

Qualitative evaluation of the Summer Holiday Programmes in the Scottish Borders 2019

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Summer 2019**

Acknowledgements

To the parents, children, volunteers and staff who contributed to this evaluation of the Scottish Borders Holiday Programmes 2019. Enormous thanks to you for your time, reflections and many suggestions.

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Executive summary

This summary highlights the key findings on the impact of the four Scottish Borders School Holiday programmes and areas for improvement. The findings are informed by interviews and focus groups and a graffiti wall undertaken with parents, children, volunteers and staff involved in the Holiday Programmes in Eyemouth, Hawick, Galashiels, and Selkirk.

The evaluation has found that the programmes play a significant role in addressing food insecurity, providing enriching activities for children and promoting child development, reducing social isolation and increasing family wellbeing and community cohesion. By consequence they are contributing to reducing or mitigating inequalities in the Borders and are well aligned with related NHS Borders, Scottish Borders Councils and National strategies.

Socialising and wellbeing

Overwhelmingly, the opportunity to socialise and play were a major motivation for families attending the programmes and were identified as a significant impact of the programmes by parents. Parents described that the programme offered the opportunity for children to socialise with existing friends, make new friends, and meet new people from outside their communities, contributing to social development and confidence.

Parents also overwhelmingly described that the holiday programmes also offered parents an opportunity to socialise, meet new people, enjoy 'adult conversation' and benefit from informal social support from peers. Parents described how this reduced their social isolation and loneliness, particularly those who didn't live in the immediate area or were new to the area, demonstrating the role of the programmes in addressing social isolation in the Borders. Some parents without significant family support and parents with mental health problems or with low confidence described that the programme had helped them with these challenges, variously giving them confidence, motivation and support, explaining that without it they felt that they would be worse off. Parents and staff also commented that some parents who had previously been considered isolated within their communities had found friends and a support network through attending the programme.

Attitudes towards the accessibility for children with additional needs varied. Only a couple of parents mentioned explicitly that their children had additional support needs. Some staff and volunteers saw there were significant benefits for children with additional support needs of attending the programme. One parent described the programme as a safe place for children with sensory needs but they, and other parents said that more could be done to make the programme accessible and promoted to children with additional support needs. Some parents and staff mentioned that concerns about child's behaviour in particular might be a barrier to attendance.

Parents overwhelmingly described the environment at programmes as friendly and welcoming by both parents and staff however they suggested that some parents may lack attendance to attend and might be intimidated or lack confidence to attend alone and fear of 'cliqueness' and 'bitchiness' could deter attendance, reflecting on their own experiences of joining new groups. Parents consistently suggested using photos of children and parents enjoying activities on Facebook and posters to show non-attending parents what the activities are like and encourage attendance. Another reason that might discourage families from attending was how busy the programmes are.

Access to activities

Parents were not explicitly asked about the barriers their families faced in accessing enriching activities for the children, but described a range of barriers to their children participating in

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other activities over the summer including the cumulative cost of summer holiday activities, lack of availability of affordable activities locally, being working parents or single parents and having limited family support, having a low income, limited transport and the closure of several regular groups over summer holidays. Parents highlighted that the close proximity and low cost of activities in the programmes addressed these barriers and were key reasons supporting participation.

Parents indicated that a significant impact of the programme was that attending holiday programmes gave children something to do. The programmes enabled them to get out of the house over the summer holidays, reducing boredom, introducing children to new sports and creative activities. They also helped families to participate in activities that they would not necessarily be able to do at home such as cooking (due to small kitchen size). Sport, craft and outdoor activities were particularly valued and often, but not always, preferences were expressed along gender lines. Staff and parents reported that parents appreciated the messy activities.

Some parents highlighted the lack of activities for older children as an issue and others identified that age-group specific/sensitive activities might encourage greater participation. Parents suggested a range of assets and activities that programmes could make more use of ranging from sports, outside activities and day trips, creative and food based activities, activities for children with additional support needs, learning opportunities and other community assets.

Good food

Parents cited that the provision of food, in particular healthy and low cost or free of charge food, was a significant impact of the programme and that children and families have enjoyed sharing food together. Parents and staff highlighted that the programme has also been successful in supporting the introduction of new healthy foods like fruits and vegetables into children and family's diets, including foods that parents and children previously disliked. This was viewed as a positive impact of the programme by parents. Sharing mealtimes with peers who are also eating different foods, was cited as a reason for children trying. The provision of fruit and vegetables to take home at the programmes (or promoted through the programme) and the cooking classes in the timetable of programmes were also factors supporting introduction of new foods.

However, whilst it had a significant impact, the provision of food was not reported to be a major factor that motivated families to attend, rather a supplementary benefit, with the opportunity to get out of the house, socialise and have something to do being much more significant factors encouraging participation. This was echoed by staff but no parents explicitly mentioned stigma associated with food provision, or any perceived benefits from co-provision of food alongside activities. However staff described current stigmatising narratives in relation to 'free food', circulating in the communities where the programmes are provided. One volunteer described increased uptake of free of charge community vegetables due to co-provision at the programme rather than through the community hub alone.

Staff have adopted a range of approaches to mitigate stigma, and promote alternative narratives around the provision of food, to encourage uptake. One example is the environmental benefit of avoiding food waste; another approach is the set-up of an un-manned market stall with recipe cards to enable people to take what they wish, and promoting free of charge food as 'encouraging a healthy diet' rather than explicitly addressing food insecurity. Such approaches appear to be successful in encouraging uptake of fruit and vegetables and breakfast and lunches.

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Getting out and 'letting off steam'

A significant impact identified by parents was that the programme encouraged families to get out of the house and get fresh air after being indoors for extended periods. Some parents described that if they weren't at the programme they would still be in their pyjamas and having the focus of attending the programme gives them a good reason to get up and out in the holidays. Another overwhelmingly significant impact is that the programmes enabled the children to 'let off steam' which tired them out, relaxing them and improving sleep. This had an added advantage of allowing the parents a break particularly the subsequent morning.

Sport was one of the most popular activities offered by the programme reported by parents and creating the opportunity to 'let off steam' and 'run about' were significant impacts of the programme. Parents suggested that a broader variety of sports activities would be appreciated. And more activities outside, including day trips.

Addressing financial pressures

Some parents described that without the holiday programme children would otherwise simply not participate in these, activities. Others described how attending the holiday programme helped financially through the availability of free of charge, low cost and reduced price activities, that reduced the total expenditure that parents might otherwise have borne for these. The provision of food has also helped families financially with the cost of a healthy diet over the summer holidays.

Child development

Parents cited that the programme supported children to develop over the summer holiday, particularly in terms of social development and confidence and child behaviour. Other areas of development referred to were diverse ranging from speech, potty and toilet training, sport skills and creativity. A staff member commented that it was an opportunity to support the child to be ready to go back to school. Some parents suggested that more learning activities would be an added benefit for the programme

Community cohesion

An extremely wide range of community actors and resources contribute to the delivery of the programmes, as described by parents and staff, with different types of actors involved in different programmes and considerable input from volunteers in programme delivery ranging from churches, farms, supermarkets, cafes, musicians, cinemas, artists, beaches, gardens, countryside, community justice, sporting groups, volunteers and many others. Staff and volunteers expressed particular pride at the diversity of community actors involved and the way partners had worked together. Parents explained that the programmes reinforced a sense of community, 'family' and coming together, building on a sense of community pride that already existed. Parents and staff also expressed a significant impact of the programme was bringing together members of communities that might not otherwise mix including families from different areas, income levels and ages, breaking down barriers between sections of communities.

Volunteers are a major asset to the programmes, with all of the programmes having at least one volunteer, contributing a wide range of roles to support and enable the delivery of the programme. Some of the volunteers have been heavily involved in the programme, shaping its development since its inception. Volunteers had a wide range of motivations for participating in the programmes, and derived different benefits. A common theme, was the sense of being part of the community that volunteers felt from contributing. Volunteers

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explained that volunteering provided an opportunity to get out of the house, to enjoy the company of other volunteers and to see the children enjoying themselves. Some volunteers also saw volunteering as an opportunity to develop confidence, learn, strengthen their CVs and prepare for working.

At some programmes, staff described that older people were very involved in programme delivery, whilst at other programmes, volunteers expressed that there were more opportunities to integrate age groups at the programmes, for example through bringing together groups for the elderly with the programmes.

Parents expressed a desire for even greater involvement, particularly in volunteer roles. The over-riding suggestion was to simply ask and encourage parents if they would like to get more involved, suggesting an opportunity for increasing parent engagement in the programme delivery. When asked, some parents and staff felt it was difficult to get involved in the running and planning of the programme, either due to the need to supervise children, being working parents, or due to a perceived lack of skills or confidence. Other parents explained that they did feel very involved in the day to day running of the programmes through simply tidying up or helping, and they had informal input into the planning of the programmes and felt a sense of pride in the combined efforts of communities, parents and services to create a successful programme. Parents suggested, when asked directly, several ways parents could become more involved in programme planning including, informal focus groups over a meal and small working groups.

