



Sainsbury's
Good food for all of us

Supporting children during the school summer holidays



A review of the Nourish the Nation Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) pilot project in summer 2024

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“When other families are looking forward to the sun, or going away somewhere nice, my stomach sinks with this awful knot in it, knowing we are going to struggle. But this year, I knew that support was there, and it was such a relief. I actually even managed to take them to the zoo with my sister this year. That is huge for us, and I was able to pack a picnic using the food we got.”

A parent in Northern Ireland whose children attended a HAF holiday club



A HAF holiday club funded by Feeding Britain



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Executive summary

In summer 2024, Comic Relief and Sainsbury's funded a pilot project through the Nourish the Nation programme with the aim of providing good food for children in the school holidays. The project aimed to improve access to holiday activities and food (HAF) for children and young people from families on low incomes.

Working with seven lead partner organisations, grants were provided to 203 local, grassroots community groups around the UK.

This report explains what went well, the main challenges, and areas for improvement. Based on this experience, the HAF project funded by Nourish the Nation will be repeated in 2025.

The issue

Government-funded HAF programmes allow children and young people from low-income households to take part in holiday clubs that offer activities, meals and free childcare spaces.

HAF was designed as support outside of school term-time for children in receipt of free school meals. In England, government funding includes a flexible 15% portion that local authorities can allocate to other children who they feel can also benefit (Department for Education, 2024).

However, government funding for HAF is still very limited. In England, 900,000 children living in poverty aren't eligible for HAF support, based on ineligibility for free school meals (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023).

In addition, the funded provision also usually falls short – in the total number of weeks that HAF is available, as well as the number of days each week.

There is currently no government HAF scheme in Northern Ireland, and limited resources for HAF in Scotland and Wales.

In Northern Ireland, research shows more than one in four parents are struggling to provide sufficient food for their children (Barnardo's, 2024b). There is a similar level of food poverty in Scotland, with 27% of parents struggling (Barnardo's, 2024a).

Research from the Children's Commissioner for Wales shows that almost half (45%) of children aged 7 to 11 say they worry about having enough to eat (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2022).

The government HAF programme in England was initially scheduled to terminate in March 2025. Since then, funding has been extended for the 2025-26 financial year.

What we did

Through funding from Sainsbury's and Comic Relief, extra places at holiday clubs were offered by 203 community groups that understand their local areas and are best placed to identify who can most benefit.

The lead partners were: Community Foundation Northern Ireland, Community Foundation Wales, Feeding Britain, Forever Manchester, Foundation Scotland, London Community Foundation and The Bread and Butter Thing.

Alongside our funding efforts we know that systematic change is required to create long-lasting change. We believe that no child should go hungry in the school holidays and that good food should be available for all children and so over the last year Sainsbury's and Comic Relief advocated, alongside trusted partner Feeding Britain, for the extension and improvement of the government's HAF programme.

The impact

- By removing strict eligibility criteria, more children from families on low incomes could take part in HAF schemes run by local community groups taking part in the Nourish the Nation HAF pilot project.
- Also, by working where there is currently no government support, or limited resources for HAF, the partners reached children and young people around the UK who wouldn't have access to holiday clubs.

Benefits to children and young people included access to child-friendly safe spaces during the long summer holiday, socialising with peers, and learning new skills.

The pilot project made a difference to families too. For many, it avoided the need for expensive childcare, helped them to stay in employment, and gave them a break that supported their mental health.

Importantly, HAF reduced the very real stigma related to food poverty. Families signed up to summer holiday activities for children, which happened alongside the provision of nutritious meals. The approach was also more inclusive, by eliminating the need to meet strict eligibility for free school meals.

Data from our funded partners shows that the HAF project:

- supported **30,094 children and young people**, including **4,324 children (14%) with special educational needs and disabilities**
- provided food for **more than 400,000 meals** – 241,407 meals at holiday clubs, and 201,884 meals worth of food for families to take home, provided in or near schools

Lessons learnt

This review of the project provides strong evidence for continuing to fund HAF programmes through Nourish the Nation.

