



Playful Ideas Research Summary

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Contents

Foreword	4
Section 1: Introduction	6
Section 2: Lessons learned	7
Section 3: Playful Ideas project case studies	
Portable Pixel Playground	10
Playlands	12
Global Play	13
The Finion Bargee	14
Special Toys Educational Postal Service	16
Play Days	17
Play in Prisons	18
Street Play	19
Tuned in Play	20
'Domestic abuse? We choose Play!'	21
Anson Cabin project	22

Foreword

The Playful Ideas initiative is an innovation programme that lives up to its billing. The projects funded by the programme are shot through with the energy of creativity, experimentation, and risk-taking (in a managed way, of course). Innovation is to a degree in the eye of the beholder, and some of the projects may be best characterised as new for their area or region, not necessarily for the nation as a whole. Yet overall, the initiative has maintained a strong focus on supporting the genuinely new, and the genuinely different.

What is the creation of a massive outdoor den-building area in the heart of one of the UK's most popular visitor attractions, if not innovative? How about the appearance of dozens of treehouses in playgrounds across the London Borough of Islington? Or a three-year exploration of play conducted jointly by socially engaged artists and children living on a housing estate in Peckham? Or encouraging parents in prison and their children to enjoy some time playing together? (This last project is one of eleven described in more detail in the following pages, taken from a total of 64 grants).

During the Children's Play Review in 2002/3, Frank Dobson and I were both clear from the outset that new models and approaches were needed. When in 2004 the Dobson Review report into what became the Children's Play Initiative was published, the idea of an innovation strand was widely endorsed.

Such a strand is of course easier to support when – as here – it runs alongside a more mainstream funding programme open to more conventional proposals. But I suspect that one other factor behind this wish for innovation is that good playworkers tend by their very nature to be restlessly inventive, always looking for different ways of doing things. It comes from being around children, and really thinking about what children actually do when they play. All that energy, creativity and appetite for novelty cannot help but rub off.

What will the future hold for the projects funded by Playful Ideas, and for the approaches they helped to



explore? Playful Ideas projects are funded for up to five years, and many are ongoing. So we will not know the wider impact of their experiments for some years to come. After all, it is in the nature of innovation that truly successful approaches take a while to make their mark.

Even so, there are promising early signs. ECOTEC's



research rightly highlights the value of strong partnerships. But looking through the funded projects, what struck me was the diversity of lead organisations involved. Surely few funding initiatives have included in their portfolio of grant recipients the National Trust, Islington Play Association, Eden Project, South London

Gallery, Exeter Mencap and Haven House women's refuge. All of which cannot help but spread the reach and impact of what might be called 'play-literate' ideas. The breadth of approaches is also striking. In their work to engage children and young people, projects have searched far and wide for inspiration, using loose materials, street parties, hi-tech playground equipment, modified toys and even traditional games from around the world.

There is little doubt about the impact of individual projects. Nonetheless, questions can perhaps be raised about some aspects of the programme's strategy. The decision to target the voluntary sector, while understandable given that local authorities were in the lead for the mainstream programme, was in my view a missed opportunity. For instance, Frank and I were both keen to explore how to open up school grounds for wider use, and the issue was highlighted in the Dobson Review report. Yet with schools effectively barred from the programme, the issue remains seriously underexplored. A lesson for future innovation initiatives, perhaps.

Taking a wider, historical look, the Children's Play initiative has had a huge impact, and can now be seen as having paved the way for the Government's Play Strategy and the £235 million investment programme launched in 2007. When Children's Secretary Ed Balls made this announcement, those who, like me, have been arguing for decades for decent places to play in every neighbourhood, might have been tempted to feel that we were finally approaching that goal. Now, of course, the new, harsher financial climate has changed almost everything. One thing, however, is certain. The play sector now has a truly impressive and growing bank of ideas, projects and approaches to help make our case to decision-makers and politicians, whatever their political hue.

Tim Gill

Writer, researcher and consultant

Section 1: Introduction

Background

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) invested £155 million in the Children's Play initiative to raise the profile of play. The Playful Ideas programme was allocated £16 million and aimed to "support innovation and new ways of providing for children's play". Playful Ideas has awarded 64 grants to voluntary and community groups and town or parish councils. The projects range in size from £10,000 to £250,000 and can be delivered over five years. Playful Ideas focuses on exploring new and innovative ways of supporting children's play, and projects are required to meet two of the following outcomes¹:

- ▶ Children will be able to enjoy novel play experiences, ideas or technology.
- ▶ Children will have new or different ways of choosing and controlling their play environment.
- ▶ Children will enjoy new approaches to play provision.

