

A photograph of three children standing in a garden with sunflowers. The child on the left is a girl with her arms raised, wearing denim overalls. The child in the middle is a boy with his arms crossed, wearing a grey t-shirt. The child on the right is a boy with one arm raised, wearing a red t-shirt. The background is filled with green foliage and sunflowers. The entire image has a purple tint.

BARKING & DAGENHAM

Holiday Activities & Food Programme

ANNUAL REPORT

2025

INTRODUCTION

The Holiday Activity Food programme

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, funded by the Department for Education, offers vital support to vulnerable school-age children and their families during school holidays. Delivered in a fun, inclusive, and safe environment, the programme provides access to nutritious meals and enriching activities for children eligible for benefit-related free school meals.

Operating across the Easter, Summer, and Christmas breaks, the HAF programme in Barking and Dagenham reaches some of the borough's most deprived and isolated communities. Through a strong network of local providers, including charities, schools, and businesses. The 2024 to 2025 programme has delivered meaningful and lasting impact for families across the borough.



This report highlights the exceptional contributions of our delivery partners, whose dedication and creativity have been instrumental in the programme's success. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved for their continued commitment to supporting children and families through the HAF programme in Barking and Dagenham.

HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past four years, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has led the way in delivering inclusive, high-quality holiday provision through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. By commissioning bespoke and specialist holiday clubs tailored to the needs of eligible children and their families, the borough has demonstrated a deep and sustained commitment to equality, wellbeing, and opportunity.

In 2024, this commitment was further reinforced through **£1,220,970** in grant funding from the Department for Education (DfE). This investment enabled the borough to establish a dynamic network of trusted providers who delivered enriching, safe, and engaging experiences that met and often exceeded DfE standards. With a strong emphasis on physical activity, nutritional education, the arts and effective safeguarding, the programme continues to strive for excellence.

In 2024 alone, our holiday activity programme reached **5,834** young people across the borough. This included:

- **5,007** primary-aged children attending across Easter, Summer, and Winter.
- **827** secondary-aged young people participating during the same periods.

We are committed to ensuring that our holiday clubs are inclusive and reflective of the diverse families living in the borough. As part of this commitment, we consistently commission specialised provision for children and young people with complex Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), ensuring equitable access to enriching holiday experiences.

To drive continuous improvement and foster innovation, the borough commissioned at least one new provider each holiday period. This approach ensures the programme remains responsive, diverse, and aligned with the evolving needs of local families, with a commitment to continual improvement. We have also welcome new schools as host sites.

As those needs shift, so too has the programme, deepening partnerships with charities, schools, and community organisations.

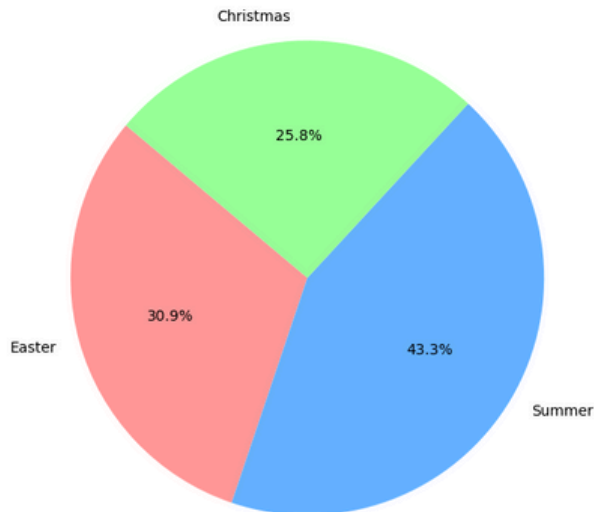
These collaborations have created a resilient, community-rooted support system that empowers children and families to thrive.