In summary, the key lessons include:

- **Flexibility of funding**, compared to government HAF schemes, helped the funded partners and grassroots community groups meet local need.
- **Evidence from the project can be used to influence UK government policy.** Feeding Britain used data from this HAF pilot project to call on the UK government to reform its current HAF programme in England so it can reach more people.
- **A longer lead time to set up local activities** will allow local groups to target children and young people who are most in need of HAF, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- **Monitoring and evaluation that is proportional to the grant size** will allow local groups to focus more on supporting children and young people.

About the HAF Pilot Project

In summer 2024, a pilot project was funded as part of Sainsbury's and Comic Relief's Nourish the Nation programme, aiming to improve access to HAF schemes for children and young people from families on low incomes.

We know this type of support is urgently needed during the school holidays.

Data shows that the government-funded HAF programme in England excludes many children from families on low incomes. Also, HAF schemes are not available across all of the UK.

The purpose of the Sainsbury's and Comic Relief-funded HAF pilot project was to:

- offer spaces to children and young people through local, grassroots community groups so that more children could access HAF schemes
- reduce restrictions that government HAF schemes use, so more children and young people could benefit
- learn more about how best to deliver this type of support.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by the London Community Foundation

Funded partners & grassroots community groups

We funded seven partner organisations to support the HAF work around the UK. These were:

- Community Foundation Northern Ireland
- Community Foundation Wales
- Feeding Britain
- Forever Manchester
- Foundation Scotland
- London Community Foundation
- The Bread and Butter Thing.

These organisations gave grants to local community groups to:

- enhance existing government HAF schemes in England, Wales and Scotland, and provide support in Northern Ireland where there is no HAF programme. Government funding generally falls short – it supports HAF clubs for only some days of the holidays, and fewer hours than a school day. The community groups worked to provide HAF schemes for longer hours and on more days.
- create more spaces for children who fall out of the government's strict criteria for taking part or live in areas such as Northern Ireland where there are no existing HAF holiday clubs.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing

How the partners delivered HAF

The seven lead partners used different approaches to run the HAF project.

Community foundations

Five community foundations supported grassroots community groups around the UK to support children from families on low incomes.

- 107 community groups took part: 41 in London, 23 in Manchester, 15 in Northern Ireland, 15 in Wales and 13 in Scotland. More grants were allocated in London and Manchester because of their population size.
- Some of the foundations invited local groups they knew and trusted to apply for grants, and others set up open calls to bring in applications.
- The London Community Foundation managed the overall fund and coordinated a consistent approach. This included a common set of measures for local groups to report results from the five regions.

Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain supported 86 community groups to provide extra HAF places for children. This included 83 local groups in England, and one each in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Feeding Britain also secured further funding to support additional holiday clubs in Scotland.

The holiday clubs provided nutritious meals and structured activities, like kayaking, recording music, and cooking. Community groups relied on existing relationships with families in their local area and experience of running holiday activities.

The Bread and Butter Thing

The Bread and Butter Thing used its funding to do two things:

1. Funding 10 local groups in the North East of England, for more spaces and extra sessions for children and young people, and meals at the holiday clubs. Also, by expanding existing HAF schemes close to its established food clubs, families had access to nutritious food to cook at home.
2. Five new food clubs set up in or near schools, for families to take food home during the school holidays. These are still running and provide families with a long-term sustainable solution.

Identifying locations and children who could benefit

The funded partners worked with local authorities and the community groups to identify locations, using a combination of data on deprivation and knowledge of local communities.

The **community foundations** prioritised children experiencing food poverty and children with SEND. The focus was on the overall needs that are found in each local area, rather than the government's eligibility criteria for HAF in England.

By focusing on local need, the community foundations aimed to keep peer groups together and decrease the stigma of attending a HAF project. The community groups also used knowledge of families in their local area who can't afford to feed their children and are using resources such as food banks.

Feeding Britain chose to partner with holiday club providers already working with priority communities. This included families of children with SEND, refugee and asylum seeker families, families with large numbers of children, and families who are in low paid work but not eligible for government HAF.

The Bread and Butter Thing opened the eligibility for HAF schemes by removing restrictions that apply to free school meals. This prioritised children whose families are on low incomes, but not automatically eligible for free school meals or HAF.

The costs of running the HAF project

HAF activities include the cost of summer activities, and of providing prepared food. They also need to meet government standards and regulations for food and activities.

