**Holiday Poverty Inquiry: Work and Pensions Committee**

# August 2019

Written Evidence submitted by Family Holiday Association and Nottingham Civic Exchange

# The Value of breaks for Ordinary Working Families and the work of the charity Family Holiday Association

The Family Holiday Association is the leading national charity dedicated to providing breaks and days out for struggling families.

Nottingham Civic Exchange has been working with the charity on a programme of work helping to understand the level of economic insecurity facing Ordinary Working Families across the UK.

In June 2019 we published an [exploratory study](https://www.familyholidayassociation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FAM437_Short-breaks-report_FV_Webv3.pdf) into the value of breaks for Ordinary Working Families1. Additional work on [Ordinary Working Families](http://bit.ly/2sdpEVF) and [Economic Insecurity](http://bit.ly/2mQggpt) from Nottingham Civic Exchange is available online.

This submission combines the findings of that report written with additional input into policy ideas from the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) alongside the Family Holiday Association’s experience of supporting 3,820 families in 2018 and over 48,000 families since 1975. The quotes you will read within this report are from families interviewed by Nottingham Civic Exchange to understand the lived experience of families and holidays in the UK.

The research was launched in June 2019 at an event attended by: policy makers including Hannah Bardell MP, VisitEngland, VisitScotland, the Scottish Government; tourism industry partners including National Trust, Haven Holidays, Forest Holidays, ZSL London Zoo; and a range of support professionals who refer families to the charity for a break.

Following the research launch, the Family Holiday Association is exploring setting up an All Party Parliamentary Group to look at the issues raised and is pushing for the new Tourism Sector Deal to consider ‘accessibility’ in its widest sense with the aim to make the UK ‘the most accessible destination in Europe by 2022’.

1 The definition of Ordinary Working Family used in this research is one where household income is between

£12,000-£34,000 a year after tax and benefits, where at least one adult is in paid employment and at least one dependent child.

## Families struggling to take breaks

Breaks are seen as a legitimate expectation in households where adults are working. Yet working families are struggling to take a break. ONS (2013/14) showed that a third of families are not able to take a week’s break each year. This is likely to have increased since the data was last published.

Parents struggling to afford a break are aware that there is only a limited window in which to create childhood holiday memories. There is a ‘ticking clock’ of childhood, creating pressure for parents.

*“If you have a working life without a holiday, that’s close to servitude, there’s no other word to describe it, other than that’s the exact definition of modern slavery, you’re just working for a living, there’s nothing else there.”* (Chris)

Families helped by the Family Holiday Association are unable to access breaks due to cost, however, there are many other barriers that prevent them taking breaks including lack of transport, low confidence and being affected by issues such as domestic violence, disability and caring responsibilities.

## Impact on mental wellbeing

Not being able to take a break has a negative impact on people’s mental health. Whilst breaks themselves provide a notable positive impact on mental wellbeing.

*“I just sit there and cry. It really has an effect on how I feel, and on my mental health. We need to have something to work towards. We work day in day out so it’s important to have a family break”* (Julie)

Those working in precarious roles are especially aware of the need for an escape from the ‘daily grind’.

83% of families experiencing mental health issues who receive a break from Family Holiday Association report long-term improvement in mental health up to a year after their break.

## Children are missing out

Children who do not access breaks or days trips are missing out on social and cultural experiences.

They are unable to participate in shared social interactions about holiday experiences. There is strong evidence of guilt and shame for parents and children where breaks are not provided.

*“…feel sad and slightly guilty as I saw so much when I was young, and I can’t give my children those opportunities to see and appreciate different cultures and countries. I don’t want them to miss out on life experiences you can’t teach from a book.”* (Heather)

40% of the children that the Family Holiday Association helps have never been to the beach before.

87% of families on a Family Holiday Association ‘ScotSpirit Break’ visited a part of Scotland for the first time.

63% of families report that they do more together such as visit a park or local attraction up to a year after a Family Holiday Association break.

# Recommendations

Policies related to modern work could incentivise or create legal and ethical obligations for employers to make it easier for workers to go on short breaks, especially those in less secure, casual employment.

