

Case Study:

The Den Makers – A Hampshire HAF Summer Challenge



Background

In Summer 2025, Hampshire's Holiday Activities and Food Programme launched an initiative titled “**The Den Makers: A Hampshire HAF Summer Challenge**”. This campaign invited children, families and providers to take part in a den-building adventure designed to foster creativity, collaboration and fun across all HAF schemes.

A working group of HAF providers were asked to suggest an activity that could be universally adopted across schemes, regardless of venue, audience, type or weather. The result was a campaign that was inclusive, flexible and engaging for everybody,

Objectives


- To create a shared experience across Hampshire HAF schemes.
- To encourage creativity, teamwork and outdoor play.

Implementation


- **Provider Sign-Up & Briefings:** Providers were invited to join the challenge and attend briefing sessions to understand the campaign's goals and logistics.



- **Guidance Materials:** Tips and hints were suggested, including ideas for materials, building locations and safe dismantling practices.




Den Building Inspiration




A bivouac is a shelter or hide made from whatever's available – sticks or branches with ferns or straw to provide cover or help you hide away. Here's one easy way to make your own.



YOU WILL NEED:

- One long and several shorter branches or sticks.
- String, twines, or vines.
- Ferns or straw.




1. Find a stick that's at least as long as you are tall. Tie two shorter sticks together as shown to support the long stick.
2. Lean other sticks all along the long on alternating sides to make a tent-like shape.
3. Cover the bivouac with long grasses, ferns, bracken – anything you can find that will camouflage you and provide shelter. Then try it out for size!





- **Safety Planning:** Risk assessments and method statements were developed to ensure safe participation.



Den Building Activity: Hazards Identified



Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk
Sharp tools (e.g., saws, scissors)	Participants, staff	Cuts, injuries
Lifting heavy materials	Participants	Strains, back injuries
Trip hazards (e.g., logs, ropes)	Everyone	Trips, falls
Falling structures	Participants	Head injuries, bruises
Allergies (e.g., plants, insects)	Participants	Allergic reactions
Weather conditions	Everyone	Heatstroke, hypothermia
Insect bites/stings	Participants	Irritation, allergic reaction
Splinters from wood	Participants	Minor injuries
Getting lost (if in a large area)	Children	Separation anxiety, safety risk



Participation & Engagement

The HAF team were pleasantly surprised to see a large number of schemes and providers taking part. Throughout the summer delivery period HAF providers submitted photos and stories of their den-building adventures, demonstrating how the challenge allowed for a range of interpretations and creativity. It was an important

part of the challenge that HAF providers took ownership of the task in hand and develop their den making skills in collaboration with the children. Several providers took the challenge outside with traditional sticks and tarpaulin whilst others stayed indoors, and the children created mini dens for little creatures. Use of recycled materials was encouraged, and it was observed during monitoring visits how the children embraced the challenge even using old tyres.

Recognition & Awards

To celebrate the efforts and imagination of participants, the HAF Team issued certificates in the following categories:

- **Architectural Genius:** For the most structurally impressive den.
- **Den of Mystery:** For the most imaginative or story-rich den.
- **Dream Team:** For top-tier teamwork and collaborative construction.
- **Eco-Builder:** For the best use of natural or recycled materials.
- **Elemental Expertise:** For the most resilient and storm-ready shelter.
- **Fairy Friendly:** For the most whimsical and enchanting den.
- **Hobbit Hole:** For the most magical or fantasy-themed den.
- **Innovation:** For the most creative design or resourceful use of everyday materials.
- **Interior Design:** For the best-decorated or cosiest den interior.
- **Jungle Vibes:** For the most nature-inspired or camouflaged den.
- **Most Likely to Survive a Zombie Apocalypse:** For the most fortified or secure den.
- **Tiny But Mighty:** For the smallest but most functional den.

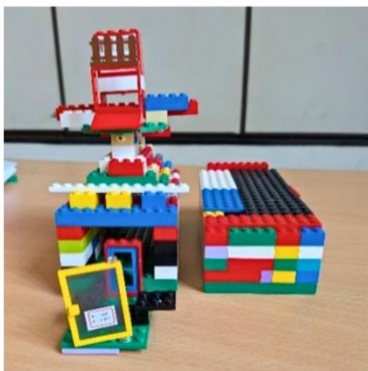
The awards added excitement and recognition, motivating everybody to push their creative boundaries.



Outcomes

- **High Engagement:** The campaign saw good participation, with providers embracing the challenge. Multi-site providers particularly engaged in the campaign, sharing their activities and successes across their different schemes.
- **Community Connection:** The initiative fostered a sense of unity and shared purpose among providers, children and families.
- **Positive Feedback:** Participants reported high levels of enjoyment, with many schemes sharing stories of teamwork, laughter and imaginative play
- **Legacy of Fun:** The challenge demonstrated the power of provider-led ideas and set a precedent for future collaborative campaigns.

“The children (and adults) absolutely loved den building this summer! This was a regular activity during our HAF scheme.” – Westside Community Centre



CM Sports



Globe Fit



Growing Places



Sports Xtra Basingstoke



Superstar Sports



Westside Community Centre