This means the HAF project costs more per person reached than some other parts of the Nourish the Nation programme, for example, redistributing food as raw ingredients that local charities use in their daily work.

Costs include preparing food and meeting hygiene standards, finding safe and secure venues, running costs of the grassroots community groups, paying skilled and specialist staff, and managing safeguarding.

Also, some community groups that were part of the HAF project supported families, as well as children and young people, by providing additional food to cook at home.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing

How much it cost for a child or young person to attend a HAF holiday club

Attending a HAF holiday club is free for a child or young person. However, we asked the funded partners to measure how much it cost their organisation for a child or young person to attend a day at a HAF holiday club. To calculate this figure, the funded partners used the following approaches:

Feeding Britain calculated their figure by dividing the amount of funding from Sainsbury's and Comic Relief by the unique number of children and young people that the holiday clubs reached. 'Unique' means the number of individual children and young people who went to a HAF holiday club, rather than counting how many times they visited. The final figure was £31 for a child or young person to attend a HAF holiday club.

The Bread and Butter Thing used a set amount based on the UK government rate for its HAF programme. This is £25 per session for each child or young person.

The five community foundations estimated the cost of providing HAF for each child or young person by dividing the total number directly benefiting from the project by the amount of funding they were awarded. The costs of delivering the HAF project varied by region. In London, the estimated cost for a child was £65, in Manchester it was £55, Northern Ireland it was £38, in Wales it was £35 and in Scotland it was £30.

The difference the HAF project made

The HAF pilot project had a positive impact on local communities, from opening up eligibility for more children to take part in holiday clubs, to providing safe spaces for children, summer activities, and nutritious food.

Benefits for children

Based on feedback, the pilot project was seen to benefit children and young people through:

- having nutritious meals outside of school term-time
- freedom from the fear of not having enough to eat
- learning new skills, such as cooking healthy food, rock climbing and making music
- not splitting up peer groups by family income (which happens with governmental eligibility criteria for HAF)
- access to safe, child-friendly spaces during the school holidays
- inclusive holiday activities for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), including one-to-one support
- time for children to socialise with peers and spend time with friends
- making memories about trips and places they may not usually be able to attend, such as the zoo and beach.

“I’m nine years old and, this summer, I went to a music writing and recording session. I was kind of nervous at first but it turned out to be the best session ever. I quickly made new friends. We had so much fun together. I felt really proud of myself for being so independent.”

A nine-year-old who attended a HAF holiday club in Coventry, funded through Feeding Britain

“What you have offered this summer has been nothing short of a godsend. Without the support and safe environment that you and your team provide, there would be nowhere else for us to take our son where he can play, explore, and have his sensory needs met in a way that is not only enriching but also safe.”

Mum to a boy who is autistic and has profound and multiple learning disabilities as well as complex needs. They went to a holiday club funded by the London Community Foundation

Jayden's story

At first, Jayden, 14, was not very interested in attending the HAF summer holiday club in Manchester. He mainly saw it as a space to pass time.

Jayden lives in a single-parent household, where finances are often tight, and access to nutritious meals and structured activities during summer breaks is limited.

At the holiday club, Jayden had nutritious and varied lunches. He was drawn to the football games, which improved his physical fitness and social skills.

A turning point came when Jayden took on a small leadership role in the outdoor activities, organising teams and helping younger children. This responsibility helped increase his confidence and gave him a sense of belonging. Youth workers encouraged and guided Jayden, which made him feel valued and heard.

This school year, Jayden's self-esteem, social skills and physical health have improved. His mum noticed positive changes in his attitude and energy at home, attributing much of it to the holiday club's supportive environment and nutritious meals.

The holiday club gave Jayden a sense of community, consistency, and personal growth that led to a lasting impact.

Jayden attended a HAF holiday club funded by Forever Manchester.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing

“Having created a welcoming environment, I was grateful for the opportunity to enjoy rare time outside our home with my nonverbal child. It eased our concerns about overstimulation and allowed us to connect as a family, something we rarely get to do.”

