

Briefing

Children's play and the Comprehensive Spending Review

'Today, just one in five children regularly play outside in their neighbourhood. The rest are denied the chance to get out of the house and have the everyday adventures that – to people of my generation – are what childhood is all about.'

David Cameron MP, 7 December 2009

'Every parent understands the importance of a secure environment for their children...spaces where they can play, where they can feel completely free, where they can safely push at the boundaries, learning and experimenting. Places where different generations can meet, binding the community together ... So we have to be innovative, we have to find new solutions ... developed in the context of the upcoming Spending Review.'

Nick Clegg MP, Deputy Prime Minister, 18 June 2010

Play England

Play England, part of NCB, is the leading national charity for children's play. In addition to our independent role, we are currently contracted by the Department for Education to deliver the 'Engaging Communities in Play' programme until March 2011.

We informally advised David Willetts MP and Tim Loughton MP in drafting the 'More Ball Games' report, part of the Conservatives' Childhood Review in 2007-8.

We have welcomed the announcement by the Deputy PM that children's play is one of the priorities being considered by a ministerial taskforce informing the forthcoming spending review. This briefing is intended to help inform those considerations.

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The problem

Opportunity and space for children's play is in decline; 90% of adults played out regularly in their street as children, but one in three of today's children say they don't play out in their street at all¹. Children's playtime at school has substantially reduced over the last 15 years². In 2010, only a quarter of 7 – 11 year olds are allowed to come home from school

¹ ICM opinion poll for Playday 2007 ICM for Playday 2010, commissioned by Play England. Interviews were conducted with 2000 adults and children across the UK in June 2010. www.playday.org.uk

² Blatchford & Baines, 2006 The significance of school breaktimes, <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/significance-school-breaktimes>

independently – compared with over three quarters in Germany. In 1971, almost half of seven year olds in England were allowed out alone, now it's less than 10 per cent.³

Why should addressing this be a government priority?

Play has a key role in children's individual lives and development, whilst community play is an important element of the public realm for families, enhancing the livability of shared space. It helps to improve children's capacity to learn, whilst strengthening community cohesion and helping to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime.

Thus, promoting opportunities for children to play and addressing current barriers to play can support a range of policy areas:

1. Child health and well-being

Active play is widely recommended as an important element in combating childhood obesity, a complex issue where, according to the government's engagement paper *Achieving equity and excellence for children* (DH, September 2010), 'many agencies and groups have a role to play to deliver change, and in supporting preventative child social care'. The importance of early intervention services in child health is also underlined in the Kennedy Report, 'Getting it right for children and young people' (DH September 2010).

2. Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour

The University of Birmingham and Institute of Education's comprehensive evaluation of the Children's Fund which distributed Treasury money to voluntary organisations addressing children and families in need, stated that: 'play could be effective in reducing the incidence of crime and anti-social behaviour'⁴. Research has also clearly shown that investment in playworkers reduces anti-social behaviour, increases school attendance, and improves communities' satisfaction with the places they live⁵.

3. Child poverty

Access to green and playable space is an important element in a healthy environment for children. The analysis for the development of the national strategy to look at how improving services can help tackle child poverty is based on four factors, including planning to ensure that the 'child's environment supports them to thrive.'⁶ Thus, 'taking action on neighbourhoods, play and green spaces, transport and crime to ensure all children can thrive in safe and cohesive communities, with equal access to work, cultural and leisure opportunities' is proposed as a key plank for local child poverty strategies. At a time when direct economic measures to alleviate child poverty are more difficult, improving space for play in deprived areas can be an effective part of these strategies.

³ Preliminary findings from Children's Independent Mobility Study 2010, Policy Studies Institute. 'Allowed out alone' refers specifically to journeys *other* than travel to school.

⁴ University of Birmingham & Institute of Education 2006, Working to Prevent the Social Exclusion of Children and Young People: Final Lessons from the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund, DfES

⁵ Beunderman J (2010) *People Make Play: The impact of staffed play provision on children, families and communities* London: Play England/NCB.

