



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Holiday and Food 2025 Programme annual report

On 8th November 2020, the government announced that the holiday activities and food programme was to be expanded across the whole of England in 2021. The programme has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018, with St Helens receiving initial funding in March 2021.

School holidays can be pressure points for some families because of increased costs (such as food and childcare) and reduced incomes, this has been especially evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. For some children that can lead to a holiday experience gap, with children from disadvantaged families:

- less likely to access organised out-of-school activities.
- more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health.
- more likely to experience social isolation.

Free holiday clubs are a response to this issue and evidence suggests that they can have a positive impact on children and young people and that they work best when they:

- provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities.
- cover more than just breakfast or lunch.
- involve children (and parents) in food preparation.

This holiday provision is for children who are eligible for benefits related free school meals across St Helens and are free at the point of access. Although some holiday clubs should be made available for children who are not eligible to free school meals, who can pay to attend. The Department for Education will consider up to 15% of the funding to provide places for children who are considered to be vulnerable by the local authority.

Aims of the programme.

As a result of this programme, we wanted children who attend this provision to:

- eat more healthily over the school holidays.
- be more active during the school holidays.
- take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of resilience, character and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment.
- be safe and not to be socially isolated.
- have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition.
- be more engaged with school and other local services.

We also want to ensure that the families who participate in this programme:

- develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting.
- are signposted towards other information and support, for example, health, employment, and education.

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, funded by a £753,246 Department for Education (DfE) grant, is targeted at families who have children who are aged 4 – 18 and are in receipt of free school meals children or who are considered to be vulnerable by the local authority (15%). The aim is to encourage children to eat more healthily and be active while not in school by attending holiday clubs during the Summer, Summer and Winter breaks.

Managed by St Helens Borough Council's Early Help Service, provision of the programme was outsourced to local partners like Saints Foundation, St Helens Children's Centres, local enterprises, faith groups and including Halton and St Helens Voluntary Community Action. This was achieved by coordinating and supporting voluntary and community sector providers to deliver the service in the spirit of the award-winning #StHelensTogether initiative, which recently won the Covid-19 Response Recognition Award at the national iNetwork Awards.

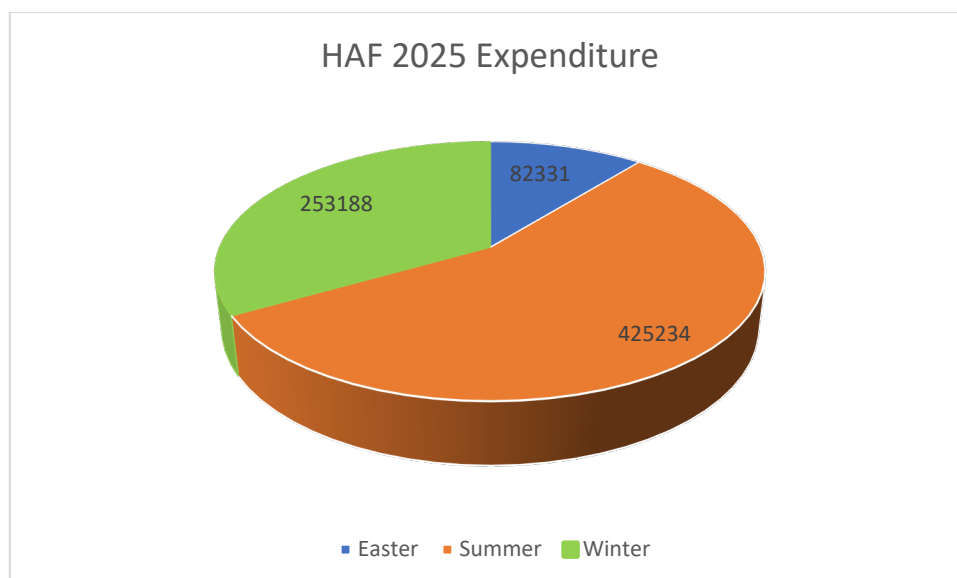
Free school meal data was supplied by the Supporting Families Programme and analysed to support a mapping exercise to indicate the levels of children who were entitled to free school meals and where they resided. This informed the differing volumes of activity that was required in each of the wards in the borough over the Easter, Summer and Winter holiday periods.