Carer of a child who attended a HAF holiday club in Wrexham, Wales, that was run by The Venture. The grassroots community group was funded by Community Foundation Wales

Benefits for families

Families also benefitted:

- better nutrition for the whole family, with meals to take home, or cookery classes for children and young people
- knowing their children have access to a dependable source of healthy food
- giving parents a break during the long summer holidays, and supporting their mental health
- eliminating some of the need for expensive childcare, which also helped parents to stay in employment
- taking part in family trips for the first time
- making friends with other local families

“As a single parent it is expensive and difficult to find activities to break up the holidays, and this was brilliant. My child tried activities they probably wouldn't normally have the opportunity to do. Thank you.”

Carer of a child who attended a HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing



A HAF holiday club funded by the London Community Foundation

Reducing stigma

Research reported by Sainsbury's shows that 10 million people in the UK face food poverty, but less than one in five (2 million) use food support services. The largest barrier is the social stigma associated with not being able to afford food. (Sainsbury's, 2024).

The pilot project showed how HAF helps reduce the very real barrier of stigma related to food poverty as families were able to access food support services at the same time as accessing activities for children. Simply put, the main draw for families was the offer of summer activities for children, which happened alongside the provision of nutritious meals.

The pilot project also reduced the stigma of having to prove a child's eligibility for free school meals. Eliminating this requirement led to a more inclusive approach, and more people could take part in HAF without shame or guilt.

James' story

James, nine, has autism and lives in Dundee with his parents. They used to find it difficult to find places they can go to as a family, where James can play freely and without judgment from others.

James first visited The Yard, an inclusive and sensory-friendly children's playground, with his school. Pupils can go to The Yard to play and take a break from sitting still in class.

Because Foundation Scotland funded sessions during the school holidays, James kept up his routine at The Yard multiple times a week outside of school term time, with lunches and snacks provided in the summer sessions. This made things easier for the whole family.

James now goes to weekend family sessions at The Yard with his parents. They meet other families and children with shared experiences which gives them support. They say it's an "opportunity to breathe".

"By opening up access to HAF, the pilot has moved eligibility from a household level to a community level. It means that whole estates can come, rather than a third of children and young people on an estate. You've got greater social cohesion and there are fewer potential flash points for division."

Andrew Forsey OBE, National Director at Feeding Britain

“We had the chance to come along last year but insecurities got the better of us. Coming along this year has been so rewarding for Taylor's confidence and he's made some lovely new friends. Having the non-eligible criteria gave us the chance to be a part of something special.”

Carer of a child who went to a HAF holiday club through The Bread and Butter Thing

The positive difference of the Nourish the Nation HAF pilot project

In numbers, the HAF pilot project:

- provided food for more than 400,000 meals, which included 241,407 meals at holiday clubs, and 201,884 meals worth of food at new food clubs in or near schools
- as of October 2024, 1,314 families joined the five new food clubs in or near schools, which were set up by The Bread and Butter Thing and continue to provide discounted, nutritious food year-round
- supported 203 local, grassroots community groups around the UK to provide extra places at HAF holiday clubs
- benefitted 30,094 children and young people
- this included 4,324 children (14%) with special educational needs and disabilities

“The overall health and wellbeing benefits of this programme were truly remarkable. Beyond meeting the basic needs of the children and their families, the initiative fostered a sense of community, belonging, and emotional support that had a lasting impact.

One of the most rewarding outcomes was the noticeable increase in confidence and self-esteem, not only in the children but in their families and even among the volunteers.”

Staff member from the Ardoyne Association in Northern Ireland. The community group was supported by Community Foundation Northern Ireland.

“You and your programme gave me and my child a whole new better life. If it wasn't for HAF, I would still be an angry recluse with no friends or life outside of my house.

I know it's supposed to be for the kids, but I've got to imagine you've helped so many parents too.”

Parent/Carer of a child who attended a HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing

What worked well

The seven funded partners provided feedback about what helped them and grassroots community groups to deliver the HAF pilot project.

Flexible funding

There were few restrictions on how the funding could be used, and the local community groups could pay for core costs of running HAF such as paying staff, hiring venues and food purchases. The flexible funding was widely appreciated and allowed them to fund work that best tackled food poverty in their area.

This meant community groups could do more with the funding compared to the government HAF scheme. For example, in the government programme in England local authorities can use up to 15% of funding to include children who do not receive benefits-related free school meals. This can include children whose families earn slightly over the cut-off point, and children with SEND who do not receive free school meals (Department for Education, 2024).