Wellbeing and Family relationships

Parents commented that the programmes gave them something to look forward to. It also offers variety and breaks the week up, helping to counter or prevent boredom. Some parents also commented that it is also valuable in socialising children who are due to go to nursery. The most common word illustrated on the children's graffiti wall at Galashiels in response to 'how does coming to the programme make you feel?' was 'happy'. Parents and volunteers also expressed joy at observing the children happy.

Parents also explained that family relationships were improved through participation in the programmes for example through getting out the house, giving parents time to do something with the children, creating an opportunity to do something together as a family and improved child behaviour.

Connection to services and routine

Parents commented that the closure of other 'groups' over the holiday creates a change in people's routine and the loss of places for children to go. An impact of the programme reported by parents, is that children benefitted from a routine offered by attending the programme. Parents appreciated that attending the programme enabled them to be connected to services and professional support, this was identified as a significant impact of the programme, despite not significantly featuring in previous research on challenges faced by families over the holidays or evaluations of holiday programmes, suggesting this is particularly valued aspect of the programmes in Borders. Explanations of the benefits varied but included: keeping in touch with the school and early years centre; finding out about NHS services and finding out about other community groups.

Childcare and working parents – an area for development

Working was raised as a potential barrier to attendance at the programme due to parents being exhausted. However, in contrast, some parents attending were working parents and had described how they had just finished a night shift and come straight to the programme so their

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children could participate in activities, before they had to go to sleep to prepare for their next shifts. Whilst no parents suggested that childcare should be an element of the programme to facilitate working, some staff and some parents suggested that childcare, particularly of young children might be a barrier to attendance at programmes. Parents also raised that grandparents in the role of caregiver, whilst parents are working, may not be as aware of the programme, or feel it is open to them thus limiting access to the programme for children of working parents.

Staff and parents suggested that provision of a crèche or childcare within activities (e.g. the live borders sessions) at the programmes might benefit parents variously through allowing parents the chance to relax with friends; to spend time with other children also participating at the programme; to allow parents the opportunity to participate in adult learning and development.

Despite the programme not offering childcare per se, parents did express that a significant benefit of the programme was that they didn't have to worry about their children, as someone else was usually looking out for them, either a staff member, an older child, or other parent. This offered an opportunity to relax a bit, and enjoy adult conversation with other parents, offering parents respite and improving their wellbeing.

Availability and access to programmes

Parents identified that families might not participate in programmes for example if they lived far from the programmes, and didn't have access transport, potentially limiting the benefits for children in families with a low income living outside the locations where the holiday programmes are offered. In addition parents highlighted that there is scope to expand holiday programmes further, although there were not strong themes arising from the comments which included increasing the frequency to more than one day (for one programme) to offering programmes in other holidays too.

Summary recommendations for strengthening the programmes in future years

These recommendations are derived from the input by parents, volunteers and staff.

1. Promote holiday programmes to increase attendance by non-attending families, particularly through a Facebook strategy and posters in key locations. The benefits of programmes should be promoted in publicity materials and all caregivers should be made to feel welcome, including grandparents.
2. Expand the delivery of holiday programmes to address unmet need e.g. access for families in rural areas; families with children with additional support needs; families in areas where programmes are infrequent and older children.
3. Support the promotion and development of alternative community based activities over holidays to address unmet need for affordable holiday activities and reduce reliance on holiday programmes.
4. Promote and provide healthy food and activities alongside one another, to meet family needs and to support families to address food insecurity with dignity whilst promoting healthy diets and reducing food waste.
5. Adapt local programmes to address the needs identified by parents including making all activities accessible to girls and boys, addressing the gender preferences towards particular activities; expanding the range of physical activities offered; increasing fun learning activities.

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6. Continue to work closely with, and make use of, community assets in the delivery of programmes including older people and parents and family friends with particular skills. Through the programmes, seek to connect communities to services and resources in their communities.
7. Promote parent involvement in holiday programmes including day to day helping, volunteering and planning.
8. Review the benefits and disbenefits of providing a crèche/childcare to support adult learning, time with older children and as an opportunity to support parents to work.

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Introduction

During the summer of 2019, in collaboration with families attending the four Borders Summer Holiday Programmes and volunteers and staff, a qualitative evaluation of these holiday programmes was undertaken.

This report presents the feedback from programme participants, volunteers and staff, highlighting the many positive impacts of the programmes and also offering suggestions for strengthening programmes further.

Aims and Objectives

The qualitative evaluation was commissioned to understand the value of four summer holiday programme's for Borders families, and, to identify areas for improvement and development, as identified by families, volunteers, children and staff involved in the holiday programmes specifically to:

1. Develop an understanding how the holiday programmes have impacted children, parents, families and volunteers in the Borders.
2. Develop an understanding of why some families do not participate in the holiday programmes.
3. Use an asset-based, participatory-engagement approach to service improvement through engaging families in identifying areas for development of the programmes; understanding views on current and potential for parental involvement in programme planning and delivery; identifying available community assets.

Overview of the Holiday programmes in the Scottish Borders

In the Scottish Borders Summer holiday programmes have developed over time in the Galashiels, Selkirk, Eyemouth and Hawick through collaborations with the Scottish Borders Council (SBC) Community Learning and Development (CLD) team and the NHS/SBC Healthy Living Network (HLN), and a diverse range of community actors to address the need for food and enriching activities for children up to age 8, from low-income families in the summer holidays.

The programmes share some similarities including similar ethos, staff input from SBC and for some programmes Public Health, inclusion of enriching and physical activities and food and healthy diet components, and work together to share learning. However, they are diverse in the frequency and hours of operation and content of programmes, each of which has developed with the intention of addressing local needs.

Background to the programmes

Evidence describes how children from low-income families are often unable to participate in enriching activities and experience food insecurity and sub-optimal diet over the summer holidays¹. A complex interplay of factors including low income, welfare cuts, family food insecurity, lack of free school meals and inadequate childcare are all identified as contributory factors. The Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018) identified a wide range of additional challenges faced by families on a low income over the holidays. These challenges contribute to inequalities in the health and wellbeing and educational outcomes for children from families with a low income due to malnourishment, social isolation and physical inactivity.

¹ Stewart, H., Watson, N. and Campbell, M. (2018).

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Findings from Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018) – Advice on poverty in school holidays

- Holidays can contribute to financial pressures, including food costs, fuel costs, costs for activities or transport.
- Food insecurity over holidays can result in children having inadequate food or parents going without to provide for their children.
- Cost and availability and reliability of transport are a barrier to accessing activities and a lack of suitable places for children to play.
- Lengthy holidays can contribute to family conflict
- Over holidays parents may struggle to get a break.
- Children may struggle with the absence of routine.
- Holiday times can create particular challenges for lone parents, parents of children with additional needs and parents with mental health problems.
- Closure of nurseries, play groups and other services can reduce play opportunities, exacerbate social isolation and increase parenting stresses.
- Parents find it is not affordable to work due to the cost of childcare over the holiday
- Social isolation can affect both parents and children over the summer, exacerbated by the stopping of other activities over the summer holiday
- Difficulties feeding extra children, or concern about the home are barriers to friends coming over.
- Lack of provision for high school age young people.
- Vulnerability of children at risk of abuse and neglect may increase during holiday periods
- There could be delays in concerns being identified by statutory agencies.

A recent report to the UK Government by All Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom (2018) recommended the UK government to eradicate holiday hunger by enacting a statutory requirement for local authorities to implement food and fun programmes over the holidays. In Scotland the Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018) report on advice for the Scottish government on addressing poverty in school holidays recommended the development of a coordinated package of school holiday support to address pressures experienced by families with low income, with nutritious food as a core element.

There is no mandatory obligation to provide school holiday programmes in UK, including Scotland, however, the Scottish Government has committed to developing a new strategic framework for after school and holiday childcare before the end of this parliament and has made some funding available in recent years². The Scottish Borders communities supported by CLD, HLN and others are demonstrating leadership in addressing the needs of low income families over the summer holidays through provision of holiday programmes.

There is limited good quality research on the impact of holiday programmes making it difficult to decide how best to implement holiday programmes that address these needs. This evaluation seeks to understand at a local level how the programmes are addressing needs, and how they can be strengthened to meet families needs further.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews and a graffiti wall were used to obtain the views of parents, volunteers and children attending the holiday programmes. A staff focus group was undertaken with CLD and HLN staff. 26 parents were interviewed, 6 volunteers and 7 staff participated in the focus group.