The Easter, Summer and Winter booklets were distributed to all the Local Authority, schools, local enterprises, faith groups and Halton and St Helens VCA for them to disseminate to the families and children who were eligible.

2025 HAF submission details

HAF 2025 Expenditure

	Easter 2025	Summer 2025	Winter 2025	Cumulative Total
Face to Face activities	70,034	379,745	170,818	620,597
Food	11,870	39,564	7,200	58,634
Advertising / Publicity	427	5,925		6,352
Management costs	0	0	75,170	75,170
Total	82,331	425,234	253,188	760,753



Over the 2025 HAF year, 869 sessions were delivered from 26 local providers in the voluntary and faith sectors, catering, and council services. A sample of activities included Crafty Cook's, art sessions, sensory crafts, pottery, IT, drama and sports. There were also family fun days, Library activities, swimming lessons, sessions to improve wellbeing and confidence. In addition, there were family outings to Blackpool Zoo, Gulliver's World, Chester Zoo Christmas lights and Salford Theatre.

Engagement over the year has been excellent with 14,555 individual children and young people attending multiple activities.

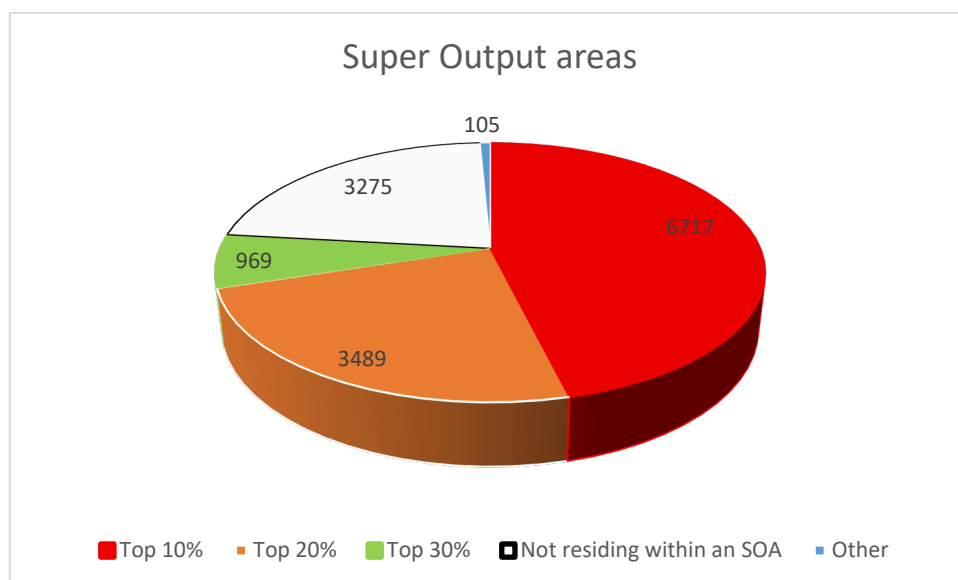
We provided 14,555 meals during the activity sessions.

The partner agencies and local authority services who worked fantastically well to provide energising programmes for all were:

Family Hub & Children's Centres, Leisure Centres, Library Services, Active Future, Active Sports, Air Nation, ComputerXplorers, Deafness Resource Centre, Everton in the Community, Friends Play, Inclusive Sports 4 All, Learn Active NW, Powered by Hip Hop, Raring Stars, Rockets Community Club, Saints Foundation, Therafit, Upbeat Academy, Les Robert's Hypnotherapy, VIBE, Cabbage Hall allotments, Fearless Youth, YMCA, HAMMA Gym, Digital Arts, and Positive Life Workshops.

