Creating Playful Communities
Lessons from the Engaging Communities in Play Progamme
By Paul Greatorex, Leisure and the Environment
Contents

3  Foreword
5  Introduction
6  How can communities get involved in play?
8  Making a difference when time is short
   Ongoing involvement - at a local level
   Ongoing involvement - at a strategic level
9  The wider context for play
10  Benefits of community engagement
    Communities taking the lead
12  Play projects as a catalyst for change
15  Support for engaging communities in play
17  What’s been learned from Engaging Communities in Play?
19  Author’s recommendations
20  Further information

Author: Paul Greatorex, Leisure and the Environment

The Engaging Communities in Play programme was delivered by Play England in partnership with Playwork Partnerships, Skills Active and KIDS.


Play England aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity for free, inclusive local play provision and play space.

Play England provides advice and support to promote good practice, and works to ensure that the importance of play is recognised by policy-makers, planners and the public.

Published for Play England by NCB
© NCB May 2011

National Children’s Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE Tel: 020 7843 6000 Website: www.ncb.org.uk
Registered charity number: 258825

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any person without the written permission of the publisher.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of NCB.
The Engaging Communities in Play programme was commissioned by the Department for Education to deliver one of the first national contracts awarded by the new coalition government. It replaced Play England’s role as the previous government’s delivery partner, supporting and challenging local authorities to deliver the play pathfinder and playbuilder programmes that ran from 2008-11.

Research suggests that the social, physically active childhoods that earlier generations could take for granted are now denied to growing numbers of children, with potentially serious consequences for their health. A major challenge in addressing this is to make public and green space safe and accessible for children’s play. The work highlighted in this report was to seek the ‘innovative, new solutions’ the government was calling for; to explore ‘how we can empower people to deliver these changes in their own neighbourhoods... by giving communities more control over what gets built in their neighbourhoods... and by making it easier for volunteers and charities to get involved’.

This report, researched and authored by independent consultant Paul Greatorex, points to some of these solutions. It speaks of what is possible when communities ally their irreplaceable local knowledge and love of their own neighbourhoods – and the aspirations they have for them – with specialist and targeted support from a dedicated and professional team. It looks at the role of the voluntary and community sector – or civic society – in providing play services and maintaining play spaces. In particular, it speaks of the need that all communities have for good places for their children to play and of the immense energy and commitment that can be harnessed to that cause with the right help and support.

What this report clearly finds is that for the most part local people cannot do this alone. The expertise of our Engaging Communities in Play team, aligned with local play specialists was a vital ingredient for these communities to achieve the outcomes that they did. This support was possible because the government provided the resources for it.

We hope this report conveys the importance of children’s play spaces as part of the fabric of community life. Children’s play is part of the lifeblood of our culture. Providing the best places possible for children to be able to play together will always be a priority for communities themselves because they know that children playing are happier, healthier and more resilient than children who are not.

We hope that the coalition government and all future national governments come to recognise that building a ‘big society’ must begin with places where all children can play. Such places are at the heart of any civilised vision for the public realm. That they should be owned by and cared for by local communities themselves does not absolve central and local governments from ensuring that they have the resources to thrive.

This is a huge challenge as budgets everywhere come under unprecedented pressure, but we must realise this vision, no matter what the prevailing context. The health and happiness of our children depends upon it.

This report begins to show the way.

Adrian Voce, Director
Play England, May 2011

---

1 See, for example, Sandercock, Dr G; Essex University; reported in Acta Paediatrica; May 2011.
2 Nick Clegg MP, Deputy Prime Minister, Speech to Barnado’s, 17 June 2010
3 ibid
Introduction

Creating Playful Communities sets out to demonstrate the benefits of community involvement in the management and maintenance of local play spaces. Equally importantly, it shows the role of communities in bringing their play spaces to life, and how, through their contribution, they can become hubs for wider community activity.

The report illustrates how communities can take a lead in developing and managing the places where children play, and how local people can be a catalyst for positive change. It highlights the support communities need from others to do this work effectively and where to find it. It also makes clear recommendations for the future in how communities can be more successful in Creating Playful Communities.

This publication is based on lessons learned from the Engaging Communities in Play (ECP) programme funded by the Department for Education, which ran from September 2010 to March 2011. The main aim of the project was to enable communities to develop, manage and sustain local play spaces. The programme was delivered by Play England in partnership with Playwork Partnerships, Skills Active and KIDS.

Engaging Communities in Play included a ‘universal offer’ to access resources and information through the Play England websites (in particular www.playfulcommunities.org.uk) networks and a national helpline providing advice to grass-roots play organisations. KIDS provided advice and support on how to make play spaces accessible to disabled children.

In addition, there was a ‘targeted offer’ for twenty selected areas. The aim was to support the development of local play projects then promote the good practice examples which emerged, from which other local communities could benefit.