The aim of the research was to seek to identify the impact on families as expressed by parents, rooted in their own experience of the programme. This contrasts with research which aims to

² Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018)

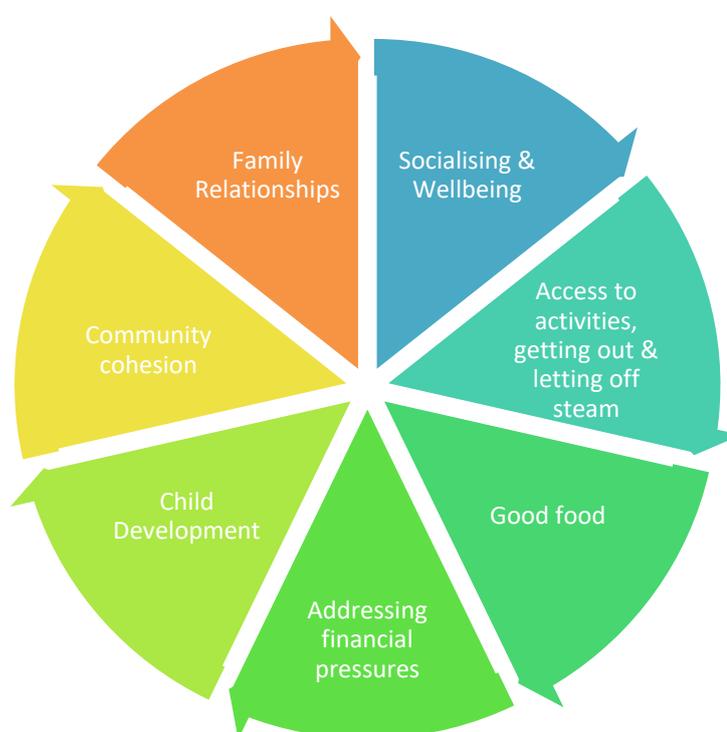
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explore the experience and impact in relation to certain public health or learning objectives or outcomes of the programme e.g. health, wellbeing, diet, physical activity. To achieve this, grounded theory was used as a method of inquiry. This means that research was undertaken without reference to any preconceived notions of the types of impact the programme might have rather the ‘impacts’ emerged from the responses elicited from evaluation participants, and were themed by thematic analysis of these responses.

An initial familiarisation visit to the Galashiels programme was undertaken and staff and volunteers consulted to understand the nature of the programme and the opportunities to discuss the programme with the parents.

Findings

The programme has a wide range of significant impacts for families, as described by parents, children, staff and volunteers. The themes arising from the evaluation relate to:



The most widely recognised impacts are summarised in the table below, by theme. These are explored more fully in this section of the report.

Theme	Impact
Socialising and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children can interact and mix with their friends and new children • Children play, are stimulated and are happy • Improved child and parent mood • Parents have an opportunity to relax and have adult time • Parents benefit from peer support • Reduced social isolation and improved mental health, confidence amongst parents
Access to Activities, getting out and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are introduced to new activities they can enjoy • Children are physically active • Children let off steam

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letting off steam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are tired out and sleep well • Activities offer good value for money
Good Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have a healthy diet and are well fed • Children and families can try and enjoy new (healthy) foods • Food offers good value for money
Addressing financial pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial burden of the summer holiday is reduced • Children can participate in activities that would be otherwise unaffordable • Reduced inequalities in access to healthy food and activities
Child Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps children develop a range of skills • Helps children increase confidence and social skills
Community Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities mix and work together • Volunteers and community contribute to community development • Volunteers and parents develop skills and capabilities • Volunteer connectedness and satisfaction • Community cohesion and resilience • Breaks down barriers
Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and families enjoy time together • Families are connected to services and can access support • Family relationships and family skills are strengthened

A wide range of further feedback and areas for development were also provided by evaluation participants. These are summarised below, and more fully in this section of the report.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Feedback and areas for development</i>
Socialising and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The environment and staff are welcoming and friendly • Fear of attending and fear of cliqueness may prevent some families from attending e.g. young parents, grandparents • Make all families and caregivers feel welcome when promoting the programme
Access to Activities, getting out and letting off steam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's lots of variety • It is greatly valued • There are no other alternative (and affordable) activities in the areas where programmes are available • Sports, crafts, messy activities are the favourites! • Lack of awareness may prevent families from attending • Lack of awareness of timetables may result in children missing activities available • Promote on Facebook and posters using photos of families enjoying the programmes • Needs of older children are less well met by the programme • Girls and boys prefer different activities. There is scope to make craft more accessible to boys and sport more accessible to girls. • More consideration of the needs of different age groups would be valued e.g. different activities or adapted activities for younger children • The needs of children with special needs are not always met by the programme • Smaller groups may be better for children with special needs • There are a wide range of community assets and additional sports that could be utilised/offered by the programme

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good location and being local makes the programmes accessible • Lack of transport/ local access may prevent children who would benefit from attending (i.e. living further away, at different schools). Transport could help. • It would be good to have it more days • It would be good to have it in other holidays • Sometimes it is too busy, this may deter some people from attending
Good Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programmes are addressing stigma around free food • Offering food and activities together promote access to food • The food is greatly valued
Child Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More educational activities would be useful • Anti-bullying could be useful before returning to school
Community cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are keen to be more involved in the planning of future holiday programmes • Parents are open to volunteering to help with the day to day running of programmes and volunteering • Parents could be encouraged to help with simple things like tidying up • Parents welcome the opportunity to be approached to help/participate • There are barriers and challenges around parents volunteering/ assisting e.g. responsibility for the care of their own children attending the programme, working etc. • It would be good to include intergenerational activities
Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A crèche would help free up parents for adult learning • A crèche would give parents time for themselves • A crèche would help parents participate with their older children rather than caring for their young children

Socialising and wellbeing

Overwhelmingly, the opportunity to socialise and play were a major motivation for families attending the programmes and were identified as a significant impact of the programmes by parents. Parents described that the programme offered the opportunity for children to socialise with existing friends, make new friends, and meet new people from outside their communities, contributing to social development and confidence.

'It helps them to get out and interact and they come for socialising with kids around their age' (Parent)

'It helps my daughter to socialise – she can have friends to play with' (Parent)

'We live in a small cul de sac, there's nothing much else around us. The kids are mixing with other types of kids from other areas. My daughter loves it. We'd never go to anyone else's and play with other kids....' (Parent)

Parents also overwhelmingly described that the holiday programmes also offered parents an opportunity to socialise, meet new people, enjoy 'adult conversation' and benefit from informal social support from peers.

'It's fun to converse with adults other than my girlfriend. Here, we have a common interest already.' (Parent)

'You can speak to people and have adult conversations' (Parent)

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'I've enjoyed having a coffee, meeting new parents, socialising. Some people I've met before but you also meet people you wouldn't normally meet.' (Parent)

'I've made quite a few new friends out of it. I feel like I could go to anyone for support. I feel very welcomed which is great.' (Parent)

'If you're having a low day you can speak to a member of staff or other parent' (Parent)

Parents described this reduced their social isolation and loneliness, particularly those who didn't live in the immediate area or were new to the area, demonstrating the role of the programmes in addressing social isolation in the Borders.

'We're new to the community, just moved here ten weeks ago. We didn't know anyone with young kids before. It's great for the kids to socialise and also great for the parents.' (Parent)

'It helps with loneliness. Especially if you've not got a lot of family involved'. (Parent)

'X is X's support worker, she said why don't you come along as I'm very isolated where we are and it's been really good for that and we go to baby club after. It's really welcoming it feels like a real family.... I've been down here a year now, trying to find my feet and social networks. It's being difficult really – to make friends.'

'A parent been living in langlee for a year and she didn't know anyone. I saw her later sitting with others at the indoor picnic, and children playing together. She was smiling and happy' (CLD staff member)

Some parents without significant family support and parents with mental health problems or with low confidence described that the programme had helped them with these challenges, variously giving them confidence, motivation and support, explaining that without it they felt that they would be worse off. Parents and staff also commented that some parents who had previously been considered isolated within their communities had found friends and a support network through attending the programme.

'I am more confident in myself - being around other people and sharing experiences... I'm just glad it was on – otherwise my depression would have come back. I'm happy.' (Parent /Volunteer)

'I suffer from anxiety and depression. This is a big thing. We did it... It's been massive, getting out the house. I've learned how to control my anxiety. I've enjoyed the adult conversation.' (Parent)

'I've got a bit more confidence and a sense of community. Being here, with everyone else, seeing people you wouldn't have spoken to... This is good for mental health and it's motivating.' (Parent)

'Confidence is definitely an impact. Parents are trying drama or trying a new food for the first time. It's given some parents the confidence to speak in public... Before long we had a circle, introducing themselves. Some of the older women were saying I would never speak in front of people, it's nice to do.' (CLD Staff member)

Attitudes towards the accessibility for children with additional needs varied. Only a couple of parents mentioned explicitly that their children had additional support needs. Some staff and volunteers saw there were significant benefits for children with additional support needs of attending the programme.

