

Central Area Council

Central, Dodworth, Kingstone, Stairfoot, Worsbrough

CASE STUDY

Introduction

This is a case study from; The Central Area Team focusing on our 'Healthy Holidays' initiative.

Background

The Central Area team have supported the delivery of the Healthy Holidays activities for the last 3 years. Primarily it has been used as a tool for community engagement with the added value of providing a healthy lunch for participants.

Through consistent delivery and Ward Alliance support, the team have created and developed a number of new community groups that took over the planning and delivery of such activities in various areas across the Central Area Council patch.

Due to the pandemic and the subsequent lock down, the area team had to re-evaluate the desired outcomes and delivery methods. Following discussions with key stakeholders, including Volunteers, Community Groups, Elected Members, Ward Alliances and Good Food Barnsley, it was agreed to revert to a team-led delivery method for the Summer, October half-term and Christmas Holidays.

The primary outcome was thus shifted from community engagement to supporting families that would otherwise suffer from holiday hunger during this time. Initially the target audience were families that were in receipt of free school meals but following the government's decision to extend the free school meal voucher scheme, the priority was changed to focus on families suffering financial hardship as a result of Covid-19 e.g. redundancy, a reduction in income due to furlough/self-isolation, reduced working hours etc.

The Issue

Though the team have a very good reach into communities, most of the previous participants of Healthy Holidays activities were on Free School Meals.

The late decision to target a new cohort with the focus on providing a meaningful contribution to reduce holiday hunger proved to be a real challenge. The families who the team wanted to primarily target were harder to reach due as they were unknown to our usual partner services, they did not always recognise that they were eligible, and in some cases, felt embarrassed to take part.

The food that had been provided in previous years was also reviewed. We acknowledged that packed lunches for example would not address food poverty. After discussions within the team and with our volunteers, it was agreed that families would be provided with the raw ingredients and instructions to make two healthy meals per week; this came with its own challenges, for example:

- Lack of equipment in which to prepare and cook the food
- Fuel poverty
- Ability to travel to venues to collect

In addition to the above, the team were conscious that ongoing engagement was also *integral* to the success of the project and new that lockdown restrictions would make this even more difficult.

* During the Christmas holiday festive hampers were supplied in replacement of the meals. The hampers were a mix of festive treats and carefully chosen store cupboard staples.

What was done

Where the team had previously used schools, family centre colleagues, social workers, and commissioned partners to promote the healthy holidays provision, they were now called upon to identify specific families and make direct referrals. In addition to this; the team developed a targeted social media campaign to encourage families to *self-refer*. Through these methods, 100 families were identified and supported in the summer and these numbers steadily increased in October and December.

In order to make the scheme accessible to all, the meals selected were 'family favourites' which were appealing, relatively quick and easy and only need basic utensils and crockery to cook and prepare. The ingredients were also supplied in the exact quantities needed for each of the recipes for ease of use.

Facebook was used as the primary source of engagement with participants. The team put together a comprehensive schedule of posts that encouraged continued interaction and created a real sense of community for those taking part. As part of this strategy and to enable user-led involvement despite restrictions; the recipes were published weekly, and people were asked to vote on which one they would like to see cooked live the following week.

Guest chefs were volunteers from existing groups, often prominent people in the community and this really helped people to feel connected with the project. Using members of the area team as co-presenters on the live cooking demonstrations was a great way of introducing the different team members to the previously unknown families and supports our ongoing engagement aims.

The result

- 79 families were supported during the summer holidays
- 146 (increase of 67) families were supported during October half-term
- 176 (further increase of 30) families were supported over the December Christmas holidays.
- A total of 1,060 children have benefitted from the project so far.
- General feedback from the families that took part was amazing. Many were overwhelmed with the offer and said they now felt supported during what is a worrying and difficult time. They were thrilled with the offer of the food in itself

but were also delighted to have the recipe cards which enabled them to use meal times as a fun and social activity and to engage positively with their children around food

- We were also able to provide additional activities e.g. craft kits which also provided them with "something to do" during the holidays.

Reflection

By liaising more effectively with commissioned providers and other local organisations, we are able to extend our reach within communities and to engage with more residents and families than we have done through previous healthy holidays projects.

Consulting with key stakeholders enabled us to identify and eliminate many of the potential barriers to families engaging and ensure that the 'offer' was appealing and meaningful from the outset. Delivering in this way also gave families the opportunity to learn new skills together and build a support network with others that also took part.

Whilst we were quickly able to adapt and put together a meaningful offer to support families within our wards; we now need to consider at the long-term delivery of the scheme. It is apparent that the Healthy Holidays provision is more important than ever: What was once *primarily* used as an opportunity for the Area Team to engage with residents, it has now become a lifeline to many families. Looking back at the previous years' data there is a clear rise in participation which indicates an increase in families that are in danger of, or are suffering from food poverty, (and not just during the school holidays).

Whilst Area Teams have a role to play, we are aware that our remit is not the responsibility to feed hungry families, especially since food poverty continues to grow beyond school holidays. We are ensuring that we are linking with other local partners who are also working on this agenda and escalate information to senior managers so that we inform the tactical and strategic direction of the food poverty agenda.

In addition to our existing volunteers, many new informal groups have started up in response to food poverty. The team recognises the need to better understand what these new groups are delivering and assess if these groups have the capacity to be part of a more coordinated approach to food distribution/ healthy holidays provision through liaising with the Area Team or directly with Good Food Barnsley.

Working with the voluntary and community sector to establish more sustainable community initiatives e.g. community pantries is also another way in which Ward Alliances and the team can contribute to this agenda whilst still fulfilling the service objectives. This is being piloted in the Worsborough Ward.

Ward Alliances, Elected Members and the Area Team will continue to be the eyes and ears on the ground to identify new and emerging issues and identifying ways these can be addressed at a Ward level and/ or Area Council level. We will continue to support Healthy Holidays in line with the remit and capacity of the team.

Photographs



