





Hartpury Active Essex Systems Evaluation: ActivAte/HAF Findings Report - January 2023

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Phase 2 Programme theory testing

- Having carried out the comprehensive collaborative process from phase 1, this phase consisted of the evaluation testing the wide range of explanatory assumptions and beliefs underpinning the areas of focus.
- •Here, we utilised a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to test these assumptions and beliefs, and then offer insights and reflections for refinement to inform overall learning to action.
- •These methods were tested with a wide range of stakeholders in the active Essex system ranging from beneficiaries to senior decision makers and influencers.
- •This phase was also supported by the embedded SROI approach.
- •It is important to state that during this testing phase we were conscious of existing evaluation work and data collection taking place across Active Essex. As a result, we made every effort to collaborate and avoid duplication (for example supporting and working with the LDP realist evaluation framework in progress).

Over the course of the evaluation, we implemented a range of qualitative and quantitative methods to facilitate the deep dive process. These are outlined below.

11 - Interviews

5 - Focus groups

Semi-structured interviews captured the impact and illustrated which changes were observable across the four areas of focus. We explored how and why engagement across the four areas of focus contributed to change in individuals, communities, and the system.

Focus groups were implemented to capture deeper insights collectively about the changes people experienced. Focus groups were an invaluable aid to facilitate conversations amongst community members, groups and organisational staff.

5 -Reflective logs

Reflective logs were a personal way for young people participants to reflect on their experiences of being involved in the ActiveAte/HAF area of focus.

105 -Surveys

Surveys were co produced as a mixed method to gather quantitative and qualitative data across the four areas of focus from participants and strategic stakeholders. These informed the programme theory testing, deep dives and the social return on investment forecast. The four ONS Wellby questions were built into each survey.





Initial assumption

How is this playing out?

If socialisation has declined since COVID then ActivAte/HAF can provide a safe place for children to socialise during the school holidays.

Children's motivation for attending ActivAte/HAF is predominantly to socialise with their peers and with staff members in a fun and safe environment. Parents and carers also felt their children were making friends through ActivAte/HAF.

The ActivAte/HAF programme will support families that are low income through providing free childcare opportunities in the holidays.

ActivAte/HAF provides opportunities for Parents/Carers to spend time caring for family, working or education/training, or moments of respite without the costs of childcare.

Parents/Carers who have paid for the programme also benefit from the opportunities provided however they have the cost of childcare.

When children participate in the ActivAte/HAF activities, trust between the children and staff builds which leads to conversations and actions around physical activity and healthy eating.

Staff are important in fostering a safe and trusting environment for participants to have a positive experience. Children follow the example set by the staff i.e. staff eating range of foods, children more likely to try the foods. Staff being physically active and joining in, children more likely to join in.

ActivAte/HAF Impact headlines

Going deeper into findings – ActivAte / HAF Participant Reflective Log One

Sa

What healthy foods do you eat at home?

"Veggies, peas, corn, banana, raspberry, strawberry."

mmy felt she ate healthily at home, and

recorded the items she enjoyed in her diary.

What new healthy foods have you tried in the sessions? "Melon, watermelon."

Sammy preferred breadsticks as a snack but didn't think they were healthy. The activity provided many options for Sammy to try new foods.

Do staff encourage you to make healthy choices? "No I encourage myself."

She agreed that staff would eat healthy but felt she could her own decisions without encouragement.

Are the staff role models to you for being healthy? "No, I am my role

model." Sammy set and managed her own goals, using a diary to make sure she drank enough water. She said the staff were active and ate healthy food in front of the children.

Do you feel happy coming here? "Sometimes."
Why? "I get into arguments [with friends]." Sammy struggled to communicate, leading to arguments. Staff remained calm and wouldn't prevent attendance or send anyone home

Do you feel safe coming here? "Yes." Why? "Gates (school gates) and solve things myself."

Sammy felt safe and was familiar with the school in which the activities were based.

What have you enjoyed the most? "Lots of paper." Sammy enjoyed writing and drawing. The staff made sure other provisions were available if she didn't want to engage in physical activity.

What have you not enjoyed? "Arguments."

Sammy's differences in communication caused conflict with others. She was told she "displays bad body language" and appears disinterested or rude towards others and their feelings.

