

Announcing [£2 million of funding for free holiday activities and meals](#) for disadvantaged families last week, Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said: *‘For most pupils, the end of the school summer term signals the start of holidays, days out and a chance to make memories with friends and family. Other families, who might rely on the support provided by schools, are not so lucky’.*

Luck has nothing to do with it. The reason children are going hungry in [Breadline Britain](#)<sup>1</sup> - not only during the holidays but all year round - is that they are structurally disadvantaged by a shrinking welfare state and a government that refuses to take responsibility for the health and wellbeing of its children. Food ‘solutions’ meet an immediate need but cannot solve food poverty; rather they risk further stigmatising and excluding families from [‘ordinary living patterns’](#)<sup>2</sup>.

Having enough to eat of an adequate quantity and quality has long been a minimal expectation of what it is to live in a western country. But our study, [‘Families and Food in Hard Times’](#)<sup>3</sup>, found families on low incomes who were unable to feed themselves properly and others who were barely able to do so. Reflecting [previous studies](#)<sup>4</sup>, some parents often went without food in order that their children did not go hungry, while in other families both parent and child suffered. [As one boy told us](#):

*‘Yeah ...we used to like eat. But now ....we haven’t eaten cos my mum’s stopped working, not enough food coming ... we have to like cope with it....and not spend nothing cos like if you do then we’re going to struggle even more’ (Kwame, aged 15, inner London)*

[The harmful consequences of insufficient food or food of poor nutritional value, particularly for children, are well-established and have immediate and long-term implications](#)<sup>5</sup>. These include poor growth, overweight and obesity and the growing incidence of coronary heart disease, type II diabetes and cancer<sup>6</sup>. Sub-optimal diets and food habits such as skipping meals are also associated with poor cognition and lower academic achievement<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, [food poverty has social and psychological dimensions that are especially important for](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Lansley, S. and Mack, J. (2015) *Breadline Britain: The Rise of Mass Poverty*. London: Oneworld Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>3</sup> Families and Food in Hard times is a mixed methods research project examining the extent and experience of food poverty for children and 11-15 years and their families in the UK, Portugal and Norway. It is funded by the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) /ERC grant agreement n° 337977.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon, D., Mack, J. and Lansley, S. et al. (2013). ‘The impoverishment of the UK’, Poverty and Social Exclusion UK, first results: Living Standards.

<sup>5</sup> RCPCH & CPAG (2017). Poverty and child health Views from the frontline May 2017. London: The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. At: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/201804/poverty20and20child20health20survey20-20views20from20the20frontline20-20final2008.05.20171.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Lawlor, D. A. (2013). ‘The Vienna Declaration on nutrition and noncommunicable diseases’, *British Medical Journal*, 347, f4417; Kirkpatrick SI, McIntyre L, Potestio ML. Child hunger and long-term adverse consequences for health. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2010; 164(8):754-62; Kirkpatrick SI, Tarasuk V. Food insecurity is associated with nutrient inadequacies among Canadian adults and adolescents. *J Nutr*. 2008; 138(3):604-12.

<sup>7</sup> Hoyland, A., Dye, L. and Lawton, C. (2009). ‘A systematic review of the effect of breakfast on the cognitive performance of children and adolescents’, *Nutritional Research Reviews*, 22 (2) 220-43; Bundy et al., (2017).

[children](#)<sup>8</sup>. Whilst parents' sacrifice can protect children from food shortage, the indirect effects of food poverty [penetrate deeply into the 'emotional heartland' of children's personal and family lives](#)<sup>9</sup>. As one girl told us:

*'If there isn't enough food we'll get it and sometimes mum will go hungry and starve and stuff. Even if it's not that much food for me and [my brother], it's enough that we've actually had something, whereas mum hasn't, and it gets a bit to the point where we'll start feeling guilty because mum hasn't had anything and we've had it' (Bryony, aged 13, coastal town in the south east of England)*

The school holidays bring [greater financial and social pressures for families](#)<sup>10</sup>. However, ['there are a range of structural causes of poverty that increase the vulnerability of children and families to experiencing hunger in the school holidays, and in that sense, holiday hunger is not a discrete issue to be considered in isolation'](#)<sup>11</sup>. Additional funds to help disadvantaged children with 'food and fun' over the holidays are welcome. But given the scale of the problem this solution goes nowhere near far enough and cannot address the underlying issues that lead to the food poverty of children and their families.

The week after the Government announced funding for additional school holiday provision, [it was revealed that it is commissioning research into the relationship between its own policies and the rise in food aid](#). There is plenty of evidence already that [this growth is the predictable and, some suggest, intended result of policies that have taken away from those who had least to begin with](#)<sup>12</sup>. Food aid, including school holiday provision, is an inadequate response that is 'susceptible to four particular challenges: [it] can be [inaccessible, unreliable, unaccountable and socially unacceptable](#)'<sup>13</sup>. To address the food poverty of children and families Government should make use of [budget standards research](#) to ensure that wages and benefits, in combination, are adequate for [a socially acceptable standard of](#)

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<sup>8</sup> Fram, M.S., Bernal, J. and Frongillo E.A. (2015). The Measurement of Food Insecurity among Children: Review of literature and concept note, Innocenti Working Paper No.2015-08, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/784-the-measurement-of-food-insecurity-among-children-review-of-literature-and-concept.html>

<sup>9</sup> Ridge, T. (2011). The Everyday Costs of Poverty in Childhood: A Review of Qualitative Research Exploring the Lives and Experiences of Low-Income Children in the UK. *Children & Society* 25(1):73-84. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00345.x>

<sup>10</sup> Davis, A., Hill, K., Hirsch, D. and Padley, M. (2016). A Minimum Income Standard for the UK in 2016 by. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> CPAG (2017). CPAG's response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger inquiry into hunger amongst children during the school holidays. Available at: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG-submission-to-Feeding-Britain-inquiry-into-holiday-hunger-March-2017.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Cooper, V. and Whyte, D. (eds). (2017) *The Violence of Austerity*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>13</sup> Lambie-Mumford, H. and Sims, L. (2018). Charitable Breakfast Clubs and Holiday Hunger Projects in the UK. In W. Wills and R. O'Connell (eds). *Children & Society* Special Issue: Children's and Teenagers' Food Practices in Contexts of Poverty and Inequality. VOLUME 32: 244-254. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/chso.12272>

[living and eating that recognises the fundamental role of food in health and social inclusion](#)<sup>14</sup>.

In the UK, we are living in a period of deep political and economic uncertainty. [Leaving the European Union and the accompanying Brexit negotiations](#), the implementation of further cuts to welfare benefits and higher inflation including food prices, the plight of families such as Kwame's, and Bryony's is unlikely to improve. The resulting food poverty and its effects on children's and young people's physical and emotional well-being is a matter of grave concern.

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<sup>14</sup> O'Connell, R. E., Owen, C., Padley, M., Simon, A., & Brannen, J. (2018). Which types of family are at risk of food poverty in the UK? A relative deprivation approach. *Social Policy and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746418000015>