

# *Working Paper*

April 2018

## Examine the location of holiday club provision in Northern Ireland

Emily Mann<sup>1</sup>, Greta Defeyter<sup>1</sup>, Paul Stretesky<sup>1</sup> and Ellen Finlay<sup>2</sup>

- 1- Healthy Living Lab, Northumbria University
- 2- Children In Northern Ireland

### **Abstract**

Poverty rates remain constant in Northern Ireland and 110,000 children continuing to live in poverty which can lead to a range of physical and psychological consequences. School holidays can be a challenging period for low income families as they experience an increase in the cost of food, childcare and activities which impact on household finances. In response to these challenges, hundreds of holiday clubs have established across the UK to provide support to low income families during the school holidays. To determine the scale of provision in Northern Ireland, this research undertook a survey of holiday clubs across Northern Ireland. Findings from the study illustrate a fragmented distribution of holiday clubs across the region, mainly operated by third sector organisations. Holiday clubs deliver a range of enrichment, physical and educational activities with many clubs providing food. To deliver this provision, many of the organisations rely on volunteers and work in partnership with agencies. However many organisations charge families to attend and thus questions whether holiday club provision delivers support for all low income families and children living in poverty.

## **Introduction**

Poverty rates in Northern Ireland have remained constant over the past decade and 110,000 children continue to live in poverty (Barnard, 2018). Poverty has a range of negative physical and psychological consequences (Fell & Hewstone, 2015). It is evident that health outcomes are generally worse in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland and large health inequality gaps continue to exist for a number of different health measures including obesity (Department of Health, 2016). Persistent poverty has a negative effect on the cognitive development of children. Longitudinal research in the UK demonstrates that children living in persistent poverty throughout their early years have a cognitive test score 20 percentile points lower than children who have not experienced poverty by the age of seven years (Dickerson & Popli, 2015). Furthermore, children from low income families experience educational learning loss during the summer school holidays to a greater degree than their more affluent peers (Alexander et al., 2007; Paechter et al., 2015). In the UK, summer learning loss in spelling is evident among low income children although their reading skills are maintained over the same period (Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017).

School holidays can place additional demands on household finances for low income families in particular the cost of food, childcare, fuel and activities (Finlay, 2017). During term time, the national government provide school food policies such as Free School Meals (FSM), breakfast clubs and fruit and vegetable scheme to support the nutritional needs of children during term time. In Northern Ireland, over 102,000 pupils are eligible for FSM, equivalent to 30.7% of all pupils in Northern Ireland (Department of Education, 2017). Whilst this provision acts as a safeguard for children from low income families during term time, there is no additional state provision for these children during the school holidays. Furthermore, the summer school holidays in Northern Ireland are eight weeks, the longest in the UK and thus intensifying the challenges for families. The absence of FSM provision has been shown to increase the risk of food insecurity for families (Graham, Crilley, Stretesky, et al., 2016). It is evident that families adopt coping strategies such as cutting back on food purchases or skipping meals to ensure children are fed (Defeyter, Graham, & Prince, 2015; Gill & Sharma, 2004; Kellogg's, 2015). The term 'holiday hunger' has been used to describe the hardship families on low income face during the school holidays when they do not have access to this free school meal provision (Graham, Stretesky, Long, et al., 2018). In addition to the impact of an increase in food costs for families during the school holidays, a recent survey by Employers for Childcare (2017) highlights the pressures of childcare costs on family finances in Northern Ireland; over two-fifths of families cut back on other household expenditure to meet childcare costs. Furthermore, the Child Poverty Alliance report cites a challenge for low income families in the region is the lack of affordable and flexible childcare (Child Poverty Alliance, 2014). The additional demands of the school holidays can have a more general impact on the quality of children's lives as families lack money for entertainment, socialising and educational or developmental activities (Gill & Sharma, 2004; Kellogg's, 2015).

In the absence of a national policy to address food security, physical activities and educational opportunities for children from low income families during the school holidays, local authorities, schools and the voluntary sector are providing a range of holiday provision clubs. They operate a variety of models of holiday provision from food, educational, enrichment and physical activities (APPG on School Food, 2015). Research from Northumbria University's Healthy Living Lab ascertained a need for holiday club for families on low incomes (Defeyter et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2016). Thus, the aim of this study is to identify the location and types of holiday provision clubs that are being delivered across Northern Ireland to support the needs of families.

## **Method**

A self-completing questionnaire was designed and distributed online via Qualtrics. The study adopted a non-probability sampling strategy and the questionnaire was distributed through the membership base of Children in Northern Ireland. The online survey was active for four weeks from 5th January until 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018. The results from the survey were coded and analysed, in SPSS Version 22 and Excel using descriptive statistics and frequency tables. Ethical approval for this study was sought and approved by the University of Northumbria's Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Ethics Board.