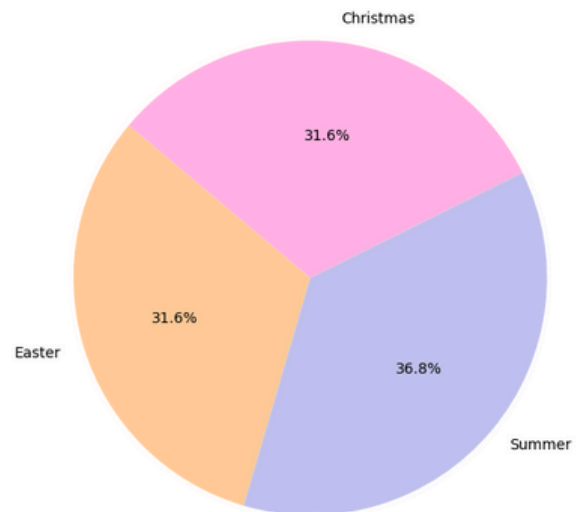
2024 REVIEW

In 2024, we successfully coordinated the delivery of 97 holiday clubs across the borough, marking our largest programme to date across all three delivery periods. Most of these clubs were hosted in schools, ensuring accessibility and familiarity for children and families. This year's expansion was made possible through supplementary funding from Public Health, enabling us to broaden our reach and deepen our impact.

HOLIDAY CLUB DISTRIBUTION



PROVIDER DISTRIBUTION



PROVIDER ENGAGEMENT & INNOVATION

As part of our strategic development, we commissioned new providers to introduce innovative approaches and alternative venues. This diversification allowed us to:

- Pilot new delivery models
- Reach underrepresented communities
- Enhance the variety and inclusivity of our programme

This approach not only enriched the overall offer but also fostered a culture of creativity and responsiveness among our delivery partners.

ACTIVITIES and ENRICHMENT EXPERIENCES

Our HAF clubs were designed to promote health, wellbeing, and personal development through a wide range of engaging activities.

Key enrichment components included:

- Oral Hygiene Education – Promoting lifelong dental health habits
- Food Education – Encouraging healthy eating through interactive cooking and nutrition sessions
- Recycling Initiatives – Instilling environmental awareness and responsibility
- Creative Arts – Supporting self-expression and emotional literacy
- Dance and Technology – Blending physical activity with digital skills
- Music Therapy – Providing therapeutic benefits through rhythm and sound

These activities were tailored to be age-appropriate, inclusive, and aligned with the HAF programme's enrichment objectives.



ENRICHMENT

CASE STUDY

As part of our commitment to supporting the mental health and emotional development of young people, we commissioned **Book Of Beasties**, a provider of innovative mental wellness resources, to deliver their **Happy Heads Card Game** through our partner **Malearn**.

This initiative aimed to foster emotional literacy, empathy, and resilience in children aged 5 to 15 through engaging, play-based learning.

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCE

The Happy Heads Card Game introduces children to a cast of imaginative characters known as "Beasties," each representing different emotions and personality traits. The game encourages players to help these Beasties feel better by identifying and discussing their emotional needs. This approach creates a safe and playful environment for children to explore complex feelings and develop empathy.

IMPLEMENTATION and ADAPTATION

During delivery, it was observed that while older children quickly grasped the game mechanics, younger participants required a simplified version. To maintain engagement, facilitators adapted the rules, allowing the game to conclude when a player collected five combined Beastie and item cards. This adjustment ensured inclusivity and sustained interest across age groups.

Each Beastie character embodies traits such as sadness or low self-esteem, which many children could relate to. This connection provided a valuable opportunity for self-reflection and emotional growth, helping children build confidence and resilience.

SOCIAL and EMOTIONAL IMPACT

As the game progressed, children began to communicate more openly, discussing which cards might best support each Beastie. This collaborative decision-making fostered new friendships and strengthened social bonds. When asked about their favourite characters, many children expressed a strong emotional connection to the "Jumble Twins," highlighting the game's ability to resonate on a personal level.

WELL-BEING ACTIVITIES and CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Beyond the card game, children engaged in a variety of well-being exercises such as:

- Deep breathing.
- Stretching and yoga.
- Creative activities like colouring, drawing, and painting.