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'He has X. This is a safe place for him. He likes sensory and there are sensory things for him to do. It could be better.' (Parent of child with additional needs)

'My grandchildren are older – I wish I'd known about it. My grandson has autism; it would have been great for him.' (Volunteer)

'Families who have children who have additional support needs... Some of the families that I've been working with are terrified of holidays and what they're going to do with parents during that time. (CLD Staff member)

One parent described the programme as a safe place for children with sensory needs but they, and other parents said that more could be done to make the programme accessible and promoted to children with additional support needs.

'I'd like more sensory activities' (Parent of child with additional needs)

'Smaller groups would allow easier socialising [mentioned her son had ADHD and is better in smaller groups]' (Same Parent of child with additional needs)

'What about kids with disabilities? I know there is a special needs department at the school' (Parent)

'It's good the school's involved. It is 'all inclusive', it's a special needs unit – although we don't do much on this.' (Parent/Volunteer)

Some parents and staff mentioned that concerns about child's behaviour in particular might be a barrier to attendance.

'Something with children with additional support needs is missing. They were worried about going along to something like this, because they were worried about other parents judging the parenting skills... it's something to work on for future years' (CLD Staff member)

'It could be embarrassed about their kid's behaviour. Let them know it's alright if your bairn doesn't behave.' (Parent/Volunteer)

Parents overwhelmingly described the environment at programmes as friendly and welcoming by both parents and staff however they suggested that some parents might be intimidated or lack confidence to attend alone and fear of 'cliqueness' and 'bitchiness' could deter attendance, reflecting on their own experiences of joining new groups. Parents consistently suggested using photos of children and parents enjoying activities on facebook and posters to show non-attending parents what the activities are like and encourage attendance.

'I'm able to speak to people. I'm always worried about being judged. Here you fit in straight away. Everyone's understanding, parents and workers. And the kids are so friendly.' (Parent)

'She's come from a long way and worried it would be cliquey as they don't know her. She's making an effort.' (Parent)

'It took me a year to go to baby group. You have an idea that it's going to be judging, older mums, cliquey, I'm not going to fit in.' (Parent)

'Bitchiness... cliqueness can stop people coming along I ignore it, I laugh it off.' (Parent)

'If people see the children in the playground, if we took more photos and posted them every week then they would (know what it's like).' (Parent)

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'...Working with the vulnerable families – I'd like to be more strategic about building them up to attending.' (CLD Staff member)

One reason that parent's might be discouraged from attending was how busy the programmes are.

'Some folk don't like the crowdedness' (Parent)

'I like it like this – when its not overly busy.' (Parent)

'It can be too busy – especially when it is sunny' (Parent)

Access to activities

Parents were not explicitly asked about the barriers their families faced in accessing enriching activities for the children, but described a range of barriers to their children participating in other activities over the summer including the cumulative cost of summer holiday activities, lack of availability of affordable activities locally, being working parents or single parents and having limited family support, having a low income, limited transport and the closure of several regular groups over summer holidays. Parents highlighted that the close proximity and low cost of activities in the programmes addressed these barriers and were key reasons supporting participation.

'I'm a single parent – there's nothing else to do. It gives them something to do.' (Parent)

'I can't find any sports for them to do – nothing else in the summer holidays...I was running out of ideas and put up on facebook asking if anyone had any ideas...' (Parent)

'We come to meet new people, get out... and there is a not a lot to do over the summer.' (Parent)

'It's an outlet for the children. They do kids things – some don't have that, like craft.' (Volunteers)

'My kids go to rugby, football. Other kids don't have access – this is breaking down the barriers' (Parent)

'They're involved in extra-curricular activities, which not lots of people can afford 'cause its bloody expensive.' (Parent Group)

Parents indicated that a significant impact of the programme was that attending holiday programmes gave children something to do. The programmes enabled them to get out of the house over the summer holidays, reducing boredom, introducing children to new sports and creative activities. They also helped families to participate in activities that they would not necessarily be able to do at home such as cooking (due to small kitchen size). Sport, craft and outdoor activities were particular valued and often, but not always, preferences were expressed along gender lines. Staff and parents reported that parents appreciated the messy activities.

'He enjoys painting and wotnot, activities, being amongst his friends. He's' loved all the sports and painting, he's more of an outdoors kids.' (Parent group)

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My daughter likes the craft but the boys don't get into the craft as much. They like physical stuff like building bricks, building things and ride on toys. (Parent)

My older daughter loved the tie dye and everything crafty. She's not so keen on the sport, but she's joined in and done her bit. It's great if they don't want to take part (staff) – they'll find something else for her to do (Parent)

'They like playing and getting messy. I have OCD and at home she's not allowed to do it – here she can do it all' (Parent)

'It was really messy. I don't care what parents say... having that space to be able to do that without the fear of mess is great.' (CLD Staff member)

A couple of parents highlighted the lack of activities for older children as an issue and others identified that age-group specific/sensitive activities might encourage greater participation.

'There should be more opportunities for teenagers – there is not something for them to do here. I've got 3 nephews with ADHD – there's nothing in the community. They are stuck in the house with not enough activities for their day and they get into trouble.' (Parent/Volunteer)

'The activities are focused on all ages so things are focused broadly. Activities suitable for the age groups would be good.' (Parent)

'The basketball is a bit big - better to do something for young kids' (Parent)

Good food

Parents cited that the provision of food and in particular healthy and low cost (or free of charge) food was a particularly significant impact of the programme and that children and families have enjoyed sharing food together.

'There is free food, healthy food not bad food' (Parent)

'The children can play, socialise, enjoy food and eat something decent' (Parent)

'The vegetables at the front door are great. Taking pack lunches away is amazing.' (Parent)

'Love the breakfast and sitting with friends and eating. Have a sense of being together.' (Parent)

'A significant proportion (of families) don't have tables, so would not eat at a table or the food. It was amazing.' (CLD Staff Member)

'It's nice to see the helpers help set up the table... and teaching parents to cook with the children, seeing everyone getting involved. Seeing everyone together and sharing the same food. And everyone eating...' (Community food worker)

Parents and staff highlighted that the programme has also been successful in supporting the introduction of new healthy foods like fruits and vegetables into children and family's diets, including foods that parents and children previously disliked. This was viewed as a positive impact of the programme by parents. Sharing mealtimes with peers, who are also eating different foods, was cited as a reason for children trying. The provision of fruit and vegetables to take home at the programmes (or promoted through the programme) and the cooking classes in the timetable of programmes were also factors supporting introduction of new foods.

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'She's a lot better eating fruit and trying new things – everyone else is eating it so she does (Parent/Volunteer)'

'Knowing that she eats certain things, and tries different things.' (Parent – in response to a question on the impact of the programme)

'X (cafe) came in once a week. They cooked a hot meal and got the kids involved with the chopping and the cooking... One week they made a pasta with big chunks of sweet potato. Parents were saying I can't believe that my child has just eaten big chunks of sweet potato and mushroom.' (HLN staff member)

'The children will eat what's there. Parents will often to say they wouldn't eat this back home. Being with peers encourages them to eat different things' (Community food workers)

'We had bought fresh pineapples to make a summer fruit crush. I said, pineapples are really cheap at the moment, they're 75p and you can get so much fruit. One of the mums said I hate pineapple I can't stand it. She tried the fresh pineapple... she said it was so nice. They're learning to eat different things with children, and these are things they thought they didn't like' (Community food workers)

However, whilst it had a significant impact, the provision of food was not reported to be a major factor that motivated families to attend, rather a supplementary benefit, with the opportunity to get out of the house, socialise and have something to do being much more significant factors encouraging participation. This was echoed by staff but no parents explicitly mentioned stigma associated with food provision, or any perceived benefits from co-provision of food alongside activities. However staff described current stigmatising narratives in relation to 'free food', circulating in the communities where the programmes are held and one volunteer described increased uptake of free of charge community vegetables due to co-provision at the programme rather than through the community hub alone.

'The parish church were doing the food – breakfast and lunches. I knew people would come for the food but the reason they said they came back was because it was really good fun. (CLD staff member)

'A partner put on a free lunch. With the activities, the food is secondary.' (HLN staff member)

Staff have adopted a range of approaches to mitigate stigma, and promote alternative narratives around the provision of food, to encourage uptake. One example is the environmental benefit of avoiding food waste. Another approach is the set-up of an un-manned market stall with recipe cards to enable people to take what they wish, and promoting free of charge food as 'encouraging a healthy diet' rather than explicitly addressing food insecurity. Such approaches appear to be successful in encouraging uptake of fruit and vegetables and breakfast and lunches.

