



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

Holiday Hunger

South Ribble Borough Council

Tackling food poverty in school aged children

Context

School holidays are normally considered times where children can enjoy themselves with friends and family; no early mornings and no official breaktimes. That 3.30pm bell ringing on the last day of term signifies an endless possibility of fun for a week or two! However, for some children school holidays are dreaded, as it is the only place that they are guaranteed enough food.

Development

For South Ribble Borough Council, tackling food poverty began in October 2019. The first scheme aimed to provide enough food that would effectively replace the free school meals children would usually receive at lunchtime. The wards with the highest deprivation figures were identified, and the school and community workers identified the children that were most at risk of not being fed adequately during the school holidays. South Ribble Borough Council were keen that the scheme was run in a way that was non- stigmatising and chose to issue vouchers which would be circulated through the local schools and then redeemed at a local community centre where Council Officers had set up 'pop up' shops.

Implementation

It was the school's knowledge of families and their situations that enabled these families to access food parcels. Initial redemption for October 2019 was slow with only 8% voucher redemption rate. This resulted in 83 vulnerable children receiving the equivalent of 415 meals. By December 2019 SRBC issued another 432 vouchers, taking the total issuing figure to 1375 children within the Borough. This time we saw a 12% redemption figure with 165 children receiving the equivalent of 10 meals for the two-week Christmas period. A local headteacher said to us:

"On behalf of those of our parents who have been provided with food donations by SRBC, I would like to say a huge thank you to all involved. This must have been a massive project for you but one which will have made a real difference to some families"

By February 2020, we were reaching 228 pupils, and the equivalent of 1140 meals. Unsurprisingly in April 2020 saw a huge increase with parents now having the children at home unexpectedly. We provided an incredible 4530 meals during the two-week Easter period. In May the Council Officers had to 'prepack' the offering to ensure that Covid 19 guidelines and restrictions were adhered to; redemption figure was 352 parcels, with 1760 meals being received. By Summer 2020 we had to rethink the process again, offering fortnightly 'pop up shops' in certain community centres with a Covid secure offering; more space, longer hours and more council officers time. Incredibly we provided 7500 meals to those most vulnerable children throughout South Ribble. The success of the scheme and continued positive feedback meant that the decision was made to expand the project Borough wide in October 2020.

Review

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we now work and increased the demand for food for children. We now serve all 53 schools across the Borough with approximately 1200 pupils receiving 6000 meals for one half term break. These are delivered straight to the school and the school distribute them to the parents in need. Although it seems unimaginable that some families are struggling to make ends meet in 2021, it is great to know that South Ribble Borough Council are actively supporting these children; and will continue to do so for every school holiday, to ensure that no child in our borough goes hungry.

For further information contact:

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