

# Briefing Paper for Policymakers

## Evaluating Stated Needs for Support for Holidays

In today's society holidays are viewed as increasingly important to people's sense of well-being. Yet for many people in varying situations, a holiday is simply beyond reach. This paper summarises the findings from a study commissioned by the social tourism working party<sup>1</sup>. It is clear to the working party members, who all work with low-income families that a break away from home is very beneficial. This research, carried out by the University of Nottingham<sup>2</sup>, aimed to understand better the types of issues affecting low-income and disadvantaged families and develop ways of assessing how they benefited from a holiday. Below we summarise how supported holidays for families on low incomes are a unique way of addressing complex needs and delivering a range of benefits to families and society as a whole. The report concludes with policy recommendations.

### Why everyone needs a holiday

*'All the problems will still be there but I can imagine feeling better able to cope with them.'*

The research assessed the range of reasons given in requests for financial support for a family to take a holiday. The research found that holidays offer a break from many of the challenging circumstances faced by families on low incomes. The inability to spend time together, problems with health, poverty, disability, domestic violence, poor neighbourhood environments and stress were major issues affecting the families surveyed. The research found that families highlighted a number of different, but connected, problematic circumstances that led them to seek assistance for a holiday. A change in the physical environment provides an escape from the problems experienced at home as well as the chance to spend quality time together, forget health or circumstantial issues, have fun and happy experiences and an opportunity to put problems into perspective when returning home.

The most important reasons for needing a holiday were identified by families as:

- **to spend quality time together as a family**  
*'I feel a holiday would benefit us all by giving us a chance to spend quality time together and to experience excitement, fun and happiness in a pleasant environment.'*

Families want to spend time together, have fun and enjoy time as a 'family unit'. Many need to build or repair relationships and some simply want to experience what they consider to be a 'normal life'.

- **to have time away from home, daily routine and circumstances**

*'We as a family feel that we would benefit from a holiday, as we're living in a deprived area. We do not feel that our children are safe to play out in the area. Therefore we have little opportunity for family time outside the home.'*

For many families there is little escape from the stressful grind of daily life that is full of chores, caring responsibilities and unsafe neighbourhoods. A much-needed change of routine and surroundings offers the chance of new experiences that have a positive impact on all family members.

- **to recover from ill health and bereavement**

*'We need a holiday because the past few years were very stressful. After a complete breakdown a holiday would help to keep the family together.'*

Plenty of families do not have time for rest and recuperation, so suffer from a range of health problems

### Social tourism

*'We have never had a holiday together – apart from the odd day out.'*

The social tourism working party was formed to promote well-being and happiness for the most disadvantaged within UK society. The working party uses as their working definition of social tourism: 'the inclusion of people living on a low income in holiday and leisure activities'. Today holidays are viewed as an increasingly important contributor to well-being. Yet for many people, a holiday is simply out of reach: roughly one-third of families within the United Kingdom cannot afford a one-week holiday. A smaller group find that even day trips are beyond their means<sup>3</sup>. All members of the working party provide support in a variety of ways towards holidays for low-income families because all agree that families should not be denied the benefits of a holiday due to lack of income. The working party aims to raise public and government awareness of the positive impact of such leisure activities. It wants to demonstrate that holidays are a social right and can provide social and economic benefits for society as a whole.

such as physical illness and mental or emotional problems. Stress is a major contributor to medical conditions. Health problems usually affect the whole family, not just the individual. Families suffering from health issues also often have associated difficulties: from financial problems to domestic violence.

■ **to visit other places and enjoy new activities**  
*'The children don't know what a holiday is about and sometimes get upset when their friends go away.'*

Children miss out on important new experiences, which they cannot share with their peers. A holiday is an opportunity to see different places, experience new activities and make new friends.

## Barriers to participation

*'We cannot afford a holiday without your financial support and help.'*

Many families need support to spend time together away from their daily circumstances. They often lack the confidence to deal with situations and would welcome experiences that will have a positive impact upon them and their families.

Families described the barriers to accessing holidays as:

practical	lack of money and transport
physical/environmental	illness, routine and stress, family tension
relational/social	lack of time, separated families, social isolation
health/individual	difficulty in seeing beyond immediate problems.