Sammy- Summer 2022

- Sammy was provided with a safe space to take time alone when overstimulated, helping build trust with the staff and feeling safe with the activity.
- Staff sought to re-engage children with varying needs to make sure they felt included and encouraged socialising with others.
- In creating a fun, safe and understanding atmosphere, staff could build trust with the children and encourage healthier eating.
- Staff completed qualifications to better support children and young people with SEND. This created a deeper understanding, develop communication skills and create an inclusive environment.

Dan – Summer 2022

- Dan is 9 years old and enjoys attending as he could be with his friends and play games.
- He that the staff were "really polite" which helped him feel included and involve others in activities.
- Dan found other activities "really enjoyable" and could also take part in his favourite activity, which was important to him.
- Staff encouragement and understanding helped build trust with the children. This created a safe environment where the children felt comfortable taking part in new activities.

Going deeper into findings – ActivAte / HAF Participant Reflective Log Two

What healthy foods do you eat at home?

"Apples, Bananas, Strawberries, Salad."

Dan said he eats healthily at home but struggled to recall more examples.

What new healthy foods have you tried in the sessions? "Peppers, Cucumbers."

Dan felt he has tried most of the food outside of this session and was not a picky eater. He reported eating most of what he was given, whether it was healthy or not.

Do staff encourage you to make healthy choices? "They encourage us to be active in a nice way." Dan felt they had the option to take part when they were ready and weren't punished if they chose not to.

Are the staff role models to you for being healthy? "They are really polite, and they join in activities with us."

The positive relationship with staff encouraged Dan to join in with new things or activities he didn't enjoy outside of the HAF programme.

Do you feel happy coming here? "Yes."
Why? "it's fun and they do football which is my favourite."

Do you feel safe coming here? "Yes." Why? "All of the staff members are nice."

Football was important to Daniel as it was his favourite activity. He felt comfortable participating in other activities as he trusted the staff who would encourage trying different activities.

What have you enjoyed the most? "The zorbs because I kept rolling backwards and I loved it." This was a new experience for Dan.

What have you not enjoyed? "I really enjoyed everything."

Dan felt everything was fun and enjoyable to take part in, with staff facilitating an inclusive and safe experience that motivated Dan to take part.

What we Explored:

If children lack role models at home, then by attending these clubs that put them in contact with people working within the community to aid in the intervention delivery, trust begins to be built between the children and supervisors and staff leading to a development of role models because children will begin to form relationships with peers and staff.

What we found:

Children look forward to seeing some staff members again after seeing them at other activities/previous holiday provision which makes them feel comfortable when attending the activities. "Some of the children will bring the staff drawings they made at home" (Andrea, delivery staff) and children described the staff as "fun", "silly", "kind" and "helpful". Despite parents and carers having limited interaction with staff, two parents received "glowing reports on the staff" from the children.

For Dan (participant, reflective log two), staff are important in getting him to try activities he was unfamiliar with or did not like because he trusts it will be fun if the staff member joined in due to the positive relationship that had been built up by staff with himself. "They join in the activities, and it makes me want to join in too" (Dan).

The children feel welcome when they turned up to sessions. "They would greet us when we turn up and give us nicknames. They are always happy to see us" (Lily, participant).

The staff are positive to the children and displayed healthy habits where children saw "adults always moving around" and "eating the fruit snacks".

Where children had higher needs, they benefit from staff that are trained and have experience in working with higher needs children. For Sammy (Reflective Log One), her need for a safe space and patience when experiencing conflict is important to allow her to feel included so that she could re-join the group when she was ready. Staff had undergone training in working with higher needs children and work to provide an inclusive environment.

What we Explored:

If there is a large population of in obesity in children per capita, then by providing an intervention which teaches children how to eat correctly and healthily through first hand lessons on nutrition, there will be a shift in mindset on a wider group as children will transmit what they have learnt to peers through their direct and indirect actions, therefore creating healthier children as they begin to recognise the benefits of healthy eating.

What we found:

ActivAte/HAF delivery partner A had built up a relationship with a local restaurant to provide inexpensive food that was still nutritious. This relationship was informal, but it means low cost, nutritional food was provided because the local partner wants to help by providing inexpensive food to local children. Where children like Sammy (reflective log one) are fussy eaters, they are a range of snacks that ensure there is an option to eat if the children do not like the main lunch option. The delivery partner also offers less healthy options such as breadsticks as a last resort for children who do not like the snacks or main lunch option so that these children are still fed.