⁶ Ending Child Poverty: Making it happen (HM Treasury/DCSF Child Poverty Unit, 2009)

4. Community cohesion

The more social networks children have in a neighbourhood, the greater parents' confidence about the safety of that area. In addition, parents establish their own networks through their children more than any other means.⁷

5. Big society

In this way, community play provision is a good example of the big society vision: where everyone looks out for one another, giving people more freedoms but also responsibility for their own actions and community. Much of the best play provision has been developed by communities themselves through local management committees and play associations, engendering collective civic activity and a sense of shared ownership in an important local facility. Communities are thus able to determine how best to meet the needs of their own children and families.

6. Combating a risk-averse culture

The government has indicated its commitment to promoting more personal responsibility and an end to the risk-averse, 'compensation culture' of excessive health and safety fears. For children this would lead to more opportunities for the 'everyday adventures' that are seen as an important part of a healthy childhood. The children's play sector, through Play England, has in recent years led the way in this field; developing and publishing, with the last government, a guide to risk management that recognises that children need to and derive benefit from managing some risks for themselves when they play⁸.

Does the government need to fund this activity?

The previous government recognised the importance of children's play by investing an unprecedented amount of funding into renovating and building new playgrounds for children across the country. Many playgrounds before this had become seriously run down, out of date or in need of re-siting. The programme provided much needed facilities in many areas that were lacking any provision, particularly in more deprived areas.

As part of the wider programme of cuts to the public sector, the last part of the Playbuilder programme was reduced. This has of course been a great disappointment to many local communities who were strongly engaged in the plans and looking forward to new facilities for their children. A great deal of momentum was generated by the investment of the last few years and what is now important is to find efficient ways to keep that community engagement going and harness it so that communities can deliver for themselves the play opportunities their children need.

This would not require the levels of investment of the recent past, but a complete end to all funding or support, runs the risk of endangering what has been established and losing this momentum.

⁷ Weller and Bruegel (2007) *Children's 'place' in the development of neighbourhood social capital*, 2007

⁸ Ball D, Gill T & Spiegel B (2008), *Managing Risk in Play Provision, Implementation Guide*, DCSF, DCMS and Play England.

Direct funding: It is important to ensure that community play projects have opportunities to access appropriate funding for their schemes, for example through big society projects including the Big Society Bank proposal. The play sector has a rich history of taking small amounts of initial investment and generating many times the amount of funding from that; enclosed are several case studies demonstrating this. Playschemes are also often able to give value added to other community priorities, which our selection of case studies also show (appendix 2).

Support: given the removal of the structured approach of the national playbuilder programme, communities will still need support. The most effective way for government to extend access to children's play would be to allocate a discrete sum to a national resource designed to equip communities to take advantage of the new opportunities provided by the localisation and Big Society agendas, specifically in developing local play provision. This resource would also be available to local authorities and public agencies to enable them to effectively engage charities and communities.

We recommend these key roles for a national play resource:

- **Direct support** for community organisations to build their organisational capacity and development potential
- **Information, advice and guidance** to enable community organisations to access relevant information, guidance and/or general advice, and resources
- **Facilitating learning** to enable community organisations to access high quality and diverse learning opportunities, including training for community play organisers
- **Collaboration** to promote and facilitate joint working
- **Brokering** to broker services and shared resources for and with the sector

Does the activity provide substantial economic value?

There is clear evidence that play provision is a cost effective use of public funds which delivers a good return on investment. The findings of an economic analysis of the benefits of adventure playgrounds show a positive net benefit valued at least 30% higher than the initial investment: every £1 invested in an adventure playground generates £1.32 in social benefits. Furthermore, the increase in social play in five to seven year olds by attending an adventure playground in comparison to ordinary playgrounds resulted in a five per cent increase in test scores, indicating how much of a difference improved play opportunities can make to educational attainment.⁹

Great Britain is below the OECD average for levels of physical activity¹⁰ and recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of overweight children, with well documented implications for long term health and financial impact on health services. Children who do 15 minutes of exercise a day reduce their chances of being obese by 50 per cent. Research by University College London found that outdoor and unstructured play is one of the best forms

⁹ Matrix Evidence/Play England, *An economic evaluation of play provision*, 2010. Test scores refer to the Georgis Criterion Reference Test (GCRT)

¹⁰ OECD 2009, *Doing Better for Children Chapter 2*, OECD

of exercise for children, being more effective than many structured sporting activities.¹¹ This shows how play can have a major role in reducing obesity and its financial burden on health services.

