

Children missing meals in 2018...

Child poverty in Greater Manchester is rarely out of the news, and whilst the roll-out of the new benefit- Universal Credit is yet to be fully known, the impact on some families is already being felt. Trying to budget for this new benefit within a family's weekly/fortnightly household income is a real issue for some parents.

And more worrying, (and something that is still yet to be addressed), is the issue of some of our poorest children missing out on free school meals during the school holidays.

It's sad to know that in 2018, (and in one of the world's richest countries), we have children who are not eating enough food, and who are reliant on free school meals in order to have a hot dinner.

But what happens to these children during the school holidays- of which we now have many- Easter, Summer, Autumn half term and Christmas?

Many parents who are living close to, or below the poverty line, are struggling to provide enough healthy meals for their children during these long school breaks.

More and more faith groups are having to step in at a local level to run lunch clubs during the holidays and whilst this is meeting a very urgent need, what is required is an early intervention approach to address the problem at a grass roots level.

Our Home-Start volunteers who visit families in their own homes on a weekly basis, are witness to the struggles many low- income families are dealing with. What they do through their ongoing emotional and practical support is empower families to make small changes that make a big difference. It may be helping them to devise a weekly household budget so that they can manage their finances better, it may be working with a mum or dad, who have never cooked before, (and instead rely on expensive convenience meals, or takeaways). Supporting parents to cook healthy cheap meals from scratch, is one of the most effective ways in proving a long-term solution to the problem of children missing out on meals.

There are so very many children living in poverty across Greater Manchester, and so many parents who need support to help them to provide better futures for their children, we could help more families who need us, but in order to do so, we need more local volunteers. If you could spare just a couple of hours each week to visit a local family in their own homes, you can find out more about Home-Start volunteering here. www.gmhomestarts.org.uk