



Professor Greta Defeyter, Faculty Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Strategic Planning & Engagement and Dr Pamela L Graham, a Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow

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## **Inquiry into why children are going hungry**

**Experts on children's holiday hunger from the Healthy Living Research Lab at Northumbria University, Newcastle have been asked to present to a group of MPs who are leading an inquiry into the issue.**

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[Experts at Northumbria University to speak to MP inquiry about holiday hunger](#) from [Northumbria University](#) on [Vimeo](#).

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger is looking into the extent of hunger amongst children during the school holidays, as well as the impact it has on their life choices.

Dr Pamela L Graham, a Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow and Emily Mann, PhD Researcher will be attending a meeting of the APPG on Hunger on Monday 6th March, 2017. Led by Professor Greta Defeyter, Faculty Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Strategic Planning & Engagement, the Healthy Living Lab has carried out extensive, nation-wide research on this topic. At the meeting, the Northumbria academics will highlight the findings of their research, which show that holiday hunger is a real issue across the whole of the UK, and one that has a significant impact on the lives of many families.

Over the next six weeks the APPG on Hunger is gathering oral and written evidence in order to gain a deeper understanding of the scale of the problem, its impact on children's mental, physical and academic development as well as proposals for responding most effectively to it.

Research by the Healthy Living team at Northumbria University into holiday clubs, which has drawn directly on the views of children, parents and holiday club staff, has shown that holiday clubs are recognised as a necessary resource to support families during the school holidays. In some cases,

parents are skipping meals, pooling food with friends and relying on cheap, processed foods to ensure their children have enough to eat during the holidays. Holiday clubs help to alleviate these issues by offering families regular access to healthy meals. However, for many families the provision of activities and the opportunity to spend time with others is the main attraction of holiday clubs. Families can become isolated during the school holidays, particularly during the long summer break, but holiday clubs give families a place locally where they can meet with other families and participate in activities without having to worry about travel or expense.

A holiday club mapping exercise carried out by the Healthy Living team in 2016 gathered data from over 400 organisations throughout all areas of the UK. The results of the project showed that holiday clubs were planned to take place, or are already up and running, in a multitude of venues including schools, church/faith groups, food banks and housing associations, with the majority of provision available in the most deprived areas of the UK. Holiday clubs aimed to support a range of needs but the provision of food, childcare and social activities were identified as areas of priority. When asked about the support needed to deliver holiday clubs, organisations viewed Government funding to be important as well as the provision of a national portal where training and information can be accessed.

Professor Defeyter said: “Holiday hunger is a very real issue and it’s shocking that in this day and age some parents are struggling to feed their children. The holidays can be a stressful time for many parents, but holidays can be particularly so for families on low incomes, many of whom qualify for free school meals during term time. The additional cost of feeding a family of four during the holiday period is approximately £30-£40 per week. This additional cost has resulted in many low-income families adjusting their shopping habits; buying less expensive food that is often laden with salt, fat and sugar because it is perceived as being more filling and better value for money than healthier options.

“We are delighted to be asked to present oral and written evidence to the inquiry. Northumbria University is leading the way in the research into holiday hunger. There’s a clear link between food and academic attainment – particularly in areas of poverty and among primary-age children. Not only does holiday hunger affect children’s lives now but it may also have significant detrimental effects on their health and life chances in the future. There is a real need for accessible food and activity provision during the school holidays for children and young people in the UK. This is something

that needs addressing as a matter of urgency.”

The University is currently undertaking further research into the area. One project includes a collaborative PhD programme with Brakes, one of the UK’s leading food wholesalers, evaluating its ‘Meals and More’ holiday club programme which supports the provision of holiday clubs in areas of socio-economic deprivation with food and enrichment activities to enhance the health, social, and educational outcomes of children, young people and their families. Other projects will be focussing on community interventions, mapping of holiday hunger provision, and evaluating the impact of holidays on summer learning loss, health and wellbeing.

The APPG carrying out the inquiry is chaired by Frank Field MP and includes South Tyneside MP Emma Lewell-Buck MP.

Mr Fields said: “Holidays for most children are a time to look forward to family outings and adventures with their mates. Clearly for some children though the overriding priority during the school holidays is to find out where their next meal is coming from or how they will be able to afford more than a fizzy drink and package of sweets each day.

“In some parts of the country, schools, and volunteers have already leapt to the defence of those children, by providing free meals and fun activities throughout the holidays. We are now on the lookout for national solutions that can be driven by local communities – with support from the Government, businesses and charities – to ensure no child goes hungry in the holidays.

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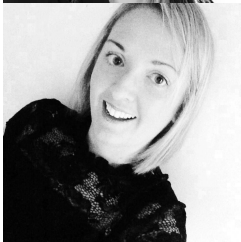


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