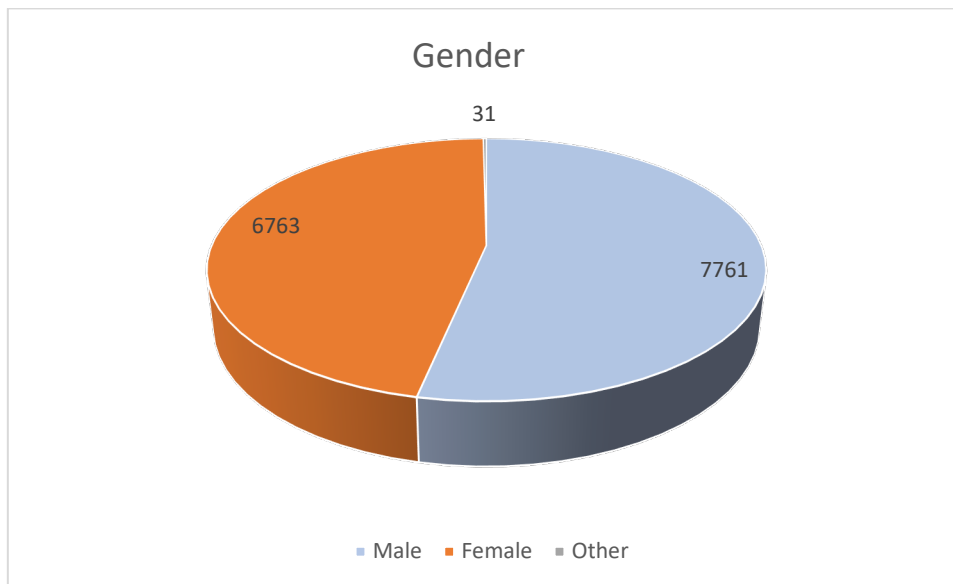
Graph 1 shows the Super Output Areas of the children who attended a HAF session (individual children and young people).

Graph 1



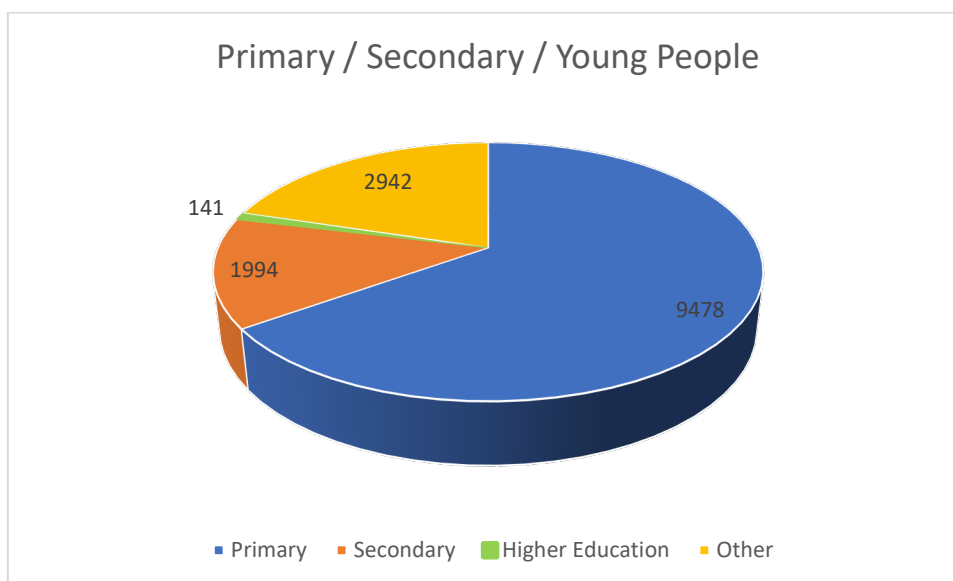
Graph 2 shows the gender mix of the children who attended a HAF session.

