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Research reveals impact of the school holidays on struggling families

More than six out of 10 parents with household incomes of less than £25,000 are struggling to feed their children outside of term time according to crucial new research by Northumbria University.

For households with incomes of less than £15,000, that figure rose to 73% of parents who said they weren't always able to afford to buy food outside of term time.

The findings particularly affect those families receiving a free school meal, which ensures that children are guaranteed at least one wholesome meal a day.

Research on school holiday hunger by 'Healthy Living' at Northumbria University has fed into a Kellogg's report – Isolation and Hunger: the impact of the school holidays on struggling families – which was delivered to MPs on Friday (17th July).

Professor Greta Defeyter, Director of Healthy Living at Northumbria University, led the research, which was commissioned by Kellogg's.

It revealed 71% of parents found it harder to make ends meet during the summer holidays compared with term-time, while 63% of parents find themselves without enough money for food during the summer. A staggering 93% of low income parents skip at least one meal a day to make sure their children are fed.

More than 65% of parents on low household incomes say they often feel isolated in the school holidays due to being unable to afford to feed their families, or go out and entertain their children.

A pilot of 12 Kellogg's breakfast clubs delivered over the summer holiday period of 2014, revealed that clubs were positively received by children, staff and parents and all groups were keen to see the provision made available during future school holidays.

Kellogg's has now developed a holiday breakfast club programme based on these findings and has committed funding to the Mayor's Fund for London to help run ten clubs in the capital until August 2016.

Child poverty is set to become more commonly felt across the country, and particularly in the North East, as the impact of recent budget cuts come into effect, says Professor Defeyter. More than 37% of children are in poverty in the Newcastle Central constituency and in the ward of Elswick this increases to 47.5%

Professor Defeyter said: "There has been a 500,000-strong rise in the number of children in poverty, and many families have reacted by serving food laden with salt, fat and sugar because it is perceived as more filling food for the money.

"We know that food poverty becomes more acute during school holidays. The question is, why help? Well, it's a basic human right to have access to food for a healthy diet, and we know there's a clear link between food and academic attainment – particularly in areas of poverty and among primary-

age children.

“We are doing something about it in term time, but what about during the holidays?”

To help families in need, Kellogg’s is partnering with FareShare, which provides food to over 2,000 charities and community projects including holiday breakfast clubs.

Kellogg’s director Paul Wheeler said: “This summer there’ll be tens of thousands of parents going without meals so they can feed their kids.

“We are trying to help these parents by funding free holiday breakfast clubs across the UK. Those already open have proven to be a great success. That’s why we’ve invited politicians from all political parties to visit the clubs this summer to draw attention to this issue and demonstrate that there is help available.”

Northumbria’s research in the field of Psychology, which includes its work on breakfast clubs, was judged to have outstanding reach and significance for its impact on society in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework exercise, which assesses the quality of research in UK universities.

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