BURY2GETHER
*** Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families ***

Responses from BURY2GETHER Members Regarding Their Experience of HAF Summer 2023 for Children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

During the summer of 2023 Bury Council ran activities under the Holidays and Activities Fund (HAF) for children eligible for free school meals plus children regarded as 'vulnerable'. Vulnerable children includes children with SEND. Usually, HAF has provided a wide range of activities that are specifically for children with SEND but in 2023 BURY2GETHER were made aware that this offer was much reduced. BURY2GETHER surveyed its members in September 2023 to ask whether their child who has SEND had been able to access activities through the HAF programme. This report presents those findings.

Note: It became apparent in the first few responses that some parents believed that the summer activities run by the organisation Bee Inclusive were part of the HAF scheme, which they were not, and were answering with regard to Bee Inclusive. The survey was quickly amended to inform participants that the survey was only about HAF activities and not those run by Bee Inclusive or any other organisation. It is possible that a few early respondents answered questions with Bee Inclusive activities in mind and not HAF activities, possibly skewing those few results. Where it is thought that might be the case, a note has been put with the results in this report.

In total 46 members of BURY2GETHER responded to the survey. Participants were able to leave answers blank if they were not applicable.

Who Was Eligible for HAF?

Out of the 46 respondents, 16 were eligible for HAF due to being on free school meals. The other 30 respondents believed themselves to be eligible for HAF because their child had SEND needs but did not get free school meals.

Despite 30 respondents not being eligible for HAF due to income, and therefore obtaining a HAF code automatically, 14 of them were automatically sent a code by their child's school and 9 received a HAF code from their child's school when they asked for one and 1 had help from a professional to get a HAF code. That leaves 6 respondents who did not get a code so could not take part in HAF. The fact that 24 respondents who are not on free school meals were supplied HAF codes indicates that their schools, or professional working with them, believed them to be eligible for HAF as their child had SEND needs and fitted into the category of vulnerable children who could access HAF.

Consequently, of the 46 respondents 16 received a HAF code because they were on free school meals and 24 received HAF codes because their child was classed as vulnerable due to their SEND needs.

Age of Children Wanting to Take Part in HAF Activities

Of those wanting to take part in HAF activities 28% were in secondary school and 72% were in primary school.

SEND Needs of Those Wanting to Take Part in HAF Activities

Respondents were asked to list all of their child's SEND needs as children can have more than one SEND need. The table below shows all the needs listed by parents.

SEND Need	Number of Children
Autistic (diagnosed or on the assessment pathway)	34
Sensory Processing Disorder/Sensory Difficulties	27
Learning Disability/Difficulty	20
ADHD	15
Communication Disability/Difficulty	11
Physical Disability	10
Mental Health	6
Epilepsy	5
Genetic Condition	5
Cerebral Palsy	3
Dyspraxia	2
Down's Syndrome	2
Visual Impairment	2
Anxiety	1
Hearing Impairment	1

The highest proportion (79%) of respondent's children wanting to take part in HAF were autistic. There was also a wide spread of different SEND needs with 43% having a learning difficulty/disability and 22% having a physical disability.

Suitability of HAF Activities for Children with SEND

Of the 44 respondents who replied to this question, 31 felt that there was a HAF activity available that was suitable for their child. The answers may have been slightly skewed as of those 31 saying a HAF activity was suitable, 5 only listed Bee Inclusive activities as activities their children had participated in and not HAF activities.

Reasons given by parents/carers for some of the HAF activities being unsuitable:

'Bigger groups.' [ie, too many children in the group for the child]

'My child's needs were graded higher level and there was none but Nerf Wars. My child

won't use a fork and knife or spoon - they won't be picking up a Nerf gun and shooting.' [ie child is level 4 disability but Nerf Wars as an activity for this level of need was unsuitable]

'I need an accessible changing bed that goes up and down. And my child likes things a certain way.'

'My child requires 2:1 [care] - nothing suitable.'

