



Cambridgeshire Holiday Activities and Food Programme

Case studies from our summer 2023 HAF Programme



Supporting families: All Seasons Children's Play

All Seasons Children's Play is in the market town of Chatteris. Sam Baker has run HAF provision since 2022. As part of the HAF offer, Sam provides a healthy lunch for the children.

Recently, Sam has seen the impact that holiday hunger has on the children that attend her provision. Families have shared with Sam the pressure they are under to stretch their food budgets over the holidays. Sam estimates that over half of her children arrive at the scheme hungry, without having breakfast. Sam organised a breakfast bar where children were able to self-serve with plenty of fruit, cereals, toast, and fruit juice to choose from. Sam has since extended this offer to so children attending now have breakfast, lunch, tea, and snacks provided. This has supported the club's aim of 'sending home a tired, happy and well-fed child'. Parents have confided in Sam of their gratitude for this inclusive approach and noted the positive impact this has had on their family finances.



Professor Greta Defeyter's [research](#) has shown that when children attend HAF provision, where meals are provided as part of the offer, family finances are improved which decreases burden, familial mental health and lowers parental stress. This has a positive impact for children including increased stability at home, higher school attainment and reduced behavioural challenges.

Working with 12 – 16-year-olds: Fireflies Forest School



The 2023 Cambridgeshire HAF Programme focussed on increasing engagement with young people (YP) attending secondary school. Historically, engagement of this age group has been challenging but unique and interesting ideas have always been popular. The widely understood narrative that the natural environment offers a sense of calm in our busy world seemed a logical place to focus on. The HAF team worked with an established Forest School to fund Bush Craft sessions for YP. Engagement was strong from the start with 30 YP attending over this summer.

There was positive impact observed on the mental health of many YP. Jessica, Fireflies owner, shared her reflections: 'one young person, aged 14, who attended hadn't left her house in 6 months due to significant anxiety. She really engaged with the sessions and enjoyed cooking round the fire and collaborating with others. Some days she attended for an hour and others for longer; we supported this as she was in control of her participation. Two sisters attended, both autistic with a difficult emotional sibling relationship. Both girls engaged with the tool area, using draw blades, and carving in the same space. This really helped them work through their disagreements and see each other's point of view.'

The HAF Team has started working with a second Forest School. This unique outdoor environment nurtures children and young people and offers opportunities to learn about themselves, reflect on their feelings as well as learning new skills.

Working with 12 to 16-year-olds: CRUNCH Holiday Scheme

Ramsey Neighbourhood Trust operate a holiday scheme called CRUNCH for secondary age young people.



The CRUNCH scheme supports and encourages young people to develop themselves, build self-confidence and eventually become part of the staffing team should they wish to. CRUNCH offer stability and support where this is not always available within the home environment. RNT support YP from low-income households with attending CRUNCH, in addition to the HAF funded hours, through a volunteering scheme which removes financial barriers to year-round participation.

This approach has been observed to have a significant impact on the lives of many. A YP who volunteered with CRUNCH now works for the organisation throughout the year. He saved his wages for driving lessons to help him become more independent; something he would never have been able to do otherwise.

Another YP suffers from severe anxiety and very often didn't feel comfortable joining in with the CRUNCH sessions. Staff supported her by offering responsibilities alongside the staff team, such as helping to set-up and serve on the food counter. The aim was to build self-confidence, encourage her to take a risk and try new experiences within a supportive group. The YP grew in confidence and completed a Youth Work course and an early years and childcare qualification at college. They remained employed with CRUNCH whilst completing the courses before progressing to full-time employment in a local nursery. [CRUNCH's story](#)

SEND Specific HAF Provision: Limitless Sports Holiday Scheme

The Cambridgeshire HAF Team aim is to increase HAF engagement opportunities for children with high needs SEND. This new summer holiday scheme offered 28 places to 4 to 14-year-olds. It was aimed at children attending Castle School, a special school in Cambridge all of whom have global learning delay and are autistic.

Specialist staff were employed by the holiday scheme from several SEND schools; this was key to ensuring children's safety and needs were appropriately met. The limited numbers of children attending ensured that staff could promote a calm environment where noise levels were low. Staff planned enriching child-led activities including cooking, arts and crafts and bouncy castle fun. Limitless worked closely with the school to ensure all key information for each child was shared, with parental consent. The HAF Team worked in partnership with specialist inclusion advisers from the Early Years, Childcare and School Readiness Service (EYCSR) at Cambridgeshire County Council and intensively supported Limitless Sports to ensure the scheme was appropriately planned and prepared. The scheme was a success and children were described as 'thriving' by staff.

Holiday scheme staff observations:

Clare, a level 4 TA at Castle School: 'Children developed their coping skills during transition times such as arriving and departing from the scheme and moving between activities.'

Child Y struggled with day-to-day transitions at school but was eager to attend the scheme. Staff observed transition times getting easier for him as the holiday scheme progressed. This has continued into the autumn term at school.

Child L is now transitioning into and within school without any difficulty and using his voice more (he is semi verbal).

Child O, aged 11, struggled previously but is now using the school bus independently this term which the school describe as significant progression developmentally.

Child T, aged 14, has improved his social skills and will now say hello to school staff in the corridors at school.'