## Criteria for the successful impact of holidays

*'It was just nice to get away and do different things. I came back feeling like I had recharged my batteries ready to start all over again with home life.'*

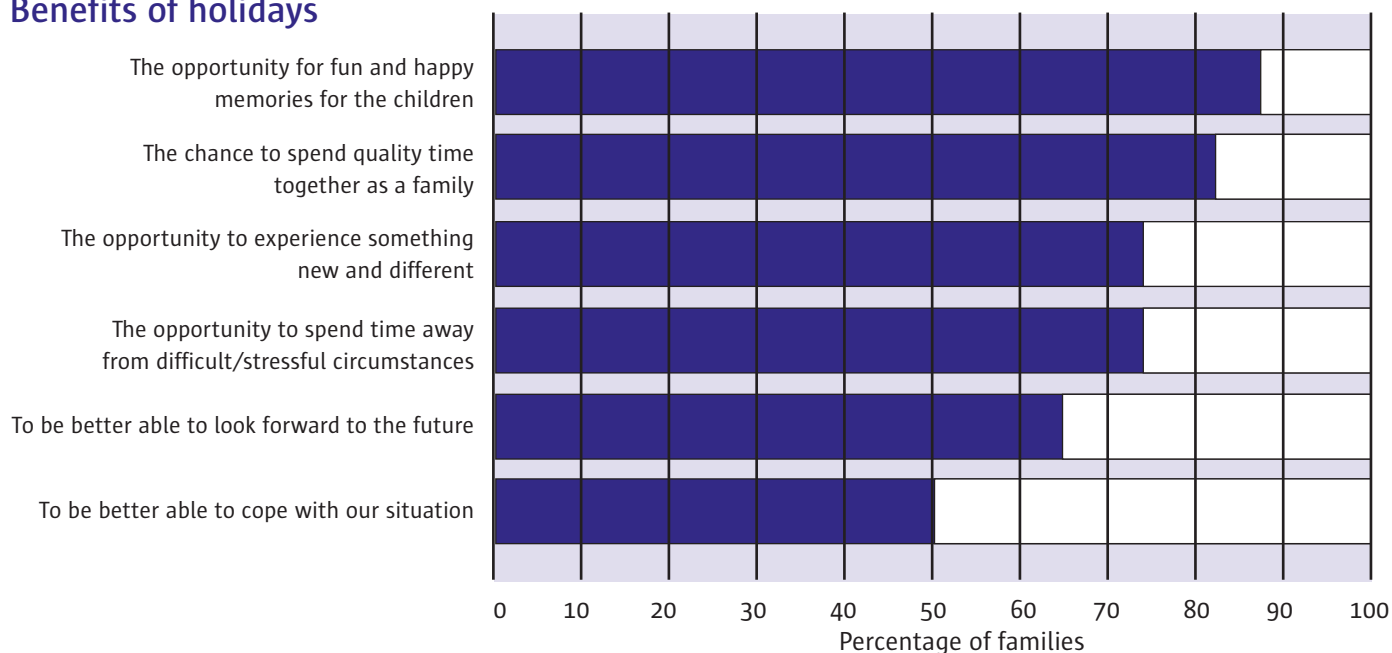
The findings illustrate the different ways of addressing families' needs and delivering holidays with a positive, long-term impact. For the *Family Fund* the most important aspect of a holiday is the time away from home and daily routine when someone is caring for a seriously ill or disabled child. The *South London African Women's Organisation (SLAWO)* offers the chance of a shared, positive experience for families affected by domestic violence. At *UNISON Welfare* the aim is to provide union members relief from stressful situations at home or at work. The *YHA (England & Wales)* offers people living in large industrial cities the enjoyment of the countryside. The *Family Holiday Association* aims to improve the well-being of disadvantaged families. By working together the working party can better help disadvantaged families from a wide range of backgrounds.

Negative circumstances can have a long-term impact on the children and many families had a desire that their problems should not be the only thing their children remembered. Something to look forward to and positive memories were perceived to be important to counteract a negative past. Being away from home is very important particularly to the children within low-income families, as many of them never see any change in their environment.

## Benefits of holidays

The benefits of the holiday were measured in a follow-up survey after the holiday and in two further focus groups with families who had taken holidays.

## Benefits of holidays



The research found that, in looking back on the holiday, the respondents felt that the impacts were highest in those aspects of life which were not related to family problems, but more towards positive outcomes for the children and from spending time together. Holidays are pro-active and positive: they help heal relationships and help families to face the future again.

