

News links from May 2020

Holiday Hunger: Charities respond

Many charities and other organisations have been working hard in the fight against food insecurity and during the pandemic their work has continued and intensified.

While the news from Wales (see right) is most welcome, the same guarantee is not yet forthcoming for children in other parts of the UK. The charities [Children in Scotland](#) and [Children in Northern Ireland](#) have ongoing campaigns, and many organisations in England are running schemes in different areas, including our own School Holiday Activity and Wellbeing (SHAW) Scheme.

The charity [Meals and More](#) has been working since 2019 to provide young people with healthy food and support in the holidays. Since lockdown the charity acted quickly to divert funds from holiday clubs to supply packed meals and food parcels.

The community charity [Oasis](#), through its "Plate Up" initiative, is running community kitchen schemes in different towns and cities in England, and enlisted the support of TV chefs Nadiya Hussain and Rosemary Shrager to write an [open letter](#) to the media calling for urgent attention to the problem of holiday hunger.

Councillors write to Gavin Williamson

Adding their individual voices to the call, over 1000 English councillors wrote to Gavin Williamson in mid-May to press for assurances that vulnerable families would continue to receive food vouchers over the summer holiday and beyond. [Read more here.](#)

Holiday Hunger

In early May, new research from the Food Foundation indicated that an estimated 5.1 million households with children had already experienced some form of hunger or food insecurity during the first four weeks of lockdown.

Even under normal circumstances, school holidays are a time of anxiety for children and families in low socio-economic or deprived communities. Leaders in schools, charities, religious faiths, businesses, government and media have called for the expansion of free school meals substitutes to cover holiday periods until the end of August.

In April, the Welsh Government confirmed additional funding of £33 million to provide £19.50 per week for every child entitled to free school meals to cover holidays until the end of August, and it was acknowledged that the DfE in recognising the problem had already committed funding for selected pilot schemes in England. However, the letter to Gavin Williamson and Vicky Ford, signed by 24 high-profile individuals and groups, called upon the Government to extend the provision for eligible children and other vulnerable groups, until the end of the Summer. [Read the letter here.](#)

Online Petition: 137,000 and climbing

In mid-May we threw our support behind a change.org petition calling on the Government to extend the provision of school meal substitutes over the holidays. Started by 16-year-old Londoner Christina Adane, the petition quickly reached 12,000 and has continued to climb. At the 100,000 signatures point, Schools Minister Nick Gibb announced that the half-term holiday would be covered, prompting Christina to write: "Our voice has been heard. This really shows what we can achieve when we all campaign together". However, no such commitment to include the summer break has been announced.

We sincerely hope that this petition will prove to be another valuable weapon in the fight against the modern-day scandal that is food insecurity.

The petition can be found [here](#).

When will children be allowed to play?

In mid-May, the Association of Play Industries raised the question of children's playgrounds and urged its members to submit questions on the Government's website for inclusion in the daily COVID briefing. The statement said: *"The fundamental role that play has in children's normal development has been completely overlooked"* and noted that a number of experts in children's mental health and development have written to the Government asking that children's social and emotional wellbeing be prioritised.

In particular, no consideration has been given to the detrimental effect of lockdown on children who live in a flat or house with no access to a garden or outside space. It is likely that these will be those children who live in the most disadvantaged circumstances in society and their experience of lockdown will be entirely different from that of children from more affluent backgrounds. The API contends that playing in an outdoor playground is an important activity for children and an essential component of their healing process as they begin to process and cope with the unquantifiable effects of lockdown. The API calls on the Government to set out the phase in which a return to children's play in public playgrounds could be considered, and to outline the safety guidelines required so that playgrounds can operate safely when conditions allow.

[See the full statement here.](#)

Earlier this year, Sir Michael Marmot [revisited his 2010 study](#) and in an [article published by 'The Lancet'](#) on May 2nd 2020 ('Society and the slow burn of inequality') Marmot argued that pandemics serve to expose fundamental truths about societies and 'If we have the capacity to learn,' show us that there are other ways in which to live and that other policy options not only become possible but essential.

Far from being a great equalizer, COVID-19 has shone an unrelenting beam upon the injustices and disparities in our society.

Marmot believes that the aim of policy after the pandemic should not be restricted to restoring economic growth, but to create societies that are truly better than what has gone before, with better health and a narrowing of inequalities.

Above all, Marmot believes that the principle of equality should embrace children, with these building blocks:

- reduction of child poverty
- funding for education and children's services
- improvement of working conditions
- ensuring that everyone has at least the minimum income to lead a healthy life
- creating healthy and sustainable environments in which to live and work
- creating the conditions for people to pursue healthy behaviours

Parents' drinking in lockdown: impact on children

In response to a [BMJ article](#) on increased alcohol consumption during the lockdown, Dr Aric Sigman considers the negative impact on children's future alcohol consumption given the potential for them, during the lockdown, to witness more parental drinking than is usual.

[Read more here.](#)

Dr Lisa Cameron MP writes to Gavin Williamson

Returning to school will be challenging for many children and families. Dr Cameron, with the support of 65 MPs and peers, wrote to the Secretary of State for Education calling for a detailed and evidence-based plan to protect and support children and young people's mental health and psychological wellbeing as the lockdown eases. [Read the letter here.](#)