Engaging Communities in Play – the twenty targeted areas
- Bath and North East Somerset
- Blackpool
- Bradford
- Cumbria
- Camden
- Cornwall
- East Riding
- Enfield
- Gateshead
- Hackney
- Haringey
- Kent
- Liverpool
- Knowsley
- Manchester
- Oxfordshire
- Peterborough
- Richmond
- Southwark
- Torbay

These communities were offered:
- Five days of consultancy support from the Play England development team aimed at fostering greater community engagement
- A Play Shaper training module designed with Playwork Partnerships to help local professionals understand the importance of play and how best to involve communities
- Practical workshops for groups with a specific interest in improving community engagement in play (for example, friends of parks groups, volunteer management groups, spatial planners, registered social landlords and parish councils).
How can communities get involved in play?

One of the most striking observations from the ECP programme is how important local people think play is for the health of their community and how much they are willing to get actively involved in improving local play opportunities.

For most families, taking part in leisure activities whether it’s a visit to the cinema, a local football match or even going for a swim, is an expensive undertaking. A picnic or a visit to a local, creatively designed, exciting play area or park is free, fun and accessible to all, irrespective of income.

This broadly perceived experience of the value of play is reinforced by Playday¹ research which found that 81 per cent of adults believe children playing outside helps to improve community spirit and 70 per cent think that it makes an area more desirable to live in. 85 per cent supported the idea of neighbours working together to improve a local area.

Parents and the local community can get involved with improving play provision in many ways and with varying levels of commitment. Even with a small input local people can make a difference. For individuals with a strong commitment there are opportunities to take a significant lead in improving the quality of play provision for, and with, local children and young people.

As well as having spaces to play in parks and through provision of specific play areas, local people and communities can become involved in making public space more child-friendly than it is.

Local planning decisions often have a significant impact on children's play. Play England therefore recommends that spatial planners should be part of a local play partnership and that play partnerships should be consulted in relation to all significant planning proposals. Local people should be involved when new developments are planned.

Loss of play space to new developments can also be opposed through the planning system by community involvement.

Case study: Treweloth estate, Pool, Redruth

The residents of the Treloweth estate in Pool near Redruth successfully campaigned to save part of a play area threatened by housing development.

Both the Parish Council and Cornwall County Council initially refused the application but the developer then appealed to the Home Office Planning Inspectorate to have the decision reversed.

The residents organised a petition opposing the development signed by 77 local residents. It was then presented through the planning system to the county council. They were also supported in their efforts by the local parish council and nearby town councillors.

Thanks to this strong public opposition the appeal was rejected and the whole play area saved. Many of the residents of the Treloweth estate are young families and they are delighted that their children can safely continue to enjoy their local play area to the full.

The campaign has also energised local residents including children and young people who have now put forward ideas to further enhance the area. Plans include planting flowering scented shrubs and meadow grass as well as adding a new slide or zip wire.

¹ ICM survey commissioned by Play England for Playday 2010 available at www.playday.org.uk
Case study: Kent Play Shaper

The Play Shaper - Engaging Communities in Play seminar was designed to support ‘decision makers’ from a wide range of relevant local public and voluntary sector agencies to enable communities take control of spaces where their children would like to play.

Each full day event was tailored to address the specific requirements of the local area. A key outcome was to identify priorities for play in the future and to secure practical short and medium term ‘pledges’ from every participant that would help to meet these priorities.

In Kent, examples of pledges for action included:

- Putting sand and water in open spaces to widen play opportunities
- Aiming for play rangers to attend Ashford play areas particularly new sites
- Creating safe and accessible places of play including improvements to street layouts
- Improving support for parish councils and voluntary groups
- Improving consultation for play developments with partially sighted children
- Developing a ‘play awareness’ course for professionals and schools
- Writing funding bids to help sustain successes and ensure retention of support for Kent Children’s Fund Network
- Adapting the Maidstone play strategy to include more council departments
- Piloting a social enterprise summer play club paired with our play ranger scheme
- Embedding play within the local development framework
- Working with the university to develop a foundation degree in playwork

Images are from other Play Shaper events.
Making a difference when time is short

Even community members with limited time can help influence local play provision simply by responding to consultation and community engagement initiatives organised by others. This might include completing a questionnaire or survey related to play provision or participating in a workshop designed to give children and their families a chance to get involved in the process of designing more exciting and dynamic play spaces.

It is possible for local people to become directly involved in a single issue campaign, for example, to save or improve a local play area; or to help on the day of a play event at the local park. Such activity may involve local fundraising or campaigning. Local people may also want to ask their local council or Member of Parliament what they are doing to support children’s play.

Ongoing involvement – at a local level

The next level of voluntary engagement involves community members taking up a longer term role relating to play in the local area. This might involve setting up or joining a friends of the park or friends of the play area group or getting involved with a recreation trust that manages a local play area. Residents’ and community associations are often interested in improving local play and youth facilities. Some areas have ‘playwatch’ schemes in which local people take on a role of ‘adopting’ a local play area and liaising with the local council to report on any damage, vandalism or anti-social behaviour. This can involve receiving training in basic maintenance, organising litter picks etc.