Parents confirmed the positive impact of the holiday on the family, especially in terms of overall well-being. By having fun, enjoyable times together as a family, opportunities were created for shared experiences and life time memories. Families:

- had the opportunity for fun and to build happy memories for the children
- had the chance to spend quality time together
- had the opportunity to experience something different and new
- were able to escape difficult or stressful circumstances
- were able to look forward to the future together.

*'We were scared at first as our comfort environment wasn't there, but we soon settled in. We all, including Kevin, came back feeling refreshed. We felt we were a closer bond as our home life is very structured. We are trying to relax on that structure.'*

Interestingly children remembered different aspects of their holiday compared with adults: children described details of events and activities. The research showed impacts on the personal well-being of all the family members.

*'It would do us good to get away from all our stress and try to enjoy life for a change.'*

*'A holiday is the best way to help us restore our emotional and mental balance.'*

## Messages for policymakers

1. The development of social tourism through government and voluntary organisations should be viewed as an integral part of social and welfare policy. The continuing emphasis by the government on reducing child poverty<sup>4</sup> and social exclusion provides a significant opportunity for those lobbying for acceptance of social tourism.
2. This research shows that issues of concern to families are often multiple, complex and inter-related. Holidays can provide a unique holistic experience that all the family can engage in at the same time. If approached appropriately, a simple break can help achieve a number of different outcomes for the whole family. A holiday is a unique format that is difficult to recreate through other therapies and interventions.
3. This research shows that issues arising out of the associated benefits of holidays to families are both wide ranging and policy-relevant. The results suggest they have potential to contribute to government initiatives such as to combat social exclusion and a mental and physical health intervention strategy.

4. Previous research papers from the Policy Research Bureau in 2003 and 2005 concluded that scientifically robust studies should be carried out. This study is another step in provision of evidence that holidays have a positive, measurable impact on health and general well-being for people and communities. The findings link with many areas of current government policy and inform policy and practice development in social tourism.

The working party recommends that government enters into an active dialogue at both national and local level to examine how excluded families might benefit from a break away.

### To summarise the areas of positive implications for local and national government:

- education, child growth and development
- social inclusion within communities
- feelings of happiness, satisfaction and better quality of life
- improvements in health (especially reduction in stress-related conditions)
- family stability and cohesion
- return-to-work policies.

## Conclusions

There is overwhelming evidence that whole families can be helped by the simple and effective measure of a short break away from home. Families living in poverty are often those most in need of a holiday, but in the worst position to be able to participate. The financial support provided by the social tourism working party members is well founded: a relatively small amount invested in quality time for families yields long-term results. The provision of supported holidays through social tourism makes an important contribution to social policy in the UK. Therefore holidays for all should be an important aspect of government policy.

**For more information on social tourism please contact one of the working party members (addresses overleaf).**

<sup>1</sup> Family Holiday Association, Family Fund, Unison Welfare, South London African Women's Organisation, YHA (England & Wales)

These organisations are providing access to holiday for low-income families and, between them, assist more than 50,000 families with holidays each year. They all support the End Child Poverty Campaign ([www.endchildpoverty.org.uk](http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk)).

<sup>2</sup> Christel DeHaan Tourism & Travel Research Institute, Nottingham University Business School.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics (2004)

<sup>4</sup> Part of the End Child Poverty Campaign (2020)

The research was carried out during the summer of 2007. There were three distinct phases of the research. Firstly an analysis of data collated from a sample of 498 application forms from individual families and welfare agents (on behalf of families) requesting financial support for a family holiday over 2006 and 2007. The applications were made to: the Family Holiday Association, the Family Fund and Unison Welfare. The second phase was a follow-up survey of a sample of 67 families and welfare agents who had been granted an award and had taken a holiday during May-August 2007. The third phase consisted of two focus groups with families who had taken a holiday over the same period on the benefits to families of the holiday.

The research was commissioned by the social tourism working party and formed part of a wider research project that aimed to:

- Collate, record and analyse data about the identified needs, benefits and impacts of a holiday for beneficiaries, over a specified period, from application, monitoring and evaluation forms. These forms were collected by the Family Holiday Association and its partners.
- Compare and evaluate different methods of application, monitoring and evaluation tools used by the partners to identify and recommend a systematic research tool for further use in the monitoring/feedback for all partners.
- Interview a number of stakeholders in partner organisations, including families, to add detail on needs for a holiday and the impacts of support in a range of different contexts.
- Develop research bids, with partners, based partially on the evidence of this research.

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The social tourism working party members all work with low-income families that seek a break from home.



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