

HAF Worcestershire Annual Report 2024-25

Worcestershire County Council
Prepared by Sutton Croft – Commissioned Service Provider

Introduction

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is a Department for Education (DfE) funded initiative which provides eligible children and young people with enriching activities and free meals during the three main school holidays.

The HAF programme is primarily aimed at children and young people attending school years Reception through to, and including, Year 11, who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals (FSM).

There is allowance for children and young people who, though may not be eligible for benefits-related FSM, will benefit from support of the HAF programme providers – this may be linked to financial vulnerability or family circumstances.

The key deliverables for the HAF programme are:

- Free meals are included in all provision with priority toward hot meals.
- Enriching activities are included in the programme design, ensuring children and young people have fun during the holidays, can maintain social input, access a range of exciting and enjoyable opportunities and explore new interests, whilst further developing skills, knowledge and confidence.
- Free childcare for working families and/or to reduce pressure on families through respite.

The Aim of HAF

The aim of the programme is to reduce the pressure for families during school holidays, by offering free access to a wide range of clubs that deliver exciting, engaging and varied programmes alongside nutritional meals and further family support – that may include signposting to other council services, such as financial advice, accessing SEND support, safeguarding or other children's services.

Research has shown that children from low-income families are:

- Less likely to access organised out-of-school activities
- More likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health
- More like to experience social isolation

In response to this, the DfE established the HAF programme to ensure children and young people countrywide can:

- Maintain a healthy level of physical activity in a fun, stimulating environment

- Receive healthy, nutritious meals that may otherwise be missed where low-income households may be struggling with cost of living
- Make new friends, try new activities, develop new skills and interests
- Improve wellbeing and social confidence
- Return to school feeling energised, focussed and engaged for continued learning

Our Delivery Approach

Since 2021, Worcestershire County Council has worked in partnership with Sutton Croft Ltd to deliver the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme. As the appointed service delivery provider, Sutton Croft has led the programme's management and administration each year, playing a key role in its ongoing development and improvement.

The HAF programme in Worcestershire continues to evolve in response to the needs of children, young people, and their families. By working closely with a broad range of partners - including holiday club providers, schools, charities, community and youth groups, family hubs, SEND teams, and other local agencies - we deliver an inclusive, diverse, and flexible offer.

Through detailed provision mapping, needs assessment, collaborative planning and a strong focus on quality assurance, the Worcestershire HAF programme offers a rich variety of activities. These support healthy lifestyles through physical activity, provide nutritious meals and promote informal learning and personal development.

Our provision continues to grow and adapt - guided by the voices of children, families, and delivery partners, as well as emerging trends, new providers and the changing socio-economic context across the county. We are proud to work with a dedicated network of trusted providers, many of whom have supported the HAF programme since its inception. Their deep local knowledge and relationships with families, schools, and communities enable us to co-design meaningful, responsive provision that delivers the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

2024 Highlights

- £1,426,163 spent on face-to-face provision
- 31,592 places offered
- By winter 2024, approximately 4400 FSM children and young people were signed up and approved on our booking website – 27% of all Worcestershire pupils known to be eligible for benefits related free school meals.
- Average days attended per child increased each holiday period (compared to 2023) – for example, at summer 2024 CYP attended on average 6.2 days compared to 2.6 in 2023.
- The proportion of secondary-aged children attending either stayed the same or increased each holiday period compared to 2023. For example, in winter 2024 30% of children were secondary-aged, compared to 13% in 2023.

- 40% of children attending HAF in 2024 attended multiple holiday periods. The continued participation by Worcestershire families demonstrates our commitment to a high-quality and reliable programme, which effectively supports and fulfils local needs.
- Activities on offer included theatre and performing arts, swimming sessions, music, dance, sports, arts and crafts, animal care, equestrian, STEM, home economics, cookery, educational visits, forest school, trips, coding and programming, water sports, outdoor pursuits, SEND sessions, multi-activity, and youth groups.

Easter 2024 Highlights

- £241,916 spent on face-to-face provision
- 54 holiday club providers
- 4607 holiday club places offered
- 81% of places offered were attended
- 2942 places were attended by primary-aged children
- 776 places were attended by secondary-aged children
- On average, each child attended 1.8 days of provision
- 2113 unique children supported by HAF
- 357 children with SEND supported by HAF
- 84% of children were primary-aged
- 16% of children were secondary-aged

Summer 2024 Highlights

- £947,977 spent on face-to-face provision
- 66 holiday club providers
- 20,970 holiday club places offered
- 69% of places offered were attended
- 12,211 places were attended by primary-aged children
- 2238 places were attended by secondary-aged children
- On average, each child attended 6.2 days of provision
- 2349 unique children supported by HAF
- 556 children with SEND supported by HAF
- 81% of children were primary-aged
- 19% of children were secondary-aged