New approaches to providing for inclusive children's play will be tried for those previously denied play opportunities.

The value and status of children's play provision will be enhanced, locally, regionally and nationally.

Ideas and approaches to supporting children's play that can be replicated by others will be identified.

About this publication

This publication highlights the range of innovative approaches to play that have been created and delivered through Playful Ideas and shares the learning from projects. In December 2009, BIG commissioned ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd to undertake the research for this publication. This research was conducted with a sample of 11 Playful Ideas projects in December 2009 and January 2010. The methodology included case study visits and interviews with project leaders and children.

In section 2, we look at the lessons that have emerged from the 11 case study projects. Section 3 describes these case study projects in more detail.

Who should read this publication?

This publication is targeted at policy makers and practitioners working in the field of children's play. This includes people who design and deliver play opportunities and may want to try something new in their local area.

¹Big Lottery Fund 2006 Children's Play: Playful Ideas Guidance Notes

Section 2: Lessons learned

BIG's Playful Ideas programme focuses on providing new and innovative ways to provide children's play through creative and novel approaches. The programme aims to fund projects that meet identified needs in local communities. This publication aims to highlight the interesting and diverse approaches to play that are being delivered by Playful Ideas projects.

What is Playful Ideas delivering?

Playful Ideas projects are delivering innovative play through a range of incredibly varied projects and activities. Innovative approaches to play include:

- ▶ Providing opportunities for play in locations or surroundings where play opportunities are not usually available. This could include approaches such as delivering play in prisons with prisoners and their families, or in refuges for women and their children who have experienced domestic violence or abuse.
- ▶ Creating new play spaces or breathing new life into existing spaces to inspire children. Examples of activities include opening up local streets for street parties, building a play barge or offering play opportunities in shopping centres.
- ▶ Engaging with target groups that are not traditionally involved in play, such as fathers or young offenders.
- ▶ Giving children the freedom to be imaginative and creative in how they play and offering new types of play that were not previously available through sharing new types of play inspired from around the globe.
- ▶ Delivering play in a way that demonstrates its wider outcomes. For example, some projects are contributing to greater community cohesion, improving mental health or reducing re-offending.
- ▶ Using and applying new technologies for play such as creating a 'digital playground' or using a young people's blog to generate ideas.

Examples of projects that demonstrate innovative approaches to play are provided in the case studies in section 3. The case studies are from across England and highlight just a small sample of what is happening within the Playful Ideas programme and what has been achieved so far.

Lessons learned

The Playful Ideas projects that were included in the research identified a number of lessons that they have learned while setting up and delivering their innovative activities. Innovation enables projects to test out new approaches and push the boundaries of play. The lessons these projects have learned may be helpful, even if you do not have access to your own play barge, or are not experienced in using technology!

Build effective partnerships

Many innovative projects worked closely with local partners to help make their project a success. Partnership working between organisations helped projects with areas such as planning, delivery, evaluation and dissemination. Projects worked in partnership with local authorities, schools, the police, Sure Start and other statutory bodies, as well as voluntary sector groups and local communities. Projects found that being open and transparent about what was expected from partners helped to ensure their input. For example, one project used a partner organisation as a 'critical friend' to provide constructive independent advice, and another included partner organisations on their management committee.

When you are innovating it is often helpful to have someone to test your ideas on first. Working with different partners also brings new perspectives, as one project found when working with the police.

Learn from others and work with specialists

Projects learnt that optimising their own strengths, and recognising areas where they needed help was crucial to getting the right mix of skills to deliver

their activities. For instance, this could involve approaching a local university to give advice on evaluation techniques, or getting local third sector capacity or support to help with recruitment or staff training. Some projects also used external experts to deliver specialist play sessions such as dance groups, sculptors or puppeteers. This left them with time to focus on delivering other areas of their project.