Despite this, the government's funding still heavily restricts the number of children from families on low incomes who can take part in summer HAF activities, since they fall above the free school meals threshold and therefore are not eligible.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing

With the Nourish the Nation programme HAF pilot project, funded partners and community groups could identify where the need was greatest, without this restriction.

The flexibility of funding allowed community groups to support children with SEND to take part in HAF holiday clubs. For example, Burgess Sports in London used the grant to buy sensory and sports equipment for children with disabilities.

The community groups also had the space to come up with innovative solutions.

A community group in Bolton, which received funding from Forever Manchester, used money left over from the summer to pay for food for children during the October half term holiday. This made sure that children could continue to eat nutritious food outside of term time.

In Scotland, some community groups saw that food wasn't being used up in the holiday clubs, so they gave it to families to take home at the end of the day. They also made links with organisations which manage surplus food from the UK's food industry.

“The speed and resilience of communities that were funded to extend their service provision during the summer holidays was amazing to see. This type of funding does not come around often. Groups were blown away by the opportunity. When Torfaen Opportunity Group [which runs a youth club for children with disabilities] opened the email to say they had the funding, they told us they cried as it means so much to them.”

Alice King, Grants Officer at Community Foundation Wales

Using both data and local expertise to identify need

The Bread and Butter Thing, Feeding Britain and some of the Community Foundations used data on deprivation to identify specific locations, and target specific groups of children. For example, Feeding Britain used data and knowledge from regional food insecurity coordinators to target areas and clubs which could most benefit.

The community foundations invest in local community groups to make sure resources reach those most in need. This mix of local expertise and data about local deprivation worked well to identify communities that would benefit most, and the relationship means the community foundations could target HAF support where the need was greatest.

Local, grassroots community groups are well placed to use their local knowledge to identify the children and young people who would most benefit from the funding.

This also contributed to a good geographical spread of funding across large metropolitan areas and areas of high deprivation.

Local knowledge and understanding

Providing grants to grassroots community groups through funded partners, meant that the HAF pilot project could identify specific support that was most needed locally.

For example, some community groups had experience of working with particular children and young people, including those with SEND. Those funded partners who set out to reach specific groups, including children with SEND, were able to do this.

Also, a community group in Northern Ireland provided back-to-school haircuts for children that had never received a professional haircut before. Another community group in London, working with Jewish teenage boys, identified that an evening scheme would work well as this group of young people would not engage with activities in the daytime or that were mixed gender.



A HAF holiday club funded by Feeding Britain

The consultation process

Feeding Britain said they appreciated being consulted by Sainsbury's and Comic Relief about gaps in the existing provision at the planning stage of the pilot project. This allowed them to use their expertise and evidence to identify where support was most needed.

Working with trusted organisations

Some of the seven funded partners relied on existing relationships with community groups that have experience of running holiday clubs and identifying priority communities. This meant the funded partners trusted the community groups and knew they would do a good job.

Plans could also be put in place quickly, and there were robust safeguarding and food hygiene policies and practices in place, as well as experienced staff ready to deliver the work.

Elsewhere, the community foundations used robust eligibility and assessment criteria to assess local groups, and provide assurance of quality, good safeguarding practices and the ability to meet the project aims.

Enhancing the existing UK government HAF programme

The Bread and Butter Thing worked with local authorities to enhance the existing UK government HAF programme, rather than starting from scratch. The local authorities knew established and trusted holiday club providers, and the due diligence had already been carried out.

HAF availability in the UK

HAF programmes are complex, and they vary across the UK.

England – The Department for Education funds local authorities to deliver HAF. The offer is limited by strict eligibility criteria. Funding has been extended through to 2025-26.

Scotland – The Scottish FA and Scottish Government fund 31 football clubs to run the Extra Time Programme. The programme opens when they receive funding.

Wales – The Welsh Government gives funding directly to schools to provide HAF schemes, rather than local authorities.

Northern Ireland – There is no government scheme for HAF. Children in Northern Ireland, an umbrella organisation for the children's sector, funds holiday clubs in four towns.

The challenges of running the HAF pilot project

The seven funded partners shared the challenges that they and local, grassroots community groups experienced. Here are the five main issues they faced.