Winter 2024 Highlights

- £236,269 spent on face-to-face provision
- 33 holiday club providers
- 6015 holiday club places offered
- 70% of places offered were attended
- 3245 places were attended by primary-aged children
- 955 places were attended by secondary-aged children

- On average, each child attended 2.6 days of provision
- 1639 unique children supported by HAF
- 410 children with SEND supported by HAF
- 70% of children were primary-aged
- 30% of children were secondary-aged

How We Deliver HAF

Worcestershire's HAF programme is determined by two key factors – FSM data and parent/carer/Child and young person feedback. Provision mapping enables us to plot potential providers against the highest areas of FSM, to ensure the spread and reach of all provision meets with the local needs of those accessing.

Our heat maps lead our review of geographical reach alongside quality of provision, number of places available, type of activities offered, support for SEND families and other target groups, plus value for money and are regularly reviewed with as part of the delivery model.

Steering Group

Our steering group comprises key members from within the community, including district leads, provider representations and Public Health. Early Help is represented through the Worcestershire County Council.

Review meetings allow us to discuss the HAF programme – understanding strengths, areas for improvement, key successes and achievements and develop further plans to boost reach and engagement.

We map provision against need, consider any geographical gaps and work collaboratively to bolster the offers and opportunities available, both for families who access and providers who may be looking to support or grow the HAF programme. We have well established relationships with providers and an ongoing commitment to making the HAF Programme inclusive and accessible for all, working in collaboration with other services across Worcestershire to support SEND families.

Further support is given to funding reviews, quality assessment of provision, promotion and raising awareness through community connections, support groups and schools.

Feedback Monitoring

Parent/carer/child and young person feedback surveys issued after each holiday period gives significant insight into the success of HAF delivery – we're able to understand what works, what doesn't and learn from our findings to shape the next holiday delivery and implement improvements measures where necessary. In particular we ask our families to rate the range of provision on offer, including type of activities, location and accessibility and quality of provision, to include ease of booking, communication with the HAF team and providers, quality of provision staffing and meals offered.

This also assists our longer-term objectives and supports us in establishing strong community links and influence, with a focus on HAF legacy and sustainability for youth provision across the county.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we work closely with our community partners to ensure our HAF offer is diverse and inclusive of a wide range of needs for children and young people across Worcestershire.

You Said, We Did...

In response to parent/carers and CYP feedback, we share this learning with the steering group and key stakeholders, to inform and determine our objectives for each holiday period.

We have expanded provision in rural areas to reduce isolation risk, there has been an increase in family-friendly activity programmes to boost accessibility and support connecting families to wider support agencies in the community. We have increased the number of providers able to support children with SEND including specialist SEND. We have worked on a focused plan with youth groups to provide a more bespoke teenage offer, recognising their needs are different to young children, whilst maintaining the HAF values and bolstering commitment to the activities.

Quality Assurance

We use the DfE quality framework to ensure all of our partners deliver provision that meets, or exceeds, standards. Careful monitoring, site visits by the HAF team and self-assessment ratings against the framework through provider reporting safeguards our HAF values and ensures the highest standards of care, safety and quality are achieved for all families throughout.

All holiday club providers are assessed each holiday period against quality standards. Winter 2024 average provider ratings below:

- Food offer rated excellent
- Signposting and referrals rated good
- Accessibility and inclusion rated good
- Physical activity rated good
- Enriching activity rated excellent

Parent Feedback

Winter 2024 survey snapshot:

- 83% of parent/carers said HAF positively impacted their child's wellbeing
- 88% of parent/carers said their CYP enjoyed winter HAF
- 84% of parent/carers said they would use HAF in the future
- 92% of parent/carers whose families attended days out at winter, rated their experience as 'Excellent' or 'Very good'

Comments from parents and carers:

- 'HAF has had such an impact on our lives – I can go to work knowing my child is having fun with new friends & exploring new interests that I just couldn't support without the help & support it offers us.'
- 'HAF has been so valuable to so many young people and their families! And given so many young people opportunities they otherwise wouldn't be able to do for so many various reasons.'
- 'He really enjoyed it - this was at a time when he was really struggling with anxiety and refusing to attend school. He has some autistic traits and the staff/instructor were all very patient with him. It was so good to see him volunteer to go somewhere away from home and have him come home happy, and a relief for me at such a stressful time, too.'
- 'He's much more outgoing and seems to have some ADHD tendencies so it's great that he has somewhere to burn off energy with friends. He is also quite anxious about school at the moment- year 6 sats and moving up - so it's good that he has somewhere with no pressure that he can just enjoy.'
- 'My daughter is being assessed for autism and can find it hard to get involved in activities without a family member there. HAF provision has given her the confidence and support to allow her this level of independence. HAF opportunities were varied and fun and allowed us the peace of mind that our daughter would be engaged and well taken of.'