The Big Lottery Fund's evaluation of the early outcomes of the Children's Play initiative¹² found that its funding has deepened and widened access to play. Furthermore, the Tellus3 and Tellus4 surveys, showed an increase in children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas of 7.7 percentage points from 2008 to 2009, rising from 46.4 per cent to 54.1 per cent¹³ indicating the impact of investment in play through the Playbuilder and Play Shaper capital investment programmes.

(See also Appendix 1, which lays out the broader case for play)

Can the activity be targeted to those most in need?

Both funding and support can be prioritised for areas with higher deprivation indices, and the evidence suggests that not only should they be, but they can provide more value for money when they are.

For example, poorer families are worst hit by the quality of public space in their area. Twenty-five per cent of children in the poorest fifth of households do not have access to outdoor space or facilities to play compared to four per cent in the richest fifth households.¹⁴ Moreover, FPI research also found that 45 per cent of the poorest families say they do not have access to well-maintained, pleasant green space, compared to just 16 per cent of the richest families. But access to green space (and therefore places where children can play) can have the most benefits for the poorest - the presence of green space is associated with reduced mortality, with the poorest income groups benefiting the most from having green spaces nearby.¹⁵ Targeting resources that help the poorest children to play outdoors has clear benefits.

How can the activity be provided at a lower cost or more effectively?

During a period of tight public finances, the challenge is to find a cost effective way to build on recent progress towards increasing play opportunities without the allocation of significant additional funds from central government. In addition to the points around funding and support mentioned above, there are a number of ways that this can be achieved:

- a) Firstly, underused assets could be used more creatively. For example, schools could offer more opportunities for children to play during the school day, while their

¹¹ Mackett RL (2004), *Making children's lives more active*. London: Centre for Transport Studies, University College London.

¹² Nicola Hall and Laurie Day 2009, *Evaluation of Children's Play programme: Report to Big Lottery Fund*, Big Lottery Fund

¹³ Spreadsheet comparison of Tellus3 and Tellus4 Local Authority figures – downloaded from

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000908/index.shtml>

¹⁴ Department for Work and Pensions (2008) *Households Below Average Income: an analysis of the income distribution 1994/95-2006/07*. London: National Statistics.

¹⁵ *Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study*, Mitchell, R and Popham, F, *The Lancet*: 372, 2008 AND *Greenspace, urbanity and health: relationships in England* *Journal of Epidemiology and community health* 61: 681-683, 2007

premises could be opened up for community use in the evenings and at weekends. Play provision could also become a more openly available facility of children's centre's, whose grounds could become valuable spaces for local children.

- b) Secondly, an innovative approach to planning could extend and improve local play provision by better integrated opportunities for children's play into the built environment, parks, open spaces and residential streets. Good planning could also ensure that revisions to land use ensure that children have safe routes to access their recreational spaces. The Mayor of London's planning guidance on play¹⁶ is a good example of how government can promote play through the planning system.
- c) Thirdly, for little additional cost, playwork could be embedded within children's services. This would help to ensure that opportunities for play are a core component of childcare, extended schools and youth provision.
- d) Finally, access to play opportunities, both in schools and elsewhere, could be greatly improved by easing the burden of health and safety regulations which currently can act as a barrier. We would particularly recommend a move from the current risk analysis approach to a risk benefit analysis approach, which allows schools and others to more realistically balance the possible risks against the desirable benefits of an activity.

Can the activity be provided by a non-state provider or by citizens, wholly, or in partnership?

The community play sector could play a much more significant role. Charities, social enterprises and community groups have a wealth of experience creating and sustaining adventure playgrounds and neighbourhood play provision outside the mainstream of the public sector and often supported by volunteers and charitable giving (see case studies). With the right support, there is significant scope for them to deliver play provision currently provided by the state and to support local volunteers to take responsibility for organising play opportunities within their community.

