the inputs contributed by stakeholders. This means that the design of the evaluation materials (daily activities with children, registration form and exit questionnaire for parents/carer and interviews with centre managers) have corresponded with the anticipated outcomes and their respective indicators included in the Theory of Change.

What has emerged from using these social value focused tools with children, parents/carers and staff is that the Holiday Kitchen was a success in relation to its three core objectives and overall wellbeing approach in eight West Midlands’ settings. These findings are based on the following empirical and policy rationale:

Overall, Holiday Kitchen in the West Midlands supported the participation of 83 families from 22 ethnic backgrounds with 127 children ranging from an average age of 5.5 year. Thirty eight of these families were social housing residents, 39 of the families received additional education, health and social support; and 17 families stated that they had accessed food bank support in the 12 months prior.

Data from eight West Midlands sites that participated in this evaluation indicates that the West Midlands programme has been a success. The integration of additional supports around finance and physical activities shows how practical, applied family learning is holistic and wide-reaching, with benefits for individual and community well-being offering the potential for social cohesion facilitated by engagement with universal services.
Improved Holiday Nutrition

In relation to the objective of ‘Improved Holiday Nutrition’ parents identified benefits relating to access and experience for themselves and their children of having a healthy breakfast and lunch at Holiday Kitchen. Children reported that they liked the food and eating activities on the programme and managers reported that families had benefitted from learning about, making and eating healthy meals at Holiday Kitchen.

Exposing children and parents/carers to new opportunities and experiences has been a hallmark of Holiday Kitchen and its complementary capability to increase awareness around nutrition, the value of nutritious food and how to access it. This is of particular importance to vulnerable families who, whilst some claim to be knowledgeable of what constitutes healthy food, they do not always have access to ingredients or the practical experience to be able to prepare it quickly, easily and as an activity that involves the whole family. Holiday Kitchen addresses these challenges comprehensively, in a fun, accessible manner for children and adults alike. Notably, the data did not indicate a lack of awareness around dietary requirements among parents; instead some parents found the physical act of preparing and cooking the food problematic. This was well dealt with by the programme with heuristic, hands-on learning at the centre of the educational model. Most notably:

- 75 percent of children enjoyed eating fruit and vegetable, 69 percent enjoyed making food and 78 percent reported enjoying trying new foods at Holiday Kitchen
- 56 percent of parents and carers felt their families ate more healthily than normal at Holiday Kitchen
- 88 percent of parents and carers felt more confident to make healthy meals/snacks for their children as a result of Holiday Kitchen
- There was a 31 percent increase in the number of families that identified their food at home as nutritionally ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ following the completion of the programme.
- Regular meals, one of the key drivers in adequate nutrient intake (Food Standards Agency, 2007) improved amongst parents and carers through the programme with 22 percent of parents/carers saying that ‘it has helped me eat regular meals’.

The value of these findings may be understood to support the Public Health Outcomes framework, Domain Two: Health Improvements items:

- Healthy weight in 4-5 and 10-11 year olds
- Diet - Percentage of children and young people who eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day; mean number of portions of fruit and veg eaten per day
- Children and young people have access to age-appropriate health information to support them to lead healthy lives

(Department of Health, April 2014)

Improved Relationships

In relation improved peer and family relationships’, the cornerstones of emotional wellbeing, again the feedback from participants and staff was positive. Holiday Kitchen settings provided safe spaces for families, enabling them to readily integrate and engage in meaningful activities as families and with peers for both children and parents/carers. Children and parents/carers reported positive experiences relating to social activities and family time through Holiday Kitchen, and managers agreed that Holiday Kitchen had helped both parents and children develop
more positive relationships with their peers and gave families the opportunity to spend more quality time together in a positive environment. Most notably:

- 87 percent of parents/carers said their children had benefitted from joining in with other children, and 74 percent of parents/carers said that their child had ‘enjoyed being helpful to others’.
- There was a 33 percent increase in the number of families that reported that the quality of their family time was ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ following completion of the programme.
- Before Holiday Kitchen, only eight (19%) of 44 respondents rated their socialising with people outside of their family between ‘good and excellent’. Following Holiday Kitchen, this had increased to 25 (57%) of respondents.
- Following the completion of the programme there was a 33 percent increase in parent/carer reported confidence in undertaking family activities with their children. Significantly those who felt little or no confidence had reduced to zero percent. This was supported by 38 parents/carers reporting Holiday Kitchen had ‘helped my family have fun together’.