Involving people effectively

Projects learned many lessons from involving children, families and the wider community in their activities. For some projects, this meant that their work was entirely child-led which ensured that all the play activities were in line with children's preferences and needs. Ways of involving people included focus groups and workshops that used interactive techniques like 3D models or drawing, through to more formal mechanisms such as a young people's committee or steering group. Projects felt that it was important to be transparent with people about the amount of time and commitment required from them and to manage expectations about how far suggestions could be implemented. It is also important to keep communicating to people involved in the project so they can see how their contribution has made a difference.

Make your project portable

Some innovative projects made their project 'portable' so that they could take the new play service or facility to their target groups instead of waiting for them to come to a specific site. This approach can help to reach children who do not usually access play services, who live in remote areas, or do not have access to transport. Outreach projects also mean that services can be targeted to specific areas including deprived and rural communities.

Make your project relevant

Ensuring that projects are appropriate to beneficiaries' needs is a key challenge. Getting this right can result in more positive outcomes for those

involved. Projects felt that acting on feedback from partners and from any self-evaluation was important as it meant that they were able to modify their services to respond to their target groups. For example, one project found that children were not engaging in the after school play sessions and wanted the activities to be delivered during school holidays instead.

Make time for self-evaluation

Self-evaluation can help your project to grow and develop. Rather than seeing it as a chore, projects said they tried to build in time and budget for evaluation on an ongoing basis. They felt they were able to learn from it and improve their project in response to this ongoing feedback. Some projects commissioned their local university or an independent consultant to conduct their evaluation, whereas others built it into the monitoring and data collection procedures they were already using. One project recommended that it is worth trying to match your self-evaluation methods with your play project activities. For example, if you are running a digital media project, using online surveys to gather feedback will fit more closely with your projects aim.

Some projects saw a value in trying to measure soft outcomes or tracking beneficiaries after they had left the project to provide evidence of impact, but in some cases they were unsure how to do it. Looking at other people's evaluation tools and techniques is often a good way of finding a solution that works for you.

Promote your project

Organisations that promoted their project found that this was helpful for both practical and strategic reasons. Organisations found that promoting their project helped them to raise awareness of it and encouraged more children and families to take part in activities. Other benefits included increased strategic influence in the local area by helping to raise the profile of the organisation itself and the importance

Lessons learned

attached to play. For some projects, their promotion activity led to them being featured in local or national press, or even winning an award. Considering the target audience is a key factor when doing publicity work. For example, one project used bilingual publicity material to help raise awareness among the wider community.

Use volunteer training to embed your ideas

Some projects trained parents and people in the local community as volunteers so that they could deliver innovative play activities. Other projects trained children to deliver play sessions to help roll out their model of innovative play. This model of training meant that more people knew how to deliver the innovative form of play and helped to build capacity so that volunteers would be able to continue to deliver innovative play beyond the life of the project.

Be productive

Some projects produced useful outputs as part of their work. This included a 'handbook' for practitioners wanting to implement innovative forms of play and a 'toolkit' with examples of activities for other organisations to try. Creating outputs with a clear audience in mind and disseminating them widely after your project has ended will help to share learning more widely in the sector.

Section 3: Playful Ideas project case studies

Portable Pixel Playground delivered by Folly Trust, Cumbria and Lancashire

Value and length: A two year project awarded £93,558 from Playful Ideas

Description: The Portable Pixel Playground is a digital playground (a modular system of computer and technological equipment) for use in public settings such as shopping centres, galleries and schools and is unique to the North West. The project provides a cutting edge experience for children with access to unique digital artwork. Run by Folly Trust, the digital playground provides free, unstructured play activities for children and young people aged 6-16. It encourages young people to use everyday

technologies in new and creative ways. Children and young people are able to take risks, experience new ideas, interact and undertake physical and creative play. This helps to combat the stereotype that playing with technology is a solitary experience. Another novel aspect of the project is that it is portable and can be taken to shopping centres and community centres enabling the project to directly target specific areas or groups.

Outcomes: Children and young people enjoy the social aspects of playing together and developing their imagination, which increases their well-being and confidence. As one parent commented, the playground is: "Very sensory and fun. We wish we'd





come earlier – the girls (age 9 and 10) could've happily spent all day here." Local communities and families feel less isolated in small towns and rural areas as the playground encourages community interactions by bringing people together. Project partners benefit from the playground as it enhances what they offer to the local community and allows them to provide new and unique play opportunities. The playground has also introduced a wider range of people to the Folly Trust who would not necessarily have come into contact with the organisation.