Mary, also a level 4 TA at Castle School, noted: 'The summer holidays are long for children with additional needs, being at a scheme made coming back to school in September less distressing and I noticed the children settled back to the school routine with more ease. Some of these families struggle financially so parents were less stressed as their children had food in their stomachs so took the worry and pressure away.'

Parent feedback: 'My child struggles without the routine of school and so attending Limitless really helped with this. Attending the scheme provided a break, allowing us to spend quality time with our younger children, this wouldn't have happened without the HAF programme.'

The HAF Team will continue to support and fund this provider with the potential for expansion into other specialist schools. The partnership with specialist advisers within the LA was invaluable and built confidence with a specialist SEND offer. We feel confident that we have engaged families this summer who are experiencing the HAF Programme for the first time but certainly not the last!

Supporting and signposting families: Little Miracles

Little Miracles is a multi-award-winning charity supporting families of children with additional needs, disabilities, and life limiting conditions; provide a non-judgemental environment using a holistic approach to support the needs of the whole family.

Over the summer, a parent of a child aged 8 attended the provision. It became obvious that the family were finding it a challenge to manage the child's needs and behaviour. The child was aggressive, and Mum found this difficult to manage, often walking away to leave staff to support the child. Little Miracles recognised the family needed support and have continued to work with the parents to support the inclusion of their child at future sessions. As the child displays aggressive behaviours, a safety plan has been written to ensure consistency in the parent's approach.

Little Miracles are currently helping the parents to apply for Disability Living Allowance. The child does not have an official diagnosis so together they are completing an Early Help Assessment to access support from the Local Authority. In addition to this the family have been offered a parenting course and have been sent videos offering tips in behaviour management. The family have explained that this support is invaluable; Little Miracles regularly contacts them to encourage continued engagement.

Supporting and sign posting families: Make Lunch Linton

Make Lunch Linton (MLL), a community group, meets weekly during the school holidays. The HAF Team funded a summer HAF scheme with MLL due to its established engagement and trust with local families. A two-course lunch and a variety of play experiences were planned daily for families.

An outreach worker attends the HAF sessions from [Reach Community Projects](#) who offer signposting, financial support and advice to families. Families have told Sarah, a founder of MLL, that they love coming along. Sarah shared that a boy aged 11 told the team that he hadn't been out anywhere during the Summer, apart from visiting Make Lunch Linton. Families are also signposted to the mobile food hub and a pop-up clothes hub where they can take items of school uniform and other locally donated clothes.



Make Lunch Linton have seen a growing sense of value in the work that they do and the families they support. Sarah observes that when children arrive, they give a hug to a team member, or over a mug of tea a parent shares their worries with one of the team. This demonstrates the impact achieved, creating a community, and building relationships with the families they support. Sarah has noticed that attending families invite their friends along. This has helped MLL increase their reach and break down the barriers of stigma.

Supporting language skills and transitions into school: MACCA

A local hotel accommodated a large group of recently arrived refugee families in summer 2023. It took some time to place children in schools locally. With the summer holidays only weeks away, it was felt they would benefit from attending a HAF holiday scheme to support their understanding of English and enable a smoother transition to school in September. A collaboration between The HAF Team, the HAF provider and a local primary school resulted in a 3-week HAF holiday scheme operating for over 50 primary aged children. Children had the opportunity to play freely with their peers, engage in physical and creative activities as well as have a daily meal and snacks.



Staff at the scheme, many of whom are also teachers, observed children forming trusting relationships with adults and developing their English spoken language. The MACCA team witnessed up to 70% of the children move from speaking their own language to attempting to use single words in English such as 'toilet', 'pen', 'sharpener' and phrases such as 'good morning' and 'thank you'. Furthermore, the behaviour and routine expectations of the scheme supported children to understand what is expected of them and enjoy experiences with peers.

The impact of being introduced to a school environment including classrooms, a dining hall and playground spaces may help increase confidence when the children transition into school life. Couple this with routines such as washing hands prior to lunchtime will only serve to further educate the children as to what life in school will look like. This may create a sense of ownership so they can focus on making new friends and concentrate on their learning. The HAF Christmas MACCA scheme also aims to engage children from the local community.

Supporting Families: Football Fun Factory

Cambridgeshire County Council value the HAF providers they work alongside and recognise the significant impact they can have on the families. A wide-range of quality improvement courses are funded to enhance providers knowledge and ensure families gain the best HAF experiences possible.

One of these fully funded courses is the accredited [Adult Mental Health First Aid](#) course which Kiefer, from the Football Fun Factory attend recently. The organisation's mission is to use football as a vehicle for child development. Kiefer is the Head Coach at the St Neots franchise.

Kiefer applied his learning from the course to his HAF holiday scheme. 'I found the course incredibly useful and insightful in terms of recognising how responses/reactions/behaviours that may usually be overlooked by our coaches could be signs of adverse mental health. I felt more comfortable supporting parents and other coaches with scenarios and situations that may occur. I also felt more confident to signpost parents to other support organisations. The course was a good opportunity to reflect on my own behaviours/language and body language to ensure I can support others including the children that attended my provision. I am more consciously aware of how my actions can help others and I would say I am calmer and more positive in all situations. This has helped create an improved environment where children can express their feelings and their behaviours are not pigeonholed, I can support the children to dig a little deeper into issues and provide guidance'.

