

## Holiday Hunger inquiry response

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1. Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) is the social action agency of the Catholic Church. We represent a network of 41 Catholic charities and diocesan agencies who work for the most vulnerable in our society. This submission was prepared based on feedback from CSAN charities and evidence from two members who run school holiday schemes in areas of deprivation. They have witnessed the extent of hunger amongst children during the school holidays, as well as the impact it has on their life chances.

### Recommendations

- In our experience, food for children in the school holidays is best provided in a way which encourages interaction in community facilities, avoiding stigmatisation. We have found examples of this in schools, churches and community centres as part of day-care activities for the children.
- We would strongly encourage the Government to consider how this neighbourly support which churches and charities are delivering on the ground might be scaled up to address the full extent of Holiday Hunger.

### CSAN member projects

2. **Nugent** is the Caritas organisation of the Archdiocese of Liverpool, providing a wide range of support to adults and children through schools, care homes, community and social work services and social enterprise.
3. One of Nugent's projects is the **Epsom Street Community Centre** (known locally as the Epsy Centre). The project works with families and children to offer free play sessions as well as educational activities in Kirkdale, where over 50% of children live in poverty.<sup>1</sup>
4. During non-term time children can enjoy a free breakfast and lunch which is prepared by the children with support from the volunteers. During last year's six week summer holiday the Epsom Street Centre was open three days per week and provided 1818 meals – 90 per day.
5. Founded by Cardinal Basil Hume, **the Cardinal Hume Centre** is a Westminster based charity tackling homelessness, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. They offer free immigration, housing and benefits advice, employment support and a hostel for young homeless people, as well as a range of family support services such as

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<sup>1</sup> See HMRC, *Child Poverty Statistics 2010*; Wards, Kirkdale: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121103084242/http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/child\\_poverty.htm](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121103084242/http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/child_poverty.htm) Kirkdale has extremely high levels of deprivation, with 50.5% of the ward in the most deprived 1% of neighbourhoods in the country and more than 90% living in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods nationally. See Department for Communities and Local Government, *English Indices for Multiple Deprivation 2015*; Kirkdale postcodes: <http://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/>

homework and after-school clubs, school holiday activities and drop-in sessions for parents and pre-school children.

6. The Cardinal Hume Centre's school holiday programme is specifically for local families on low incomes and runs in the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. It is funded by the John Lyons charity and provides a healthy lunch as well as activities and educational support. Last year 58 families (126 children up to age 11) participated in the holiday programme.

### **The reality of Holiday Hunger**

7. Child hunger, particularly during school holidays, remains a significant concern for CSAN charities. The issue is widespread, and it is feared that the problem is much deeper than currently understood due to parents being afraid to disclose their difficulties.
8. As stated in our previous response to the Feeding Britain inquiry, Catholic Care Leeds are aware of many families who skip meals in the summer holidays or are regularly only eating cereals.
9. The Catholic Children's Society Westminster has found that headteachers in the Diocese are concerned about lack of food during the school holidays as parents struggle without Free School meals, and noted that that holiday projects are popular because of the food available. This concern was echoed by the Catholic Education Service.
10. The Epsom Street Centre manager was able to confirm the reality of holiday hunger, adding that providing a hot meal was integral to the non-term time service.
11. The Cardinal Hume Centre gave the same response, confirming that food is provided as an integral part of their holiday programme.

### **The need for integrated services**

12. One key advantage of holiday schemes is that its key focus is not food. As our previous submission to the Feeding Britain inquiry stated, the stigma and embarrassment clients often feel around emergency food provision can act as a barrier to accessing foodbanks and material support.
13. At both the Epsom Street Centre and the Cardinal Hume Centre, the meals are provided as part of a day of activities. This means the families are not attending simply in order to find the food they are struggling to provide for their children.



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14. The Epsom Street Centre manager reported that older children are especially conscious of the stigma around not having enough money for food and will not admit to being hungry. Their solution is to have the older children cook the meals for the younger ones, often their siblings, and share in the meal. This way, they are not given the meal, but earn it. In addition, they are taught basic culinary skills, such as how to produce cheap but nutritious food in large batches.
15. Furthermore, the parents are allowed, very informally, to take store cupboard staples from the kitchen area – a can of beans or tinned vegetables. They know they do not need to ask, and this means they can quietly take whatever they need without admitting they are struggling that week. The Epsom Street Centre also has a 'giving plate', onto which parents can put donations to the Centre for that day's activities. This means that when they can, they can give a packet of biscuits or a bottle of squash, and are no longer simply beneficiaries but also contributors.
16. Epsom Street also offers a holistic approach to problem solving and has many community partners who come along and support the local community members with other issues such as health and wellbeing, benefits, housing, debt advice, tax credits and education (formal and informal) including NVQ's and AQA's.
17. At the Cardinal Hume Centre, lunch is served but as part of the school holiday programme, viewed as lifeline by parents, who accompany their children. The scheme provides both free, fun activities and educational support which the families may not be in a position to offer themselves.
18. The summer school holiday programme also provides an opportunity for the parents to access other services offered at the Cardinal Hume Centre, such as benefits, housing and employment advice. The majority of the programme's attendees are unemployed and often face other pressures, such as cramped accommodation and a lack of money to find ways to entertain their children during the holidays.
19. With food provision integrated with community services in this way, the immediate needs of the families are met (hunger) and the long-term problems they face can also be addressed.
20. The Cardinal Hume Centre has recognised the effect of stigma and have begun to give out food donations from parishes in a foodbank-style way. The hope is that by locating the foodbank in the local community,<sup>2</sup> take-up will be higher than it is currently is. By offering advice and information alongside the provision of food, people in need will be able to access a range of services in one place.

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<sup>2</sup> The local foodbank is in another part of Westminster, in a venue that is not very visible and also not close to the social housing in south Westminster.

### **The root cause of Holiday Hunger**

21. When asked about the root of holiday hunger, the Epsom Street Centre manager made it very clear it was simply the impossibility for these families of making ends meet. She said donations to the 'giving plate' were far more likely to come at the beginning of the month, and that more people made use of the informal provision of tinned food towards the end of the month as money ran out. She also stressed that if the children are hungry, it is certain that the parent is going without.
22. She highlighted that the school holidays are a particularly difficult time for those "on the bread-line" as there are extra costs in addition to finding the meals ordinarily provided for free at school. Some families have to reduce the hours they work in order to take care of their children, thus reducing their income that week. Families must also take into account costs such as the additional gas needed to cook the meals – 30 minutes extra usage of the cooker each day equals two-and-a-half hours extra gas each week, which can be significant for those who have a pay-as-you-go meter.
23. She added that many of the parents whose children attend the Epsom Street scheme are on universal working tax credits and zero hour contracts, both of which impact on their ability to budget effectively.
24. The Cardinal Hume Centre gave the same response, adding that there was sometimes also a lack of life skills, including money management and cooking skills. For this reason, they always provide easy-to-cook, cheap food which families can replicate themselves at home:
- "Each day we prepared a meal and ate lunch with the parents and children. This was a huge help to families who rely on free school meals during term time. It provided a balanced, healthy meal for them each day. We tried to provide a variety of affordable meals which could be replicated by the families at home."
- Family Service Manager, The Cardinal Hume Centre*
25. As stated in our previous response to the Feeding Britain consultation, Holiday Hunger is an in-work poverty issue. The primary cause of people accessing food provision is the gap between income and outgoings. This remains regardless of whether the family's primary income comes from employment or social security.