Lessons learned: Folly Trust believe that part of the strength of the project is because the North West has a strong digital arts and media culture, from which they have gained a lot of peer support and promotion at a regional level. This form of regional support is also facilitating partnership working, enabling the organisation to build up relationships with a new range of local organisations. For the partners, it is beneficial because they can add play opportunities to the range

of activities they can offer. There are challenges and practical issues such as the portability of the actual playground in terms of its size and complexity. Folly Trust are currently working on increasing access to the playground and commissioning artwork that is as fully portable as possible. Folly Trust are also taking into account the costs and practicalities of arranging extra events to keep up with demand. The rurality of the North West region can sometimes hinder the spread of the project through the area resulting in many practical issues which can limit their impacts upon the whole region. As a result there are large rural areas and pockets of need (especially in Cumbria) that are currently unmet.

Get in touch!

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Playlands delivered by St. Albans Mencap, St Albans, Hertfordshire

Value and length: A five year project awarded £228,000 from Playful Ideas

Description: Playlands works with children and young people with learning disabilities aged 8-19 and with their siblings and peers. The project offers integrated play for able bodied and disabled children and aims to reduce social exclusion and raise awareness of learning disabilities. The types of play offered include unstructured play and play chosen by beneficiaries. This includes creative and imaginative activities such as tepee building and novel circus activities that integrate into play sessions. A key aim of the project is to engage fathers in play which is relatively uncommon in play provision. The project

promotes a novel initiative which encourages fathers to get directly involved in play with their children to help broaden their play experience. This enables fathers to share the experience of caring for a child with disabilities. The project is innovative for this locality because there are no other resources of this nature in the district or immediate adjoining districts in Hertfordshire.

Outcomes: During their first year of delivery, beneficiaries are gaining increased confidence and widening the boundaries of their play experiences. The project would eventually like to increase the delivery of play involving fathers in more locations with increased frequency in the area. St Alban's Mencap is benefitting from running the project as they have not previously worked with children. This has been beneficial in increasing the reach and scope of their work. At a national level, Mencap are aiming to develop and build up their growing knowledge of the children's sector and raise the profile of their work at the regional and national levels.

Lessons learned: The project found that broadening the play experiences and opening up children's boundaries generated a lot of enjoyment. For example, using an adventure playground, a facility that is not traditionally associated with teaching disabled children, was very popular. In terms of project delivery, the team find it is important to manage peoples' expectations by talking to schools, parents and children in their home settings about what they can realistically expect from the project. The project is planning a structured event and conference in February 2010 to draw together other participants in Children's Play schemes to discuss experiences of working in the children's sector.

Get in touch!

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Global Play delivered by World Jungle, Bristol and Gloucestershire

Value and length: A three year project awarded £147,333 from Playful Ideas

Description: Global Play enables children and young people to have the opportunity to explore cultural diversity in fun and exciting ways. It involves playing traditional games from around the world, as well as exploring modern cultural play and the connections and influences from different cultures. The project considers innovative ways to help children and young people incorporate Global Play into everyday life. They offer a wide range of play activities including: fun days; free play; outdoor play; and creative and imaginative play through dance and drama based activities e.g. African dance. One beneficiary explained how they: "Really enjoyed the [African] drumming, the games, face paints". The project works most often in majority white, deprived rural settings with little previous exposure to multi-cultural play. The project works in the chosen play setting over a period of time to try and combat misconceptions about other cultures in preparation for a child's adult life. The project also works in multicultural city settings, targeting specific local communities.

Outcomes: As a result of the project, children and young people are developing a greater understanding of different cultures through both physically and mentally challenging play. The project is finding that parents are becoming increasingly involved in a voluntary capacity with the project. Through their work, the project is developing strong links with Play Partnerships and Play England and they are planning to disseminate their work nationally by enlisting the help of external consultants in this process. These partners are also developing their awareness of the benefits of providing a multicultural environment for play.