Graph 2



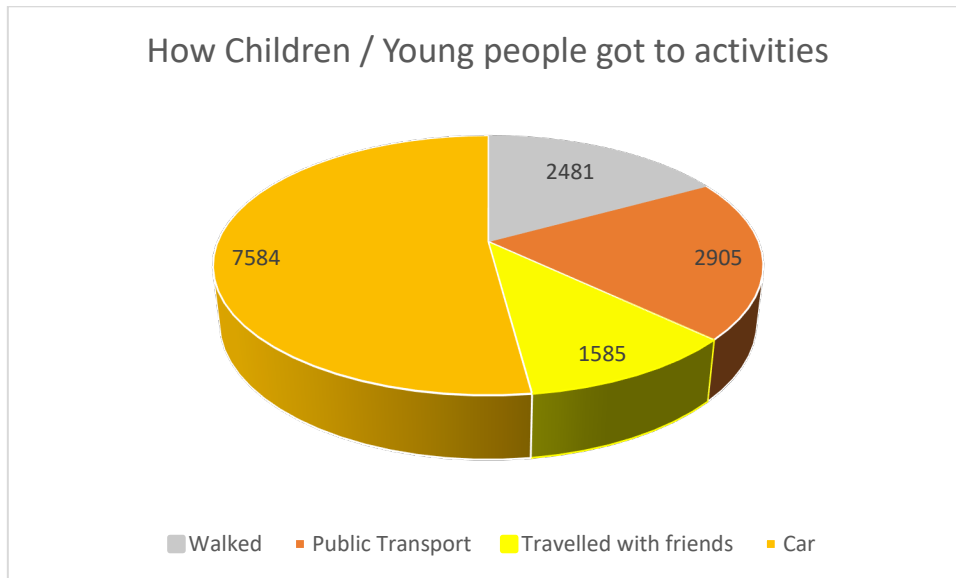
Graph 3 below shows the split of primary and secondary school children who attended a HAF session.

Graph 3



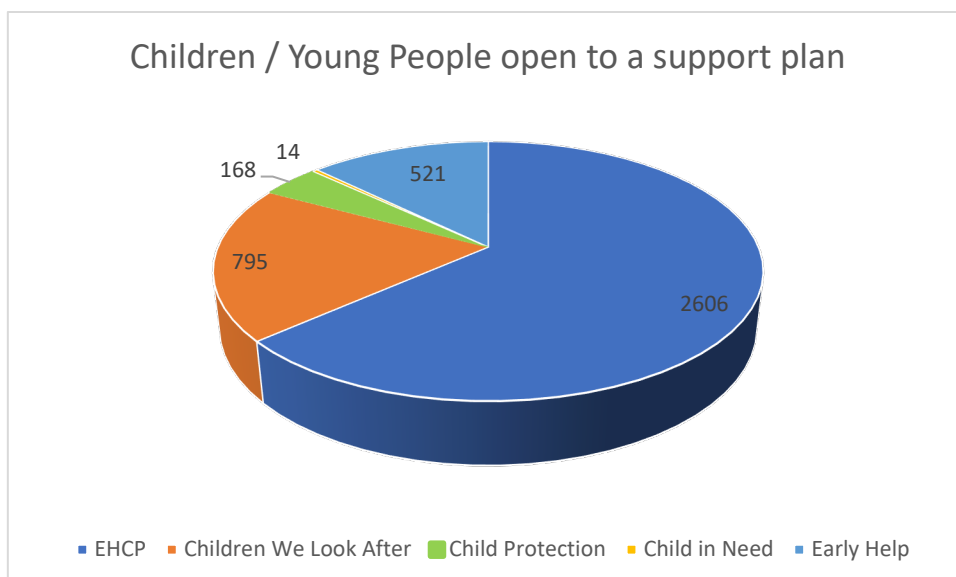
Children and families were asked how they travelled to HAF activities.

Graph 4



Children and Young people who are open to a support plan who attended HAF activities.

Graph 5





Smoothie making during a session at the 4F Centre with Everton in the Community.

Children and young people being extremely careful engaging with a Pyrography Name Plate exercise during an activity with Fearless Youth.



Children and young people learning how to code and to be creative with technology.

Children and young people enjoying physical activities and socialisation promoting fitness, co-ordination and teambuilding skills.





So excited to see Santa!!

Impact

During the 2025 HAF Programme, children and young people were given opportunities to take part in enriching activities they may not otherwise have experienced, particularly in the context of the on-going cost of living crisis. These opportunities enabled them to build friendships beyond their usual social circles, connecting with peers from across the borough. As the programme progressed, we saw participants grow in confidence and resilience.