'In X there's quite a lot of stigma around free food. Very mixed feelings in the town about where food is on offer. A lot of parents are commenting on that's maybe for 'targeted' families. We had to work to say it's about food waste reduction....it's about saving it from landfill. When we are doing cooking activities with families, playing down from the aspect that it was about food poverty.' (HLN Staff member)

'We ran a market stall – all fresh vegetables that folk take away. We really encourage others to take away to encourage healthy eating.' (HLN staff member)

Getting out and 'letting off steam'

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A significant impact identified by parents was that the programme encouraged families to get out of the house and get fresh air after being indoors for extended periods. Some parents described that if they weren't at the programme they would still be in their pyjamas and having the focus of attending the programme gives them a good reason to get up and out in the holidays.

'It is getting us out of the house, interacting with other kids.' (Parent)

'We're getting fresh air and breathing outside' (Parent)

'Overall it's good; you enjoy looking forward to it after you've been in the house all week...' (Parent)

'It's had a good impact on us and other families like us who would otherwise be in their jammies.' (Parent)

Another overwhelmingly significant impact is that the programmes enabled the children to 'let off steam' which tired them out, relaxing them and improving sleep. This had an added advantage of allowing the parents a break particularly the subsequent morning.

'It's some time for them to blow off some steam. But I'm busy with the baby.' (Parent)

'He's more relaxed – goes for a sleep.' (Parent)

'It's helped him a lot – we're out for hours, it tires him out.' (Parent)

'It is good for me because of her burning off steam' (Parent)

'It lets me lie in on a Friday morning ('cause they're asleep)' (Parent Group)

'The kids are sleeping at night, the kids are tired... a massive thing to happen in the summer break... to have the knowledge your child is going to go to bed at night.' (CLD Staff member)

Sport was one of the most popular activities offered by the programme reported by parents and creating the opportunity to 'let off steam' and 'run about' were significant impacts of the programme. Parents suggested that a broader variety of sports activities would be appreciated.

'Every week it's Live Borders' ? (Parent)

'My son likes football, he plays in Eyemouth. There is no football in the programme.' (Parent)

'Gymnastics/sports for free – at smaller cost. In Peebles and Gala its £25 a day for kids to do gymnastics... Something like a sports day for a day. Folk could do it.' (Parent)

'...football, gymnastics, dance class, taekwondo, boxing' (Parent group)

'A swimming thing would be good, for a swimming lesson' (Parent)

'Athletics, that kind of thing? Touch rugby? I don't know about the rules these days though.' (Parent)

And more activities outside, including day trips.

'Going outside – they could do parachutes or rounders in a big field.' (Parent)

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'More days out/trips. Even if we had to pay its still an option – not expecting everything to be free. For example Harestanes or something like that.' (Parent)

'Multi-courts. There's a brand new play park – you can lock the kids in. There are lots of walks – but don't know what the staffing is like to do that.' (Parent)

'One or two day trips to a park – something for them to enjoy' (Parent)

Addressing financial pressures

Some parents described that without the holiday programme children would otherwise simply not participate in these, activities. Others described how attending the holiday programme helped financially through the availability of free of charge, low cost and reduced price activities, that reduced the total expenditure that parents might otherwise have borne for these.

'I was thinking is there anything that you don't have to pay for because I don't have any loose change. I was really hoping that when I came today you don't have to pay as I literally have no money today.' (Parent)

'There's a deal going with the swimming pool – that's good. If you've got 3-4 kids that's good. Even 50% off the inflatable's.' (Parent)

'It is a chance to spend time with the kids. We do that with them anyway but it keeps them going through the holiday. Its hard (in the holiday) as a parent. You have to spend money all the time – doing lots of activities...' (Parent)

'It's free and easy to get to – it is good for poor people' (Parent)

And the provision of food has helped families financially with the cost of a healthy diet over the summer holidays

'Not everyone has money for holidays, like parents struggling with money... the lunches are good for people not working' (Parent)

Sandwiches and fruits are good. With four or more, it costs more food wise in the holidays.' (Eyemouth Parent 3)

'The amount of food we had donated... parents were really able to benefit from the free lunches. Even parents that are a bit better off compared to other families still said it helped.' (HLN staff member)

'It became their main meal and then they just had to do 'lunches' for tea. It was a massive financial draw.' (CLD staff member)

'One parent said that they saved around £30 per week through getting breakfast and lunch with four kids – a real bonus for them.' (CLD staff member)

'We can provide breakfast and lunch. Parents/carers make lunch together. Abundant Borders is part of it. Oblo have been helping make lunches on a Tuesday. To feed a family, large families, is expensive. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday lunch is provided. Food is a big part.' (Volunteer)

Child development

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Parents cited that the programme supported children to develop over the summer holiday, particularly in terms of social development and confidence and child behaviour. Other areas of development referred to were diverse ranging from speech, potty and toilet training, sport skills and creativity. A staff member commented that it was an opportunity to support the child to be ready to go back to school.

'It's brought them out of their shells – usually they don't bother playing with other kids, now they get stuck in' (Parent)

'It's made us better – something we look forward to, she's a lot more confident. She used to be more reserved.' (Parent)

'She's got more confidence. It's brought her on. I've been told she's advanced for her age.' (Parent/Volunteer)

'My daughter has been slow with her speech. It's bringing on her speech, interacting with other kids.' (Parent)

'One child had got so much out of drama... I've referred her to a local group... there are things to do about the funding. I noticed a key thing was how she was interacting This was a child who was not communicating at the beginning. The forum of drama was enabling her to communicate with others.' (CLD Staff member)

An opportunity to keep the brain active, so that you come in after the six weeks holiday so your brain is ready to learn.' (CLD Staff member)

Some parents suggested that more learning activities would be an added benefit for the programme

'Homework club – would be handy for the parents.' (Parent)

'We've started to use the book club at the other group... More for older children not toddlers. Fun education – science experiment.' (Parent)

'Anti-bullying, especially when going back to school' (Parent Group)

Community cohesion

An extremely wide range of community actors and resources contribute to the delivery of the programmes, as described by parents and staff, with different types of actors involved in different programmes and considerable input from volunteers in programme delivery ranging from churches, farms, supermarkets, cafes, musicians, cinemas, artists, beaches, gardens, countryside, community justice, sporting groups, volunteers and many others.

Staff and volunteers expressed particular pride at the diversity of community actors involved and the way partners had worked together. Parents explained that the programmes reinforced a sense of community, 'family' and coming together, building on a sense of community pride that already existed.

'I appreciate it's not the best area, it's got a reputation, but there's nothing wrong with this place. I couldn't ask for a better place. This (the programme) has just topped it off.' (Parent)

'I'm grateful our community came together and helped us and let us be part of the summer programme' (Parent)

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'It is a community thing – I meet people here and then I can stop and have a conversation in the street, a blether not just nod and say hello...It brings the community together... it's so valuable, good what folks have done.' (Parent/Volunteer)

'A highlight was how each partner agencies worked together' (CLD Staff member)

When asked directly, parents, volunteers and staff identified some opportunities to engage more community actors and assets in programme delivery, most of which were sporting and outdoors resources described above and in detail in Appendix 2.

Parents and staff also expressed a significant impact of the programme was bringing together members of communities that might not otherwise mix including families from different areas, income levels and ages, breaking down barriers between sections of communities.

'It's good for community – it brings together people from across the town.... Last year it was just X, now from all town. They see others from other schools.' (Parent Group)

'It is not stereotypical – all types of parents come.' (Parent)

The other highlight I would say is that all the church volunteers and a significant proportion of attending parents... each group commented on how the preconceptions of the other group had been absolutely destroyed. They were saying 'What a wonderful bunch of people. What a great vibe.' (CLD Staff member)

'There is a wide mixture of activities and wide range of people coming – single parents, families, grandparents, and friends. People don't know each other, and people come from outside... Parents from PTA are involved as participants so it is a really good mix. It is really good this year.' (Volunteer)

Volunteers are a major asset to the programmes, with all of the programmes having at least one volunteer, contributing a wide range of roles to support and enable the delivery of the programme. Some of the volunteers have been heavily involved in the programme, shaping its development since its inception. Volunteers had a wide range of motivations for participating in the programmes, and derived different benefits. A common theme, was the sense of being part of the community that volunteers felt from contributing. Volunteers explained that volunteering provided an opportunity to get out of the house, to enjoy the company of other volunteers and to see the children enjoying themselves. Some volunteers also saw volunteering as an opportunity to develop confidence, learn, strengthen their CVs and prepare for working.

'I am more confident in myself- being around other people and sharing experiences.... it has got me back into the working role to build up CV for when I do go back' (Parent/Volunteer)

'The volunteers feel very valued by the local community... they were instrumental in the beginning. They see this every year now and they are chuffed. They can see this is something that they did.' (HLN Staff member)

'I like working with kids, I get a lot out of it, see what's going on....I like getting involved with the community.' (Volunteer)

'Sense of community... [community] is worth it... company... to get out of the house' (Volunteers)

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'It is good being with [other volunteers] and put something back in the community and learning stuff.' (Volunteer)

'It has rewards – I can see the children thrive, have fun doing outside activities, and community based.' (Volunteer/ also a staff member)

At some programmes, staff described that older people were very involved in programmes delivery, whilst at other programmes, volunteers expressed that there were more opportunities to integrate age groups at the programmes through for example bringing together groups for the elderly with the programmes.