## Results

A total of 126 organisations in Northern Ireland completed the survey and over two-thirds of respondents (69.8%) currently provide or plan to provide holiday club provision (Table 1).

Table 1 Survey responses

	N	%
Provide / plan to deliver holiday club(s)	88	69.8
No holiday club(s) provision	38	30.2

### *Location of holiday clubs*

Figure 1 illustrates the location of holiday clubs across Northern Ireland against the percentage of children living in low income families. Children in low income families is measured as the percentage of children living in families in receipt of out-of-work benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60% of the UK median income. The map highlights a concentration of holiday clubs around Belfast. However the distribution of holiday clubs is fragmented across Northern Ireland with notable gaps in holiday club provision in areas with high percentage of low income families.

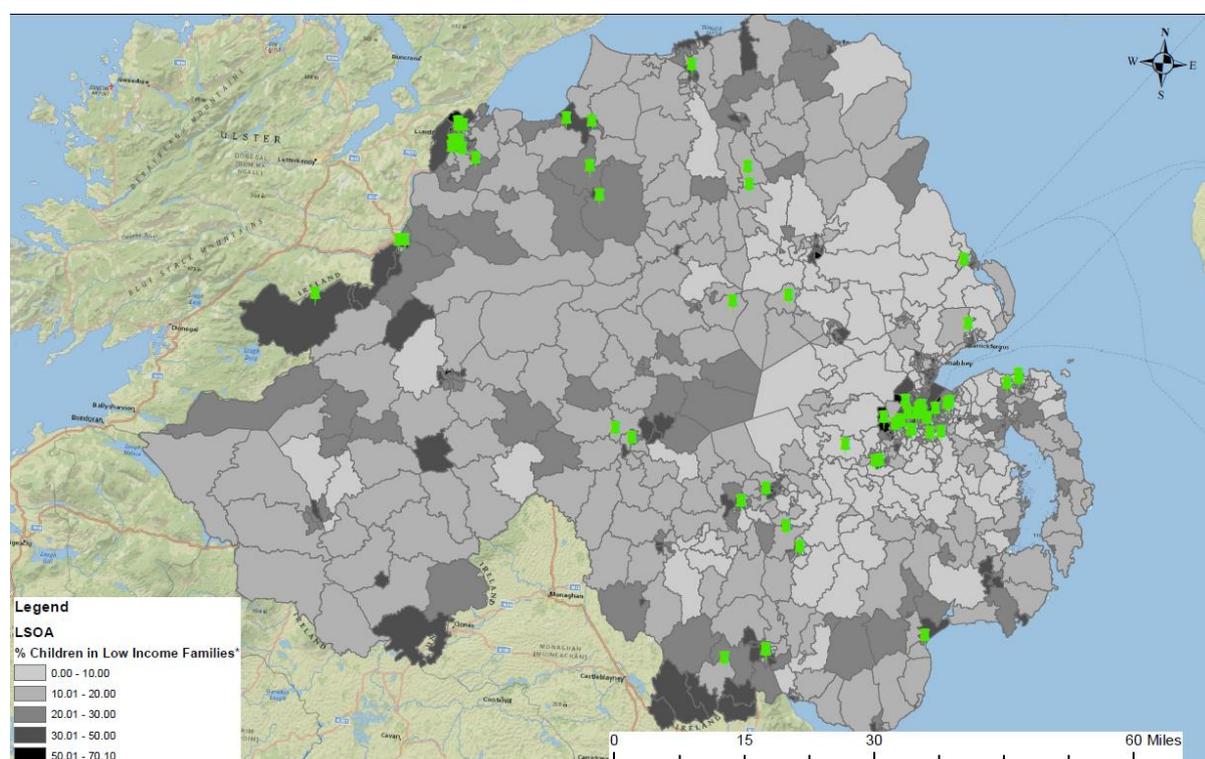


Figure 1 Distribution of Holiday Clubs across Northern Ireland Super Output Areas by Children in Low Income Families 2017

### *Delivery of holiday club provision*

Table 2 presents the findings on the delivery of holiday club provision. The majority of holiday club providers are from voluntary or community organisations (N=57) although local authorities, schools and church or faith groups also deliver holiday provision. Following a recent mapping exercise of holiday clubs in the UK (Mann & Defeyter, 2017), we would have expected a higher response rate from church or faith groups and may have missed some of holiday clubs due to the sampling strategy adopted for this study. Half of holiday clubs (N=38) work in partnership with other organisations or agencies to deliver holiday provision. Furthermore, organisations rely on volunteers and over three-quarters of organisations (N=58) recruit either a mixture of paid staff and volunteers or solely

volunteers to help deliver this provision. Whilst the majority of holiday club providers are third sector organisations, almost two-thirds of organisations (N=50) charge for their holiday club provision. Furthermore, 30% of all holiday club providers (N=27) charge over £2.50 per session for their provision. Many holiday club providers offer regular provision with over two-thirds of organisations (N=54) providing five or more sessions per week.

