

News links from June 2020

Summer School Meals Success! - but the fight continues . . .

We were delighted that Marcus Rashford and many politicians such as [Robert Halfon](#) joined the throng of voices calling for the extension of replacement school food provision over the summer.

[The PM's announcement](#) in mid-June was, of course, a great cause for celebration but, like [Marcus Rashford](#) and Bury South MP [Christian Wakeford](#), we believe that more must be done. The voucher scheme is [reported to be hard to use](#) and with many families being badly hit by the pandemic, making replacement school food available during holiday periods a permanent arrangement would be a just and humane act.

We are now campaigning for just that - for school food provision for eligible children to continue for ALL school holidays. It's going to be necessary as many family incomes will be reduced. We're working with the UK Youth Parliament on this using the hashtag [#schoolmeals365](#). Can you help? See our covering email.

Children with Disabilities

Families who live with children with disabilities feel "cut off and ignored" according to a BBC report in June. With travel restricted, access has been curtailed to members of the wider family who might otherwise have shared the load; getting paid help has become more difficult and access to play clubs and some schools has stopped. Parents are worried that children who are missing therapy and the company of others will regress.

[Read more here](#)

Coronavirus-related changes to the Children and Families Act mean that children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHP) are no longer guaranteed to get the support they need. [Read more here.](#)

Food Banks

Record food bank use in the first month of the lockdown was widely reported in June, with the Trussell Trust saying it gave out 89% more food parcels in April, compared to the same month last year, while the Independent Food Aid Network (Ifan) recorded a 175% increase over the same period. [Read more here](#)

Carers and parents with children with disabilities were twice as likely to use a food bank as the rest of the population, according to a research carried out by the charity Carers UK. [Read more here](#)

Nurseries and Early Years

Steve McCabe MP, concerned about early years provision being under threat, [asked the Secretary of State for Education](#) what plans there might be to protect them, and was told of an "unprecedented package to support nurseries and early years provision". In spite of that, it is predicted that one in four early years settings will close within the year. This finding comes from a report entitled "The Forgotten Sector" published by the [Early Years Alliance](#), an educational charity representing 14,000 members.

The Alliance's report outlines and explains the key reasons for these concerns through an analysis of the responses to the organisation's recent surveys on the impact of the pandemic on the childcare sector, and a comprehensive overview of the key challenges facing the sector including gaps in current government support schemes.

The Forgotten Sector also includes a series of recommendations on steps that the government could take to ensure that childcare providers are able to stay afloat during this difficult period and beyond.

[Download the report here.](#)

Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

The NSPCC has accused ministers of “turning a blind eye” towards children impacted by domestic violence. The charity said helpline calls had surged by almost a third since the start of the lockdown as they urged the Government to strengthen support for these children. The warning came a week after the new Domestic Abuse Bill entered the committee stage in the House of Commons. The charity said ministers had repeatedly failed to take heed of advice from experts who claimed the new legislation failed to adequately protect children. [Read more here](#)

Meanwhile, ex-Chancellor and Home Secretary Sajid Javid MP, aware that the lockdown has created “a perfect storm” for abused children, promised a “no holds barred” inquiry into child sex abuse in the UK with the Centre for Social Justice think tank. The inquiry will examine organised child sexual exploitation and the abuse of children online. Mr Javid said he was particularly concerned about lockdown because “*children are left to isolate alongside their abuser and they will therefore suffer severe long-term damage and this kind of thing isn’t reflected in statistics just yet, but it will be, and I’m very concerned about that*”. [Read more](#)

Northern Ireland Police echoed those sentiments and announced their support for the [Stop It Now!](#) campaign amid concerns that children are at increased risk of abuse during the lockdown.

Mental Health

A study has concluded that children are likely to suffer depression and anxiety after lockdown. The research draws on more than 60 pre-existing studies into topics spanning isolation, loneliness and mental health for young people aged between four and 21, and concludes that young people who are lonely might be as much as three times more likely to develop depression in the future, and that the impact of loneliness and mental health could last for at least nine years. [Read more.](#)

And in the Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, neuroscientists said that reduced face-to-face contact among teenagers and their friends during the pandemic could have damaging long-term consequences. [Read more.](#)

The Childhood Trust, which works with about 200 charities, reported that children are developing serious mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress, because of the pandemic, and that disadvantage is leaving children extremely vulnerable. [Read the report.](#)

And on top of that, Barnardo’s found that a third of the 4,000 children they surveyed said they had experienced an increase in stress, loneliness and worry. [Read more.](#)

Put a strong, protective arm around the Covid children

We at the **Children First Alliance** have been campaigning for nearly two years to put children at the heart of Government. Our flagship call is for a Cabinet Minister with responsibility for the health and wellbeing of children and young people as we recognise that firefighting on individual policy fronts was never going to be enough to reverse the continuing negative trends. A Cabinet post would be a way to drive policy and co-ordinate strategy across all Departments.

We were therefore very gratified this week to see our campaign aims taken up by a group of charities and other organisations who wrote to the the PM to urge the Government to put children’s needs on a par with health and the economy to stop their life chances being derailed, saying that Covid-19 threatens to cast a shadow over the young for years to come. [Read more here.](#) **What can we say, apart from “hear! hear!” ?**