When examining how children and parents/carers have responded to this increase in confidence in relationships, it is evident that the applied activities around food and nutrition, exercise and literacy have enabled individuals to feel more willing, able and happy to be part of a group. This holds true for the relationships between peers, siblings and the dynamics between those charged with caring for the children.

Beyond the intrinsic value of these findings, such outcomes complement areas of the Public Health Outcomes Framework Domains 1 and 2, particularly in relation to emotional wellbeing and school readiness (Department of Health, 2014). While further research to understand what the sustained impact of the programme would be on attainment is required, these finding do suggest Holiday Kitchen’s ambitions as a family wellbeing programme that supports out of school learning in relation to both ‘collaborative learning’ and ‘social and emotional learning’. They also have implications for wider social inclusion and family functioning – themes at the heart of the Government’s Support for Families policy.

**Increased Positive Holiday Activities**

Understanding to what extent Holiday Kitchen has increased the participation in positive holiday activities for low income and vulnerable families cannot be clearly delineated from the above findings around relationship and needs to be considered together. This objective was explored by considering interest in learning and levels of participation:

- In terms of school readiness, 67.5 percent of parent/carers felt that Holiday Kitchen helped their children to ‘feel more confident about the start of the new academic year’.

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9 See Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) evidence based toolkit for further details on the value of these forms of learning in closing the attainment gap.
10 [https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/support-for-families](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/support-for-families) [accessed March 2016]
Of 117 children’s responses to what was ‘tops’ about Holiday Kitchen, 39 percent of the answers related to areas physical activity.

66 percent of parents/carers also stated that they have become ‘quite a lot’ or a ‘great deal’ more interested in new things.

In relation to the outcomes of reduced financial strain and exclusion from holiday activities related to the positive holiday activity programme objective, these too were broadly positive with a 26 percent increase in the number of adult respondents who felt that their finances were ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ between the beginning and end of the programme.

These findings reinforcing the programme’s family learning model which enables new skills, interests and physical activity. Managers also agreed that Holiday Kitchen helped stimulate learning.

Taken together with the findings associated with relationships, the evidence shows that learning and increased social participation has been enabled for parents and children through Holiday Kitchen. The range of activities, day trips and effective signposting also increased awareness of local, low-cost or free holiday activity opportunities for families beyond the programme, which positively impacts on the wider social inclusion of participants. Given the vulnerability of a significant proportion of participant families, it can be concluded that the programme succeeded in increasing both the access to and participation in positive holiday activities for families who took part.

Notably 98 percent of parents said that they would recommend the programme to a friend.

**Overall wellbeing outcomes**

In responses to end of programme questions adapted from the Warwick and Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) (Tenant et al, 2007 p7) parents reports included:

- 69 percent of 42 respondents said their child’s mood had improved ‘quite a lot’ or a ‘great deal’ through Holiday Kitchen participation.
- 66 percent of parent/carers said that they ‘have been feeling more relaxed’; and 67 percent stated that Holiday Kitchen has helped them to ‘feel better about myself’.
- 57 percent of parents also reported that Holiday Kitchen has helped them ‘feel closer to other people’.

These feelings have been identified as central to mental wellbeing in the evidence based Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (ibid) 11.

Such findings suggest Holiday Kitchen has contributed to more positive emotional wellbeing outcomes for the vast majority of children in the programme and to a slightly lesser degree, a significant number of parents/carers who participated. It is unclear to what extent these outcomes have been enabled by improved access to healthy meals through Holiday Kitchen, but we should not ignore the scope for nutrition to

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11 WEMWBS is a measure of mental well-being focusing entirely on positive aspects of mental health. It is a short psychometrically robust scale widely used by within the NHS and by other mental health professionals.
positively support concentration and mood regulation in both adults and children (Cornah, D., 2016). These findings reaffirm the programme's integration of the New Economics Foundation's Five Ways to Wellbeing (2008) activities into daily delivery. They also enable the programme's wellbeing outcomes to be positively cross-referenced with other wellbeing programmes using WEMWBS based assessment tools to confirm that Holiday Kitchen has succeeded as a low cost family wellbeing initiative.

Taken altogether the findings present a compelling case that the programme not only reduces holiday risk factors related to food poverty, debt, emotional health and social isolation, but positively contributes to community wellbeing assets, networks and resilience during holiday risk periods. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to determine the extent to which participation in Holiday Kitchen has improved families’ functioning, but it may be recognised that the programme has contributed towards families’ ability to thrive throughout the year (the central Holiday Kitchen vision), and by inference supports efforts to address poverty and inequality, particularly in relation to community health, attainment and social inclusion in West Midlands in line with priorities identified by the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission (December 2015).