In some places there are opportunities to be involved with staffed play provision such as adventure playgrounds, play centres, playschemes or as part of play ranger/warden projects. Community members can become regular volunteer playworkers at such schemes or committee members of the associated management group.

Children and young people can also become involved in the development and delivery of local play provision, for example, as helpers to younger children, becoming representatives on play management groups, or via children’s play and youth councils.

Ongoing involvement – at a strategic level

In many areas there will be opportunities for community members to volunteer or help with organisations and groups who have a more extended remit or level of responsibility such as:

- **Play associations.** These vary considerably but normally are voluntary sector organisations that provide a wide range of play services having both paid and voluntary staff. They often, but by no means always, work with a local authority. Some CVS and similar organisations also provide play services, frequently being commissioned by the local authority and other public bodies.

- **Town and parish councils** and recreation trusts. Many of these are major providers and managers of local play areas and work with the help of local volunteers and play, youth and other community groups.

- **Voluntary sector organisations** primarily supplying advice and guidance on play such as County Playing Field Associations who advise parish councils, recreation trusts and other community organisations on play space issues, protection of play areas, maintenance and insurance etc.

- **Play partnerships.** These bring together local agencies involved or interested in children’s play including different local authority departments and other public bodies, and voluntary and community organisations. Play partnerships can take a lead on engaging local communities in making decisions on what play opportunities should be offered; and how and by whom these are best provided.

Contacts for such groups and organisations should be available from the local authority leisure or children’s information service.
The wider context for play

Current government policy emphasises volunteering and neighbourhood based community action, including community ownership and management of services.

Play provision has a proven track record in this way of working. It provides a focus for community engagement and brings together a wide range of stakeholders. Play has always been a local concern which people are passionate about, with much of provision delivered by the voluntary and community sector, based on needs and solutions identified by local communities.

Improving opportunities for play provides additional benefits to the simple fun and enjoyment that it gives to children and young people:

• Play is important for children’s health – both physical and mental. Active physical play can contribute to reducing levels of childhood obesity.
• Access to play and informal recreation opportunities can help to reduce anti-social behaviour
• Providing play opportunities brings communities together and is a strong force for community cohesion.

As play cuts across many service areas including leisure, parks and green space, education and children’s services, spatial planning, health, community safety, crime reduction, and regeneration, it also provides the opportunity for a wide range of services and agencies to work together with and for the benefit of local communities.

Play is a universal right of all children and when planning for play in a local area it is essential to ensure that children and families from all parts of the community are fully involved in the process. This will include considering the needs of disabled children and other ‘hard to reach’ groups such as BME communities.

Case study: Design 2gether in Dudley

In Dudley disabled children are actively involved in play space design. The local play partnership set up a children and young people’s panel, Design 2gether, in which disabled children were fully engaged. The panel provided feedback directly into play space design.

To recruit the panel play staff visited various other decision making panels in which young people were taking a lead. This included Dudley Decision Making Kids; me2 young people’s panel (for disabled children and young people); KIDS Orchard (for disabled children and young people); and Chat Back Productions (for looked after children).

There are 12 members of the Design 2gether panel aged between 8 and 14. As several members require support due to disability and care requirements, arrangements are made to provide sufficient staff to cater for individual needs. The venues for meetings and their location are carefully selected to ensure full access for disabled children.

Design 2gether has brought fresh ideas, enthusiasm and innovation to the play programme in Dudley. It has made sure that local play development is inclusive and led by the children and young people themselves. In recognition of their work the group won the Young Volunteers of the Year award at the Dudley Volunteers awards in 2009.
Benefits of community engagement

Engaging communities in decision making and in prioritising and delivering local play projects has many benefits:

- Better communication, understanding, trust and relationships between stakeholders (public, private and voluntary) through, for example, play partnership and play forums
- Increased satisfaction and ownership of service provision – where play provision is shaped by local people it tends to be more appropriate and in turn better used and looked after
- More transparency and accountability – local people can see how decisions about play are made and know who to contact if things go wrong
- Development of local skills, a strong community sector and a local voice
- Improved community cohesion – improving play and informal recreation for local children is often an aspiration shared by all sectors of the community

There are also lots of personal benefits and opportunities for those involved including:

- Helping to ensure play facilities and services are improved and better meet local need
- Enabling local people to express their opinions, make their voice heard and be more involved in decision making processes that impact on play provision
- Providing opportunities to learn new skills and gain knowledge and confidence in expressing and presenting their views
- Identifying solutions to issues and helping to avoid or resolve conflict. By engaging with all sectors of the community in decisions about play provision potential conflict about, say, the location and appropriateness of different kinds of play provision within a neighbourhood can be minimised
- Meeting new and like minded people, discovering more about different people and communities and learning from experiences of others. Play opportunities should take into account the various cultural traditions found in diverse ethnic communities.