**Table 2 Delivery of holiday club provision**

	N	%
<i>Type of organisation:</i>		
Voluntary or community group	57	65.5
Local Authority	13	14.9
School	10	11.5
Church or faith group	2	2.3
Other	5	5.7
<i>Work with partner agencies to deliver holiday club:</i>		
Yes	38	50
No	36	47.4
Don't know	2	2.6
<i>Staffing of holiday clubs:</i>		
Mixture of paid staff and volunteers	51	67.1
Paid staff	18	23.7
Volunteers	7	9.2
<i>Charge families to attend:</i>		
Yes	50	65.8
No	26	34.2
<i>Cost per child, per session</i>		
Up to £2.50	16	37.2
£2.51 - £5.00	10	23.2
£5.01 - £10.00	9	20.9
£10.01 - £15.00	2	4.7
£15.01 - £20.00	3	7
Over £20.00	3	7
<i>Average number of sessions per week</i>		
1	2	2.7
2	2	2.7
3	9	12.3
4	6	8.2
5	29	39.7
Over 5	25	34.2

#### *Attendance*

Table 3 illustrates the attendance at holiday clubs. The focus of holiday club provision is for primary school aged children (5-11 year olds) with more places offered to this age group nevertheless many organisations provide holiday club provision for secondary school aged children (12-18 year olds). Furthermore, the majority of sessions are child-only as parents do not attend holiday clubs.

Table 3 Attendance at holiday club

	N	%
<i>Average number of children (0 - 4 year olds) attend the holiday club per session?</i>		
Up to 10	7	
11 - 20	7	
21 - 30	3	
Over 30	2	
<i>Average number of children (5 - 11 year olds) attend the holiday club per session?</i>		
Up to 10	7	
11 - 20	12	
21 - 30	6	
Over 30	34	
<i>Average number of children (12 - 18 year olds) attend the holiday club per session?</i>		
Up to 10	10	
11 - 20	13	
21 - 30	6	
Over 30	14	
<i>Parents attend holiday club</i>		
No	61	83.6
Yes	12	16.4

#### *Activities*

Many of the organisations offer a range of activities at their holiday clubs (see Table 4). The most common activities offered are craft or art activities, physical activities, off-site visits of activities and educational activities. Cookery is also frequently offered by organisations. The most common ‘other’ activity offered is residential trips (N=3). In addition, some organisations also deliver advisory services to parents.

Table 4 Activities provided at holiday club

<i>Type of activity</i>	N
Craft / art activities	66
Physical activities	65
Off-site visits or activities	60
Educational activities	59
Cookery	45
On-site advisory services for parents	9
Off-site advisory services for parents	5
Other	11

#### *Food Provision*

Over two-thirds of organisations (N=51) provide food at their holiday clubs (see Table 5). Snacks are the most common type of food provided at holiday clubs followed by lunch and breakfast. Both hot and cold lunches are prepared and served at holiday clubs serving lunch although there is a focus on delivering more hot lunches than cold lunches.

Organisations preparing and serving food were asked if they will have the resources to provide the same number of meals next year, 60% (N=18) believed they would however 68% of organisations (N=17) believed they would not have the resources to extend their food provision and provide more meals.

Table 5 Food provision at holiday clubs

	N	%
<i>Food provided:</i>		
Provide food at holiday club	51	69.9
Do not provide food at holiday club	22	30.1
<i>Types of meals served:</i>		
Snacks	41	
Lunch	27	
Breakfast	19	
Dinner	2	
<i>Average number of hot lunches prepared and served in total each week:</i>		
Up to 50	10	
51 - 100	7	
101 - 150	1	
151 or more	3	
<i>Average number of cold lunches prepared and served in total each week:</i>		
Up to 50	9	
51 - 100	4	
101 - 150	1	
151 or more	1	
<i>Holiday club always served food:</i>		
Yes	38	77.6
No	11	22.4
<i>Have resources to provide same number of meals next year:</i>		
Yes	18	56.3
No	14	43.8
<i>Have resources to provide more meals next year:</i>		
Yes	8	32
No	17	68