'My child is non-verbal, incontinent and needs 1:1 care. This means there is no availability for them to join in.'
'None of the activities seemed specialised or tailored to meet the needs of a child with limited verbal communication and significant sensory needs. My child requires 1:1 support as detailed in their EHCP. Also all the activities appeared to be tailored around organised sports and team activities which are very challenging for my autistic child.'

'Only one suitable was an equestrian activity that I felt was cruel. Other activities were way too busy for my child's needs.'

'They weren't with people who my child trusted. They did not give enough information to reduce my child's anxiety. Some activities did not seem inclusive, according to the information provided.'

'Only one HAF activity was actually accessible - Secret Garden. We had booked Funtime but then found out from another parent that the session had completely changed and would not then be accessible. No communication from Funtime to let either me or other parent know. This was extremely disappointing and upsetting as it meant out of all the HAF activities on offer, only ONE was suitable for my child because they are a wheelchair user with complex needs. I emailed HAF to complain but to no avail. In any other context this would be viewed as discrimination.'

'The first set of activities made available were appalling in terms of being accessible for autistic children. They were generally in-school type clubs. My child needs to be able to have his sensory needs met so climbing, swimming, etc, are far better. These were introduced later but they were booked up very quickly.'

'Wouldn't accept as needed 1:1.'

HAF Activities Attended

Parents/carers reported that their children took part in Funtime, gymnastics, Hindles School of Excellence, a make-up session, Quality Sports, Secret Garden, activities at St Andrew's PALS and NEST Forest School.

Variety of HAF Activities Suitable for SEND

When asked if parents/carers felt there was a wide variety of HAF activities for their child with SEND to take part in, 47% said no, 42% said yes and 11% did not respond.

Parents/Carers Comments on Suitable Activities

'There were two that appeared to be accessible. However, one changed their sessions without notifying parent carers to be a less accessible session.'

'We could only do Secret Garden, which was great but the offering for 14 year old SEND was poor.'

'There was nothing suitable for [my child]... All I have seen on HAF was the garden activity [Secret Garden] - really disappointed with this summer's HAF.'

Asked if there were enough suitable HAF activities to use all their vouchers, 53% of parent/carers said no, 36% said yes and 11% did not reply.

Parents/Carers Comments on Ability to Use All Their HAF Vouchers

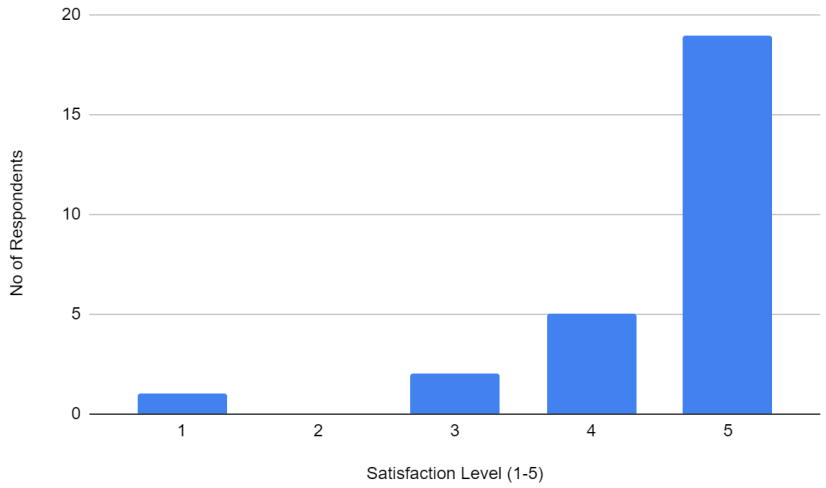
'The HAF vouchers were, frankly, a waste of time for families like ours.'

'HAF this summer was a real disappointment. We didn't use one voucher. Poor choice of activities for SEN families.'

Inclusion

Asked if they felt that the activity/activities their child attended with HAF were inclusive 56.5% said yes, 37% did not respond and 6.5% said no.