Some charities within the community play sector benefit from the support of local play associations and play networks, which provide information and advice and training on relevant issues such as child protection or fundraising and offer pooled resources, for example by hiring out equipment or offering volunteers brokerage. These services play an important role, sustaining and increasing the capacity of local community providers. However, nationally their coverage is patchy and so many charities are unable to access this support. This is why an appropriate national support resource is vital to enable this to happen.

Play also provides some excellent, well established examples of the mobilisation of grass-roots citizen engagement, such as the annual national Playday, itself started by grass-roots activists 23 years ago, which now facilitates over 800 play events a year.

¹⁶ Mayor of London 2008, *Supplementary Planning Guidance: Providing for Children and Young People's Play and Informal Recreation*, Mayor of London

Can non-state providers be paid to carry out the activity according to the results they achieve?

Yes, both in terms of charities, social enterprises and community groups providing play provision and also there are national play organisations which have the expertise needed to provide the national support resource instead of central government departments which could be established on a results based contract. However, with the ending of the Tellus surveys, new ways to measure such results would need to be investigated.

Can local bodies, as opposed to central government, provide the activity?

Yes, the play sector has a long history of creating and sustaining play provision outside of the public sector, and has in many places developed local play associations whose role could be expanded. But they will need to be supported to make this culture shift over a period of time.

Appendices:

- 1 Providing for children's play as part of a family-friendly public realm
- 2 Case studies

What is the problem?

Outdoor play for children is in serious decline: 90% of adults played out regularly in their street as children, but now one in three of today's children say they don't play out in their street at all¹⁷.

Because of this, they, their families and communities are losing out, and problems are building up for the future. This decline and its consequences are of real concern to the public: an opinion poll carried out by ICM in March 2010 found that 83 per cent of British adults said the next government should have policies that ensure children can play outside more. Not surprisingly, parents are especially concerned: in the same poll, 93 per cent of parents said it was important for their children to have more opportunities for outdoor play.

The loss of outdoor play opportunities is one of the main causes of the rise in numbers of overweight and obese children. While government has, over the years, brought forward a range of responses, the 2009 OECD¹⁸ says that Great Britain is below the OECD average for level of physical activity.

But outdoor play is not just about physical activity. When children play outdoors with their friends, they are learning and practicing social and emotional skills and competencies that shape their lives. While playing does often lead to the acquisition of specific cognitive or motor skills, its real significance is to children's emotional well-being. A thorough research review by the University of Gloucestershire in 2008¹⁹ concluded that 'Playing helps to build resilience through developing regulation of emotions, attachment to peers and places, stress response systems, emotional health through pleasure and enjoyment, and physical health.'

Data from the Millennium Cohort Study, which is tracking the lives of over 15,000 children, found worryingly low levels of outdoor activity. Looking at parents of children aged five, 40 per cent of mothers - and over 50 per cent of fathers go to the park or outdoor playground less than once a week²⁰. Children themselves confirm this picture, saying that having more places to go to spend time with friends was the main thing that would make their lives better²¹.

Crime and anti-social behaviour are a major concern. The Family & Parenting Institute found that over 54 per cent of those in inner city areas said tackling this was their top priority. Even in villages and small towns the figure was 35 per cent. However, in rural areas, road traffic and lack of public transport were a bigger concern - 50 per cent of rural families

¹⁷ ICM for Playday 2010, commissioned by Play England. Interviews were conducted with 2000 adults and children across the UK in June 2010. www.playday.org.uk

¹⁸ OECD 2009, *Doing Better for Children* Chapter 2, OECD

¹⁹ Lester S and Russell W (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: Play England.

²⁰ Hansen K and Joshi H (eds) (2008) *Millennium Cohort Study Third Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings*. Institute of Education.

²¹ Tellus4 survey 2009

placed one or other of these as their top issue for improving the neighbourhood for families²².

Not surprisingly, poorer families are worst hit by the quality of public space in their area. The FPI research also found that 45 per cent of the poorest families do not say they have access to well-maintained, pleasant green space, compared to just 16 per cent of the richest families.