These activities helped children regulate their emotions and express themselves in non-verbal ways. The use of “rest cards” within the game also encouraged self-awareness and the importance of taking breaks.

ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT: PAPER BOAT & PLANE CONTESTS

To further support younger children's engagement, facilitators introduced paper boat and plane races. These light-hearted contests promoted teamwork, focus, and joy. Participants like Janiyah and Ajlarae expressed excitement and preference for these activities, reinforcing the value of incorporating physical and creative play into mental wellness programmes.

“

The game was very fun to play, and the Jumble Twins were our favourite Beastie!



CONCLUSION

This activity enriched the HAF programme by combining mental health education with interactive play, enabling children to explore emotions, build empathy, and form social connections in an inclusive and age-appropriate way.



FOOD PROVISION

As part of our commitment to holistic food education, we worked in close partnership with a range of food providers, including **Take and Make, Made in Hackney, The Felix Project** and local community organisations such as **Soul and Sound**. Guided by our Food Education Partnerships Coordinator, these collaborations have enabled us to deliver fresh produce, hands-on food education, and healthy eating workshops across the borough.

These partnerships have not only supported the delivery of nutritious meals but also sparked meaningful conversations and activities around healthy food choices. Children and families engaged in cooking sessions, learned about seasonal ingredients, and explored how to prepare balanced meals on a budget.

POSITIVE IMPACT & COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Feedback from families and delivery partners has been overwhelmingly positive. Our inclusive and practical approach to food education has been well received, with many families reporting increased confidence in cooking and making healthier lifestyle choices at home.

ADDRESSING DEPRIVATION HIGHLIGHTS ACTION & COST OF LIVING

Targeting areas most affected by deprivation and the rising cost of living has been central to the success of our holiday programme. By integrating food education with sports and arts-based activities, we've enhanced the overall experience for children and young people. Seasonal food hampers and recipe kits have further supported families, encouraging bonding through shared cooking experiences.

SCHOOL BASED DELIVERY & ENGAGEMENT

Strong relationships with local schools have played a vital role in the programme's success.

Most of our Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) sessions were hosted within school settings, which significantly boosted accessibility and participation.

As a result, many programmes were oversubscribed, and the number of schools involved has steadily increased year on year. The majority of providers opted to secure food provision through the borough's principal school caterer, BD Group.

This ensured a consistent and high quality offer, which we could be assured met School Food Standards.



"We played a fun game where we had to guess them just by touching their skin, since we couldn't see them. It made learning feel like an adventure!"

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

CASE STUDY

In its first full-scale summer programme for children and young people aged 5–18, Dance Network Association delivered a vibrant and impactful experience that placed physical activity, wellbeing, and inclusivity at its core. Over two four-day sessions, the organisation offered a rich schedule featuring 3 hours and 15 minutes of daily dance activities, led by a diverse team of instructors and covering a wide range of styles. These sessions were complemented by daily wellbeing practices, creative crafting, and specialist workshops in areas such as Afro Grooves, Parkour, Nutrition, and Technology.

To support families holistically, Dance Network Association also provided free weekly wellbeing and nutrition workshops for parents, alongside healthy snacks and hot, balanced meals for every child, ensuring all dietary needs were met with care and without stigma. The programme was delivered by a dedicated team including lead artists, support staff, and 1:1 SEND specialists, with access to quiet spaces for children requiring additional support, creating a safe and nurturing environments for all.



"Dance makes me feel energised and releases stress when I am having a bad day."

Despite a short recruitment period, the programme saw a significant increase in engagement, with 139 registrations, up from just 20 during the Easter provision. This growth reflects the community's increasing trust in the organisation's offer. Key successes included the introduction of outdoor play spaces, improved session scheduling, and tailored programming for older participants. Children responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to try new dance styles and foods, while the collaborative creation of group codes of conduct fostered a strong sense of teamwork and mutual respect. Dance Network Association's summer programme not only delivered a wide range of engaging physical activities but also demonstrated a deep commitment to inclusion, creativity, and wellbeing. Insights gained, such as the benefits of staggered arrivals and adjusted session lengths for younger children, will inform future delivery, ensuring the programme continues to evolve in response to the needs of its participants and their families.

RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES

In partnership with Inspire Minds Through Sports, we facilitated residential trips to Trewern, offering children a unique opportunity to experience outdoor learning, team-building, and personal growth in a natural setting. These experiences were particularly impactful for children who may not otherwise have access to such opportunities.

NUTRITION EDUCATION

CASE STUDY

Company Drinks placed food education and nutrition at the heart of its summer programme, using the overarching theme of exploring the wild to create a rich, immersive learning experience.

The programme was delivered in their unique venue, the Outdoor Bowls Pavilion. This is surrounded by outdoor space, edible plants, herbs, and vegetables, providing a natural setting that brought food education to life.

Children engaged in hands-on activities that connected them to the origins and benefits of healthy eating. From making homemade cola with natural ingredients to participating in art workshops using dried flowers and twigs from the garden, every session was designed to spark curiosity and deepen understanding.

To extend this learning beyond the children, Company Drinks offered free weekly nutrition workshops for parents and carers.

These sessions provided practical guidance on balanced diets, food budgeting, and meal planning, creating a supportive space for families to build confidence and share knowledge.

This whole-family approach ensured that the programme's impact reached into the home, encouraging healthier habits across generations.

Throughout the programme, Company Drinks observed a positive shift in attitudes. Children became more inquisitive about food, eager to try new ingredients and understand what they were eating.



Families reported feeling more informed and empowered, with many making small but meaningful changes to their eating habits. By embedding food education into every aspect of the programme, through nature, creativity, and community, Company Drinks not only delivered vital knowledge but also inspired a lasting appreciation for healthy, sustainable living.

To conclude our HAF Programme in 2024...

Our food education activities sparked a real love for cooking, nutrition, and healthy living among children. From hands-on workshops to recipe boxes, young participants explored food in fun, creative ways, building confidence, curiosity, and a deeper understanding of what it means to eat well.

They didn't just learn about food, they connected with it, celebrated it, and shared it

"I had lots of fun and met new people. I found it interesting learning about the different herbs, cultures and music and everyone was really nice."

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & DISABILITIES (SEND)

Transforming Lives Through Specialist SEND Support – DABD's Impact in Barking & Dagenham

DABD continues to deliver an exceptional standard of care and support for children with SEND through its specialised services, particularly during the Winter HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme. Feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive, reflecting the organisation's deep commitment to inclusion, compassion, and tailored support. Creating a Safe, Nurturing Environment.

Creating a Safe, Nurturing Environment

Parents consistently praised the warm, welcoming, and professional atmosphere created by DABD staff. Many highlighted the team's patience, consistency, and ability to manage complex needs with empathy and skill. The environment was described as both safe and joyful, allowing children to thrive and feel genuinely cared for.

Personalised Support That Makes a Difference

Families noted the individualised attention their children received, including one-to-one support where needed. This personalised approach helped children settle in quickly, even those who typically struggle with transitions and led to visible improvements in confidence and happiness. One parent shared that their child, who usually finds it hard to adjust, left each session smiling.

A Lifeline for Families

For many, DABD's service has been described as a lifesaver, not only for the children who benefit from engaging activities and social interaction, but also for parents and carers who gain much-needed respite. The programme has helped families feel supported, understood, and less isolated, especially those navigating the challenges of raising children with complex needs.

Building Positive Memories

Children formed strong bonds with staff and peers, often expressing excitement about attending and reluctance to leave. Activities were inclusive, enjoyable, and meaningful ranging from creative play to structured routines that supported emotional and social development. Parents expressed gratitude for the positive memories created and the lasting impact on their children's well-being.