Lessons learned: World Jungle believes that replication of the project may need to be slightly different in city areas, as their work is mainly focused upon rural areas. Consideration of population baseline data within cities would steer the types of play activities they undertake. Bringing in external expertise from high calibre artists from different cultures (as opposed to Play workers) is also recommended by the team. Another important factor to consider is the management of the many tutors involved in the delivery of the project. Careful organisation and planning of project delivery far in advance, holding regular tutor meetings, laying out clear session plans and procedures are all good lessons learned. The appropriateness of the timing of the project also emerged as an issue; after school clubs were not working as well as they hoped because children were often too tired and the tutors found it very hard to engage with them. They have found that when the project moves to working in holiday times the children are more focused.

Get in touch!

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The Funion Bargee delivered by Milton Keynes Play Association, Milton Keynes

Value and length: A five year project awarded £246,232 from Playful Ideas

Description: The Funion Bargee is a purple narrow boat (or barge) that has been tailor built to deliver play opportunities to isolated rural communities and communities living in deprived areas along the Grand Union canal in the three local authority areas of Northamptonshire, Milton Keynes and Bedfordshire. Since July 2009 this new play provision has enabled the Play Association to offer various play sessions primarily to 4-14 year olds. These sessions include history talks, nature trails, drawing, reading, learning about locks and barges and building dens in woodland by the canal. The barge is fitted out with play materials and takes donations from local companies of scrap for creative and free play. Staff and volunteers run the boat and move it to various destinations along the canal. They can also moor up if

they see children on the towpath and have spontaneous play sessions. The play barge is also moored alongside existing play provision or to tie into existing events, such as activities being run by local Parish Councils in parks. The barge is enabling play in what might otherwise be considered a dangerous environment for children.

Outcomes: The outcomes from the project are that local children are being offered a new and novel form of play and new environment for play, which they find very exciting. Around 700 children who would not previously have had access to such an opportunity will benefit from play in the natural environment. It is hoped this will lead to improved behaviour and reduced antisocial behaviour. Communities are also benefiting, for instance, through volunteering and receiving new learning opportunities for adults who get involved. The boat is very recognisable and this has helped raise the profile of the Play Association locally.

Lessons learned: Getting the children involved in naming and decorating the boat has been beneficial as it has given the children a sense of ownership and has made the boat more recognisable to local people. This also means it is easily recognisable as a play barge and not a regular barge. Close working with the local company that built the barge meant it was fitted exactly to their specifications, rather than modifying an existing boat. Partnership working with other local community groups or so-called 'community mobilisers' has helped in running events (like a big fun day) where the play barge attended. The Play Association is now sharing their learning with two other organisations that are interested in building play boats.



Get in touch!

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Special Toys Educational Postal Service delivered by STEPS Charity, Torquay

Value and length: A three year project awarded £163,375 from Playful Ideas

Description: The project provides a postal developmental toy library service for physically disabled children that cannot operate high street toys by themselves. Funding has allowed the project to adapt high street toys by inserting specialist sequencers. These allow children to operate a toy with lots of buttons and functions through one switch that they can press. The adapted toys allow physically disabled children to develop through having the opportunity to play independently which helps develop their cognitive skills and physical dexterity. To take part in the project, children must be registered with STEPS. Currently the project has 3,000 registered clients. Their personal details are recorded including the types of toys they enjoy which helps STEPS match toys to children's needs and interests. Parents are asked to provide feedback on the toy which enables the team to select the next appropriate toy. As a result STEPS can then send more stimulating and suitable toys to a wide age range of children.

Outcomes: Evaluation feedback from parents shows that children love playing with the toys they have been sent by the project, and that this is contributing

to a better quality of life. For example: one parent commented that her daughter 'gets very excited when a new box arrives and can't wait to see what's inside. She loves music so the bouncing bongo was a real hit.' The project also provides children with more complex toys that help develop their cognitive processes as well as physical development: One parent commented: "since I've spoken to you the last time, my son has now been able to operate the joystick on his own. I would like to thank you for the hours of fun which you've given my son and the chance to prove to himself that he can do things on his own with the right help."

Lessons learned: From working on the project using sequencers on toys, the project hopes to develop more complex toys with a greater number of possible functions that would enable STEPS to adapt child computers, as well as more complex toys. In general, the selection of the toys is working well, based on information received from parents concerning their likes and dislikes. STEPS feel their service could be further improved by including pictures and descriptions of the toys on their website to make sure the toys are appropriate (however additional funding would need to be secured for this activity). It is also important to consider the different types of switches that can be used by children as this can affect the extent to which a child can develop their motor skills. For instance, smaller switches that fit in the palm of your hand have to be used more delicately which improves children's control. The project has also learned that designing evaluation forms to explicitly ask how children's skills have developed as a result of the project is a useful way to help track children's progression in a more formal way.