Families also benefited, as the pressure of providing meals during school holidays was reduced. Every session included a substantial meal, easing the financial strain many families face. Young people gained valuable life experiences and, in some cases, progressed into volunteering roles – building skills that will support their future education, training and employment.

Children and families also took advantage of swimming lessons delivered through our own Leisure Centres. These sessions helped families become more confident in the water, enjoy time together and for many children, achieve their 25-metre swimming certificate.

Additionally, more children and families now have a greater understanding of what life is like for those with a deaf parent or child, having learned basic signing and developed awareness of communication challenges within deaf-inclusive families.

Children/Young Peoples comments

Therafit SEND Provision, participating in sporting activities, arts and crafts and outdoor and indoor activities, "I thought it was fun and competitive, so I had a challenge of winning. Teamwork and sport communication was used a lot as well as concentration and patience and I made friends." **12-year-old female.**

Upbeat Academy's Arts Through Time camp "I made new friends from other schools, we got to dance, make bracelets and headbands, arts and crafts and learn music fireball."
11-year-old male.

"When we went, it was really fun and I faced one of my fears holding a tarantula and it was epic and it was really fun and I met some animals that I've never met before. Holding loads of reptiles it was really, really fun. I don't think I would've ever hold some of the animals that I did hold today. I faced a lot of my fears." **9-year-old girl.**

Parent/carers comments

"Today was fun, we were surrounded by happy people and the activities put on over the holidays helps to structure our holiday time so they have something different from the usual routine to do which they wouldn't normally be able to have every day. The children enjoyed the party games especially musical statues and having their faces painted. Today has helped them to grow their confidence but to have fun too.

"Parent of 5 and 7 old boys.

"Keeps my son active and he thoroughly enjoys it. He gets to engage with other children in a safe environment. This provider helps my son with regulating his sleep during the holidays." **Parents of 8-year-old boy.**

"There are so many different activities which is great for the children. It's great to have something where Jack can interact during the many activities with his brother who has SEND needs." **Dad of 2 boys aged 6 and 8.**

"Z. benefits from HAF because of social interactions that help him with making friends and rules within the activities that help improve his listening skills and concentration, which can be a challenge given his impulsive behaviour." **Dad of boy aged 9.**

"Can't thank you enough. With my rent and bills increasing I couldn't afford to get the boys a proper day out. Blackpool Zoo has forever been a favourite, and I've not been able to take them for a couple of years, so it made it so special. Having us all well fed, and all 3 boys out in the fresh air all day - notoriously difficult to achieve all together with ASD&ADD - as well as knowing you were there if I needed extra hands, honestly the HAF day out made mine and the boys half term. Got some lovely pictures and A's first time seeing the zoo made memories that he'll keep forever - even got them to watch a few animal talks which has been unheard of before. Amazing you are helping families get days like these." **Mother of 3 boys.**

Analysis

The HAF programme delivered 869 sessions across all St Helens schools for the Easter, Summer and Winter holiday periods. These sessions delivered by 64 local organisations, and more than 14,000 substantial meals distributed to children and young people.

The 14,555 children and young people who attended this year's programme. All participants either entitled to benefits related free school meals or identified as vulnerable by the local authority. Of these, 11,175 lived within the top 30% most deprived areas of the borough. Evidence suggests that children and families living within a Super Output Area are more likely to require additional support. Among those who attended, 7,761 identified as male, 6,763 as female and 33 identified as other, with the majority attending a primary school (8,143 children).

This year's programme further expanded its range of SEND-specific activities, ensuring a more inclusive offer across the borough.

The programme has enabled children and young people to attend activities of their choice, and this has supported children's/young people's mental health, well-being, and creative elements in addition to them having opportunities of trying activities that they may not have had the opportunity to in the past.

Families were encouraged to walk to activities during the holiday periods. Although there has been a slight increase on last year in the number of families choosing this option, further work is required to promote more economic ways of travelling to activities.