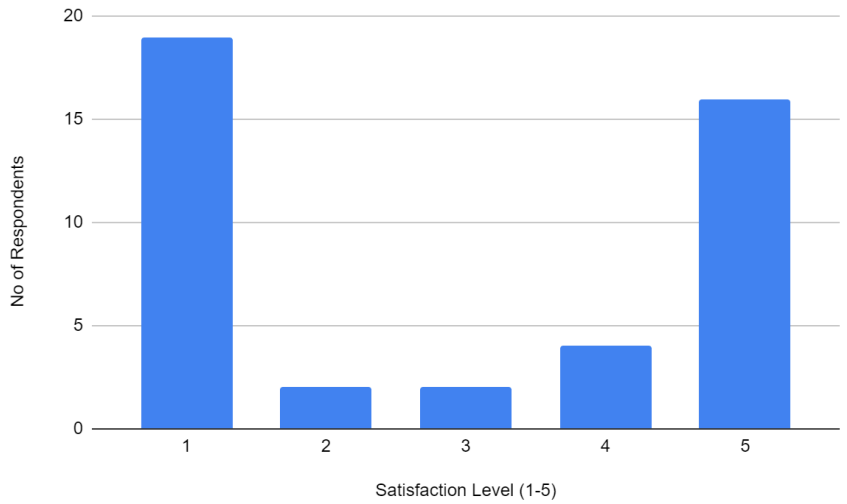
Children's Enjoyment of HAF Activity/Activities They Took Part In



Parents/carers were asked to rate how much their child had enjoyed the HAF activity/activities they had taken part in on a scale of 1-5 (1 did not enjoy, 5 really enjoyed).

The majority of those children who had taken part in a HAF activity had enjoyed their session. Note: under the scale ‘5’ there were 5 participants who only listed their child taking part in Bee Inclusive activities, and under the ‘3’ scale there was one participant listing only Bee Inclusive activities.

Parents/Carers’ Satisfaction with HAF 2023



Parents/carers were asked to rate overall how satisfied they were with the HAF programme for their child with SEND for 2023 on a scale of 1-5 (1 unsatisfied, 5 very satisfied). There was a split with some parents very satisfied with the HAF programme but many who were not.

Other Holiday Activities for Children With SEND

52% of parents/carers were unable to find activities outside of HAF suitable for their child with SEND to take part in. Of those that did find other activities these included activities provided by Action for Children (2 respondents), Bee Inclusive (13), CAFT (1), Spectrum Gaming (1), Pauline Quirke Academy (1) and a school holiday club (1).

Other Comments from Parents/Carers in General

‘I booked my child onto Funtime for Boccia - accessible for wheelchair users. I found out by another parent that they had changed the session to something not appropriate nor accessible for my child. I contacted the organisation, who confirmed this, saying that they may offer it in October instead. I'm so glad I didn't turn up to this session as it would have been very upsetting.’

‘I felt the HAF summer this year took away SEND activities and replaced them with activities for older children like make-up . My other child with no needs was never sent vouchers, and he is entitled, but was sent them this summer which I found odd. Just felt let

down this time.'

'Disappointed not to receive a code this time as had received [a code] previously and my child's needs are still the same. There would have only been 2 activities suitable though, so they wouldn't have been able to access much so vouchers would have gone unused.'

'By the time I received the codes there were no activities left for my child to attend. They got on one only because she was on the short list.'

'I didn't feel there were enough options for my SEN child. They enjoyed the St Andrews PALS sessions but not sure it was particularly tailored to them, and even though the staff were lovely an introduction and a bit more of interaction would have been really appreciated as we felt a bit lost on the first day.'

'HAF was fantastic. I'm really grateful to access it. It gave variety and support and my child loved it. She made friends and experienced exciting new things whilst I was able to work. Can't fault it - the booking system was easy to use and offered me all the info needed.'

'HAF is not tailored for SEN families. In fact, I think SEND is an afterthought... Bee inclusive were excellent and honestly I can't thank them enough for the range of activities available and the way they have brought together our community, which seems so often to be forgotten by other organisations.'

'I felt really isolated in the holidays... I couldn't use my HAF vouchers.'

'Bee Inclusive, Spectrum Gaming and other organisations need to be funded so that my child can have a social life.'

