

Holidays -- a right or a privilege?

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Holiday memories from childhood are often some of the strongest to remain with us into adult life. But many children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds have little chance of forming those memories when the money is not available to allow them to take a break.

Now, research into the benefits of going on holiday and ‘getting away from it all’ has been carried out for by academics at The University of Nottingham. Dr Scott McCabe, a lecturer in the University’s Christel DeHaan Tourism and Travel Research Institute, has explored the impact of holidays on the lives of disadvantaged families. It is hoped that this and future research will inform national government policy on health and well-being, stress and work, social inclusion and communities, mental health and education.

Dr McCabe and his team worked with organisations like the Family Holiday Association, a charity which helps provide and promote the benefits of social tourism; the Family Fund, which helps families with severely disabled children to enjoy ordinary life; the Youth Hostel Association; and Unison Welfare, the charitable arm of Unison who can provide breaks and holidays for members and their families.

By interviewing families who had been helped by these organisations, Dr McCabe was able to outline the key benefits of their holidays. These included:

-- ‘Spending time together as a family’ — many of those interviewed spent little time together as a family, whether through working hours,

disability or estrangement. They felt that the ‘quality time’ they spent together on their holiday strengthened family ties.

-- ‘Recharging batteries’ — holidays allowed families to take themselves away from their daily problems and relax. Some respondents had mental or physical health problems, others had suffered bereavements, and some lived in problem areas and had disputes with their neighbours. The holiday gave them the space and time to think, and relief from routine, chores and stress.

-- ‘Making memories’ — More than 80 per cent of respondents said that the biggest benefit of the holiday was the opportunity for fun and happy memories for the children.

-- ‘The opportunity to experience something new and different’ — the families interviewed said that the reasons for being unable to take a holiday were mostly practical, such as cost, health restrictions and lack of transport. Once these practical obstacles were overcome the sights, sounds and experiences of the holiday were very valuable to the respondents.

“The debate raised here is whether a holiday is a right or a privilege,” said Dr McCabe. “In France there is the chèques-vacances system — vouchers given out by employers and by the government which can only be spent on holidays. In Spain the Imsero programme sends older people, who are often among the most socially-excluded in society, on holidays. In the UK, the work to get disadvantaged families on holiday is generally done by charities.

“By researching how holidays benefit those who ordinarily would not be able to afford or arrange them we can help to inform future policy making. Save the Children have suggested a seasonal grant for low income families that would ease financial pressure during holiday

periods — a time when they can experience additional hardship. This research outlines the some of the potential benefits of that type of measure.”

John McDonald, director from the Family Holiday Association says’ There has never been a better time to emphasis the value of holiday for families who least afford a break but who, arguably, would benefit most.”

Source: University of Nottingham

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