Health and social services should explore commissioning breaks (through social prescribing models) to support the early intervention and prevention agendas (such as the Life Chances Fund) for particular groups, and support the government’s loneliness strategy and programmes.

The Work and Health Programme and holistic employment support programmes – such as Working Well – could research the work-related benefits arising from the increases in self- efficacy and motivation associated with family holidays and short breaks.

Funding for tourism businesses should include conditions or incentives to ensure that it is tied to increased participation from those that are economically marginalised.

Social tourism could be a key lever for regeneration, especially in helping to revive towns that have seen their commercial tourism industries decline (through the economic strategies of Local Enterprise Partnerships, for example). Resources from devolved funds, and funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund and the post-Brexit Shared Prosperity Fund could support this.

VisitEngland could replicate the ScotSpirit Breaks project that VisitScotland and Family Holiday Association run to support struggling families. Businesses offer accommodation, holiday activities and transport. The commercial incentive of reduced seasonality and more all-year round employment can help get businesses on board.

Policymakers should also consider the wider barriers to taking family breaks, for example the [prohibitive costs of childcare](https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/families-face-rising-tide-childcare-costs-prices-rise-again) with a part-time place costing an average of £6,600 a year, which lead some parents to use all of their annual leave to cover school holidays in order to avoid the use of formal childcare.

Housing associations and other social and community-led housing providers could utilise accommodation to promote wellbeing and social capital. For example, the Linc Cymru Housing Association in Wales uses its accommodation to offer ‘stay well’ short breaks for people with care needs and their families. During the dissemination of our report, the Cabinet Office, NTU and the Family Holiday Association have begun to explore the possibility of utilising university residencies in a similar way.

Regional coordination to stagger school term time dates could overcome one of the biggest barriers to travel which is the cost associated with peak time travel. Some schools have combined in-set days providing an additional week a year in which families can access lower cost breaks.

We believe that holidays and short breaks:

* Are to be understood in the context of the multiple demands and pressures upon low to middle income households with children.
* Are seen by the families as a legitimate expectation in households where adults are working.
* Have a notable positive impact on mental wellbeing. Conversely, not being able to take breaks had a negative impact on individuals’ mental health.
* Strengthen family relationships.
* Create shared family memories – particularly when children are young. There is a ‘ticking clock’ of childhood, which creates pressure for memories whilst children are still young enough to want to share holidays with parents.
* Provide new social and cultural experiences for children and adults, which provide educational opportunities in the broadest sense.
* Provide respite from the daily routine of work and family commitments. Both the looking forward to the break and the experience of a break itself have a positive impact.
* Enable children to fully participate in shared social interactions about experiences of holidays. There is strong evidence of guilt and shame for parents and children where this is not provided.
* Are made less accessible to those with school age children due to the term-time absence policy. This was seen as penalising those on low incomes and also those with extended families abroad.

The impact of economic insecurity on households across the UK risks holidays and short breaks being an exclusive and restricted activity. The UK government needs to seriously consider how it provides opportunities for families to make memories, take breaks and strengthen family connections.

# About the authors

[The Family Holiday Association](http://www.familyholidayassociation.org.uk/) is the leading national charity dedicated to providing breaks and day trips for families coping with some of the toughest challenges life can bring. Each of the 48,000 families we’ve helped since 1975 is referred to us by somebody already working with them in a supporting role. In 2019 we are due to provide breaks and days out for 5,000 families across the UK.

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[Nottingham Civic Exchange](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nce) is Nottingham Trent University’s pioneering civic think tank with a primary focus on issues relating to the city and the region. Nottingham Civic Exchange enables discovery by creating a space where co-produced approaches are developed to tackle entrenched social issues. Nottingham Civic Exchange supports the role of NTU as an anchor institution in the city and the region. Nottingham Trent University holds engagement with communities, public institutions, civic life, business and residents at the core of its mission.

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The Family Holiday Association and Nottingham Civic Exchange are happy to share additional information to the inquiry and supply oral evidence if called.