Delivery partner B's provision of hot food provision is limited to burger, sausage, or chicken nuggets and chips for lunch. This does not align to the values of teaching children to eat correctly and healthily although there are options of fruit as healthy snacks. The nutritional value of the food is not an issue for some parents and carers because they feel children could be "fussy" and "it was more important they ate something rather than nothing". The survey data suggests that 82% of parents and carers feel the food options were healthy although only 59% feel their children talk about healthy foods they eat at the activities.

Some children that are entitled to free lunches bring their own packed lunch, guaranteeing something they like but not guaranteeing the nutritional quality.

What we Explored:

If there is limited support to lower income households in regard to managing working life and childcare, then this initiative will support parents with childcare along with the added benefits of the programme therefore making it more attractive because parents will not have to pay for childcare or take time off work to care for their child allowing them to generate more of a disposable income.

What we found:

For parents and carers, ActivAte/HAF provides an opportunity for childcare which allows them to work, care for other children or family members, or for moments of relaxation. 54% of parents and carers are able to work during the times their children were at ActivAte/HAF. One parent works from home so "having them occupied during the day means I can work without worrying about entertaining [the children]" whilst another has a new-born baby so it provides them with the opportunity to relax and look after their baby.

The ActivAte/HAF programme is important to parents that do not use the programme as childcare to go to work. For their children, they enjoy "seeing friends in the holidays" and taking part in their favourite activities, keeping them entertained whilst the parents can care for other family members or use the time for relaxation. The opportunity to work is not the key factor for all parents signing up their children to participate in ActivAte/HAF.

What we Explored:

If families are apprehensive to send their children to the programme, then by recognising the success and benefits of the programme through the community they will be more inclined to sign their children up therefore reaching a larger audience.

What we found:

The relationship of LTO's with Active Essex allows for continued provision across Essex with trusted providers. Providers deliver locally and are known by community members (ABCD and Place Based working). For Angelica, she has attended the activities for the last couple of years. "I know lots of the instructors but sometimes there are new ones.

They're fun as well. I like coming here". Angelica felt she is treated well by staff and that behaviours were dealt with well. "Sometimes we can be silly or loud, but the instructors always talk to us. They don't shout if they tell us off".

Where there is a need for support for higher needs children, organisations are expected to cater for this by Active Essex. There needs to be greater education around working with SEND children across all staff involved in ActivAte/HAF where children may not be supported and even excluded because additional needs. LTO's that have experience and training in working with SEND children recognise that many parents and carers were grateful for an activity club that was inclusive for their child.

What we Explored:

If socialisation amongst children has declined since COVID, then we can introduce a safe place for children to socialise, parents will then recognise the social benefits of the programme and the main driver for parents will no longer be the food because they will understand the multitude of other positive effect to both themselves and their children.

What we found:

The main driver for many parents and carers appears to be the opportunity for their children to socialise during the holidays, where the food was beneficial but the opportunity for their children to socialise with others was more important than the nutritious value of the food. Joe (parent) feel that their child could "see their friends and do different activities". It also meant children were out of this house and "not playing on their consoles" (Glenn, parent). Angelica (participant) said that if she wasn't at the ActivAte/HAF provision, she would "probably be lazy or playing online with my friends" during the holidays.

Socialising with friends is a big reason that children enjoy attending ActivAte/HAF. They can meet new people and see their friends in the holidays, whilst taking part in fun and structured activities. The instructors/coaches create a fun environment where children could enjoy participating in these activities and make new friends. ActivAte/HAF activities provides opportunities for the children to socialise which is important to the children and parents. 90% of parents and carers feel their child had made new friends through ActivAte/HAF, where the activities provides fun opportunities to be active and facilitates a fun environment to meet new people.

Further supporting evidence for ActivAte/Holiday Activity Food

- Parents and carers were asked about their perceptions as to how their children engaged with the ActivAte HAF activities.
- Whilst their children took part, parents and carers told us that they were able to engage in paid employment (54%), childcare (19%), take vital time to relax (12%), participate in education or training (10%) or undertake other activities (such as errands) (5%).
- Parents and carers strongly agreed that:
- 83% the activities were fun
- 99% the activities promoted positive wellbeing in their child
- 90% their child made friends whilst meeting and socialising with other children
- 79% the activities were healthy for the children to engage with
- 89% said their child will engage in more physical activities in the future
- 68% their child learned new skills or abilities relating to physical activities
- 71% their child was more confident because of the activities
- 59% children had talked about the healthy food and drinks they were given. 82% parents and carers said they thought themselves that the food options were healthy and 80% said the drink options were healthy too.



What do these findings mean and where do we take them for refinement?