Communities taking the lead

The Engaging Communities in Play programme has provided many examples of how communities can take a lead in developing and managing the places where children play. It also illustrates many of the benefits of local people being actively involved in play provision.

Community involvement in the management of local provision and services

It is likely that current government policy will lead to more local organisations taking a greater lead in the provision of local play opportunities. Such engagement is already common in many existing play projects and much can be learned from established good practice, for example, community managed adventure playgrounds, play centres, and friends of parks/play groups.

Case study: Indigos Go Wild

Indigos Go Wild is an environmental play project created, staffed and managed by a group of local parents in Brixham, Devon. Initially a small group of local parents 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. With the support of the school they formed Indigos and gained permission to lease the land for 25 years.

Indigos have 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. Parents are encouraged to volunteer to help and in so doing develop new skills. 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.
Communities creating new, innovative solutions to local need

Many people involved with play are skilled in developing new and creative approaches to support and sustain play services. To best meet the challenges of changing times even long-established play organisations should ensure they review their practice and be bold in making necessary changes.

Providing opportunities for young volunteers

Young people can be provided with opportunities for volunteering by becoming involved with local play and informal recreation projects. Young people are often highly motivated to work on initiatives that aim to improve local play and youth facilities and services.

Case study: Play Torbay

Play Torbay is an incorporated charity and was launched in October 2010. Its predecessor Torbay Play Forum had been operating for ten years but following widespread local consultation it was decided that a new re-launched membership play association would be better placed to meet local play needs.

Play Torbay’s purpose is to improve the quality and quantity of play provision for children and young people living in Torbay.

Play Torbay has set itself up to be:

- Inclusive and have an open membership for all playworkers including those from the voluntary and statutory sector, friends of the parks, parents and the local authority
- A charity which raises funds and intends to be self-sustaining
- Ready to be commissioned to deliver services and work strategically and in partnership with the council
- A voice for young people - through an associated children and young people’s group, Young Play Torbay
- An information hub: a contact point for everyone in Torbay involved in creating, organising and facilitating play opportunities for children.

The change from the old play forum to Play Torbay provides a single voice for play in Torbay. It is fit for purpose in the new economic and policy context and everyone is working well together to facilitate and influence positive change in play, both for and with local children and young people.

Case study: Young Play Champions in Eastleigh

In Eastleigh a Promoting Opportunities for Play (POP) Project recruited young people aged 12 – 18 years as volunteers to become play champions. The role included taking part in official openings of play areas, promoting play in the area and encouraging widespread community use and care of the new play spaces.

Young people were made aware of the POP project through schools, youth clubs and community groups. Early engagement with young people included consultation on what the young people would like to see in new play areas; workshops to design a logo for the project; setting up and running activities for all ages and abilities and carrying out consultations within the community. Activities like circus skills, and balloon modelling helped make sure that participation was fun as well as productive.

The initial aim was for 26 play champions. This has been exceeded as over 100 play champions have taken part in workshops and events demonstrating the benefit of a flexible approach that allows the project to be driven by participants’ input.

The play champions have given the community the opportunity to see and engage with young people as positive role models. The volunteers have enhanced their leadership and communication skills and have improved their self-confidence through working with members of the community of all ages and abilities.
Play projects as a catalyst for change

Play provision providing a focus for community action

Play projects can bring a group of parents together who initially have a focus on improving play opportunities for their children but who move on to thinking and planning in relation to wider community issues. Providing opportunities for play is also often part of a more extensive community initiative. Sometimes it can be the spark which galvanises the community into making more extensive changes and improvements in their local neighbourhood.

Case study: The Plantation, Writhlington

The Plantation is a small copse of trees, grass and woodland plants in Writhlington, Radstock owned by Somer Community Housing Trust. When the trust took ownership of the site in 1999 the land had become a dumping ground for rubble, rubbish and dog mess. In 2002, they started consulting with the local community to establish their aspirations for the site and to develop ways in which the Housing Trust, local residents and other partners could work together.

Over the years The Plantation has been transformed, always with the active involvement of local children, young people and their families:

- New paths have been laid and rubbish bins, a new gate and fencing installed
- Dogs have been banned from the site after a community vote
- Dangerous trees were felled and the timber used for benches and play features
- The CVS worked with local children and young people to create a bike trail, stage and den building area
- A wood sculptor worked with local children and young people and pupils from St Mary’s Primary School to carve sculptures on tree stumps and create an entrance archway
- Horticultural students from Norton Radstock College became involved in maintenance. They also created log and stone piles as wildlife habitats, put up bird and bat boxes and designed an information board showing what plants and wildlife can be found on the site.