## Discussion

In response to the challenges experienced by families during the school holidays a range of organisations are delivering holiday club provision across Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the findings from the survey illustrate that holiday provision is a piecemeal offering; whilst there is a concentration of holiday club provision located in and around Belfast, there exists a more fragmented distribution of holiday clubs across the rest of Northern Ireland. The findings demonstrate that the majority of holiday club providers are community or voluntary groups. Thus, it is not surprising that there is a reliance on volunteers to help deliver the provision and half of organisations work with partner agencies or organisations to run their holiday clubs. Although there is a significant number of third sector organisations delivering holiday clubs, many holiday club providers charge families for this provision. It is evident from the findings that holiday clubs offer an extensive range of enrichment, physical and educational activities including off site visits for primary and secondary aged school children and this may account for charging families for this provision. Furthermore, two-thirds of organisation deliver a comprehensive programme and offer five sessions or more per week and thus it is likely that their holiday club programme is aimed at supporting working families. Previous research has highlighted the lack of flexible and affordable childcare across the region (Child Poverty Alliance, 2014) and whilst holiday club provision appears to support working families, the distribution of

holiday clubs illustrates the gaps in provision. Furthermore it is evident that the cost of attending childcare impacts on household budgets (Employers for Childcare, 2017) and therefore highlights whether the cost of accessing holiday clubs is prohibitive for low income families and their children to attend this type of provision.

Although holiday clubs offer a range of enrichment activities, the provision of food is more varied. Whilst the majority of holiday clubs provide food at their clubs, the most common meal provided is a snack. In the absence of school food policies such as FSM provision and breakfast clubs during school holidays, a number of organisations provide either breakfast (N=6) or lunch (N=14) and 13 organisations provide both breakfast and lunch. It is evident from the findings that it is a challenge for organisations to deliver and serve food. Over two-fifths of organisations (N=14) believed that they would not have the resources to provide a similar amount of food provision the following year and over two-thirds of respondents (N=17) would not have the resources to extend this provision and provide more meals.

A limitation to this study is the sampling frame and we may have missed organisations delivering holiday club provision, such as church or faith based groups. Nevertheless whilst this is a non-probability survey and the findings cannot be generalised, the results demonstrate there is a piecemeal offering of holiday provision supporting children and their families during the school holidays.

## References

- APPG on School Food. (2015). *Filling The Holiday Gap: Update Report 2015*.
- Barnard, H. (2018). *Poverty in Northern Ireland 2018*. York.
- Child Poverty Alliance. (2014). *Beneath the Surface: Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*. Belfast.
- Defeyter, M. A., Graham, P. L., & Prince, K. (2015). A Qualitative Evaluation of Holiday Breakfast Clubs in the UK: Views of Adult Attendees, Children, and Staff. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 3(199). <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2015.00199>
- Department of Education. (2017). School Meals in Northern Ireland 2016/17 Statistical Bulletin. Retrieved from <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/school-meals-northern-ireland-201617-statistical-bulletin>
- Department of Health. (2016). Health Inequalities – Regional Report 2016. Retrieved April 19, 2018, from <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/health-inequalities-regional-report-2016>
- Dickerson, A., & Popli, G. (2015). Persistent poverty and children's cognitive development: Evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 179, 535–558. <http://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12128>
- Employers for Childcare. (2017). *Norther Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2017*. Lisburn. Retrieved from [http://vouchers.employersforchildcare.org/media/Website Version - Childcare Cost Survey 2011.pdf](http://vouchers.employersforchildcare.org/media/Website%20Version%20-%20Childcare%20Cost%20Survey%202011.pdf)
- Fell, B., & Hewstone, M. (2015). *Psychological perspectives on poverty in the UK*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. York.
- Finlay, E. (2017). *Holiday Hunger Evidence Session*. Belfast.
- Gill, O., & Sharma, N. (2004). *Food Poverty in the School Holidays*. London.
- Graham, P. L., Crilley, E., Stretesky, P. B., Long, M. A., Palmer, K. J., Steinbock, E., & Defeyter, M. A. (2016). School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 4(April 2014), 1–8. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2016.00172>
- Graham, P. L., Stretesky, P. B., Long, M. A., Mann, E., & Defeyter, M. A. (2018). Holiday Hunger: Feeding Children During the School Holidays. In V. Harman, B. Cappellini, & C. Fairclough (Eds.), *Feeding Children Inside and Outside the Home*. London: Routledge.
- Kellogg's. (2015). *Isolation and Hunger : the reality of the school holidays for struggling families*. Manchester. Retrieved from <http://pressoffice.kelloggs.co.uk/Going-hungry-so-their-children-can-eat-Third-of-parents-on-lower-incomes-have-skipped-meals-during-school-holidays>
- Mann, E., & Defeyter, G. (2017). Holiday Club Survey 2017 Preliminary Findings. Retrieved from [http://www.frankfield.co.uk/upload/docs/Holiday Club Survey 2017.pdf](http://www.frankfield.co.uk/upload/docs/Holiday%20Club%20Survey%202017.pdf)
- Shinwell, J., & Defeyter, M. A. (2017). Investigation of summer learning loss in the UK -

Implications for holiday club provision. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 5.