Case Study: Malvern Cube Projects

I am writing to express my heartfelt thanks for the wonderful activities you provided over the Easter half term. My daughter was able to attend the Cotswold Wildlife Park trip, the Food Bank, Youth Café, and Water World sessions— and she had such a fantastic time.

The half-term period can be particularly difficult due to the lack of routine, which is very important to her as she is autistic. Having structured, enjoyable activities to look forward to helped ease that disruption significantly.

My daughter struggles at school and socially with peers, but thanks to the inclusive and supportive environment you offer, her confidence is growing, and she is starting to form real friendships. It's been amazing to see this progress, and I truly believe it's been made possible by the safe spaces and excellent understanding support your youth workers provide.

As a parent, it's incredibly reassuring to know that she is safe, well supported, and thriving when she's with you. I'm genuinely grateful for the opportunities you've given her, and I hope the valuable work you do continues for a long time to come.

- Written by HAF Parent

Case Study: Lakeside Campus

This summer I wanted to offer children a different perspective on utilising green space and being in the outdoors. Alongside the 15 activities we already offer here at Lakeside which include water sports: kayaking, SUP, canoe. We also have the newest addition to our site which is a 10m aerial tower which includes abseil, leap of faith, big zip and climbing. With many of our children and young people attending our site each holiday, we wanted to offer an opportunity to experience other activities and educational experiences in the outdoors. So, this year we had the new aspect of holiday club which was the incorporation of workshops. We welcomed DSMBC and the RSPB who delivered workshops to children where they experienced controlling a model boat, dissect owl pellets, leaf rubbing and making bird feeders.

I believe we have started the journey of including additional workshops into our holiday club programme, and now I would like to capitalise on the project and include more as a weekly part.

The children thoroughly engaged with new opportunities and even the volunteers delivering the workshops were taken back by how enthusiastic and focussed the children and young people were.

- Written by Samantha Petchey, Campus Supervisor / Outdoor Activity Instructor

Case Study: YMCA Worcestershire

This Easter, as part of our Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme, we had the pleasure of welcoming a new participant who we hadn't previously engaged with. Before the programme commenced, we had conversations with her PGs, who shared that their young person struggled with anxiety. They had said that typically their young person would refuse to partake in programmes and events like this due to their anxiety, but had agreed on this occasion to give it a go.

On their first day of attendance, they arrived early, providing our team with the opportunity to introduce them to the staff and familiarise them with the venue. The young person expressed anxiety about leaving their parents and the unfamiliarity of the environment. We assured them that our staff were available for support and that they could contact their parents if needed.

After a hesitant goodbye, they joined the main youth room and engaged in activities with the staff. Although they felt more at ease with the staff, they remained apprehensive about interacting with the other young people. However, they demonstrated their willingness to participate by supporting the team with various tasks for the day, such as setting up activities and managing the drinks station.

As the day progressed, we witnessed a gradual transformation in the young person. They began to grow more comfortable and confident in their surroundings. They even started

initiating interactions with other young people without requiring any prompting or support from the staff, marking a significant shift from their initial demeanour.

Upon leaving that day, they were beaming with enjoyment, having made friends and embraced the activities. PGs were thrilled by the progress witnessed. Encouraged by this positive experience, the young person continued attending for the next two days, each time growing more confident and at ease with their surroundings.

By the conclusion of the programme, they had developed a newfound sense of belonging and confidence. They cherished the experiences and memories made during their time with us. Empowered by the supportive environment and connections formed with the staff, the young person expressed a desire to further engage with YMCA Worcestershire.

As a result, we directed them to our Monday Youth Club in Redditch, where they have since attended every session with enthusiasm. They have seamlessly integrated into the group, comfortably engaging with their peers and contributing positively to the community.

- Written by YMCA Worcestershire

Marketing & Comms

Throughout 2024 we utilised a multi-pronged communications strategy to promote HAF, with a focus on targeting less-engaged audience segments.

Schools can be disengaged through confusion and misunderstanding of the HAF programme. We aimed to combat this through email bulletins, offering a responsive communication channel and providing HAF information in easily digestible formats. Ensuring their understanding of HAF is key to accessing more families in need. We also provided schools with marketing packs for sharing with their families and offer site visits to further inform on the HAF programme and provide marketing materials or hand outs where possible.