It is now an exciting green space that can be enjoyed by everyone, where children can play in safety in a stimulating natural environment, where plants and wildlife flourish and where local people can learn about nature and how to look after it.

As one local resident testifies:

‘Through my kitchen window it’s absolutely amazing to see the children playing and to know that they have somewhere safe that they’re enjoying, whilst playing in natural elements. I think this helps them to take good care of the space too.’
Staffed play provision providing a hub for community action

Staffed play provision, often managed by voluntary management groups and involving volunteer playworkers takes many forms including:

- Adventure playgrounds
- Play and children's centres
- Play ranger schemes
- Mobile play provision e.g. playbus projects

Play England’s experience is that parents and carers are frequently enthusiastic supporters of staffed play provision. Parents also recognise that staffed provision offers creative and challenging play opportunities in a safe environment and they appreciate the input of skilled and dedicated playworkers. It is not uncommon for such services to become a hub for wider community projects and activity once they become established.

Case study: New Ark Adventure Playground

In Peterborough the New Ark adventure playground has been in operation since the early 1970s. It started off life as a City Farm and over time expanded to include an adventure playground, a nature garden and an Eco Centre. It is managed by a management council of local people nearly all of whom are parents whose children play at the New Ark.

New Ark adventure playground is a real hub for community action. It is staffed by a team of 25 full and part time employees and in addition about 100 volunteers help with all kinds of jobs on and off the adventure playground, farms and garden. They currently have over 300 children registered and its services have developed well beyond the staffed play provision of the adventure playground, to include:

- A toddler group
- pre-school playgroups
- a city farm
- a nature garden
- an after school/school holiday programme - including a service to Newark Hill School to meet/bring children to the playground
- an environmental programme
- a play support service.

Community involvement bringing different generations together

Community engagement with play can be a catalyst for bringing different generations together. Older people can feel intimidated by groups of children and young people in their neighbourhoods yet tend to agree that it is important that play facilities and services should be provided for local children.

Barriers can be broken down if young people become actively involved in planning for improvements in their play and youth facilities as, if done well, this will involve them in discussion with older residents through community consultation events, making presentations to residents associations and parish councils etc.

Adventure playgrounds and other staffed provision also often provide opportunities for parents and older people to volunteer and help run local play provision. In long-established staffed playgrounds parents often become helpers having been users of the playground themselves as children.
Case study: 
**Garston Adventure Playground**

Garston Adventure Playground known locally as ‘The Venny’ is located in a housing regeneration area in Liverpool. It’s managed by a voluntary management committee and has been open for more than 30 years. It employs three playworkers who played on the playground as children and has a dedicated team of active local play volunteers many of whom also used the playground as children.

Clare, one of the playworkers tells us ‘I’ve been working here for sixteen years. I started when I was five and I’m still here now. This is your childhood here. This is the best thing that can ever happen to a child, to come to this playground. It’s fantastic. It was my childhood. Everything about my childhood is the memories I’ve got of this place - the opportunities this playground gave me’.

An eight year old boy of today is equally enthusiastic and says simply ‘it’s got everything that you ever wanted’.

The importance across the generations is reinforced by Carmel who brings her grandson to the playground:

‘I started coming to Garston adventure playground when I was 14. Then when I grew up and had my children I used to bring them here and it was really good. They loved it and never wanted to go home. And now my daughter has got a son of her own and I bring him here. And so it’s like three generations of my family have used the playground and we’ve all enjoyed it’

A video that gives a vivid taster of Garston adventure playground and the extent to which it’s success has brought different generations together can be found at www.playengland.org.uk/resources.
Support for engaging communities in play

Local authorities supporting community involvement in play

Though not a statutory service, most local authorities have a play strategy and choose to provide a range of services and support to play facilities and services. Current government policy makes it likely that in many areas local councils will tend to look more and more to working with the voluntary sector to identify local priorities and then to contract services from the sector to best respond to the play needs identified.

Community engagement in play and working together with local authorities will be increasingly important in order to provide the best play outcomes for local children.

Local authorities supporting volunteering

Some local authorities encourage volunteers to be involved in delivering their own play services and this is most successful when the local authority has clear procedures for recruitment, training and ongoing support for its volunteer playworkers.

Case study: Ashford Borough Council

Ashford Borough Council takes a proactive role in supporting play in partnership with local communities. This includes:

- Support to the Ashford Play Forum and town/parish councils
- Producing a downloadable community Play Pack covering:
  - setting up play sessions and activities
  - consultation and community engagement
  - working with staff, volunteers and parents
  - designing, constructing and maintaining play spaces
- applying a risk-benefit analysis to play spaces
- health and safety issues including safeguarding children
- \textit{Ok to Play} - a play space quality assurance mark that looks at design, location and providing challenging play within a safe environment.

