

Families, hunger, and the holidays

Foodbanks usually see an increase in demand for emergency food for children during the summer holidays. Many run holiday clubs providing activities and food for families, but voluntary emergency food provision cannot end hunger during the holidays alone.

Over a third of all food distributed by the foodbank network throughout the year goes to children, but there is extra financial pressure during the school holidays for families who rely on free school meals during term time, amounting to [between £30 and £40 a week](#) per child.

Research from the University of Oxford, the largest-scale study of UK foodbanks to date, shows that households using foodbanks experience high levels of food insecurity and other forms of destitution. They represent a population that are not having their needs met by either state provision or work. The research found that:

- **Families with children are particularly likely to fall into crisis**, making up over half of people at foodbanks. People referred to foodbanks are more likely to have dependent children (70%) than the UK average (42%).
- **Single parent households are almost two times more prevalent in foodbanks** than in the general population.
- **Work does not always protect families from falling into crisis:** households with children at foodbanks are more likely to be in work than households without children, but working families earn less than half of the low-income threshold for the UK.
- **Over 80% of families with children at foodbanks were classed as severely food insecure** (meaning they had skipped meals and gone without eating, sometimes for days at a time) in the past 12 months because of a lack of money.

What needs to be done?

1. Extend the Department for Education pilot funding local holiday clubs

The Department for Education's pilot holiday clubs scheme, which offers £2million to fund holiday clubs across England, is a great first step. The Trussell Trust advised on the design of the clubs to ensure provision is dignified and effective, and includes activities as well as food provision.

To make sure no child goes hungry in the holidays, we urge the Government to extend the pilot to future holidays and place a statutory duty on local authorities to provide food and activities in the holidays, funded by the Department.

2. Ensure parents have enough to live on so they can provide for their families all year-round

(a) Increase benefit levels for families with dependent children

- **Uprate benefit levels for the Child Element in Universal Credit and Child Tax Credits**
- **Suspend the benefit cap for parents of children aged 0-2**

More financial support is needed for low income families with dependent children: for couple families with two children at foodbanks, 65% received less than £500 in the past month whilst 96% received less than £1000. For single parent families with one child at foodbanks¹, 76% received less than £500 in the past month whilst 97% received less than £1000. With rising food and housing costs, and the benefits freeze continuing to squeeze tight budgets, families are prioritising housing costs over food and other essentials. Ensuring families can cover the basic cost of essentials would eliminate the need for a foodbank parcel in the holidays altogether.

(b) Ensuring work pays for parents on Universal Credit.

- **Increase the work allowance to its pre-April 2016 level**
- **Suspend job-searching requirements for the most vulnerable lone parents**
- **Increase the threshold for eligibility for Free School Meals on Universal Credit**

Despite 31% of couple families and 21% of single parent families including a working adult (compared to 15% of households at foodbanks), employment did not adequately protect households from needing a foodbank. The equivalised average household income for families with an adult in work was just £419 for the month before needing a foodbank, and while this is significantly higher than the figure for families without work (£277), this is well below the low-income threshold for the UK (£1050 a month after housing costs).

Working families must be able to keep more of what they earn. While the Government has taken the right step in increasing the work allowance by 3%, from £192 to £198, this does not amount to pre-April 2016 levels (£222 for a couple with children claiming housing costs and £263 for a single parent renting) and so should be increased. Increasing the eligibility threshold for Free School Meals in line with Northern Ireland (at £14,000) would also help low income families cover essential costs. Finally, [University of Oxford research](#) has found that sanctioning and foodbank use have a 'strong, dynamic relationship'. More families will be subject to conditionality under Universal Credit, so we recommend a 'yellow-card warning' system as well as suspending job-searching requirements for single parents of pre-school aged, or more than two, children.

¹ Minimum Income Standard: £2,056 for couple families, two children; £1338 single parent, one child