Get in touch!

For more details contact Ian Tomlinson
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Play Days delivered by The Greenhouse Multi-Cultural Play and Arts Project, Liverpool

Value and length: A five year project awarded £246, 232 from Playful Ideas

Description: Play Days provides a programme of new and inclusive play opportunities for children from diverse ethnic backgrounds living in the Toxteth area of Liverpool. It is free, and caters for up to 40 children every night after school and daily during school holidays. The project ensures it meets the needs of its beneficiaries via its children's steering group, which has 16 members aged 8-12 years old. Members provide ideas for play activities and help design the project's landscape garden. Children also take part in play leader training to enable them to deliver their own play activities as either part of the project, in their own school and or community.

Outcomes: Parents and project staff are seeing the difference in the children attending the project with developments in communication skills and confidence, especially for children who are on the steering group or who have taken part in the play leader training. A Play Days member of staff explained how: "It's fantastic for the social skills, making friends and especially the confidence they're gaining, one of our steering group members who is 9 years old even hosted the organisation's Annual General Meeting last year, that's the level of confidence this project gives them." The children's steering group designed a questionnaire with the lead play officer to gauge the improvements in children's quality of life through the project's support. The results demonstrate that 92 per cent of the children were healthier and happier. A separate evaluation with the local community found out that the local people are happy that there is somewhere for the children to go as there are very few play spaces in the area. Play Days will continue its work in gaining feedback from children, parents/carers and the local



community and in tracking and evaluating its impact over the five years of the project.

Lessons learned: Play Days have learned that it is important to listen to what the children want to do during a play session. A staff member commented that: "The steering group works well. Get the children making the decisions, or helping to make the decisions, because if they're involved they respect the project a lot more." For play leader training to be successful it should ideally be delivered at the beginning of the summer holidays, before the summer play programme has begun, as the site is quieter and the children were clear that they had attended the project for the play training session. The children should set their own training goals and deliver games with other children. Researching the project before starting was also advised. For instance, staff visited other play centres with members of the children's steering group to find out what they liked and brought back ideas back to the project, such as clearing outdoor space to be used for games and growing their own plants.

Get in touch!

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Play in Prisons delivered by Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), South West England

Value and length: A three year project awarded £243,437 from Playful Ideas

Description: Play in Prisons targets children affected by a parent's imprisonment. Operating within three prisons in the South West, it encourages interaction between imprisoned parents and their children through play and, for older children, informal sports, on family visit days. The PACT Director of Services explained how family visit days "provide new opportunities for children and parents to interact and play in an environment where this has not previously been practical". This is unique because in a 'typical' visit imprisoned parents are not usually allowed to interact with their children. The activities run in the prisons for older children include football and basketball and the activities for younger children include face painting and storytelling.

Outcomes: With over 100 years of experience, PACT has a good understanding of the gaps in provision for children of prisoners. The project aims to reduce stress amongst children and young people associated with prison visits and to deal better with the separation of the family. The project also aims to maintain family links and contact as this has been proven to reduce the imprisoned parent's likelihood of re-offending (producing positive outcomes for children and families). As one beneficiary described: "I had fun today. I enjoyed the football and face painting. I liked spending time with my Daddy. I made a badge and a pirate hat." The project aims to reduce the social isolation and marginalisation of children of offenders that have an increased likelihood of mental health issues. As family visit days run from 11am to 3pm children have time

"I liked spending time with my Daddy. I made a badge and a pirate hat"

to make new friends, play together and undertake activities such as arts and crafts as well as playing with their imprisoned parent. A report by the Government's Social Exclusion Unit has shown that prisoners who maintain contact with their family whilst they are serving their sentence are up to six times less likely to re-offend upon release, underlining the important outcomes from Play in Prisons.

Lessons learned: Partnership working is intrinsic to the delivery of the project and involves an holistic, multi-agency approach. Encouraging interaction and play between children and imprisoned parents also has a lot of cross-over with established ways of reducing offending and is a common interest of many partners. The downside of partnership working is that the delivery of the project can take a while to organise. Very often it can rely on having a good key contact within a prison, such as a prison officer. A limiting factor for the project has been the rural nature of much of the South West. As a result, transport issues associated with getting to the prisons and the effects of travel need to be factored into the work with children. PACT aims to disseminate outcomes and good practice as a result of the project and produce a best practice toolkit. PACT is also in the process of developing national guidelines for the delivery of this work.