In 2011, the council completed a full review of their play strategy and in addition to celebrating successes the new strategy reinforces the Council’s commitment to play based on three key themes:

- \textit{Plan4Play} - Planning and evaluating outdoor play spaces so they are assets to the community and children and young people have happy fulfilling play time
- \textit{Go4Play} - Promoting and providing challenging play opportunities that are inspired, designed and run by children and their families
- \textit{Connect4Play} - Connecting fresh ideas experience and expertise to meet the play needs of children and families more effectively
Social enterprises supporting communities around play

In some parts of the country support for children’s play is taken on primarily by the voluntary sector through Play Associations, Play Forums, the CVS or other such voluntary sector support bodies. Sometimes this service is commissioned by the local authorities. Most of these support bodies are continually involved in fund-raising and they are able to apply for funds that are not accessible by local authorities.

Communities involved in identifying sustainable funding solutions for play

In times when public bodies are facing unprecedented reductions in their funding it is becoming increasingly necessary for local play providers and organisations to be inventive in searching out new means of sustainability.

Case study: Southwark Council

Southwark Council and its play service recognise the importance of volunteers and the excellent service that they can provide to the Borough’s adventure playgrounds and play projects. They also see the importance of volunteers being properly trained and are aware of the difficulties sometimes faced in recruiting and retaining the voluntary play workforce.

In recognition of the valuable contribution from volunteers the council have launched a volunteers’ credit scheme. Credits are built up through volunteering and these can then be ‘cashed in’ to gain additional training and development opportunities. The types of training available include Skills for Life NVQ level 2, a personal development plan and the shadowing of a senior playworker or the play service manager.

The play service has also recently added options that may be more attractive to younger volunteers who can now swap their credits for non-training related benefits such as access to various leisure and recreation facilities in the borough.

Case study: Playworks Nottingham

Playworks, Nottingham Children’s Play Resource Centre, is the home of Nottingham Play Forum, an incorporated charity owned by its members. Their aim is to improve the quality and quantity of play provision for children and young people, by providing training, education, resources, support, advice and information to individuals, groups and organisations. Playworks provides:

- Play development and information services including:
  - strategic lobbying for children’s play opportunities and playwork
  - advice and information through a play library, publications and a regular newsletter
  - a forum for play open to individuals and organisations
- A scrap store and arts and crafts shop
- Playwork training – activity based and certificated courses
- Hosting play events and conferences
- Delivery of street play provision in targeted communities
- Opportunities for voluntary work in play
- An onsite créche, which supports Playworks services and training
What’s been learned from Engaging Communities in Play?

In only six months the Engaging Communities in Play programme has highlighted and supported many projects in a way that clearly demonstrates the value and potential of directly involving local communities in local play provision. From that experience many lessons were learned:

• Children, their families and the wider community believe that having good local play opportunities in their neighbourhood is hugely important and they are prepared to work hard to help make sure they get them.
• There are many different ways for local people to become engaged in making their local play spaces and services better. Even those with limited time can make a valuable contribution. It is not always easy running a local voluntary play organisation or recruiting and retaining volunteers. Groups often need and appreciate professional support from skilled workers. This sometimes includes very practical guidance such as advice on playground inspection and maintenance. Support can be provided by either, or both of, the public and voluntary sectors.
• Play cuts across many service areas including leisure, parks and green space, education and children’s services, spatial planning, health, community safety and crime reduction, and regeneration. As such, it provides the opportunity for a wide range of services and agencies to work together with and for the benefit of active local communities.
• Effective communication and partnership is important. Where a strong local play partnership is in place that has direct contact with decision making bodies play gets more support and is better protected.
• Play England resources such as Design for Play, Managing Risk in Play Provision, the Playful Communities web-site, and the various play briefings papers are widely used and found useful by local community groups, parish councils etc.

Case study: Roman Road Adventure Playground

Roman Road Adventure Playground in Tower Hamlets opened its doors in February 2011 and is proving to be a massive hit with local children with over 100 already on the register. Parkside Residents’ Association was instrumental in getting community buy-in in the early planning stages, supported by outreach programmes delivered by PATH, the Tower Hamlets Play Association.

It is the first adventure playground to have revenue funding sponsored by a social landlord. Following an approach from Parkside Residents Association and PATH, Old Ford Housing Association has committed revenue funding for two years from 2011 and sees the adventure playground as a key asset, not only to its own residents, but to the wider community. It aims to seek future funding for play within the rest of the organisation to enhance opportunities for children and young people in sustainable communities.

There are plans to use the building as a borough-wide training facility for staff, play-workers and volunteers to help with sustainability and maximise use when not open to children. The aim is to develop it as a community hub for local people, while keeping the primary purpose as the playground’s indoor play area.