Challenge one: Lack of time to set up and deliver the project

A decision was made in Spring 2024 to offer funding for the HAF pilot project. There was a clear need to reach more children. In addition, there was a need to highlight HAF, with the government funding due to expire at the end of 2024.

Comic Relief and Sainsbury's felt it was ambitious but worthwhile to launch the pilot project.

The funded partners received confirmation of funding for this work in May 2024. In some areas of the UK, like Scotland, school holidays start at the end of June. This short lead time was the biggest challenge for the funded partners and affected the work in different ways:

- **Applying for grants**

The five community foundations said the short lead-in time affected the application process for local community groups. Community groups with existing holiday schemes in place could extend their provision. Other community groups either didn't apply or were unsuccessful in their application.

The five community foundations were unable to support community groups with the application process because of the tight timescale.

- **Setting up processes to run the holiday clubs**

As part of the pilot project, The Bread and Butter Thing proposed opening new food clubs in, or near to, schools. Staff said they had to work quickly to deliver this aspect of the project.

Vic Harper, CEO of The Bread and Butter Thing, said: **"Due to timings of approvals and the upcoming school holidays, we had to work at pace to identify gaps in the community and engage the relevant local authorities and community groups. While the approach to enhance existing provision worked well, further lead in time would be useful in future especially as every local authority has a different offer and way of administering the project."**

Andrew Forsey OBE, National Director of Feeding Britain, says: **"The short lead in time raised some operational questions. This included having sufficient time to: turn around payments, communicate to schools and communities that the additional capacity had been made available, and get the necessary goods and services in place for individual clubs."**

- **Promoting the holiday clubs**

The short lead-in meant there wasn't enough time to promote the HAF schemes to new audiences.

Vic Harper at The Bread and Butter Thing, says: **"With more time, we could have made sure that the communication was inclusive and helping to change people's perceptions around accessing support. We were reducing the stigma associated with accessing food support by reducing eligibility criteria for HAF, but I don't know how well this was communicated by the local authorities."**

- **Including children with SEND**

Community foundations worked with community groups that they had existing relationships with to save time. This made it harder to reach children with SEND.

Not all of these community groups had experience of, or the ability to quickly adapt to working with this group of children.

Leigh Ogden, Grant Programmes Lead at the London Community Foundation, says: **"Scaling up activities and capacity within a short timescale was a significant challenge. It made it difficult to recruit and train additional staff and volunteers, which limited the number of children with SEND that some community groups could work with."**

Challenge two: Inconsistency in how the UK government HAF programme is delivered

The Bread and Butter Thing found it challenging to work with different local authorities in the North East of England, as each of them has a different way of delivering and reporting on HAF.

Vic Harper says: **"This was new learning to us as we had wrongly thought that the government scheme would be consistently delivered. This didn't hinder our project, but in future, knowing this up front would make some of the local engagement easier from the outset."**

Challenge three: Identifying local, grassroots community groups with experience of HAF schemes

Where there is no current government HAF scheme (Northern Ireland) and limited resources for HAF (Wales and Scotland), there were a limited number of holiday club providers with previous experience of running HAF schemes. This meant that the community foundations had few community groups with previous HAF experience to invite to apply for grants, and they had to work hard to identify community groups running existing holiday clubs, instead of new providers that could develop the holiday clubs in time.

Challenge four: Effective monitoring and evaluation

When funding was awarded in June, the Nourish the Nation programme indicators for measuring the pilot project weren't finalised.

As an alternative, the London Community Foundation put together 19 questions for community groups to report on. These reflected what staff at the London Community Foundation felt the teams at Comic Relief and Sainsbury's wanted to understand about the HAF project.

In some regions, community groups said that the reporting request was clear and proportionate. However, some of the community foundations said there were too many monitoring and evaluation questions for the local, grassroots community groups to answer.

Leigh Ogden at the London Community Foundation says: **“These are very small community groups. The monitoring can be quite challenging for them because that’s not what they do. They are experts in delivering.”**

In contrast, existing Nourish the Nation funded partners, Feeding Britain and The Bread and Butter Thing already had monitoring and evaluation systems in place so found this aspect of the programme less challenging. The Bread and Butter Thing worked with local authorities which had established processes in place, so there was no extra work for the community groups to do.

Challenge five: Tackling the root cause of food poverty

Tackling the problem of food poverty affecting children and families is complex. The issue needs consistent government support to address the underlying causes.