KEY CHALLENGES

The 2024 Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme successfully delivered a wide range of high-quality activities. While overall delivery was strong, monitoring and evaluation identified key areas for improvement:

1. Eligibility Verification

The introduction of universal free school meals for Key Stages 1 and 2 created confusion among families regarding HAF eligibility. As providers are responsible for eligibility checks, clearer guidance and more robust verification systems were needed to support accurate eligibility. Analysis of Summer participant data against school census showed that some providers needed to make their eligibility checks more robust. Our top performing provider delivered a briefing to all other providers and provider updated guidance, resulting in better performance during our Winter programme.

2. Booking Management

To mitigate last-minute cancellations, providers were advised to overbook by 10%. However, the decentralised booking approach led to some issues such as double-booking and families moving between programmes. We encouraged providers to liaise to avoid this from happening.

3. Attendance Patterns

- Winter Programme Attendance: Attendance during the Christmas period remained the lowest across all three HAF delivery windows. Contributing factors included family holidays, early nightfall, and inconsistent school term dates. Providers responded by contacting families and using waiting lists to fill gaps.
- Safety Concerns: A decline in Summer attendance was linked to the high-profile child tragedy in Southport and concerns about potential unrest during Easter. Some providers adjusted delivery hours or closed early to prioritise the safety of staff and participants.
- Winter monitoring enhancements: Revised monitoring and data collection forms improved the accuracy of attendance and booking records, which led to improvements in reporting to the DfE.

4. Forward Planning

Analysis of participant lists against school census data will continue following each programme to hold providers to account with regards to their eligibility checks. This will also inform decisions around commissioning, with poorer performing providers decommissioned.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

We collaborated closely with the Council's Marketing and Communications Team to ensure the HAF programme was effectively promoted through school bulletins, resident updates, and social media channels. To maintain consistent branding, we developed tailored posters and digital assets targeting both young families and teenagers for each programme cycle.

In addition to featuring the programme prominently on our website and in monthly newsletters, we leveraged our wider partnership network to extend outreach. We also partnered with the Revenues and Benefits Team to directly contact eligible families, ensuring targeted communication reached those most in need.



ADDITIONAL FUNDING AND PROGRAMME ALIGNMENT

As part of our efforts to enhance and expand the reach of our Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, we successfully secured an additional £80,000 in funding from Public Health. This supplementary funding was strategically allocated to support children and families who, while not eligible under the core HAF criteria, were identified as being of excess weight through governments' National Child Measurement Programme. An additional £90k was also allocated via a residual COVID recovery grant.

The additional resources enabled us to extend free holiday provision to these young people and their families. This provision included access to nutritious meals, physical activities, and enrichment opportunities designed to promote healthy behaviours and improve overall wellbeing. The initiative also supported our broader objective of reducing health inequalities and fostering community cohesion.

This funding was fully integrated into our HAF delivery model, ensuring a seamless experience for all participants. We worked closely with local health and community partners to identify eligible families and coordinate support services. This collaborative approach not only maximised the impact of the funding but also strengthened our alignment with wider public health and social care objectives.

Furthermore, our HAF programme was intentionally aligned with other local initiatives, including community wellbeing projects, youth engagement schemes, and school-based health promotion campaigns. By joining up with these programmes, we were able to create a more holistic support network for families, enhance referral pathways, and ensure that our provision complemented existing services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to say a big thank you to our HAF providers, who have continued to deliver a fantastic provision across the borough.

List: 2024 – 2025

Active Future - H Sports Ltd T/A Active Future East London
Art Bash
Ballerz UK
Carter Productions
Centrestage Perform CIC
Community Music Service
DABD
DNA
Everyone Active
Future Youth Zone
IMTS
Kick
Learning Hive
Malearn
Motion 4 Kids
Omega Sportz LTD
Premier Education
Pullums Dance Academy -
The Football Fun Factory
TKO Amateur Boxing Club
Ultimate Vision Sports
Your Sport by the PE Specialists

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