Central to national and international interventions around child poverty is the aim of removing debt and its associated stress (Crown, 2010) and enabling social mobility, not only with an accent on income, but by addressing the underlying causes of poverty such as financial management and poor physical and mental health.12 Through this evaluation, it may be concluded that Holiday Kitchen, with its accent on access to healthy and good value food, enrichment activities, improving family and community interaction and signposting to further services, is a building block in this process and crystallises many of these theoretical – and often abstract – aims into practice. To these ends, it is clear that the aims highlighted by Frank Field in his seminal report (Field, 2010) where cycles of poverty are eradicated through education and empowerment, are shared by the Holiday Kitchen programme. Likewise, these findings suggest Holiday Kitchen may also work to complement a range of activities that fall under the current government’s Support for Families13 policy focus including parenting support and Early Years programmes.

Recommendations

1. It is emergent from the data that this programme has drawn on the core ethos of family learning and applied it to healthy eating, physical activity and being part of a wider community of family, children, parents, carers, staff and stakeholders. The longer term value this form of learning programme has on educational attainment generally or holiday learning loss particularly (Campbell et al, 2015) is beyond the scope of this study. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to better understand if the programme’s themes and delivery format can sustainably complement work done elsewhere to close the attainment gap for disadvantaged children – particularly in

relation to the Educational Endowment Foundation’s evidence based topic areas of collaborative learning, parental involvement; and social and emotional learning.

2. There are clear indicators from this evaluation that Holiday Kitchen has been successful in placing family learning at the heart of the programme. This has the potential to stimulate change in healthy living, nutritious food, engagement with universal services and financial management. These are essential to the strength and success of the programme and it is recommended that they are built upon going forwards. Such work could draw on recent studies which illustrate the intrinsic value of family learning to school learning, employability and preparing young people for the flexibility required by the modern workplace (NIACE, 2013).

3. It would also be useful to undertake a longitudinal study of how Holiday Kitchen can influence attitudes towards and behaviours related to physical activity, eating and learning over the medium and long-term to ascertain the impact on the families who have been supported by the programme, particularly in relation to additional supports and structure which can run in parallel with the programme throughout the calendar year.

4. Heuristic learning (learning by doing) was favoured among children and it is important that further Holiday Kitchen delivery continues to place participation at the centre of their activities.

5. Using a Social Return on Investment approach it would be possible to delve deeper and track the proportion of stakeholders who reported experiencing each outcome as a direct result of attending Holiday Kitchen from the data collected (with sufficient resources). This could be broken down and analysed by delivery venue. It would be possible to calculate the number of stakeholders for whom each outcome is ‘material’ (i.e. significant) and where possible, the magnitude of change (i.e. how much difference the programme has made to stakeholders in relation to each outcome). This type of analysis is explored in the ‘light touch’ SROI case study produced for the Green Acres delivery venue in the 2014 Holiday Kitchen programme evaluation. By conducting a more comprehensive analyses we would be able to better understand the breadth of value (and for which outcomes the value is most significant) generated for key stakeholder groups through the Holiday Kitchen programme.

It is recommended that such work be undertaken to better understand the social value and economics of such interventions, to help inform future policy related to the management of holiday risks and community asset based responses in low income neighbourhoods and for vulnerable families.

6. To maximise the opportunities and outcomes achieved by Holiday Kitchen, there is a need for the greater integrated involvement of other services like schools, Local Authority Family Support and Public Health teams, as well as financial support service organisations.

7. Operational recommendations:
7.1. It is apparent that issues around management of resources such as time are of utmost importance. Early communication needs to take place between sites, referral agencies and parents to ensure maximum uptake and suitable referrals.

7.2. During delivery, it is suggested that sites make the most of the human resources available by asking parents to support where appropriate, tasking them with roles or responsibilities, rather than sitting on the side-lines in some cases. Increased parental involvement would relieve pressure off sites with a limited number of staff, support parents to practice skills in an active citizen manner and champion what it means to co-deliver a holistic family learning experience.

7.3. Parental recommendations focused on: More and longer sessions, more organised trips, and more age appropriate activities for younger children

Please refer to *Holiday Kitchen: Supporting integrated Prevention and Early Intervention outcomes for vulnerable families in Sandwell* (April 2016) in the same suite of reports for a case study on the medium-term efficacy of Holiday Kitchen outcomes and an exploration of how the programme may complement existing services to provide vulnerable families with year round integrated support.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1 West Midlands: Holiday Kitchen Family Case Study – Report from a centre manager

NB names have been changed to preserve anonymity

Susan attended Holiday Kitchen with her daughter, aged 3 years. Kiera had struggled for independence from her mother; Susan always stayed near her daughter, wouldn’t allow her to do things for herself, and is quite overprotective. This resulted in very challenging behaviour from Kiera. Through Holiday Kitchen, Susan grew in confidence to allow her daughter some independence.