Currently, government funding for HAF is different across the UK. There needs to be a more consistent approach, and sustained investment to make sure all children are able to eat healthily, be active, and enjoy themselves during the school holidays.

Next steps for future HAF work

Using feedback from funded partners and local, grassroots community groups, we have compiled eight recommendations for future Nourish the Nation HAF work, with the aim to better support children, young people and their families.

Recommendation one: Continue to invest in HAF to support children, young people and families.

Related to: Inconsistency in how the UK government HAF programme is delivered.

There is strong evidence for continuing to fund HAF projects. Funded partners have built solid relationships with local, grassroots community groups experienced in running holiday clubs for children and young people. These community groups have knowledge of, and insight into their local areas which can help them to reach children and young people who are not eligible for government HAF schemes. By continuing to work with these groups, we can build on the success of the pilot project.

The flexibility of the funding allowed community groups to cover their costs while running holiday clubs for children and young people in their local areas.

Future HAF programmes should provide clear guidelines up-front about how the funding could be spent, allowing the funded partners and local community groups to act quickly and efficiently.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by The Bread and Butter Thing

Recommendation two: Increase the lead-up time for funded partners and local, grassroots community groups to prepare to run the HAF project.

Related to: Lack of time to set up and deliver the project.

Having more time to prepare – ideally four months before the school holidays start in Northern Ireland and Scotland (where the summer holidays start earlier than in England and Wales) – will allow:

- funded partners and community groups to get further funding for HAF holiday clubs, extending their reach and increasing the profile of HAF.
- other grassroots community groups with relevant services to submit applications for HAF funding. This would increase the HAF project's geographical reach and extend access to more children that are under-represented or excluded from government HAF.
- grassroots community groups to reach their target group of children and young people. For example, children with SEND.
- funded partners to better support grassroots community groups. They could hold briefing sessions for community groups interested in applying for grants, explain how the grants can be used and help them to complete their applications.
- funded partners to work together to develop robust and succinct monitoring measures. They can then support local, grassroots community groups to understand the measures and complete monitoring accurately.

Recommendation three: Commit to multi-year funding to allow funded partners to scale up and expand HAF work.

Related to: Inconsistency in how the UK government HAF programme is delivered.

Having certainty about funding would benefit funded partners, community groups, and children and their families.

- Funded partners will be able to award grants to new local community groups in different locations, in addition to existing providers.
- Funded partners and community groups could plan ahead. They could look for match funding for HAF from other potential funders as they would know the project is again being funded by Comic Relief and Sainsbury's.

- Families will know their children have a safe space to go during the school holidays and it can allow them to plan and access paid work.
- The Nourish the Nation HAF pilot project could be extended into Christmas and Easter school holidays. The existing government-funded HAF programme in England runs in the Easter and Christmas holidays.

Recommendation four: Communicate HAF to families to help change perceptions and reach more children and young people.

Related to: Tackling the root cause of food poverty.

There is evidence that the HAF pilot project helped to reduce the stigma associated with accessing food. Importantly, it was clear that families signed up primarily for the holiday activities, rather than the nutritious meals for children.

This is important because we need to change people's negative perceptions of seeking food-based support.

With a longer lead-in time, funded partners and local, grassroots community groups could spend more time promoting HAF to families and making communications inclusive for everyone. For future HAF work, there needs to be more emphasis on activities rather than holiday meals. All programme assets should contain this key message and be available in other languages.

Recommendation five: Agree outcomes for each area up front.

Related to: Effective monitoring and evaluation.

Every local area of the UK is different, from the length of school holidays to how government HAF schemes are run. The proposed outcomes for each area should be agreed up front, rather than a blanket approach being applied across all areas.

With a longer lead-in time, funded partners can take time to understand the local needs of each area of the UK where they will work and communicate this to Comic Relief.

For example, in Northern Ireland, the school holidays start earlier and summer holidays are longer, but local community groups received the same amount of funding to run the holiday clubs. For example, in London the cost for each child to benefit from a holiday club is greater than in other regions.



Photo: A HAF holiday club funded by the London Community Foundation

Recommendation six: Improve case study collection to source more positive stories about HAF.

Related to: Effective monitoring and evaluation.