'I found it hard over the summer due to my child needing contact care. I am physically disabled and it makes it hard to do a lot of the activities with them. Secret Garden was brilliant as I was able to leave my child to play and sit in the car as I struggle walking. They were all so lovely and my son really enjoyed it.'

'Overall I love the full day activities because it's very helpful when some of us parents go to work and can get childcare on time.

'I wish that these activities were available for all children with special needs, not just those who are more able. But it needs to be thought about and planned. My child would need 1 to 1 and that's not going to happen because of the cost.'

'I would be VERY interested in learning about other local activities for SEND children over the summer holidays.'

'My child didn't get to experience the HAF activities as we didn't receive any codes.'

'It was helpful and good.'

‘More for disabled people [would] be good.’

‘Nothing for teenagers available.’

‘The SEND offering was poor as was the amount of age-appropriate things for a 14-year-old SEND child. Also, HAF vouchers for SEND were only worth half the value if you had a neuro typical child for the activity. However, the people at Secret Garden were lovely and put on a great activity.’ [If you booked a SEND session, eg at Secret Garden, you only got 2 hours whereas a non-SEND session was 4 hours. You could book 2 SEND sessions together but that took up 2 credits rather than 1 for a non-SEND child booking 4 hours.]

‘There was a noticeable reduction in activities suitable for my SEND child this summer from other years as a result of the LA not agreeing the same funding as previous years.’

Conclusion

In previous years children with SEND had a wide choice of activities specifically aimed at their needs provided via the HAF programme. The HAF offering this year drastically reduced the number of activities specifically aimed at children with SEND. BURY2GETHER believes that children with SEND and in receipt of free school meals should have just as varied a programme of activities on offer as children without SEND on free school meals. Only 2 providers offered exclusive SEND sessions making it hard for parents to use all their HAF vouchers. The activities provided were either physical or outdoors. It is not fair, and it is not much fun to be expected to go to the same activity again and again, however good it may be, when children without SEND have a wide choice of activities to attend. Children with SEND deserve to have the variety of experiences with HAF as their peers without SEND enjoy. To not provide more variety for children with SEND needs and on free school meals feels discriminatory.

Where children were able to access a HAF session, on the whole the child enjoyed the activity, although parental satisfaction of HAF as a whole was lower.

BURY2GETHER would suggest that children with SEND come under the category of ‘vulnerable children’ who are eligible for HAF even if they are not eligible for free school meals. This will include children who are not just ‘category 4’ disability but an overwhelming number of neurodiverse children who will need extra support to attend activities or activities specifically aimed at children with SEND needs. .

Recommendation

BURY2GETHER would like to draw attention to the Disabled Children's Partnership report, *The Loneliest Summer*, published this year which highlights the distinct lack of holiday clubs for children with disabilities: there are none in Bury. This leaves parents of children with SEND at a disadvantage to parents of children without SEND during the school holidays. With Bury Council reducing the number of HAF activities for children with SEND this increases the vulnerability of families with children with SEND. In its report - based on a national survey of 1794 parents of disabled children - **the Disabled Children’s Partnership calls on the government and local councils to ensure that at least 15% of activities**

funded by HAF are specifically for disabled children. It highlights the risks to disabled children who cannot access social opportunities in the school holidays in terms of regression of skills, isolation and difficulties transitioning back to school; the risks to parents in terms of increased stress, isolation and exhaustion; and the often forgotten risk to siblings, who do not get time with their parents or a break from being young carers.

BURY2GETHER would recommend that the HAF programme includes at least 15% of activities specifically for children with SEND and that children with SEND that are not eligible for free school meals have access to the HAF programme.

BURY2GETHER would also recommend that a parent/carer rep from BURY2GETHER be on the Steering Group for HAF. This would mean that there is alway a voice from parents/carers of children with SEND on the Steering Group.

Finally, BURY2GETHER would also recommend that a Task & Finish Group is set up to explore how other LA's run the SEND offering for HAF to see if anything can be learnt from their experiences.

BURY2GETHER
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