'It's good for me, especially at my age, getting older... I think some of the children like someone like a grandmother.' (Volunteer)

'All of the café volunteers were older. We have photos of every single one of them holding a baby. Mums were like 'brilliant' and off they went.' (CLD Staff member)

'There is a volunteer group with the elderly. [It would be good to have] a group with the elderly to mingle with the kids. It's difficult to persuade them to come in. Some of the elderly don't have families.' (Parent/Volunteer)

Parents expressed a desire for even greater involvement, particularly in volunteer roles. The over-riding suggestion was to simply ask and encourage parents if they would like to get more involved, suggesting an opportunity for increasing parent engagement in the programme delivery.

'I didn't know about the volunteering. I didn't know I could help. There is nothing to say come and help. If it wasn't for them saying 'would you like to 'and you can bring your child... [I wouldn't be a volunteer].' (Parent)

'Perhaps parents could pick a day to do something like the drinks or food – but you'd need to consider the health and safety aspect. Some things might not be viable – you need to be trained e.g. the multi-sport, even for the planning. Parents could be asked to come forward with ideas in the first week (an idea hat or idea ball?) that a professional could then take forward.' (Parent)

'There should be rules stating it is self clean. This should be explained to people.' (Parent)

'People with specific skills. But it takes a certain type of person. I couldn't do it, I'd be crippled with anxiety. Athletes, or people who have succeeded. I think parents have skills they could pass on. Ask them maybe. I'm a chef. My neighbour does army training. They could play outside - physical education is a massive part– get them outside, get them running, not getting used to sitting indoors.' (Parent)

'Some parents have no knowledge about looking after children...people think they'll get something wrong or people will look at them funny' (Volunteers)

When asked, some parents and staff felt it was difficult to get involved in the running and planning of the programme, either due to the need to supervise children, being working parents, or due to a perceived lack of skills or confidence.

'Some parents would find it hard because they work' (Parent)

'For parents with so many kids its hard.' (Parent)

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'Everyone's in their own world as a parent.' (Parent)

'I'm quite shy I wouldn't help' (Parent)

Other parents explained that they did feel very involved in the day to day running of the programmes through simply tidying up or helping, and they had informal input into the planning of the programmes and felt a sense of pride in the combined efforts of communities, parents and services to create a successful programme.

'Everyone's pretty involved people have spoken to X individually (about what they'd like included). Everyone just gets involved – pulling out tables. It's a bit of respect back, tidying up.'

'Just keep doing what you're doing. Listen to parents. The parents are asked a lot for input.'

Parents suggested, when asked directly, several ways parents could become more involved in programme planning including, informal focus groups over a meal and small working groups.

'maybe a group chat on facebook - I think people say what they think more on facebook.' (Parents)

'10 minutes in a room next year to ask parents to volunteer their ideas – think they would be interested.' (Parents)

Night time meetings? Like a curry night/pizza night? (Parents)

Wellbeing and Family relationships

Parents commented that it gave them something to look forward to. It also offers variety and breaks the week up, helping to counter or prevent boredom. Some parents also commented that it is also valuable in socialising children who are due to go to nursery.

'he knows the group is on, it's something he looks forward to and breaks the week up.' (Parent)

'It's only me and her. I don't work. It's something to look forward to over the summer.' (Parent)

'I come because it is fun. She (my daughter) gets bored at home and needs constant playing with and I find this hard' (Galashiels parent 1)

'It has made them less bored – getting them together, tiring them out. Especially in the bad weather' (Hawick Parent 3)

'It's good for socialising, normally groups stop for summer – little one is going to nursery after summer. It's good for her to be around a big group.' (Parent)

The programme's makes children happy. The most common word illustrated on the children's graffiti wall at Galashiels in response to 'how does coming to the programme make you feel?' was 'happy'. Parents and volunteers also expressed joy at observing the children happy.

'It gives me the experience of seeing kids doing something they enjoy' (Parent)

'seeing my wee boy happy' Parent Group (in response to a question on what he gets out of the programme as a parent)

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'It has rewards – I can see the children thrive, have fun doing outside activities, and its community based.' (Volunteer)

Parents also explained that family relationships were improved through participation in the programmes for example through getting out the house, giving parents time to do something with the children, creating an opportunity to do something together as a family and improved child behaviour.

'They are young – I was just talking to one of their grandparents – she said that out of the home environment they are better behaved – so different in this setting. (Volunteer)

'I would say it's improved their behaviour' (Parent)

'I actually think it has brought us all closer – they understand they have to listen' (Parent)

'Me and my partner are getting along – with me not in the house constantly under his feet. It has brought us closer.' (Parent)

'As a family, we are here doing something together. Usually mum and dad would be doing something separately...or dad would be away.' (Parent)

Connection to services and routine

Parents commented that the closure of other 'groups' over the holiday creates a change in people's routine and the loss of places for children to go. An impact of the programme reported by parents, is that children benefitted from a routine offered by attending the programme,

'It also gives her routine/ is the same place as the nursery.' (Parent)

'It gets us in a routine, going out to see people.' (Parent)

'Parents saying summers a really long time, and the routine just melts away over the summer.' (CLD Staff member)

'Coming to the school is positive – it is a positive environment, it gives them routine, it is familiar, it makes them think of coming to school in a positive way' (Parent)

Parent's appreciated that attending the programme enabled them to be connected to services and professional support, this was identified as a significant impact of the programme, despite not significantly featuring in previous research on challenges faced by families over the holidays or evaluations of holiday programmes, suggesting this is particularly valued aspect of the programmes in Borders. Explanations of the benefits varied but included: keeping in touch with the school and early years centre; finding out about NHS services and finding out about other community groups.

'Helps them know what is going on in the early years (centre).' (Parent)

'Seeing teachers is a better relationship. Its beneficial.' (Parent)

'Childsmile – has been good for parents - It has given them more knowledge of what they didn't know. Sometimes they come to school, but the kids don't pass this on.' (Parent Group)

I've found out (at the programme) about the redbull cafe – twice a month – so I can go and meet people there too. (Parent Group)

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'There are quite a few groups like cooking on a budget – I'm going to go along to them. X's going to keep me in the loop.' (Parent Group)

'From a professional school point of view, it helps to keep in contact over the summer, and they can talk to you about issues – provides a support service. I can have a relationship (with the children) not a break where I don't see them, so I am up to date.' (Volunteer/also a staff member)

Childcare and working parents – an area for development

Working was raised as a potential barrier to attendance at the programme due to parents being exhausted. However, in contrast, some parents attending were working parents and had described how they had just finished a night shift and come straight to the programme so their children could participate in activities, before they had to go to sleep to prepare for their next shifts.

'Both my partner and I are working it is good to come up to the school - I've been working since 5am' (Parent)

'It's focussed on families on the dole, but there are also families on low income- families that are working. A packed lunch is good.... I've just come off a night shift and come straight here. My wife works until one so when I go home I'll have a rest and be back to work tonight.' (Parent)

Whilst no parents suggested that childcare should be an element of the programme to facilitate working, some staff and some parents suggested that childcare, particularly of young children might be a barrier to attendance at programmes. Parents also raised that grandparents in the role of caregiver, whilst parents are working, may not be as aware of the programme, or feel it is open to them thus limiting access to the programme for children of working parents.

'I tried to contact some families at the early years centre. Spoke to some people who didn't come. About 3 families. Their views were the ages of children – had very young babies. One had just had a baby. Would be too much to try to get to the programmes and manage everything. One mum spoke about she didn't have the confidence to come with the different ages.' (HLN Staff member)

'Maybe more than 1 child makes it hard to get out.' (Parent)

Staff and parents suggested that provision of a crèche or childcare within activities (e.g. the live borders sessions) at the programmes might benefit parents variously through allowing parents the chance to relax with friends; to spend time with other children also participating at the programme; to allow parents the opportunity to participate in adult learning and development.

'Crèche for part of the sessions especially for the younger ones – so we can play with the older ones. Can be a bit of a problem, Especially when you can't get involved. -just a little part of the session.' (Parent)

'its a great thing for the kids. Should do a crèche to give the adults a quick half hour to themselves.' (Parent)

'Its some time for them to blow off some steam. But I'm busy with the baby.'