Get in touch!

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Street Play delivered by London Play, London

Value and length: A three year project awarded £249,969 from Playful Ideas

Description: The Street Play project creates play opportunities and promotes safe play near children's homes by organising play focused street parties. Working with London Play Associations to support local residents in organising the events, the idea of the project is to reclaim public spaces for children and recapture the idea of street parties. Each street party is different depending on what local residents want. For example, one street party attracted roughly 250 children, teenagers and adults from the hosting street as well as the neighbouring streets. There were several food stalls, street entertainers including a steel band, a fire engine for the children to explore, face painting and a variety of games.

Outcomes: The street parties are being received very positively by the children and their parents after the first year. This has created more positive attitudes to playing outside and feeling safer: One child aged 8 commented: "I loved playing with my friends out in the road." The street parties are intergenerational events, which help to create a sense of community: Once local resident said: "I have never been to an event where so many people contributed by bringing food, baking cakes, decorating the street and giving a little of their time to help set up the event...I certainly made new friends and feel that the whole street has benefited from properly meeting each other and taking time to talk." The success of the street parties in some areas is encouraging local residents to campaign for allocated times for street play in their area. London Play is working with local authorities across London to help residents achieve this aim. Additionally, London Play feels the events which have received publicity are helping to raise the profile of play in London.



Lessons learned: A variety of media are being used to effectively promote the project, including 'Time Out' and local radio. This is helping local residents to understand and appreciate the project. London Play engages children in the design and development of street parties using a 3D street model so children can draw their ideas of play to help them visualise what their party could be like. For such a project, it is also important to investigate the different rules for street closures in London boroughs, such as charges for road closures and advertising road closures. London Play is lobbying local authorities to reduce the charges and make it easier to close roads. This campaign is having some success, with one local authority agreeing not to charge anything for street closures. London Play now uses this local authority as a model of good practice, resulting in other local authorities reducing their charges. London Play is actively supporting other organisations who want to implement similar projects in their areas and the project won the Children and Young People Now's Play Award in November 2009 which further helped to raise the profile of street play.

Get in touch!

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Tuned In Play delivered by Escape Community Art in Action, Warwickshire

Value and length: A five year project awarded £246,175 from Playful Ideas

Description: This arts and technology based project aims to work with around 6,500 beneficiaries aged 8-16 in 15 communities across Warwickshire. The project offers a series of freely chosen imaginative and explorative play opportunities and brings together a variety of play styles in a new way. Activities include imaginative play through using new technology, digital media and sound recording to enable children to design play projects either online, at home individually, or in groups at play venues. The activities are then built using recycled and scrap materials to create the ideas physically. Redundant technological equipment is used to enhance the link between the virtual and the physical. The aim is to maximise the links between, and transition from, virtual to physical play. This type of play was not previously available in the county. The outputs will be linked with Warwickshire Digital Hub for dissemination. The Tuned In project caters for all children, and through its inclusion policy aims to encourage children from a range of backgrounds to access the project. The project is training volunteers and community members to deliver this form of play so the model can be sustained. Tuned In involves children in democratic style approaches to project planning and delivery by using peer consultations, and peer promotion and celebration. This links to the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Outcomes: So far the project is leading to positive outcomes for the children taking part, including encouraging team working skills, increased confidence and discovering new talents and skills. Being involved in creative play also helps children's health and wellbeing. The project is finding that linking technology and play can inspire new ways of playing. Young people have also been given a voice in terms of articulating the types of play they wish to be involved in and communities are starting to see the benefits of free, creative play. The project is also opening up new spaces to play which were not available beforehand. This means that more play opportunities are now available in the county.

Lessons learned: The local play lead for Warwickshire is supportive of the project but as there is no counterpart in Stratford the project has to act at local level rather than more strategically. Instead, the local youth service is particularly helpful in advocating for the project. The project is finding that collaboration with schools and local voluntary services is vital. These groups are providing support in terms of organising events and providing help with training, advertising and management. Briefing partners and commissioners fully at the start and being transparent about the types of high level inputs that are needed from them up front, is proving to be vital to the project's success.

