



School holiday support: the impact of HAF

How the HAF programme is supporting vulnerable families

By Laura Furminger, Partnership Officer (HAF)



The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme runs during the Easter, Summer and Winter holidays, and is a lifeline for many families in West Sussex who access benefits related free school meals. Eligible school children, aged 4-16, can access up to 4 sessions during Easter and winter, and 16 sessions over the summer.

HAF sessions are available at a variety of different holiday activity clubs situated across the County; all offer enriching activities, running for minimum of 4 hours. Every session offers a free nutritious meal. There is a wide variety of clubs on offer, including skateboarding tuition, beach and forest schools, coding, and computing, multisport, art and craft, drama and theatre.

For families struggling with the rising cost of living, the HAF programme offers them the peace of mind that their children will be able to continue receiving a free meal a day over the school holidays, whilst also keeping active and having fun!

Although the HAF programme is primarily for children who are eligible for benefits related free school meals, it also supports non-eligible children who are considered vulnerable. This has included Children We Care For, refugees and asylum seekers and children at high risk of antisocial behaviour or criminal exploitation, such as County Lines.

Christmas Family Event

In December 2023, the HAF programme worked with the food rescue charity, UK Harvest, to deliver a free family fun day in Crawley. The event was attended by over 1000 people, who all enjoyed a wide range of activities and performances put on by HAF providers, local community groups, the Police cadets, Fire & Rescue, and St Johns Ambulance services. Support and advice were offered to families from 7 different agencies, such as West Sussex Recycles, Crawley Free Shop, Twin Education Support Service and Early Help & Family Support.

Food and drink was provided by UK Harvest, meaning 550 people enjoyed a free hot meal on the day, using products that would otherwise have gone to waste. Snacks and hot or cold drinks were also available alongside the hot meal.

A free bus service was provided, bringing over 100 people from some of the most deprived areas of Crawley. 79 families who attended with a HAF code were also gifted a "HAF PAK" which included ingredients to make their own delicious pizza at home, along with an activity pack. We are hoping to run events like this again this winter holiday and are currently looking at possible venues in other areas of West Sussex.



Parent Feedback



"HAF has been great from the start. The provider understood our concerns having never used a holiday club before and offered extra support, which was amazing. My child loved the camp and we'll definitely sign up to more in future. Thank you so much!"

"My child had the best week at the HAF programme. He came home so happy every day, which is rare. I just wanted to say thank you to you all for your kindness towards my child - everyone was so warm and friendly, and

he felt so included and involved, which is so important to him."

"Thank you so much, guys. They were so happy, smiley, and enthusiastic when we collected them. They have spoken about it so much, so thank you again."

What's next?

Booking is now well underway for summer HAF delivery. There are over 60 different providers offering HAF places across West Sussex this summer, places can be booked using the [online booking system](#). Please contact the HAF team on HAF@westsussex.gov.uk with any queries, or to look up a HAF code.

For providers interested in offering HAF places, Expression of Interest for winter delivery will open from 30 August 2024 until 1 October 2024.