



Building
stronger
families

Play, Learning and Family Bonding

Lucy Davis, Early Years Practitioner at Nottinghamshire Healthcare, gives a flavour of just one of the holiday food and activities sessions running in South Broxtowe, Nottinghamshire, during the 2018 summer holidays. The aim of the session was to provide a variety of play and learning activities, in addition to a free breakfast and lunch for children and families.

Healthy breakfast

Today families were given a choice of toast or healthy cereal upon arrival. Staff, volunteers and families reinforced the importance of hand hygiene, especially when handling and eating food, and all went and washed their hands. During breakfast, we discussed portion sizes, which resulted in one parent making a comment about how her daughter overfills her cereal bowl. The child was happy to compromise and have a standard serving. She said she found that the portion was adequate, and Mum said that she would try smaller portions at home. We then discussed the media and their methods of advertising (often unhealthy) breakfast cereals and portion sizes.

Other enrichment activities

We offered a range of different activities, with the playdough activity being particularly popular. Families got creative (e.g. pretending to make and bake gingerbread people). Some children said that they were making their family out of gingerbread, commenting on who was part of their family and who was special to them. Families enjoyed this activity and wanted the activity to continue for longer.

Our physical activity

We provided a wide range of fun sports activities for families to choose from and activities which would be suitable for the whole family. Some played with the balls and cones (e.g. throwing and catching and using the cones to create goal posts for them to have a game of football). Some used the stilts to balance and walk with. Others used the large parachute activity, with children offering suggestions for what to do, for example, bouncing balls on the parachute to see how high they would go.

Preparing lunch

Today families were seated around different tables and each group was allocated a task (e.g. grating cheese, slicing tomatoes). Younger children had the opportunity to take an active role in chopping, using safety knives, and were supervised continuously throughout this activity.

Parents supported their children and modelled chopping and grating. Families discussed together the different actions needed when preparing food (e.g. chop, grate, slice) and during this activity children were heard commenting: *'Good that I am trusted to use this (safety) knife.'* *'I am good at grating. I love grated cheese.'* *'I like helping.'* Several adults commented on their children's concentration during this food preparation activity, and how they will try to replicate such activities at home.

Tasty lunch

For lunch today, children and families made their own stuffed pitta pockets by selecting healthy fillings of their own choice (e.g. chicken, cheese, salad), followed by a selection of yoghurts. Several adults commented that their children had selected combinations and flavours that aren't usually eaten at home – and that they were surprised to see their children eating them enthusiastically.

Throughout lunch, discussions took place between staff, parents and children about:

- the social aspect of meal-times and how powerful this can be for children
- food waste (we encouraged families to take any food left over home with them)
- storing cereals to preserve quality in Tupperware containers
- saving money by making their own food rather than buying ready-made meals.

Volunteers also suggested simple kitchen jobs that children can easily do to support their parents, for example, washing fruit and vegetables, scrubbing vegetables and peeling under supervision of adults.

Engaging parents and carers

Children attend these sessions with their parents/carers. Today's activities helped children develop their social play and interaction, and also encouraged sharing and turn taking, language and communication, and provided the opportunity for parents to role-model positive play and interaction. Parents were engaged in all the play activities, food preparation, eating together and tidying up the venue (e.g. clearing tables).

Supporting local families

One of the Food Bank volunteers from the church where we held the session explained they provide many local residents with food. This was evident upon our arrival to the venue, with many local residents waiting outside for the venue to open at 9am to enable them to collect food. A volunteer also advised that they have several families who struggle in the school holidays to provide the extra meals and entertainment for their children – and said she was pleased to see these families accessing our session (which they signpost families to). Volunteers also said they felt that the club is useful in maintaining routines and social interactions for the families. During today's session, vegetables, grown on the local allotment, were delivered to the church for the families to take home with them.

Find out more about Family Action's holiday food and activity programmes at www.family-action.org.uk/holidayhub