Get in touch!

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‘Domestic abuse? We choose Play!’ delivered by Haven House, Sheffield

Value and length: A five year project awarded £249,900 from Playful Ideas

Description: The ‘Domestic abuse? We choose Play!’ project provides a range of play activities in a women’s refuge to enable children who have experienced domestic abuse adjust to a new life with their mothers. The project is innovative as it is creating an overall framework for play within a crisis refuge service, with children’s choice and control at the heart of the organisation’s work. It enables mums to be involved with their children through play and empowers children to take the lead and decide what play opportunities are needed in a refuge setting. A play room has been established in the refuge that is open at specific times, providing free play opportunities for children supervised by children’s workers or refuge workers. Within the play room, four different themed areas encourage many creative and imaginative play opportunities. They seek to work with the widest range of children aged 0-16 and girls from 16-18 that are staying with their mothers.

Outcomes: Play workers see the role of undirected creative play as essential for children to make sense of difficult past experiences and as a form of ‘disguised semi-therapeutic work’. A key outcome of the work has been the positive impact of play in crisis situations for both children and their mums. The refuge manager describes how children enter the refuge feeling vulnerable due to past experiences and that “for refuges, focusing upon play can be empowering for both women and children”. On an individual level, children and young people have experienced an increase in confidence and positive interactions with children and refuge staff. They have the opportunity to play with equipment that is theirs and enjoy themselves. One 11 year old child commented that: “I love it here as the play room is really big, with lots of toys and new technologies and



I can choose to play on anything. The children’s workers are really friendly. I come here every day and it’s all really cool. It makes me feel good”. At a strategic level, Haven House is seeing the influence of their work on other refuges and are working to emphasise nationally how play is a way of working with mums and their children together.

Lessons learned: As many of the mothers and children share a room, relationships can be placed under stress. To combat this, the Saturday activities are working particularly well, such as cookery classes and day trips away from the refuge. These activities have enabled mums and their children to have quality focused ‘time out’ together. Although children and young people can access play facilities in the play room at the refuge, they are supervised with play workers and not their mums. Having extra activities on Saturdays allows them to have quality time together in a different environment.

Get in touch!

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Anson Cabin Project, Anson Cabin, Manchester

Value and length: A four year project awarded £198,889 from Playful Ideas

Description: Anson Cabin provides opportunities to children and young people that are at risk of joining gangs and entering into street crime to increase positive perception and their self esteem. It also encourages lone parents to engage in training and employment and increase positive perceptions of other ethnic groups. The project aims to use new methods, environments and target groups to encourage play such as through working in partnership with the Police to run a bike workshop with the local Youth Offending Team. Other partners include the Police, South Manchester Regeneration Team, Youth Service, and Sure Start for early years play. Children are encouraged to take a lead in choosing and delivering play sessions through the Children's Board, and 'Junior Play Workers' can receive training in leadership skills as part of being on the Board. The project also plans to deliver a child-led outreach initiative to promote the Anson Cabin Project and the benefits of free play to hard-to-reach children. Inclusivity has also been achieved through the distribution of publicity materials in additional languages such as Urdu and Punjabi in order to reach all members of their local community.

Outcomes: For children involved in the project, the provision of a safe place to play, learning new skills such as fundraising, increasing social skills and personal confidence have been key outcomes. Parents are benefiting from training, for example in leadership skills, and an Anson Cabin street team does small tasks for the elderly in the community. As the Cabin is the only play provider open throughout the year they are highly valued by the local authority and Manchester Play team. The Police have also reported a decrease in youth nuisance and anti-social behaviour at weekends as



a result of the youth project that they run on Fridays.

Lessons learned: Having a Children's Board and empowering children in decision making is very successful, as well as having a mixture of organisations (such as the Police) on their management committee to help with different ideas and steering. Enabling children to take the lead through the Children's Board and Junior Play Workers is greatly increasing the confidence of the children involved. It is also increasing the reach of the project because children introduce new friends that the project may not have initially reached. A key benefit to the project of being based in the Manchester region is the focus upon child-led play and the support of organisations such as the Manchester play team, regeneration team, and community Police. The project is currently going through an Equality in Play procedure, which has been helpful for the organisation and planning of the project.

Get in touch!

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