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Media Release

Holiday Kitchen: Learning Food and Play for Families who Need it Most

A report out today highlights how a summer school holiday free meals and activities programme for people on low incomes in the West Midlands is easing financial strain and reducing stress levels for up to 75 per cent of families – a model which could soon be rolled out across the UK.

Family Action are working with Ashrammoseley Housing Association and the Accord Group, to provide support to vulnerable families during what can be stressful, long summer holidays.

Holiday Kitchen, set up two years ago, offers free and affordable meals and activities that improve children's well-being and educational opportunities.

The report published jointly by the Accord Group, Birmingham City University, Planning for Real and Family Action, liaised directly with families who attended the programme, with over 34 per cent saying they had, had to rely on using food banks in the last 12 months.

Holiday Kitchen aims to improve social inclusion, improving family nutrition and well-being, which ultimately helps to reduce the financial and emotional strain during the school holidays which make up 25 per cent of the year.

The programme is based on the delivery of 2,300 meals spread across eight days over 11 areas in low income neighbourhoods in Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull and last year reached over 300 families.

When asked, 75 per cent of families said Holiday Kitchen had eased their financial situation during the holidays and reduced stress by 32 per cent.

In addition, 50 per cent felt that by attending the programme they were able to feed their family more healthy meals at homes, with 15 per cent saying it had also improved their nutritional knowledge.

A key finding from the report was the need for greater social interaction and support, with 75 per cent of families saying they felt more positive social contact with people outside their family. Overall, 95 per cent of families said they would recommend Holiday Kitchen.

Dr Caroline Wolhuter, Head of Social Inclusion for **Ashrammoseley**, said: "At present there is a clear policy gap in relation to providing additional support to low-income and vulnerable families during the 25 per cent of the year that make up holiday periods, when free school meals are not available and the opportunities to access learning, play and additional support retreat.

"Holiday Kitchen however, supports the recommendations from 'Feeding Britain' The Food Poverty Inquiry led by Frank Field, which calls for the Government to begin costing the extension of free meal school provision and is a proven and established model intervention."

Dr Jane O'Connor, Senior Researcher in Education at Birmingham City University, led the evaluation of Holiday Kitchen and said: "Our assessment of the experiences of the children and adults who participated in Holiday Kitchen indicate that the scheme is highly effective in supporting families in need during the summer holidays.

“In particular we found evidence that children who attended Holiday Kitchen benefitted from both the regular nutritious food provided and the range of activities which were educational as well as being great fun.”

Kat Aukett, Assistant Director Services and Innovation for Family Action, said: “ We know from the thousands of vulnerable families we work with every year, that school holidays can provide particular pressure points for parents and children, particularly those from low income or disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Our experience and this evaluation show that the Holiday Kitchen programme can help to ease some of this pressure by providing vital support to families through holiday learning, food and play. We are committed to helping to grow this programme, so hundreds more families can benefit, both this summer and beyond”.

Notes to the editor

About Family Action

Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK’s most vulnerable people. We seek to empower people and communities to address their issues and challenges through practical, financial and emotional help.

Our work is wide-ranging and includes help for parents-to-be, the provision of many Children’s Centres in local communities, intensive family support, emotional health and wellbeing services, counselling, mediation and therapies, support in schools and financial grants programmes.

www.family-action.org.uk

About the Accord Group

The Accord Group is made up of seven organisations which work together to provide 13,000 homes and a range of services, including health and social care, to over 80,000 people across the Midlands and beyond. The Group is one the largest housing associations within the West Midlands region, employing almost 5,000 people.

All Group members share the same overall mission and values whilst retaining their own identity, governance structures and ethos, and contributing their unique skills and expertise to the wider Group.

The Accord Group partners are **Ashrammoseley**, bchs (Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services), **Caldmore**accord, Direct Health, Fry Housing Trust, Heantun Housing Association, and Redditch Co-operative Homes.

The Group is not-for-profit and specialises in involving customers and communities in shaping the homes and services it provides. Offices are based in Birmingham, Coventry, Redditch, Rowley Regis, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton. The Accord Group is a member of PlaceShapers, a national alliance of more than 100 community-focused housing associations. Find out more at placeshapers.org