During Holiday Kitchen, Keira joined in with activities such as the ‘Animaltastic’ session, an interactive and educational experience where children met exotic species of animal and allowed to hold and stroke them. This really excited Kiera and she participated fully (Susan said that Keira loves animals). Susan was amazed that Keira was able to do this by herself with only little encouragement, so much so that Susan has now decided to have the Animaltastic at Keira’s next birthday party.

Susan started to let Keira become more independent as the sessions went on. She allowed her daughter to play in the garden area with the other children using exercise equipment specially designed for the children. Keira thought this was great fun and had a go on all the equipment. At one point, getting a little over excited, she had a little fall. Susan ran to her rescue but with the reassurance of the staff Keira called down and realised that children do have falls and this may happen from time to time. Because the reassured Susan that all children fall over, she understood that Keira would be fine and allowed her to continue playing.

On the coach trip for our day out in Weston Super Mare, Susan said to me that this is something she would have never done before. Susan said that the confidence that she has gained doing Holiday Kitchen and a few of our other courses has made it possible for her to venture further afield and try new things with Keira. On the coach trip she was able to deal with Keira’s behaviour in a positive manner, she praised Keira throughout the journey and on the way back. Susan said that they had a fantastic time, adding that Keira got to see the beach and have fun with others she had met from the Holiday Kitchen.

Evaluation of family

I believe that Susan has gained more confidence and self-esteem by doing the Holiday Kitchen. Watching others families from within the group with their children has helped Susan to allow Keira to do more for herself and explore without Susan being right by her side at all times. Susan now wants to help at the children’s centre and volunteer in the future. With help and support from the team, I feel she will get there.
Appendix 2: Summary Findings from the Post Delivery Interviews with Programme Co-ordinator in the West Midlands

By Mark Gibbs, Family Action

Background
Of the nine West Midlands delivery partners eight participated in these interviews. Six had delivered Holiday Kitchen before and so had previous experience to reference when considering delivery in summer 2015.

Responses to Interview Questions
What do you feel went well?
- Five out of the eight respondents reported that the activities worked well.
- Two out of eight respondents reported that the toolkit and co-ordination was helpful.
- Two out of nine respondents reported that spreading the sessions over four weeks worked well.

What do you feel did not go so well?
- Five out of eight respondents reported that the planning and lead-in time was not long enough.
- Three out of eight respondents reported that some of the children were either too young or too old to properly engage.

Do you think Holiday Kitchen plays a role in helping vulnerable families manage risks during holiday periods? If so, how?
- Four out of eight respondents reported that there was a positive impact on family finances.
- Four out of eight respondents reported that there was a reduction in potential risks to children.

Do you think families have benefited from learning about, making and eating healthy meals at Holiday Kitchen?
- Six out of eight respondents reported that families learned how to eat healthy meals on a budget.
- Four out of eight respondents reported that families learned about new food and cooking.
- Three out of eight respondents reported that fruit was enjoyed by the families.

Has attending Holiday Kitchen helped families spend positive time together? Tell me more about this?
- Eight out of eight respondents reported that parents and children engaged in the activities together.
- Two out of eight respondents reported that families recognised the importance of eating together.

How has Holiday Kitchen helped children develop more positive relationships with each other? Tell me more about this?
- Seven out of eight respondents reported that children engaged in the activities together.
How do you feel Holiday Kitchen has helped stimulate children’s interest in learning? Tell me more about this?

- Eight out of eight respondents reported that the children had learned from the activities.
- Three out of eight respondents reported that children were most likely to take the experience into the school environment.
- Three out of eight respondents reported that the Field to Fork activity worked well.
- Two out of eight respondents reported that the Family Shield activity worked well.
- Two out of eight respondents reported that the money activity worked well.
- Two out of eight respondents reported that the Forest School activity worked well.

Do you think Holiday Kitchen attendance has helped improved the self-confidence of children? If so why?

- Seven out of eight respondents reported that children became more confident during the programme.
- Three out of eight respondents reported that children became more confident to engage with the staff running the programme.

Do you think Holiday Kitchen attendance has helped improved the self-confidence of parents? If so why?

- Eight out of eight respondents reported that parents became more confident during the programme.
- Four out of eight respondents reported that parents were prepared to talk about and share their circumstances and experiences.