Mick Conway, from Play England said: ‘This is an excellent model of how partners can work together to overcome challenges and deliver a brand new and sustainable adventure playground in the heart of the community’.
• When communities are fully engaged with the provision of local play opportunities, services and facilities tend to be of a higher quality and better used.
• Local people really value voluntary managed play provision such as adventure playgrounds and play centres. It is also important to celebrate the success of local voluntary play projects to maintain and widen community involvement.
• The play and voluntary sector are often very creative and innovative in their work and are very willing to help each other. There is great scope for learning from each other especially outside the local area.
• Play provision is strongest where there is a well-developed and positive relationship between the local authority and the voluntary sector and parish councils and where each party is clear about its role and function.
• Hard facts and figures highlighting the impact of investment in play are a critical tool for demonstrating its value when budgets are tight. Play projects should aim to collect such evidence wherever possible.
• National economic conditions, the end of the central government Play programme and reductions in local authority funding are currently having a dramatic impact on playwork and play development in local areas, with many local authority play services and voluntary sector play organisations struggling to keep going. There is a pressing need to devise new methods, and refresh old ones, to adapt to the changing times and sustain play services and organisations through this difficult time of transition.

Local authorities and their voluntary sector partners have consistently reported that they have benefitted from the workshops and the bespoke services provided through the programme. In many cases they have described the experience as a catalyst that has sparked projects and developments in play that would not otherwise have happened.

This pilot has therefore demonstrated both the value of engaging local communities in play and how support from Play England can help maximise the benefits of such engagement. The resources produced by the programme will be a lasting and valued support to local groups across the country.

---

Case study: The East Riding of Yorkshire ECP programme

In East Riding the Play Shaper event had a local focus and involved all partners involved in the future of the pathfinder funded Withernsea Adventure Playground. It ensured that partners had a deeper awareness of its value and helped to highlight the value of having a strong ‘friends of’ group for the playground.

Play England also provided support to the adventure playground steering group meetings and facilitated links with the voluntary sector. This gave all involved more confidence in working together to sustain the playground.

Workshops were held with the town and parish councils that resulted in many parishes adopting new way of working to help maintain and sustain their community play spaces. It enabled the parish councils to appreciate the importance of taking more responsibility for ‘animating’ the play spaces as well as simply maintaining them.

The ECP programme was really appreciated in East Riding. A council officer commented

‘Play England has been so supportive, quick and responsive to all of our requests and has brought expertise that we don't have here. It is crucial that you continue to provide such training packages (both facilitated and ‘train the trainer’ information). The Play England good practice information and guidance is so useful to us and you must continue to produce these documents.’
To national government

1. Central government should continue to develop the policy context in which local communities can be better supported and be more effective in developing and providing play opportunities for their own children. Policy on schools, childcare and children’s services; planning, housing and transport; public health and the environment – each have a bearing on children’s play. These should be coordinated so that a joined up approach to creating more child-friendly public space in general and more extensive community play opportunities in particular can be developed.

2. This national play policy should be informed by expertise based on robust evidence including, in particular, evidence of the outcomes and impact of different kinds of provision so that judgments can be made about the social return from investment in community play. Such research should be centrally funded.

3. Central government should therefore provide a national resource to enable the growth of local initiatives and local investment in play from non-statutory sources. There is a need for a central point of information, guidance and support for communities to draw upon to ensure community play provision is a significant part of local plans.

To local government

4. Local authorities should work with civic society and local charities to maintain, develop and support effective play partnerships, enabling effective communications and the development of cohesive local plans to deliver and sustain effective and cost-effective play provision where it is most needed. These play partnerships should be formally consulted on all relevant planning applications and spatial development strategies.

5. Play partnerships should sit within local children’s services commissioning frameworks so that voluntary and community play provision may be fully considered among the range of early interventions for investment from pooled budgets.

6. Play partnerships should be resourced to develop a strategic, cross-cutting role for planners, police, parks and green spaces as well as for schools and extended services. They should also provide expert advice, resources and support for communities to develop, manage and maintain their own local play opportunities.

To Play England

7. Play England should continue to provide a national voice for play, making the case for play both in its own right and as an important element of other agendas such as health and community cohesion. Play England should also lobby for funding nationally, provide practical resources to support local campaigns, and research new and innovative means of sustaining play opportunities locally.

8. Play England should continue to develop and provide accessible practical guidance, advice and support to play partnerships across the country as well as direct, complementary support to local voluntary and community play organisations wherever possible.