ActivAte/HAF provides opportunities for children to socialise during the school holidays where they may otherwise not socialise with other children. The inclusive nature of activities and staff is important to encouraging children to connect with others during the activities.

Overall, ActivAte/HAF promotes a message of healthy eating during the activities. Activity providers influence the provision of healthy foods in which children can eat whilst attending the programme and staff act as role models when they demonstrate healthy eating habits in front of the children.

There is a need to identify where providers would benefit from support in accessing inexpensive and nutritional food. This is to ensure nutritional food is offered throughout all providers.

There is a gap in understanding if families are accessing further opportunities of support through signposting. Where there are relationships with organisations being signposted to for additional support and resources, it is important to identify how and why families are accessing additional support.



Initial assumption

Working with Locally Trusted
Organisations (LTOs) means there is
capacity to build trust within the
community. These clubs will provide a
safe and fun environment for
vulnerable families because these
organisations will already be well
established and understanding of
community needs.

If ActivAte/HAF is able to pick up traction with system partners, then these system partners will start to embed strategic goals of the programme because they recognise the benefits to the community and therefore align their aims and objectives with this.

How is this playing out?

AE had already built up a good network of LTO's they can utilise and support to deliver the HAF/ActivAte programme. This meant many organisations that delivered the programme were able to provide more opportunities for physical activity or additional support post ActivAte/HAF programme delivery.

It is clear that the aims and philosophies of the ActivAte/HAF programme are fully embraced by the LTO's delivering it. However, more collaboration is needed across the Essex landscape if more senior system stakeholders are to embrace the role of ActiveAte/HAF providing sustainability beyond the reliance on government finding.

ActivAte/HAF System headlines

What we Explored:

If ActivAte/HAF picks up more traction with system partners, then there is more potential for it to be reflected in the strategic goals of these organisations because they will recognise the benefits that the intervention is bringing to the community so will therefore align themselves with similar aims and objectives.

What we found:

The influence of ActivAte/HAF is amongst LTO's that Active Essex work with already. The network was built up over time and has enabled Active Essex to deliver the ActivAte/HAF programme which had post programme opportunities for physical activity already available via the LTO's delivery outside of the school holidays. This sees a continuation of mutual interest in getting people active, through a different programme where funding is available.

There is potential for community capacity building in which opportunities for further support are signposted to families that are potentially vulnerable as they are in receipt of free school meals or are low income. Where ActivAte/HAF is the conduit between families and potential access to further opportunities, there is need track how families engage when signposted to understand if families are accessing these further opportunities as a result in their engagement in ActivAte/HAF.

What we Explored:

If ActivAte/HAF can encourage healthier eating amongst children, then wider stakeholders may refer children that need the programme as the benefits are being recognised. This referral system may aid in targeting the most in need cases and will also promote the programme to families that qualify.

What we found:

The LTO's that Active Essex work with embody the values of ActivAte/HAF to provide opportunities for children to be physically active and have access to nutritious food. There is an understanding of the potential benefits to vulnerable families when they can access free holiday childcare with free food, amongst the organisations involved directly in ActivAte/HAF.

Supporting low-income families is a politically contentious subject. For wider, potential, system partners, the political will for change may not see ActivAte/HAF as a viable option to reach their strategic goals and may cause a divide amongst sectors goals and beliefs and how supporting ActivAte/HAF benefits them. Where parents and carers may potentially be "unemployed, feeling depressed, not living in a great community, housing substandard. The fact you've taught me to cook from scratch probably isn't going to generate fundamental change" (Megan, Senior System Stakeholder) there is a concern over how ActivAte/HAF can have a sustainable impact in tackling structural inequalities. Whilst there are conversations happening across sectors, in which Active Essex are involved to some extent, stakeholders are "not as joined up as we could be" (Megan, Senior System Stakeholder).

What do these findings mean and where do we take them for refinement?

ActivAte/HAF is positioned to provide lowincome and targeted families access to further support and resources that can potentially improve their overall wellbeing. Within a constrained education sector and cost of living crisis there is significant value for wider sector integration to take shape in considering how such an approach can become sustainable.

For ActivAte/HAF to have wider system stakeholder engagement within the programme, there is a need to demonstrate the value that Active Essex provides through ActivAte/HAF in achieving outcomes that are important to wider system stakeholders.





These findings are part of an overall evaluation report. If you would like to see the overall report, please email kev.harris@hartpury.ac.uk for the Active Essex Systems Evaluation Report