For families who may otherwise have been unaware of HAF offers, we use in-person customer outreach through community events. This includes introducing the HAF programme to potential users, sharing flyers, offering guidance for signing up and more. More generally, to inform and remind families about HAF, we produced flyers, social media posts, and programme brochures.

HAF Legacy

We work closely with all of our community partners to support the HAF legacy – through the development of sustainable youth provision, improving reach across HAF families and those within vulnerable cohorts and by working with local agencies to ensure children and young people accessing HAF activities use their experience for positive futures – better school attendance, community involvement, personal skills development and encouragement in pursuing interests for onward growth, such as volunteering, young leader schemes and apprenticeships.

Our collective commitment to continuous improvement for our HAF programme ensures we're delivering the best activities for children and young people - that meets their needs and interests through dynamic programming, but also to facilitate support services, signposting and referrals to reduce the everyday challenges that many families face.

Our aims are to:

- Deliver exciting, engaging activities for CYP – creating meaningful memories and celebrating community
- Support families through signposting and information resources – to ease the burden and boost accessibility
- Offer safe, happy, welcoming provision which enables parents/carers to receive or seek the support they need and remove barriers that may otherwise impact mental health and wellbeing.
- Develop programmes to suit and support the growth of 11-16 year olds – a balance of engaging and appealing sessions that also promote life skills, personal development and confidence and opportunity for meaningful employment or interests into young adulthood.

Expenditure

For 2024 HAF, Worcestershire County Council received a grant of £1,647,370 from the Department of Education. This was primarily distributed directly to holiday activity providers for face-to-face provision.

The table below shows the expenditure breakdown of this year's grant. No additional funding from external sources was spent on HAF.

Expenditure	Amount
Face-to-face holiday club provision (including provider costs, holiday club staff, venue costs, activity costs, food/meal costs and other costs directly associated with the provision of free holiday club places directly funded through the HAF programme)	£1,426,162
Remote holiday club provision	N/A
Publicising the scheme to eligible families and other communications	£18,791
Capital expenditure (e.g., catering or sports equipment for clubs)	N/A
Management and administration of the programme by the LA	£164,917
Other costs (e.g., translations, transport, provider staff training, booking systems etc)	£39,300
Total expenditure	£1,649,170

Partners

With the greatest of thanks to all of our providers who deliver the HAF programme – thank you for your continued support, understanding and dedication to delivering the best provision possible for our families across Worcestershire:

- Active Discovery Camps
- Active Youth Outreach Services
- AJB Sports In Education
- All Sorts Of Performing Arts CIC
- Arrow Vale Youth Centre
- Bonterre CIC
- Boughton Park Tennis Club
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Welcome Refugees
- Bromsgrove District & Redditch Borough Councils
- Bromsgrove Independent Design Centre (IDC) CIC
- Bromsgrove Youth & Community Hub
- Chaddesley Corbett Endowed Primary School
- Confi-Kids
- Cranham Primary School
- Cube Youth (Malvern Cube Projects)
- Empower Active CIC
- Energ!se
- Evesham Adventure Playground Association
- Forest Families
- Freedom Leisure
- Happy Healthy Kidz
- Heart of England Forest
- Holy Redeemer Primary School
- Jam Coding Worcestershire/Herefordshire
- Joe's Jungle
- Just Camps Worcester
- KA Kits Academy CIC
- Kidderminster & District Youth Trust
- Kingsleighs Equine Education Centre
- Kitsune Martial Arts Academy
- Kixx Kidderminster
- Lakeside Campus
- Little Oaks Preschool
- Malvern Special Families
- Midland Mencap
- Museums Worcestershire
- Northleigh Primary School
- Offmore Primary School
- P&E Sports
- PAL Fitness & Education CIC

- Palace Theatre
- Pampered Ponies
- Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Club
- Pershore Riverside Centre
- RB Holiday Camps
- Reach CIC
- Redditch United in the Community
- Redditch Youth & Community Enterprise
- Redgate Sports
- Rigby Hall School
- Rubicon Leisure
- Severn Arts
- Shine Out Of School Clubs
- SLM Community Leisure Charitable Trust
- St Barnabas CofE Primary School
- Sunflowers After School and Holiday Club
- The Bugs Group
- The World Outside
- Unity Academy
- University Of Worcester
- Webbs Wychbold
- West Mercia Women's Aid
- Winter Funland Birmingham
- Woodrush Youth & Community Centre
- Worcester Community Trust
- Worcester Snoezelen
- Worcester Theatres Charitable Trust
- Worcestershire Cricket Foundation
- Wyre Forest Leisure Centre
- Wyre Forest Swimming Club
- YMCA Worcestershire
- Young Futures Academy
- Your Ideas
- YSS Worcestershire Young Carers