One outcome of the Children's Fund, which distributed Treasury money to voluntary organisations addressing children and families in need, was a recognition that early interventions for whole communities (as distinct from individual families) where there were high multiple deprivation indices could be very effective in reducing some of those indices. Thus community play projects within deprived areas with relatively large numbers of children 'at risk of social exclusion' showed an impact on data such as youth offending stats. The University of Birmingham and Institute of Education's comprehensive evaluation of the Children's Fund stated that: 'play could be effective in reducing the incidence of crime and anti-social behaviour'²³.

What has been done so far, and how effective has it been?

In 2006 the Big Lottery Fund launched its Children's Play initiative, a £155 million funding stream focusing on improving play opportunities in England. In December 2007 the last government announced the investment of £235 million in public play facilities over the following three years, as part of its Children's Plan. Key commitments included the creation or refurbishment of 3,500 public play areas, the creation of 30 new staffed adventure playgrounds, and training to a recognised level for 4000 playworkers. These actions were underpinned by a national play strategy.

Initial indications demonstrated how such combined investment can lead to significant, even dramatic, improvements in play opportunities. National indicator NI 199 (satisfaction with parks and play areas), based on the Tellus³ and Tellus⁴ surveys, showed an improvement of 7.7 percentage points from 2008 to 2009, rising from 46.4 per cent to 54.1 per cent.²⁴ The Big Lottery Fund's evaluation of the early outcomes of the Children's Play initiative²⁵ has found that the funding has deepened and widened access to play.

Users' perceptions of new play facilities were improved by a good, well-overlooked location, a feeling of social safety, a variety of equipment suitable for children of different ages, a green, pleasant environment and good maintenance and upkeep²⁶. Encouragingly, the Local Government Association (LGA) is finding that local authorities are taking a more balanced, proportionate approach to risk. In the words of Cllr Shireen Ritchie, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board: 'Councils have dismissed the "no balls allowed" ethos to introduce zip wires, climbing structures and tree houses.' Perceptions of social safety are key and a trained staffed presence can be invaluable to enhancing feelings of safety.

The message from the initiatives was that improving play opportunities is highly popular with children, families and communities. Moreover, play has great potential for improving their lives, contributing to their learning, growth and well-being and to the health and vitality of

²² James C and Gimson S (2007) Families and Neighbourhoods. Family & Parenting Institute

²³ University of Birmingham & Institute of Education (2006) *Working to Prevent the Social Exclusion of Children and Young People: Final Lessons from the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund*, DfES

²⁴ Spreadsheet comparison of Tellus³ and Tellus⁴ Local Authority figures – downloaded from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000908/index.shtml>

²⁵ Nicola Hall and Laurie Day (2009) *Evaluation of Children's Play programme: Report to Big Lottery Fund*, Big Lottery Fund

²⁶ Emma Wallace, Julia Pye, Fay Nunney and Nick Maybanks (2009) *Children and Parents' Experiences of Recently Improved Play Areas: Qualitative Research*. London: DCSF.

families and communities as a whole. Under normal economic circumstances, these findings would be a secure basis for further expansion. At a time of public spending cuts and a shift away from tight centrally controlled programmes, an innovative new approach will be needed.

Conclusions

When it comes to children's well-being, parents are not just concerned about outdoor play: crime and bullying, the virtual world, and the commercialisation of childhood are also large concerns. Yet in practice, many of these anxieties will become less acute if we as a society can make better offers in children's free time, tempting them away from screens with engaging real-world activities, and reconnecting them with a more welcoming environment beyond home and school.

Making villages, towns and cities more child- and family-friendly is perhaps the most powerful expression of a political commitment to improving the lives of families. It is also an issue where politicians at local and national levels can have direct influence, through their control of the planning system and publicly funded children's services. With political will and a clear vision, the solutions can be found even in difficult economic times.

Case Study 1

Nottingham Play Forum: Social enterprises and charities supporting communities

Nottingham Play Forum is an independent organisation owned by its members and operates under the name Playworks to support children's play in Nottingham. Playworks provides a range of training, education, resources, support, advice and information to individuals, groups and organisations. Membership is open to local voluntary groups, families, schools, students and private organisations. Full members in the voluntary sector have voting rights at general meetings and elect a board of trustees who manage the organisation.