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'If there were a crèche in place, the opportunities would be limitless. Crèche could happen whilst parents are getting accreditation... not detracting or taking away from what is already in existence... allowing adult learning to happen.' (CLD Staff member)

'Live borders were really keen for the child to be left. That left some parents hanging around – what do they do? We provided a space for them to use. There's potential to do a range of different things in a big chunk of time.' (HLN Staff member)

Despite the programme not offering childcare per se, parents did express that a significant benefit of the programme was that they didn't have to worry about their children, as someone else was usually looking out for them, either a staff member, an older child, or other parent. This offered an opportunity to relax a bit, and enjoy adult conversation with other parents, offering parents respite and improving their wellbeing.

'It gives us a break. It's somebody else's problem – the older kids look after him so we don't worry about him so much.' (Parent)

'Everyone looks out for each other. If you lose your kids (at the programme) someone else looks out for them.' (Parent)

'It gives my 5 minutes to myself even to feed the baby' (Parent)

Availability and access to programmes

Parents identified that families might not participate in programmes for example if they lived far from the programmes, and didn't have access transport, potentially limiting the benefits for children in families with a low income living outside the locations where the holiday programmes are offered.

'Previously I couldn't afford bus travel previously as we were on benefits. This is an issue. If you can't afford to get there it is sad because there are lots of opportunities. Now I can afford it as my husband has a job.' (Parent)

'My area has nothing whatsoever for us. Thankfully I can drive.' (Parent)

'I know some people will like to be picked up and dropped off.' (CLD Staff member)

In addition to expanding geographical reach, parents highlighted that there is scope to expand holiday programmes further, although there were not strong themes arising from the comments which included increasing the frequency to more than one day (for one programme) to offering programmes in other holidays too.

'More than 1 day would be good. You don't get play groups these days. Been good that it's been every week.' (Parent)

'thank you – it would be good if it was on in October too.' (Parent)

'There is no programme in Easter, so you are not going anywhere, and it is raining.' (Parent)

Programmes are greatly valued

With parents commenting on the good staff, friendly atmosphere, all the toys, the locations and the variety of activities.

The activities we do I thought it was amazing and the food, especially for free. (Parent)

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'You can come with your child, there's so much to do. Everything is here for you... Its been so good' (Parent)

'It is really really good. A lot better than I thought it would be. I didn't expect all the snacks.' (Parent)

'Its wonderful. Everyone is friendly. Enjoyed the food and the company. Its been really enjoyable.' (Parent)

'It's really good, a lot of work goes into it.' (Volunteer)

Discussion

Whilst there is a body of research on the 'costs' of the summer holidays for low income family, there is less available research on 'what works' to mitigate some of the challenges faced by low income families over this period, this makes designing policies and programmes that are effective challenging.

This evaluation is useful because it brings together insights from people closest to the local programmes including families, volunteers and staff, on the programmes' impacts and how they can be strengthened, based on personal experiences and observations. The evaluation also aims to ensure that knowledge and decisions about community based programmes are generated and informed by local communities, particularly those with direct knowledge of the programmes, and to ensure that future holiday programmes can draw on the available 'assets' in the community in their delivery.

Social isolation can affect both children and parents over the summer. Closure of nurseries, play groups and other services can reduce play opportunities, exacerbate social isolation and stress associated with parenting. Difficulties feeding extra children, or concern about the home are barriers to friends coming over³. Through facilitating a welcoming friendly environment which promotes social interaction and community mixing for both parents and children, the holiday programmes in the Borders are playing a significant role in mitigating social isolation and promoting social integration. This impact is particularly significant for lone parents, parents of children and parents with mental health problems for whom holiday times can also create particular challenges⁴, who expressed that the holiday programme had helped them to overcome or mitigate some of the challenges they experience.

However, efforts should be made to address the concerns and fears that non-attending families may have about the programmes, which could deter attendance, thus reinforcing social isolation. The programmes should be actively promoted as social, welcoming places for parents to enjoy a coffee and adult conversation. Paerents who are unsure or lack confidence to attend should be supported to attend. A first time or 'try it out' session could help encourage attendance. Parents of children with additional needs are also known to face challenges over holidays, and there appear to be opportunities to strengthen the programmes to ensure they are accessible, and promoted to children with additional support needs, where appropriate, which should be explored.

There are marked inequalities in children's participation in fun and enriching activities over the summer holidays⁵. Parents highlighted that there were limited affordable alternative local activities available for children apart from the holiday programmes, indicating that programmes

³ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018)

⁴ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018)

⁵ Stewart, H., Watson, N. and Campbell, M. (2018).

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are meeting a significant need for summer holiday enriching activities and mitigating unequal access to these activities over the summer. Early years are a crucial time for child development and also the key age group who are provided with free school meals which cease over the summer, justifying the provision for this age group. However, we know adolescence is also a crucial time for development and need to consider how gaps in availability of enriching activities for young people could be addressed better in the community.

Lengthy holidays can contribute to family conflict with families spending extended periods together. Children may struggle without the routine of school or nursery and parents may struggle to get a break⁶. Feedback from parents, demonstrates the positive impact of the programmes on family relationships and child wellbeing.

Food insecurity and poor diet are a significant risk for children from low income families over the summer, due to an interplay of factors including low income and welfare cuts exacerbated by absence of school meals. Parent's comments indicate that the programmes contribute to mitigating food insecurity and child poverty amongst low income families attending the programmes through the provision of a low cost healthy breakfast and a free of charge lunch each day of operation. A further benefit is the effective promotion of healthy eating amongst attending families. The programme's successes of co-providing food and activities is consistent with other research that has suggested that the provision of fun and enriching activities alongside the provision of healthy food, can be an effective approach to address the needs of children without the stigma associated with free food provision⁷ The programmes have adopted sensitive approaches to promoting uptake of food, countering negative narratives around free food provision.

Families with a low-income are at risk of extended periods of inactivity over the summer holiday. Parent feedback provides evidence that the existence of the programme motivates families to get out of the house, and through structured physical and stimulating activities and unstructured play, the programme reduces sedentary behaviour for participating children helping them to relax and sleep. Only a few parents explicitly described physical activity opportunities as a driver for participation, but benefits associated with participating in physical activity including children 'letting off steam' and 'running about' were described as important impacts of the programme.

Summer learning loss in UK is an under-researched area but evidence from the US suggests that in term-time children learn at similar rates, but on returning to school after the summer children from families with a low-income have typically fallen weeks or months behind peers from higher income groups as measured on standardised tests before and after the holiday period⁸. The impacts of the programmes on child development described by parents, including improved speech and confidence, are all potentially factors that could indicate that the programme is contributing to mitigating summer learning loss. However, participants did not provide any significant insights into how the programme affected learning of particular subjects such as mathematics or reading. Some parents indicated that more fun learning activities would be beneficial, indicating this could be an area for future development.

Holidays can contribute to financial pressures, including food costs, fuel costs, costs for activities or transport in the absence of school and after school clubs⁹. Parents comments in relation to free of charge and low cost foods and activities, demonstrate that the programme is successful in easing financial pressures for some families and contributing to reducing child poverty through this reduction in outgoings.

⁶ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018)

⁷ Stewart, H., Watson, N. and Campbell, M. (2018).

⁸ Stewart, H., Watson, N. and Campbell, M. (2018).

⁹ Stewart, H., Watson, N. and Campbell, M. (2018).

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Additional childcare costs over the summer holiday can also place additional financial burdens on families over the summer holidays¹⁰. Parents can find it unaffordable to work due to these costs¹¹, this could be a barrier to full-time employment of mothers, perpetuating low family income. It is hypothesised that holiday programmes could play a role in supporting parents to work over the summer¹². The programmes in the Borders require parents or a carer to attend with the child, so do not provide direct child care, and in that way do not directly support parents to work. Provision of childcare as part of the programme is an area for consideration in the design of future programmes, for reasons proposed by parents and staff (to allow parent education, to allow time with older children, to allow parents respite) and also as an opportunity to support parent employment. However, these benefits should be balanced against the benefits associated with family participation in programmes described above.

Improved community cohesion is a reported benefit of holiday programmes and this was also evident in the Border's programmes, highlighting the important role of the programmes in strengthening community resilience and social integration. Research indicates that integrating interaction between older people and children could add considerable co-benefits for younger and older age groups and is a potential area for development¹³. This was also suggested by volunteers involved in programme delivery and should be considered.

Whilst programmes have undoubtedly had a significant impact for families who have participated, it is significant that parents highlighted that many families are unable to access programmes due to geographical and transport barriers to access, also recognised in the Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018). In the Borders, the SBC Child Poverty Index illustrates that there are families in poverty in each intermediate zone, and each locality has a proportion of children who experience greater poverty, indicating the dispersed distribution of child poverty in the Borders¹⁴. The remoteness and rurality of the Borders further exacerbates this, consequently many children are still unable to access programmes, and these families are perhaps most likely to also be disadvantaged by a lack of local activities in their areas. Expanding geographical locations of the programme might be one solution to addressing this, as might providing transport for families to attend central locations.

