



Providing opportunities to disadvantaged pupils

Celebrating the HAF Programme

By Laura Furminger, Partnership Support Officer

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme runs during the school 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 the Easter and winter breaks, and 16 sessions over the summer.

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

Over the past year, through connecting with schools and families, it has become apparent that the HAF Programme can benefit children in far more ways than originally intended. HAF can introduce a relaxed environment for children, where they can learn new skills away from more formal classrooms at school. Vulnerable children, in particular, benefit from the safe space that HAF creates, which enables them to try new things and build new relationships.

Over 33,000 HAF sessions have been attended in 2024, and this number will rise as we continue to collate data from the winter HAF delivery.



Community outreach

For the second year, the HAF programme worked with the food rescue charity, UK Harvest, to deliver a free family fun day on 21 December 2024. The event was attended by over 370 people, who all enjoyed a wide range of activities and performances by HAF providers, local community groups and the Army Cadets, Fire & Rescue and St Johns Ambulance service. Support and advice were also available to families from different agencies, such as West Sussex Recycles and Adult Education.

Food and drinks were kindly provided by UK Harvest, meaning all attendees enjoyed a free hot meal and plenty of refreshments on the day. This was made using products that



would otherwise have gone to waste. Snacks and hot or cold drinks were also available alongside the hot meals.

Families also had access to a toy bank, toys had been donated by the listeners of Wave 105 FM, to help with Christmas gifts and plenty of fresh food was available to take home, all saved from going to landfill.



Feedback

"We have continued to use the HAF club during the Christmas holidays and, again, what an amazing experience we have had. I would also like to add, regarding the amazing food, my child has food related issues but has found there's always something for her to eat. It's a win-win for us that she is even trying new food with them at the HAF club."

Comment from a parent of 6 year old child attending WSCC HAF club.

"It has been invaluable from a Safeguarding point of view knowing that pupils who are disadvantaged and, in particular, subject to a CP/CIN plan, have somewhere safe and familiar to go in the holidays where they are guaranteed a decent meal and engaging activities, which they would otherwise not receive at home. It has meant that our pupils have been in a safe environment with consistent adults and routines which have most certainly benefitted them a huge deal and supported their return to school. I hope that funding continues as the HAF programme is such a key part of safeguarding vulnerable children and providing opportunities to disadvantaged pupils when school is closed."

Comment from a headteacher of a WSCC primary school

What's next?

We are pleased to confirm that the DfE's HAF funding will be continued into 2025. We are delighted that we will be able to continue providing this vital support for West Sussex families for another year.



For more information on the HAF Programme, including how it can help to support children and young people's learning and development, please visit the [HAF page](#) on our website.

Please email the HAF Team via HAF@westsussex.gov.uk with any questions about the Programme. We are also able to provide a list of HAF codes for eligible children at your school or details on HAF Clubs in your area if required.