Do you think that Holiday Kitchen has helped parents to have greater social interaction with other parents? If so why?

- Eight out of eight respondents reported that parents interacted with and supported each other.
- Five out of eight respondents reported that parents became friends during the programme.

Do you see any other key benefits of Holiday Kitchen for families and your service?

- Four out of eight respondents reported that some families have accessed other services provided by the delivery partner.

Operational Conclusions

It is clear from the responses that Holiday Kitchen was a success and the activities were very widely enjoyed by the parents and the children. Delivery partners who had delivered the programme in previous holiday periods had learned from former experience, particularly in relation to running the eight days over four weeks rather than four days over two weeks.

A number of comments suggested the delivery partners were well supported with better co-ordination and that the time spent by families on the evaluation exercises was more proportionate than previously.

The new delivery partners also felt that that their programmes were a success and found both the training and the toolkit very helpful in planning and delivery.

Most negative comments related to planning time and cost of the programme. Most respondents indicated that they would have liked more time for planning their programmes, which would have also given them more time to recruit the families.
Several commented that it would have been good to have a small budget to cover the costs of incidentals such as travel and resources. Several respondents also commented that they didn’t have 100% attendance for the programme and that the target for twenty children and ten families might be too high to both achieve and resource.

Others commented on the age range of children and the levels of need of various families. Some programmes had very young children that were not able to engage in the activities and similarly for older children, some of the activities were not engaging. Where there were families with high levels of need, staff were required to offer more support than to other families.

Social Impact Conclusions
Across all the intended objectives, all respondents felt their programmes met the intended impact, although there were areas where the impact was greater than others.

There was some recognition that Holiday Kitchen provided a safe environment for families and that it would have reduced financial pressure through the provision of free food and activities.

The weakest area was around helping families to manage risks during the holiday. There was little reference to supporting parents around safeguarding and health risks, although one respondent reported that as a result of attending Holiday Kitchen one family was able to come off their CAF plan.

The strongest area of impact related to healthy eating. Respondents felt that the provision of breakfast and lunch met a fundamental need of families to be able to have nutritious meals. Furthermore, Holiday Kitchen was able to demonstrate how families can eat healthily on a budget and they were also given the opportunity to try new food and new ways of cooking.

Relationship building was also a strong area of impact. All respondents reported that parents and children engaged with the activities together; siblings played with each other and with children from other families. Both parents and children were reported to be more confident to engage with each other and with the staff running the programme.

All respondents felt that the activities were effective in engaging the children and helping them learn new things, this was especially the case with the Field to Fork and Forest School activities which combined learning with physical activity. Several respondents reported that the activities were simple enough for families to do for themselves.

Impact on Delivery Partners’ Service
The majority respondents reported that the provision of Holiday Kitchen meant that families were more likely to continue to be engaged with services provided by the delivery partner or other agencies. For some sites, the programme offered the opportunity to encourage parents to become volunteers.
Several respondents also recognised the importance of Holiday Kitchen in learning about the needs of local families and how future programmes and other services could be shaped.
How do you feel Holiday Kitchen has helped stimulate children’s interest in learning? Tell me more about this?
- Eight out of eight respondents reported that the children had learned from the activities.
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Holiday Kitchen Evaluation Team

The Accord Group consists of a group of dynamic, innovative and ambitious housing, health and social care organisations which provide services across the Midlands to over 80,000 people. We are a values-led social business motivated by adding social and economic value to the communities where we work.

Holiday Kitchen has been pioneered by Ashrammoseley Housing Association, which is part of the Accord Group. As an agency committed to social inclusion and social impact we co-develop collaborative partnerships and creative projects with a diversity of local residents to meet community needs. This work notably focuses on addressing poverty and social exclusion through excellent service and social innovation. Holiday Kitchen forms part of our work to address child poverty. For more information, please visit accordgroup.org.uk

Planning for Real is an expert community engagement unit which develops specialist visual, participative and inclusive materials for a wide range of audiences. We have an in-house accredited Social Return on Investment (SROI) practitioner who supported this evaluation programme. For more information, please visit planningforreal.org.uk

Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK’s most vulnerable people. We seek to empower people and communities through practical, financial and emotional help. We provide effective and innovative services that have a positive impact on people’s lives. Our work is wide-ranging and includes help for parents-to-be, the provision of many Children’s Centres in local communities, intensive family support, emotional health and well-being services, counselling, mediation and therapies, support in schools and financial grants programmes. For more information, please visit family-action.org.uk

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