Whilst the programme has contributed to reducing food insecurity, providing access to enriching activities, reducing financial pressures and other benefits, the scale of impact of the programme in some locations is constrained by its frequency, with some programmes operating only once per week and all programmes only operating during the summer holidays and not in other holidays when families with a low income face similar challenges. To contribute more significantly to reducing the challenges faced by families over the summer, particularly with regards to food insecurity, the frequency of holiday provision would need to be increased to meet needs. However there do appear to be some benefits associated with holiday programmes not running every day of the week, particularly as parents attending programmes with fewer days of operation commented that the programme gives families and children something to look forward to in the week. Further consultation with parents might elicit what would be a good balance of provision, and allow efficient allocation of resources across programmes.

The findings in this evaluation are broadly consistent with the findings from evaluations of other programmes, and demonstrate emphatically how they are addressing the identified

¹⁰ Stewart, H., Watson, N. and Campbell, M. (2018).

¹¹ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018)

¹² Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018)

¹³ Stanford Centre on Longevity (2016).

¹⁴ NHS Borders (2019) Scottish Borders Child Poverty Action Plan

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needs of low income families in the Borders¹⁵. The successes of programmes in introducing children and parents to new healthy foods, promoting family relationships and child and parent wellbeing, and the value of volunteer involvement for volunteers and communities, appear to be relatively unique benefits identified for the Borders. The evaluation has also highlighted possible opportunities to promote attendance by families and has established a wide range of areas to strengthen programmes further, through an asset based approach.

The findings of the evaluation indicate delivering holiday programmes in the way that they are delivered in the Borders is aligned strategically with, and contributing to achieving Scottish Government Public Health Priorities, Scottish Borders Director of Public Health Report, the Scottish Borders' Children and Young People's plan and Child Poverty Action Plans.

Recommendations

These recommendations are derived from the input by parents, volunteers and staff.

- 1. Promote holiday programmes to increase attendance by non-attending families, particularly through a Facebook strategy and posters in key locations. The benefits of programmes should be promoted in publicity materials and all caregivers should be made to feel welcome, including grandparents.**
 - a. A strategy should be developed to promote the existence of the programme on facebook not just through early years centre's posts but crucially through re-sharing by staff, families, volunteers and other community organisations. The activities available on each day, and the timings, should be clearly advertised to all families and children who may benefit from these activities, together with photos of families participating.
 - b. Posters in key locations frequented by families who would most benefit from the programme should supplement facebook advertising and bag drops.
 - c. Ensure holiday programmes are promoted as welcoming, friendly, places, open to all; for parents to have a coffee and meet new people and have someone to talk to. Programmes should be promoted as a place where children can interact, play, participate in a variety of activities and let off some steam as these are qualities of the programme that are particularly valued by parents.
 - d. Consider ways to promote the programme to grandparents who are caregivers over the holidays.

- 2. Expand the delivery of holiday programmes to address unmet need e.g. access for families in rural areas; families with children with additional support needs; families in areas where programmes are infrequent and older children.**
 - a. Address the holiday needs of families living in parts of the Borders beyond the central programme locations. Transport requirements should be considered as part of holiday programme provision.
 - b. Review and, where appropriate, extend the frequency of programme provision across the four programmes, in summer and other holidays where food insecurity and access to enriching activities could result in particular challenges to families.
 - c. Address the holiday needs of families and children with additional support needs including promoting programmes that already exists to meet these needs through the Summer Holiday programmes
 - d. Review how the holiday needs of older children and their families could be addressed over the holidays either within the programme, or as a separate provision, including promoting programmes that already exists to meet these needs through the Summer Holiday programmes.

¹⁵ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2018); Forsey, A. (2018); Welsh Local Government Association (2016).

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- 3. Promote and provide healthy food and activities alongside one another, to reduce food insecurity with dignity, whilst promoting healthy diets and reducing food waste.**
 - a. Work with community actors to ensure availability of free of charge fruits and vegetables and other foods to take home.
 - b. As far as possible ensure food provision is environmentally friendly, reduces food waste and promotes a healthy diet, and ensure that families and communities are aware of these positive benefits.

- 4. Adapt local programmes to address the needs identified by parents including making all activities accessible to girls and boys, addressing the gendered preferences towards particular activities; expanding the range of physical activities offered; increasing fun learning activities.**
 - a. Recognise the popularity of the sports, crafts and messy activities, including and in addition to outdoor activities, when designing future programme timetables.
 - a. Consider what can be done to make craft activities more attractive to boys e.g. building type activities, involving men's sheds.
 - b. Expand the range of sporting activities offered including sports more accessible for girls, considering local assets in the community e.g. rugby clubs, football club, gymnastics clubs etc.
 - c. Increase fun learning activities to address summer learning loss/ attainment gap and support children with holiday homework.

- 5. Continue to work closely with and make use of existing 'assets' in communities, in the delivery of programmes including parents and family friends with particular skills and older people. And through the programmes, seek to connect communities to services and resources in their communities**
 - a. Use holiday programmes to promote other services that might benefit families with a low income, with mental health problems or who are socially isolated.
 - b. Consider how elderly groups could be included in the delivery of the programme to promote inter-generational activities.
 - c. Parents with skills that could benefit in the holiday programme for example, sport or cookery should be identified and supported to volunteer, and offered capacity building opportunities where they feel that they don't have sufficient skills to share their knowledge.

- 6. Promote parent involvement in holiday programmes including day to day helping, volunteering and planning**
 - a. Put in place a mechanism for community members and parents to be consistently and formally involved in the planning of holiday programmes, as equal partners e.g. through a planning committee held over a community meal.
 - b. Actively request parents to help informally with day to day activities from cleaning up after themselves and children for example through posters and encouraging parents politely and setting expectations at the beginning of holidays and reinforcing this.
 - c. The opportunity to volunteer to help with the day to day running of the programme should be promoted to parents, when additional volunteers would help to improve the quality or capacity of the programme, either by asking directly or on Facebook. The reported benefits of volunteering should be emphasised when discussing volunteering.

- 7. Review the benefits and disbenefits of providing a crèche/ childcare to support adult learning, time with older children and as an opportunity to support parents to work**

Conclusion

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Our research with these groups has found that the Border's holiday programmes deliver an impressive range of positive impacts for children and also for parents and communities. The programmes address many of the needs identified in previous research on the challenges generated by holidays for families with a low income. Programmes are also highly valued by participating families.

The programmes play a significant role in addressing food insecurity, providing enriching activities for children and promoting child development, reducing social isolation and increasing family wellbeing and community cohesion. By consequence they are contributing to reducing or mitigating inequalities in the Borders and are well aligned with related NHS Borders, Scottish Borders Councils and National strategies.

A number of opportunities for strengthening the programme have been identified by parents, volunteers, children and staff, some of which go beyond the auspices of the holiday programme, requiring more strategic consideration and some of which will need to attract additional funding to be delivered. As child poverty and families facing challenges over summer holidays are geographically dispersed across the Borders, priorities must be to seek to address non-attendance by families, and to reduce inequalities in access to holiday programmes for families that live far from the locations where programmes are delivered, to ensure the benefits of the programmes are not concentrated on the currently participating families but have a Borders wide impact.

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Appendix 1. Question guide adapted for interviews with parents, staff and volunteers

1. Can you tell me a bit about which activities you come to and why you come? (how many sessions have you been to/ how often do you come?)
2. And can you tell me a bit about what your child and you get out of it? What sort of an impact has it had?
3. What do you like about the activities – what is good? (for child/parent)
4. What could we improve? What would make the programme better for you/ your child?
5. Are there other things in the community we could make better use of in the programmes e.g. skills, groups, organisations, places?
6. Can you tell me what you think about how we could get parents and community members more involved in the programme e..g helping, organising, volunteering?
7. Can you tell me a bit about what you think stops some families from coming to the programme?
8. Do you have any other comments or feedback about the programme?

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Appendix 2. Suggested assets and activities to include in future programmes

Parents suggested a range of assets and activities that programmes could make more use of ranging from sports, outside activities and day trips, creative and food based activities, activities for children with additional support needs, learning opportunities and other community assets. The box below describes all these suggestions.

<p>Sport and physical activities available in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athletics - Touch Rugby - Multi-courts - Sport other than live borders - Rounders outdoors - Football - Gymnastics - Taekwondo - Dance - Boxing - Swimming 	<p>Creative and food activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ride on toys - Making parachutes - Building things - More messy activities - More cooking - More arts and crafts 	<p>Other community assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get the men sheds involved - People in the community with specific skills - Parents with specific skills e.g. summer are chefs - Get other groups involved e.g. older peoples - Doing something for the carnival
<p>Green assets: outside activities/ day trips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting outside - Day trips to parks 	<p>Activities for children with additional support needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More sensory activities 	<p>Learning opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Homework club - Number club - Anti-bullying session before returning to school