The organisation has several funding streams. Core funding is from Nottingham City Council under the Voluntary Sector Investment Programme. Their training schemes are funded through Early Years Child Care 0-7. They get additional funding from the Big Lottery Fund, to carry out a street play project targeting areas of deprivation characterised by high crime rates, drug misuse and gang culture. The organisation believes that the play schemes have a massive impact in helping to reduce crime in the local area. Older children, who had previously been involved in anti-social behaviour, have started running the play schemes, giving them a sense of belonging and ownership in the community. The Street Play project worked with 1,486 children and has been instrumental in creating and supporting independent play champions in the community – local residents taking ownership of play projects.

These play schemes have been met with enthusiasm by the whole community. Parents have taken an active role volunteering, such as facilitating a 'walking bus' so children can get to the play provision safely, or opening and locking the park before and after the sessions. Base level funding has allowed community members to be trained as playworkers, providing them the basis to take on responsibility of the play sessions themselves.

The organisation offers training for members of the community, many of whom have been out of work for long periods of time and lack self esteem, and support them to do voluntary work. This helps to build their confidence, learn skills such as first aid and arts and crafts, and to find paid employment. In 2009, 620 people received playwork training and a further 471 people were involved in community roadshows. They also support local play schemes by offering them training in fundraising and drafting funding applications.

Playworkers have developed a range of services to support voluntary and community involvement in play. The Play Development and Information Service provides advice and information through a play library, publications and newsletter.

The scrapstore, providing for community groups using recycled materials donated by local businesses, was used by over 1,100 visitors. They currently have 370 members, who can pay a small fee (around £5) in exchange for a trolley full of materials. They have partnerships with retailers John Lewis, who donate unwanted Christmas decorations, which are then sold to play schemes at a cheap price and Boots who donate boxes of products, which are sold for fundraising purposes.

Case study 2

Toffee Park: Adding value through business and other support

Key themes:

- Fundraising
- Partnership with private sector
- Community involvement (training young people, vulnerable groups)

Toffee Park is located in a densely populated area of south Islington, London. One of London's smaller adventure playground sites, it is surrounded by a mixture of medium and high rise estates on the edge of the City.

The majority of funding for the adventure playground is achieved through volunteering from local people, business and institutions. Toffee Park holds local fundraising events where children sell their artwork and help out on the stands. The children raised £200 at the last local event and these are usually held once or twice a term. Parents are encouraged to help out at community events, such as fundraising or helping on trips out with the children. Funding is also sought through applications for grants, such as BBC Children in Need, Big Lottery Fund and New Deal Regeneration programme.

The adventure playground has developed corporate volunteering relationships with a number of businesses through Business Link, including Colt Telecom, John Lewis Partnership and Santander. The Colt volunteers, many of which are local residents, helped installation of a large tube slide, while volunteers from Santander installed the zip wire, saving the playground several hundreds of pounds.

Corporate companies have helped with the general maintenance of the adventure playground, including gardening and wood-proofing the building, saving Toffee Park over £10,000 per year. This support was developed through a local voluntary time bank who organise corporate days where businesses can offer their time and a financial support to voluntary organisations. Other corporate funding is obtained through children's parents who work at businesses (such as John Lewis) and nominate Toffee Park for sponsorship when fundraising opportunities arise. Many of the local businesses wish to keep in touch after the partnership, often dropping by to see the staff and offer further support for fundraising.

Toffee Park has also developed a mutually beneficial relationship with Middlesex University where design degree students have designed and installed an innovative water play feature as part of their coursework. The water feature was partly paid for by the savings made through business support, and will use collected rainwater from the building's roof for both children's play and to irrigate a newly-developed garden and children's allotment area. Islington Play Association made contact with local universities to ask if they were interested in creating a partnership with the playground, and Middlesex University expressed interest to be involved. The students and the lecturers visited the adventure playground and undertook the project as part of their university qualification. The manager estimates that if Toffee Park had commissioned the water feature via a private company, the cost would have been around £10,000.

The adventure playground also has connections with the local colleges, who put on student fundraising days. This is beneficial to the local students who enjoy engaging with the community and feel as though they are contributing to improving the local area.

A website design company based in nearby Clerkenwell has developed a website for the playground at no charge as part of a corporate social responsibility programme.