Paul Greatorex May 2011
Further information

Further information on the Engaging Communities in Play programme can be found at: 
www.playengland.org.uk/communityplay

Useful Play England resources

Adventure Playgrounds – built by communities
Play England publication with case studies drawn from the third sector adventure playground grant programme. This shows how community run adventure playgrounds can provide value for money become hubs for different types of community action and build community cohesion. 
www.playengland.org.uk/builtbycommunities

Design for Play – A guide to creating successful play spaces
Play England guide shows how to design good play spaces and provides advice on how to engage and involve the community at all stages of the design process
www.playengland.org.uk/designforplay

Get organised!
Guide produced to support local communities groups and others to plan Playday events provides useful information about working in partnership with your local community
www.playday.org.uk/playday_events/resources.aspx

How to involve children and young people in the development and design of play spaces
Play England and Participation Works publication on involving children in the design process. 
www.playengland.org.uk/howtoinvolvechildren

Our Play, Our Choice
Good practice briefing outlines the findings of a play consultation on how disabled children can be involved in the design of play spaces.  
www.kids.org.uk/briefings

People Make Play
A Demos report, commissioned by Play England, that shows the vital role of staffed play services, often run by the voluntary sector. 
www.playengland.org.uk/peoplemakeplay

Planning for Play: Guidance on the development and implementation of a local play strategy
This guide provides useful advice for those who are leading the development of a local play strategy. 
www.playengland.org.uk/planningforplay

Playing on: sustaining play provision in changing times
Children’s Play Council publication addresses key issues of attracting longer term funding and the sustainability of play provision. 
www.playengland.org.uk/playingon

Better Places to Play through Planning
Play England guidance outlining how play opportunities can be enhanced through the spatial planning system. 
www.playengland.org.uk/betterplaces

Save Children’s Play – Action Pack
Play England resource that communities can use and adapt to establish their own local campaigns for children’s play. 
www.playengland.org.uk/our-work/save-children’s-play
Community play briefings
Play England has produced a series of briefings on a range of subjects of interest to community play providers. To accompany these briefings several videos about community-led play provision have also been made.
www.playengland.org.uk/communityplay

Play England and associated websites

Play England
Play England exists to promote excellent free play opportunities for all children and young people.
www.playengland.org.uk

Playful Communities
Playful Communities provides information, advice and resources for individuals, local community groups, voluntary sector organisations and others who are developing play provision in their local neighbourhood. The website includes resources for local people involved in managing staffed play projects and volunteering, as well as for those supporting or maintaining play areas.
www.playfulcommunities.org.uk

Play Day
Play Day is an annual celebration of the child's right to play. The website provides information and resources for community groups and others to organise local events to promote the right to play including working with the media and how to publicise your project.
www.playday.org.uk

Play Shaper
Play Shaper helps the people who plan, design build, and manage our public spaces to understand their role in creating more child-friendly communities. The website is packed with useful information relating to play under a number of different headings including play and planning, play and schools and play and health.
www.playshaper.org.uk

Other useful websites

Association of Play Industries (API)
The Association of Play Industries (API) is the lead trade body in the play sector; with over 80 members it represents the interests of manufacturers, installers, designers and distributors of both outdoor and indoor play equipment and safer surfacing.
www.api-play.org

Children's Play Information Service (CPIS)
CPIS is a national information service on children's play, part of NCB's Library and Information Service.
www.ncb.org.uk/cpis

Fair Play for Children
Fair Play for Children promotes children and young people's right to play, in the UK and worldwide.
www.fairplayforchildren.org
Further information

Other useful websites continued

Fields in Trust
Fields in Trust is an independent UK-wide organisation dedicated to protecting and improving outdoor sports and play spaces.
www.fieldsintrust.org

KIDS
KIDS' vision is a world in which all disabled children and young people realise their aspirations and their right to an inclusive community which supports them and their families.
www.kids.org.uk

PlayBoard Northern Ireland
PlayBoard Northern Ireland is the leading agency for the development and promotion of children and young people’s play in Northern Ireland.
www.playboard.org

Playing Out
The Playing Out website provides materials and resources to support street play as a normal part of neighbourhood play.
http://playingout.net/

PLAYLINK
PLAYLINK is a multi-faceted independent play and informal leisure consultancy working in the areas of design, planning, policy, strategy, local engagement, fundraising and organisational development.
www.playlink.org

Playwork Partnerships
Playwork Partnerships, based at the University of Gloucester, aims to enrich children and young people’s lives through their experience of quality play by promoting the importance of play and playwork, and increasing the learning opportunities for playworkers.
www.playwork.co.uk

Play Scotland
Play Scotland works to promote the importance of play for all children and young people, and campaigns to create increased play opportunities in the community.
www.playscotland.org

Play Wales
Play Wales works to raise awareness of children and young people's need and right to play and to promote good practice at every level of decision making and in every place where children might play.
www.playwales.org.uk

SkillsActive
SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure, Learning and Well-being, which includes playwork.
www.skillsactive.com
This report was produced as part of Play England’s Engaging Communities in Play programme funded by the Department for Education.

For further information about the Engaging Communities in Play programme visit: www.playengland.org.uk/communityplay

Play England promotes excellent free play opportunities for all children.

We believe that all children should have the freedom and space to play enjoyed by previous generations.

This involves more than just providing well-designed play areas; it requires the commitment of local and national decision makers to create more child-friendly communities.

By making play a priority we can create healthier and happier communities for all.