By increasing the amount of time to set up the HAF project, the partners could put systems in place to collect more case studies from families using the holiday clubs. These can be used to show the positive impact of HAF to potential funders, those who might use the holiday clubs, and policymakers.

Recommendation seven: The level of reporting needs to be reduced to essential data only.

Related to:

- **Identifying local, grassroots community groups with experience of HAF schemes**
- **Effective monitoring and evaluation.**

Monitoring and evaluation requirements should be proportional to the levels of funding that local, grassroots community groups receive. There needs to be a balance between questions that are beneficial and not requesting too much data from community groups. Also, it is important that community groups spend

minimal time on reporting so they can focus on supporting children and young people. Reducing the number of monitoring questions will be fairer to the community groups.

It is suggested that seven indicators are reported on for future HAF work:

- Number of children and young people directly benefiting from the HAF schemes
- Number of children and young people with SEND taking part in the HAF schemes
- Number of meals provided through HAF schemes
- Number of meals worth of food provided by food clubs in or near schools during the school holidays
- Number of local, grassroots community groups around the UK providing HAF schemes
- Number of places provided for children and young people by the HAF schemes. A “place” is a space for one child or young person for a day.
- Number of families that have joined food clubs in or near schools.

Recommendation eight: Call on the UK government, and devolved national governments, to scale up HAF work and, more broadly, tackle the root causes of food poverty.

Related to: Inconsistency in how the UK government HAF programme is delivered.

Tackling food poverty is complex. It needs investment and commitment from the UK government and devolved governments.

Recommended next steps include:

- the Nourish the Nation programme being clear on what data and information is needed to measure the outcomes and impact of the HAF project. This will provide an evidence base for policymakers.
- funded partners increasing the profile of HAF and raising awareness with their respective governments. Feeding Britain has been doing work in this area already, using data from the HAF pilot project to call on the UK government to reform its current HAF programme in England so it can reach more people. Further advocacy work could address the root causes of food poverty and encourage national governments to set and scale up HAF schemes
- Comic Relief and Sainsbury's calling for the UK government to do more to tackle food poverty and improve the HAF programme.
- the Nourish the Nation programme collating available data on food poverty to support influencing work. This will make sure that all funded partners are using the same evidence and information.

About the funded partners

Here is more information about our seven funded partners and what they do.

Community foundations

Five community foundations – Community Foundation Wales, Community Foundation Northern Ireland, Forever Manchester, Foundation Scotland and London Community Foundation – are part of UK Community Foundations, a membership organisation for accredited community foundations across the UK.

The community foundations improve the lives of people across the UK by investing in local charities and grassroots community groups. By partnering with donors, the community foundations make sure resources reach those most in need. This fosters equality and creates opportunities across UK communities.

Local charities and grassroots community groups play a vital role in addressing local issues, including food poverty. Their deep understanding of the challenges facing their communities allows them to create long-lasting change.



A HAF holiday club funded by Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain

In 2017, Feeding Britain led a successful campaign to secure a commitment from the UK government to introduce and fund the HAF programme in England. Between 2018 and 2020, Feeding Britain funded holiday clubs in the pilot phase of the government HAF programme. At the end of the pilot phase, and ahead of the introduction of HAF across England, Feeding Britain set up the HAF Alliance. This is a network of charities and not-for-profit organisations with experience of providing HAF schemes.

Feeding Britain also works with a network of local partners to run food clubs. These take place in venues such as community centres, children's centres and schools. Members of the food clubs can access support to manage their finances and take part in cookery sessions to learn how to use the ingredients they buy.

As well as holiday clubs and food support services, Feeding Britain provides two weeks' emergency fuel credit to people at risk of being disconnected.

The Bread and Butter Thing

The Bread and Butter Thing provided extra places at HAF holiday clubs in summer 2023 but on a smaller scale, funded by Comic Relief and Sainsbury's as part of the Nourish the Nation programme. The HAF project in summer 2024 allowed the charity to expand this work.

Year round, The Bread and Butter Thing supports over 130 food clubs in local community hubs across England. These include primary schools, church halls and community centres. The food clubs provide people on low incomes with nutritious, quality and diverse food at a discounted price.

People can also access other services at the food clubs, to help them make the best use of their money, learn new skills, and support their mental health and wellbeing.

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