Toffee Park attempts to ensure that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are integrated into community life. They have good links with local family centres and offer free places for families in need of support. They are part of the local health service's short breaks scheme where disabled children attend the adventure playground, allowing rest bite for their families. This is partly funded by the health service.

The staff team is comprised of local people who attended Toffee Park as children. An apprenticeship and training scheme is also available to young people who used to attend the playground. The council funds these young people to complete an introduction to playwork course. Many of the local people have an emotional attachment to the adventure playground and help to make corporate days a success and volunteer when is needed.

Case study 3

Indigos Go Wild: Communities involved in the management and staffing of a local play spaces

The Indigos Go Wild project is an environmental play project created by a group of local parents in Brixham, Devon. The group was established by four mums who identified a need for play opportunities for their children. Indigos started as a small after school club, which became more popular by word of mouth. The founder of Indigos ran a community centre and negotiated a free room to carry out the play sessions. Parents took responsibility for ensuring the maintenance of the after school club by using any materials and equipment that they had at home.

The group identified a derelict wooded site adjacent to a local school and thought it would be a good space to carry out play sessions with local children. Indigos approached the head teacher of the school and asked permission to use the wasteland for the play project in return for clearing and maintaining the wasteland. With the head teacher's support, a letter was drafted to the LEA who owned the land. The council at first refused, but Indigos persisted until the council sent an officer to come out and examine the land. The officer was supportive of Indigos vision and wrote to DfE to ask permission. Indigos eventually gained permission to lease the land, but the council asked for a large fee of around £10,000. Indigos argued that they would be helping the community by clearing the wasteland and negotiated the price down to £100 per year on a 25-year lease. Parents drew on their own knowledge to fill out forms and learned as they went through the process. The lease was only achievable with the support of local people and council officers.

This was the start of the Indigos Go Wild project, which offers children the experience of challenging and exciting play opportunities in a natural environment. The project is staffed and managed by local parents. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in community-based projects and develop new skills. On-site this includes general land management, building and maintaining paths and structures used by children. Off-site this includes participation in creating floats for local carnivals and events. The parents have sustained the project since 2003 through successful fundraising and have worked with other agencies including children's services and other voluntary and community groups.

Indigos worked with adult volunteers as well as children and young people to create a 'magical' play space where children and young people can build dens, make fires, cook, grow plants and climb trees. The place space is 'magical' because it is not structured; swings are made out of ropes by the children and the environment is kept natural. The project works on three principles: respect yourself, respect others and respect the land. No other rules are necessary. The land – as it is known to children – is open during the school holidays, some evenings and weekends.

The play space has been beneficial to the wider community. Children who had been diagnosed with ADHD played on the land and their diagnosis is now being questioned as their behaviour has greatly improved; it may be the case that these children simply lacked opportunities to let off steam. The project also won a Government Respect Award, because the project had initiated a cultural change of promoting respect amongst children and other local people. The local area had a problem with drug users and Indigos challenged some parents for using drugs on the premises. This led to the drug users setting fire to some of the wasteland and causing hundreds of pounds of damage. The community had to pull together to rebuild the play space, eventually driving the drug users out of the area.

Case study Woodland Play Centre

Woodland Play Centre is a privately owned company, set up by a qualified playworker. The founder, Louise Kennedy, bought ten acres of land and uses it for her play centre. The project is self funded but has made many successful funding applications, including money from the local Sustainable Development Fund.

The project has contributed towards the well-being of the community. Children with behavioural problems at school, or with learning difficulties such as autism, find it difficult to socially engage with others and can benefit from the experiences at Woodland Play Centre. It gives children, who are frustrated or anxious, the opportunity to 'let of steam'.

The founder of the centre ensures that she maintains good networks with local landowners and agencies, and works on reciprocal obligations with local people. A wide range of people enjoy the Woodland Centre; even people without children and from different age groups have offered to volunteer their time. Local people are offered a small incentive (drink and burger, for example) to help out on the grounds. Parents who work for local businesses bring resources from their work, such as large ropes, or spare cut-offs for building purposes. The play centre also offers their services to hard-to-reach groups and schools carrying out Duke of Edinburgh Award.

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